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## NEWS RELEASE

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**Please Release On:** Immediately

**For Information Contact:** Cascade County Commission Chairman, Jim Larson 454-6810

### **Cascade County Signs Declaration of Emergency**

Great Falls – Cascade County Commission Chairman, Jim Larson, signed a Declaration of Emergency for Cascade County on Friday morning, March 20, 2020. Under MCA 10-3-406, a Declaration of Emergency enables the County to enact their Emergency Operation Plan and access to additional authority not available otherwise. The Cascade County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) is a pre-planning tool defining the management strategies for response to the emergency needs of a community. The Cascade County EOP was approved by the Chief Executive Officers for Cascade County, the City of Great Falls, Town of Belt, Town of Cascade and Town of Neihart in 2016 and is reviewed regularly and updated by the Local Emergency Planning Committee and local governments. The EOP is utilized by the Cascade County Emergency Management Department to address mitigation of foreseeable hazards and define how emergency response will be conducted to protect communities during and following an emergency. The EOP also helps identify available resources and provides guidelines for resource management.

The current Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic qualifies as an imminent threat to the residents of Cascade County and surrounding counties, and therefore enacting the Declaration of Emergency is appropriate.

Cascade County Commission Chair, Larson emphasized “the timely actions recommended by the Cascade City-County Health Department are critically important to follow.” He further

explained, “we do not wish to create additional alarm among the citizens of Cascade County with the signing of this Declaration; however, by signing it we can access resources and make more timely decisions to support our Cascade City-County Health Department.” Larson complimented the efforts of the Department and all the community health providers who are working diligently to assess patients, test patients, and treat those with flu symptoms.

In the event of a medical incident like COVID-19, the Cascade City-County Health Department (CCHD) may order the opening of the Emergency Operations Center and assemble personnel to track resources, order resources from the national stockpile, and coordinate essential services needed to prevent the spread of a contagious disease throughout the county. Since February, the CCHD, under the direction of the Public Health Officer, Trisha Gardner, has been coordinating discussions, and assembling critical health providers and first responders to help position the community response in advance of the spread in our community. Thursday, Ms. Gardner enacted an Order closing all bars (including coffee bars), breweries and distillery tasting rooms, casinos, restaurants, bowling alleys, gyms, movie theaters, and other commercial businesses in which people assemble for recreation, with the exception of drive-through, delivery and pick-up services, within Cascade County. The order became effective at 6:00 a.m. today and remains in effect until 8:00 a.m. on Friday, March 27, 2020 pending any further notification. The changing pandemic situation may result in a change or extension of this order if conditions warrant.

The Emergency Declaration is posted on the Cascade County website, [www.cascadecountymt.gov](http://www.cascadecountymt.gov). The Board of Cascade County Commissioners reminds the residents to frequently visit the Cascade City-County Health Department website at [www.cchdmt.org](http://www.cchdmt.org) for the latest updates on the COVID-19 pandemic and resources available in our community.

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