



MEMO

To: Montana State Library Commission
From: Jennie Stapp, State Librarian, Evan Hammer, Digital Library Administrator
Subject: Fiscal Year 2027 Montana State Reference Network Budget
Date: August 7, 2026

At the June 10, 2026, Commission meeting the Commission requested information regarding the impact of lower than anticipated adoption of the Montana State Reference Network (MTSRN).

MTSRN History

- 2006-present Stakeholders began early discussions about a real-time network for Montana. Montana tribes and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) build reference stations around Montana.
- 2013 The Montana State Library (MSL) awarded a \$45,000 Montana Geospatial Information Act (MGIA) Grant to the Chester-Joplin-Inverness School to install a Continually Operating Reference Station (CORS) to serve Liberty County. This project was completed with students and the Liberty County GIS Coordinator.
- 2015 Chester-Joplin-Inverness students presented the benefits of the CORS station to the residents of Liberty County to the MSL Commission.
- 2016 Liberty County received a second MGIA grant for \$8,500 to expand coverage of the CORS station.
- 2018-2024 Montana tribes, MDT, and MSL operated a pilot network in partnership with the Washington State Reference Network (WSRN) to test the benefits of operating a network in Montana. The WSRN staff managed pilot users during this period. Montanans were invited to use the network at no cost during the pilot phase.
- 2022 The MSL Commission authorized MSL to seek legislative authority to establish an enterprise fund to operate the MTSRN using a subscriber-based funding model.
MSL hired the MTSRN Operator who took over network and pilot user administration from the WSRN.

- 2023 The Legislature passed Senate Bill 60 that established the enterprise fund to operate the MTSRN. The Legislature also appropriated one-time MGIA monies to establish the MTSRN. The MSL Commission adopted administrative rule regarding the subscription model.
- 2024 The pilot program ended in June and MSL began accepting paid subscribers to the MTSRN.
Due to declines in MGIA revenue, MSL did not spend the full legislative appropriation. MSL did not hire a planned MTSRN tech to support the Operator and did not make planned investments in software to add more stations to the MTSRN.
- 2024-2026 MSL contracted with Real Marketing Solutions to increase awareness of the MTSRN with key targets in the agriculture and equipment industries in Montana. Their final report is included in meeting materials.

MTSRN Subscribers

MSL created a glidepath to set targets for subscriber adoption that would result in a funding model that fully funds the operations of the MTSRN. Projections were based on experiences in neighboring states where it took time for users to embrace the new technology. In Utah, for example, it took several years to reach 300 subscribers, but since they hit that benchmark usage has steadily increased.

The original target for full funding was 2029. Based on revised subscription targets we have shifted this date to 2031.

Subscriptions

Year	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Subscription Target	-	70	75**	150	250	400	500
Subscription Cost	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500
Revenue	-	\$105,000	\$112,500	\$225,000	\$375,000	\$600,000	\$750,000

Refer to the Commission's April Business Meeting materials to review the full glidepath: [Montana State Reference Network Glidepath March 2026](#)

At the time this glidepath was revised in March, the MTSRN had 74 paid subscribers. Based on the number of renewals, new subscribers, and active users, MSL projects that the number of subscribers will increase to 77 subscribers in 2027.

Additionally, the MTSRN provides service to 26 educational users, 15 users with promotional licenses, and 20 users who have contributed stations to the network.



For users who do not require real time correction, MSL supports the option to download raw data from any station in the network for post-processing at no cost. Users have downloaded raw data two dozen times since the start of the fiscal year.

MTSRN Revenue and Expenditures

Fiscal Year	Revenues
2024	\$ 62,087
2025	\$ 103,100
2026	\$ 63,000
2027 *YTD 8/7/26	\$ 70,500

Subscription Year	Subscriptions	Revenue
2025	69	\$88,900
2026	72	\$108,000
2027 *YTD 8/7/26	68	\$102,000

Fiscal Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
61000 Personal Services	\$ 58,568	\$ 113,580	\$ 116,416	\$ 120,974	\$ 123,876
62000 Operating Expenses	\$ 200,073	\$ 201,240	\$ 227,195	\$ 69,397	\$ 43,182
Total Expenditures	\$ 258,641	\$ 314,820	\$ 343,611	\$ 190,370	\$ 167,059
*excluding Software Contract FY 25 and 26					

MDT costs

MDT has determined that the MTSRN is a worthwhile invest for their business needs and that they will continue to support the network.

Contract costs for network hardware and software:

FY2025 - \$120,000

FY2026 - \$132,000

FY2027 - \$134,000

Additional Montana investment



The MTSRN currently consists of 80 stations managed by MDT (47), EarthScope (20), Tribal Nations (3) (Tribes have also supported 15 of the MDT and EarthScope stations), Colleges and Universities (4), Counties (3) and other partners (3). Stations cost approximately \$30,000 to \$50,000 each.

In the coming weeks, the Operator will add an additional 25 stations recently completed by MDT.

MTSRN options

1) Maintain status quo investment in the current subscriber-based funding model

Under this scenario MSL continues to support the MTSRN for a prolonged period with a mix of MGIA and State General Fund until such time as the MTSRN may be fully funded from subscribers. MDT continues to fund the software contract and station construction.

Anticipated costs FY27: \$390,709 (Operator, operations costs, nodes, equipment, administrative costs)

2) Streamlined network operations

Under this scenario MSL limits investment to cover the cost of the Operator and associated operational and administrative costs which MDT will not cover. This would assume that MDT continues to cover the software contract, costs of station construction and nodes for any stations they add to the network. MDT or partners would also cover any maintenance costs for new or existing stations. This is the lowest cost option to keep the network operating as a paid service for potential Montana users to grow interest over time.

Anticipated costs FY27: \$155,000 (Operator, operations costs, administrative costs)

3) Increase investment in the MTSRN subscriber-based funding model

Under this scenario MSL continues to support the MTSRN with a mix of MGIA and State General Fund with increased investment to provide adequate support for the Operator and to drive up subscribership.

This option includes hiring a full-time tech who can provide backup support to the Operator and ongoing technology investment to ensure the system is well-managed to meet user expectations.

For this option to be successful, Real Marketing Solutions recommends that MSL hire a contract sales representative who is available to travel the state to meet with potential customers in



person. In their expert opinion this approach is what customers in Montana expect and what MSL has, here to date, been unable to offer.

MDT continues to fund the software contract and station construction.

Anticipated costs FY27: \$545,350 (Operator, Tech, nodes, marketing contract)

4) End MSL involvement with the MTSRN

Under this scenario, MSL would cease to provide operational support for the MTSRN. MDT has said they would continue to operate the network for agency needs and are willing to support existing educational users.

Should the Commission adopt this option, MSL recommends that operational support end on June 30, 2027 to give current subscribers adequate notice. Current revenue in the MTSRN enterprise fund would be expended on fiscal year 2027 expenses. The Operator position would be eliminated through a reduction in force.

MSL may need to seek legislative approval to rescind the authorizing legislation passed in 2023.

Anticipated Costs FY27: \$150,000 (Reduction in force and winddown costs)