

Weatherby first big win for alliance

- [Jonathan Gallardo](#)
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When Gov. **Matt Mead** announced in January that gun manufacturer Weatherby was relocating from California to Sheridan, it was seen as a win for Wyoming.

It's also a very big win for the Northeast Wyoming Growth Alliance, said Energy Capital Economic Development CEO **Phil Christopherson**.

The group, which represents Sheridan, Buffalo and Gillette, was formed a few years ago with the goal of attracting businesses to this corner of the state.

Christopherson said site consultants don't start looking at a community until it has a population of 50,000 or more. Only two cities in Wyoming fit that criteria. Combined, however, Gillette, Sheridan and Buffalo have close to 80,000 people, and the three cities "are very unique," Christopherson said.

"As a region, we have a whole lot to offer," he said.

The alliance submitted a proposal in the fall of 2016 for an unidentified business that the Wyoming Business Council called "Project Arms," Christopherson said.

Each of the three communities made its case, identifying places for the business to set up shop.

The company, which was Weatherby, wanted a Western-themed town on the edge of the mountains "that fed into their mystique and what they have to offer," Christopherson said.

It came down to Cody, Lander and Sheridan, he said, and the one factor that made Sheridan outshine the others was that it had a shovel-ready business park. It had been there for years, only occupied by one company, but it was ready for a new company to move in.

“The further ahead you can be in that process, the more likely businesses will come,” Christopherson said. “Weatherby didn’t want to make the announcement and say, ‘We’re going to turn dirt in two years.’ They want to get moving.”

There are some people in Gillette’s private sector working on a similar thing now, he said.

The Weatherby move represents the first large-scale success for the NEW Growth Alliance, Christopherson said.

“We’ve had a number of leads, but this is the first really big win, and we’re very excited about it,” he said.

It’s estimated that Weatherby will directly create 70 to 90 jobs and more than \$5 million annually in payroll in the next five years, but Christopherson said the indirect impact will be even larger.

“When a major company moves into your area, that’s a good thing, but the real good thing is the additional business it generates,” he said.

Weatherby will probably need “small manufacturers and distribution-type businesses,” he said. “Where we need to focus now is helping develop support businesses.”

So although Sheridan may have landed the headquarters, Buffalo and Gillette are winners in this situation too, he said. Students in the machining program at Gillette College could very well land jobs at Weatherby.

Christopherson said he hopes this is just the first of many successes for the NEW Growth Alliance.

“We’re working on several leads,” he said. “That’s all I’m going to say.”