

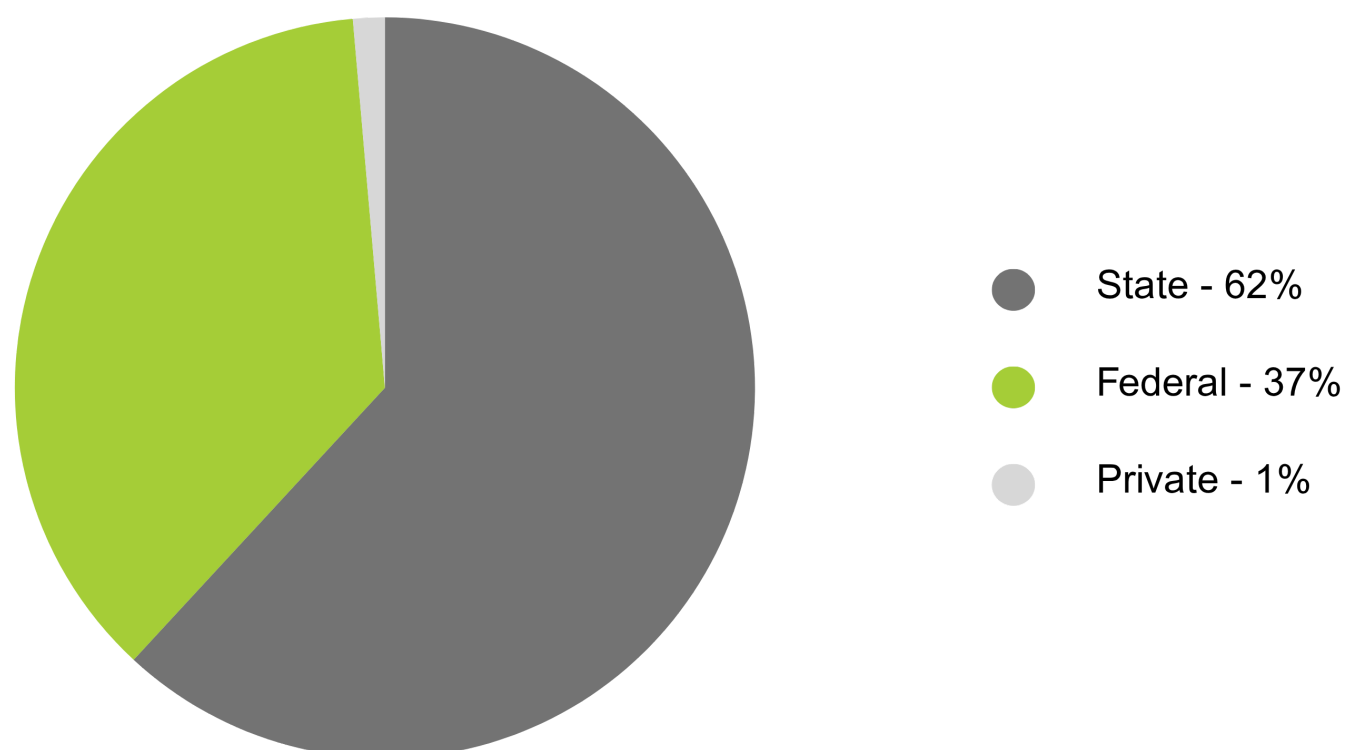
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# Federal Natural Resource Funds at Work

## What federal funds are received

In fiscal year 2025, **federal funds accounted for \$756,824 of the Montana State Library’s Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) budget, representing over a third of total NRIS funding.** These federal dollars are essential for making information and mapping products on Montana’s natural resources easily and readily available for land management, infrastructure planning, and permitting across Montana.

## NRIS FY 2025 Funding Sources



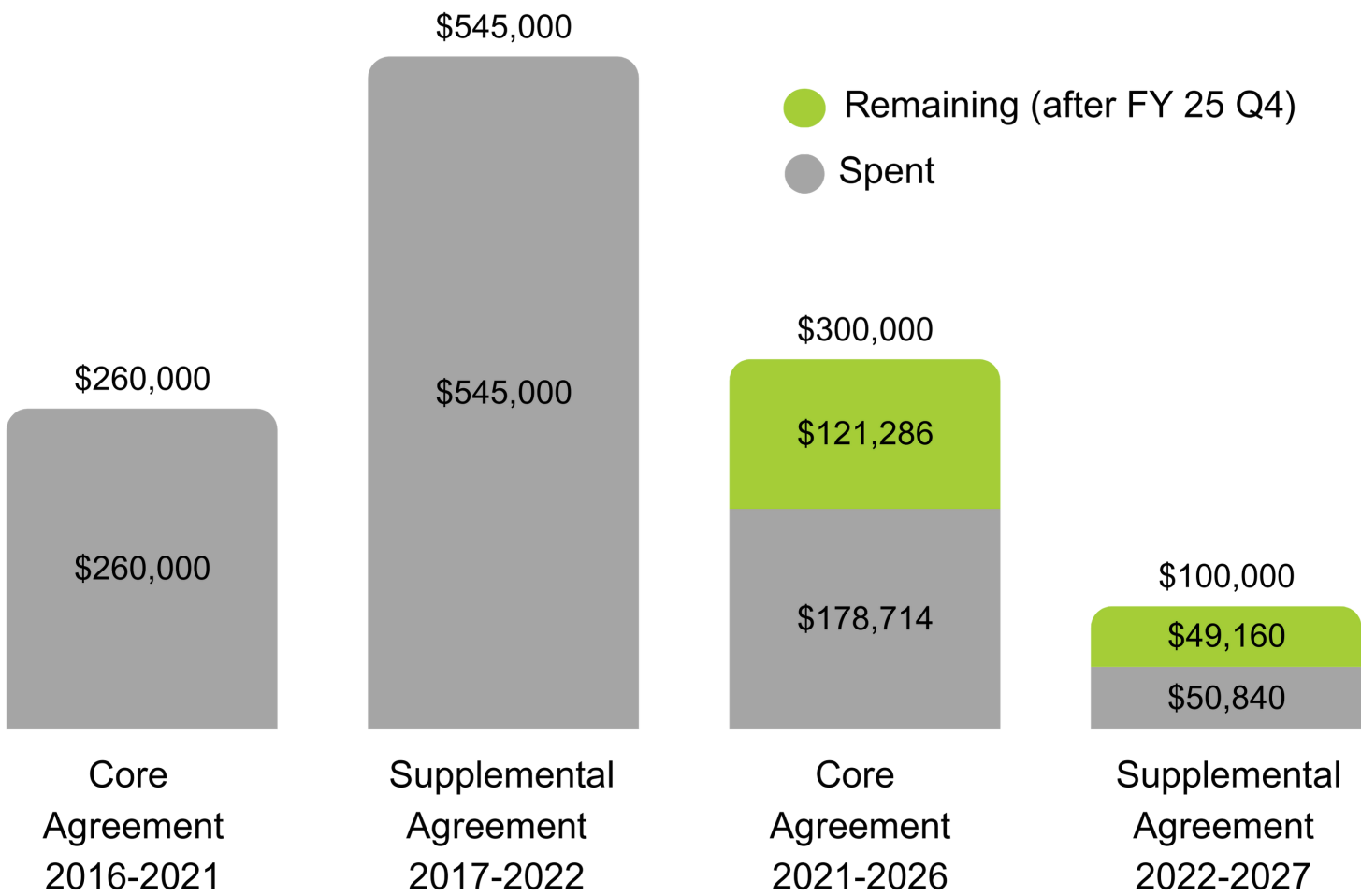
Federal dollars make up 37% of NRIS funding and support 5 FTE. Key federal partners include the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, NRCS, Bonneville Power Administration, and Office of Surface Mining. **Federal investments ensure that Montana's communities, businesses, and agencies have access to the reliable, up-to-date information they need for stewardship, planning, and economic growth.**

## Budget line items funded by federal dollars

NRCS Core Agreement (2021-2026).

# Natural Resource Information System

## Funds from NRCS Five-Year Agreements



Montana State Library has partnered with NRCS for more than 30 years to provide public access to natural resource data including soil and water data and to develop geospatial data and mapping products that support ecological planning, land cover mapping, and natural resource inventories. The NRCS Core Agreement supports 1 FTE, ensuring the delivery of essential natural resource data and information services to government, nonprofits, businesses, educators, and the public. This federal investment sustains the maintenance and enhancement of key web applications, including the [Ecological Site Reviewer](#), [Montana Lidar Inventory](#), [Air Photo Browser](#), and the [National Resources Inventory](#).

Beyond web applications, the agreement allows the Montana State Library to produce and archive monthly [snow and water supply maps and charts](#), process and provide access to statewide and historical aerial imagery, and develop and maintain mapping data and web services related to Montana’s natural resources. The library also processes and disseminates lidar data through the Montana Lidar Inventory web application.

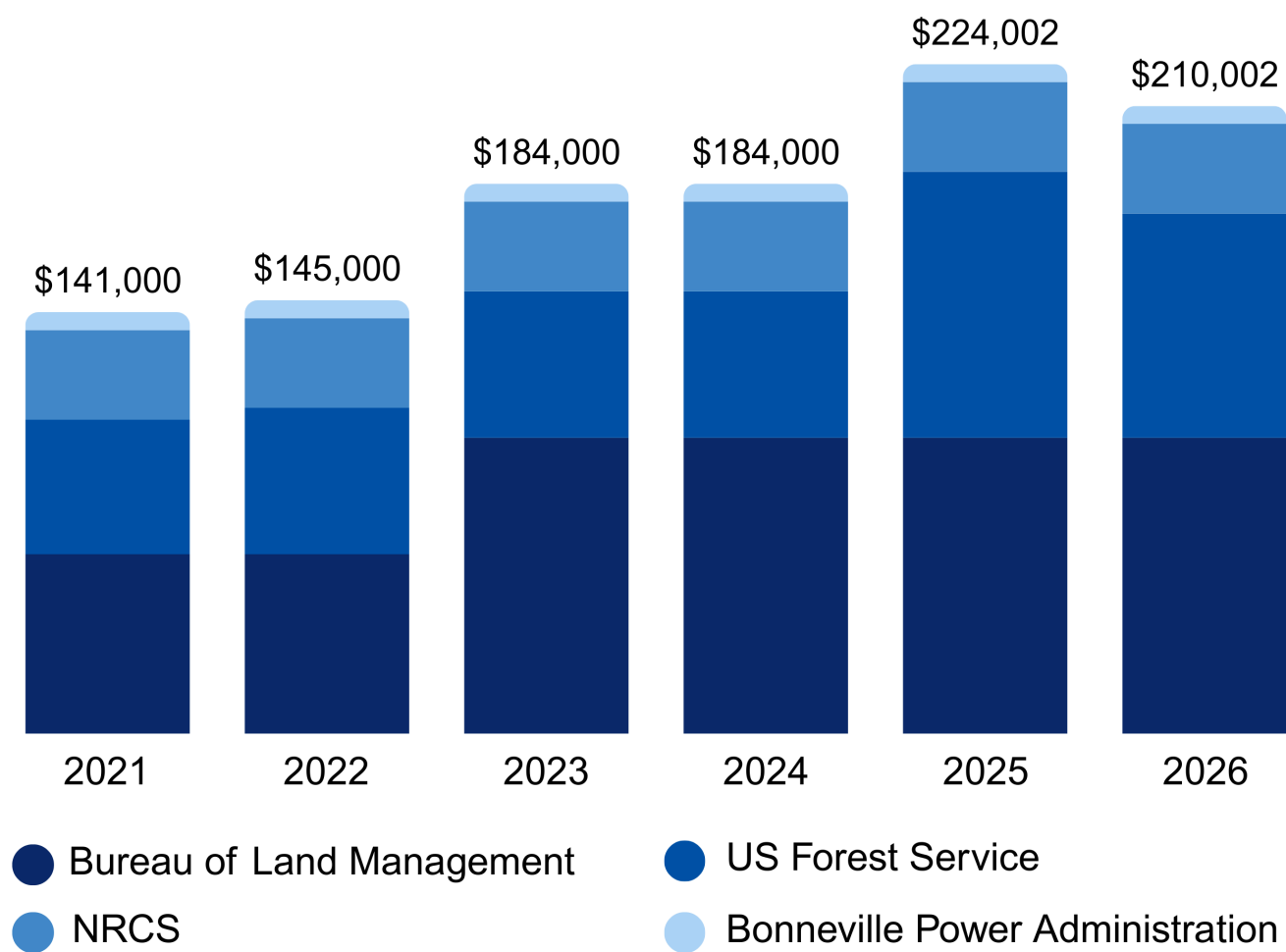
### NRCS Supplemental Agreement (2022-2027)

The NRCS Supplemental Agreement further expands the library’s capacity by supporting the processing of new, incoming lidar projects. Through this agreement, the Montana State Library publishes downloadable lidar products and web services, making high-quality elevation data readily available to NRCS staff, state agencies, and the public. This ensures that the latest lidar information is accessible for a variety of critical applications across Montana such as wildfire management and response, agriculture and precision farming, and infrastructure and transportation planning.

### MTNHP Federal Funds Summary

# Montana Natural Heritage Program

## Federal Funds



One of the statutory programs of NRIS is the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP). MTNHP uses federal funds for the maintenance of centralized, objective data on Montana’s flora, fauna, and biological communities. Federal funds also support 4 FTE within the Montana Natural Heritage Program who maintain and update authoritative data on the state’s plants, animals, and ecological communities. Staff operate several web applications, including the Montana Field Guide, Map Viewer, and Species Snapshot.

MTNHP also produces Environmental Summary Reports that consolidate information on species, surveys, land cover, wetland and riparian mapping, land management, biological reports, and invasive or pest species for specific areas of interest. These reports, requested by consultants, land managers, and others, are critical for meeting regulatory requirements by providing access to current, objective data on sensitive species and habitats. Comprehensive databases, web tools, and reports enable agencies and developers to identify potential conflicts early, streamline permitting processes, and make informed decisions for projects such as mining, timber sales, and energy development.

## Potential impact of the loss of federal funds

**Should federal funds be lost, several key natural resource projects and the staff that support them would be at risk.** The Montana State Library relies on NRCS agreements to process and deliver customized aerial imagery, which is essential for state agencies, local governments, and the private sector. Most statewide lidar data acquisition and management are funded by federal partners such as NRCS, United States Geological Survey (USGS), and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). While much of this funding does not go directly to the library, the resulting data is fundamental for mapping, flood-risk assessment, and infrastructure planning across Montana. These data collections capture a moment in time and should be regularly refreshed to provide current information for planning and policy making. Without continued federal investment, only existing imagery and lidar data would remain available, and the state would lose the capacity to acquire and process new information.

A lack of updated lidar data would also significantly hinder Montana’s ability to prepare for and respond to fire season. Lidar provides detailed, three-dimensional information on forest structure and fuel loads, which is critical for mapping wildfire risk, modeling fire behavior, and targeting fuel reduction efforts. **Without new lidar acquisitions and ready access to the data, land and fire managers would be forced to rely on outdated information, making it more difficult to predict fire spread, prioritize prevention, and plan effective responses, increasing the risk to Montana communities as wildfire seasons intensify.**

Federal support is also critical for Montana’s Water Information System. Key hydrography and watershed datasets are currently static while transitioning to a new national data model through the USGS 3D Hydrography Program (3DHP). Reduced federal funding would prolong this transition, forcing agencies and partners to rely on aging data. Outdated hydrography can undermine Montana’s ability to manage and prepare for growth and development. Reliable watercourse information depicts some of the most sensitive and high-risk landscapes, such as floodplains, riparian zones, and channel migration zones. Rivers and streams need space to move. **Up-to-date hydrography assists municipalities and agencies with growth plans and guidance to minimize risk to infrastructure and property and to maintain clean water.**

Loss of federal funds would also have serious impacts on the MTNHP, which relies on federal grants and contracts to maintain essential datasets. Without this support, the program would face significant financial shortfalls. MTNHP support would be limited to maintaining existing natural heritage data collections, but they would quickly become outdated, undermining MTNHP’s ability to expedite environmental reviews and provide certainty to its users in environmental review, permitting, and planning processes. If the program is unable to update species and habitat data, Environmental Summary Reports and other resources would become less reliable, forcing developers and permit applicants to spend more time and money seeking or generating their own data. **This would increase costs, cause delays, and erode the efficiency and predictability that MTNHP currently brings to permitting and land planning processes across Montana. Without current and comprehensive information in place, industry would likely face greater litigation due to uncertainty.**

Current level of threat to these funds

NRIS Federal Funding Threat Assessment



**Based on communication the State Library has received from federal partners, current funding for Montana’s natural resource data and mapping initiatives appears largely secure.** FY 25 Bureau of Land Management funds were paused briefly but later reinstated. Other FY 25 dollars remained in place and are being fully spent. FY 26 funding agreements are in place from the BLM, The Department of Military Affairs, and the USFS. The Montana NRCS office has proposed a renewal of the five-year agreement with the Montana State Library that would begin in FY 26. This agreement is working its way through the federal approval process and the final dollar amount of the agreement is not yet known.

MTNHP and Water Information Systems staff work closely with staff from the Region 1 Forest Service Office in Missoula and the Bozeman NRCS office. **Reorganization of the US Department of Agriculture into five hubs creates additional uncertainty** regarding ongoing communication with key partners and

their funding support.

Additionally, **federal partners have expressed that there is currently too much uncertainty to begin to discuss renewals to agreements that extend beyond FY 2026**, though this would typically be the period when we would begin to negotiate those agreements.