MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 26, 2006

TO: Robin Trenbeath

FROM: Darlene Staffeldt, Montana State Librarian

RE: Answers to Questions for Today's Meeting

1. Where does the State of Montana government need to be with GIS in the next 5 years?

Through State's Strategic Plan for Information Technology, agencies have been encouraged to *appropriately* incorporate GIS technology into their business functions. This will likely be accomplished through the further development of GIS capabilities within each agency along with some services, i.e. web applications development, being provided by the private sector.

The costs and benefits of placing the technology directly in the hands of program staff must be weighed carefully against the costs and benefits of centralizing the technology at the Department of Administration. Although the bottom line is important, there are other more complex factors affecting the true success of any GIS program.

No matter how the technology is implemented, the spatial component of data and information will become more integrated into the business of government. To that end, a systematic approach to the creation and preservation of geospatial data is necessary. Certain datasets will benefit from state-funded coordination efforts. All will benefit from a standards-based approach, whereby interconnectivity between diverse datasets containing like elements is ensured. Agencies that produce data with a spatial component must be encouraged to provide the data in a manner that ensures compatibility with related datasets and to provide complete and accurate metadata so that the information is understood and utilized appropriately by others.

Competition between agencies and duplication of efforts must end. When state agencies compete and duplicate, Montana taxpayers lose and customers become confused about where to turn for service. An overall picture of the "GIS Enterprise" within Montana State Government must be developed so that agencies can plan accordingly and so that the Governor's Office and the Legislature can be presented with a cohesive picture so they can fund GIS appropriately.

2. How do you see your agency supporting/fitting in with that vision?

As GIS capabilities grow within state government, it is Montana State Library's intent to provide a comprehensive program for preserving and providing access to Montana's

growing body of geospatial data, treating it as valuable content which has been developed with public resources.

The MSL program will provide equal access to GIS users and to the general public. It will provide for physical storage where appropriate, but also provide access to information held by other organizations in a distributed model or federated enterprise. It will include not only the most current data, but archived versions of data that changes over time. In many cases, it will present geospatial information in context with other information sources that are relevant to a particular location or research question. Finally, it will include datasets beyond those which are addressed in the Montana Spatial Data Infrastructure.

For a complete rationale for MSL's continued role as the State's GIS Clearinghouse, including pertinent statutes and definitions, please see the separate document "Rationale for Montana's Geographic Information Clearinghouse".

3. What do you see as the primary strengths of your agency in reaching that vision?

Mission: MSL is the library for the Montana State Government enterprise. Assimilating, managing, and ensuring long-term access to government information, including geospatial data, is in direct accordance with the MSL mandate and mission.

Governance: MSL is governed by a Library Commission under laws that provide the legal and ethical guidance regarding access to government information in Montana. The Library Commission serves to shield MSL's collection from the ebbs and flows associated with administration change every four years.

Vision: Our Library Commission recently completed strategic planning for the next five year period and have reaffirmed their support for ongoing library operations regarding GIS and geospatial data.

Expertise: MSL has a long history of acquiring, managing, integrating, and providing access to geospatial data. MSL's staff and management have been firmly committed to serving the geospatial data needs of Montana for almost twenty years and are committed to continuing in that role. NRIS has been a leader in Montana's GIS world since 1988 (we hold ESRI site license 186). During that time NRIS staff acted as project staff for the largest Superfund site in the nation, served as a GIS service bureau for many state agencies, led coordination efforts statewide and provided technical advice as other agencies have developed their own GIS capabilities. Since the inception of the GIS bureau at ITSD, NRIS has gradually narrowed its focus to activities that are aligned with its library function.

Partnerships and Community Support: MSL has strong partnerships and data sharing relationships with many state and federal agencies. Response to periodic customer surveys targeted at the Montana GIS community repeatedly confirm overwhelming support for the GIS and geospatial data activities of MSL.

4. What do you see as the primary impediments or obstacles for your agency in reaching that vision?

A. Lack of support from ITSD and the GIS Coordinator

As an agency whose business is information, MSL finds itself increasingly under the oversight of ITSD. The distinction between the activities and authority of MSL as the state enterprise library and the activities and authority of ITSD related to its duties under MITA is not clear in the minds of many.

According to the Library Commission, the distinction should be clear – issues and activities relating to content, including geospatial data, should be the realm of the library. Issues relating to technology choices are under the oversight of ITSD, although this does not mean that ITSD should directly control or perform all technology functions for an agency.

ITSD appears to no longer uphold the MOU, instead aspiring to perform the functions assigned to MSL under that agreement. The GIS Coordinator appears to be exercising his influence to curtail data and funding for the clearinghouse and to affect Policy and Planning decisions which negatively impact the clearinghouse.

The result of these conflicts is an enormous level of overhead on the part of MSL. Management spends and inordinate amount of time defending its mission and its activities to ITSD, not based on technical questions, but based on policy issues with no clear answer.

B. Lack of Resources:

In order to support the breadth and depth of staff necessary to accomplish an ambitious level of service, NRIS has historically depended on grants and interagency agreements. MSL has decided to gradually reduce its reliance on this type of funding, as it places the highest priority for staff time on the goals and objectives of the funding agency, and not on the development of a comprehensive clearinghouse for Montana.

MSL's data center has been built and maintained through significant contributions from its partners. As MSL reduces its reliance on partner funding, we will require additional funding to maintain a high level of reliability and availability in our IT infrastructure. Although the data center is current in all aspects at this time, we have put forth a request to the Governor's Budget Office for additional funding for information technology.