



MONTANA Natural Resource Information System Metadata Program

What are metadata?

Metadata, or “data about data,” document the origins, quality, and characteristics of geographic data. Metadata are essential for assessing the value of geographic data for specific applications or uses. On a paper map, the legend is the metadata. The legend contains information about the publisher, the date, the type of map, the geographic coordinates, the map’s scale, and accuracy among many other things. Metadata help:

- **Protect an agency’s investment in geographic data.** Millions of dollars have been spent in Montana to develop digital geographic data. That data can lose its value and utility if it is not documented. For example, if the map projection is not known, the geographic data may not be useable at all, even with a large investment of additional time and resources.
- **Standardize data searches.** The Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) developed metadata standards over a several year period with extensive review by professionals throughout the country. FGDC compliant metadata allow people to search for geographic data to determine what data are available and if that data will meet their specific needs.
- **Geospatial data users avoid a duplication of effort.** The National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) Clearinghouse was established to search for geographic data via the internet. The Montana State Library became one of the first NSDI Clearinghouses Nodes in 1995. There are now more than 100 Clearinghouse Nodes throughout the world, five of which are based in Montana. Prior to internet access, GIS users worked with their professional contacts to avoid duplications of effort. When metadata is in a standard format available via a Clearinghouse Node, even a new GIS user can determine what geographic information already exists.

What are the goals of Montana’s Metadata Program?

The Metadata Program was established at the Montana State Library in 1998 as recommended by the Information Technical Advisory Council (ITAC) Geographic Information System (GIS) Task Force. The primary focus is outreach through:

- **Education** for technical users and administrators in individual settings, group workshops, and formal presentations.
- **Technical Support** and advice on the wide variety of metadata tools that are currently available. There is hands-on training available for at least one tool on each hardware/software platform, and a working knowledge of all the metadata tools.
- **National Liaison** between Montanans and national efforts. The program tracks evolving metadata standards, and provides Montanans with information about funding sources to aid them in their initial metadata collection efforts.

Who participates in Montana’s Metadata Program?

The program is supported by and works with:

- Information Services Division (D of A)
- Department of Environmental Quality
- GIS Technical Working Group
- Local Government GIS Coalition
- Greater Yellowstone Area Data Center
- Montana GIS Users’ Group and
- A wide consortium of other GIS users throughout the state.

Contact the NRIS Metadata Program:

**Natural Resource Information System
Montana State Library
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Helena, Mt. 59620-1800**

**Phone: (406) 444-5691
Website: <http://nr.is.state.mt.us/gis/gis.html>**

