MEMO

To: State Library Commission
From: Bruce Newell
Re: Montana Library Network (MLN) Report
Date: October 5, 1999

I've been visiting with Montana librarians and library trustees, discussing the MLN draft plan. It's been my pleasure to talk with many of you (from Libby to Glendive; from Missoula to Plentywood) and to witness a wonderful autumn slice of what has to be the state of bliss.

As I last reported, folks like the MLN draft plan, and every group I speak with has good ideas that flesh-out the draft plan. In addition to their good ideas, librarians have identified several opportunities for inventive solutions, a.k.a. 'problems.' Some have happy and immediate solutions; some may not. Here's a sampling:

About 300 (perhaps more) Montana libraries have Follett or Winnebago microcomputer based library systems. Neither of these packages has, to date, proven to be compatible with OCLC's SiteSearch, the software we're going to use to build our statewide union catalog and resource sharing system. That's the bad news; the good news is that (thanks to their Montana customer's queries) both vendors are working with OCLC and expect to have the kinks worked out early in 2000.

I. SiteSearch will automate Montana libraries' interlibrary loan process, shrinking the mounds of paperwork and the myriad steps that make interlibrary loan an expensive and often frustrating proposition. Each library will have an electronic profile, describing their ILL preferences (what's borrowed, lent, and for how long and under what conditions). This library-built profile lets SiteSearch perform its magic. Filling-out the profile will be a time consuming if necessary process. It's hard to imagine how three consultants will be stretched to help all Montana's libraries think through and complete their profiles. It's hard to picture a statewide system without all libraries able to enjoy the benefits of the MLN SiteSearch server.

II. "So what," said one Montana librarian [I paraphrase], "so what if we can find and request items at light speed? What are we going to do about speeding up document delivery?" Good question. This might be something the NTF could explore in the future.

III. Folks love LaserCat. But what will it look like when it's more then WLN's database from Washington, Alaska, Idaho, and Montana libraries? Will it include UltraCard MARC? If not, what will serve in its place for producing library cards for those many libraries still using a card catalog or generating a card-based shelf list? Again, good questions. Questions to discuss with OCLC at the next Networking Task Force meeting, November 10.