Montana Geospatial Information Advisory Council Business Meeting

9:00 a.m., September 17, 2026

Hybrid Meeting

Executive Summary

Recording Link

Attendance

Council Members: Jennie Stapp (Chair); Allen Armstrong; Maureen Celander; Eric Spangenberg; Joe Kauffman; Lee Macholz; Devin Mendez; Valentijn Hoff; Nick Youngstrom.

Council Members Absent: Judy (Tribal representative).

MSL Staff and Presenters: Erin Fashoway (State GIS Coordinator); Lesley Miller; Troy Blandford; Matt Trebesch; Meghan Burns; additional staff and guests attending in person and online.

Call to Order and Introductions

Timestamp: 00:01:10-00:03:50

Chair Jennie Stapp convened the meeting, welcomed participants, and facilitated introductions. The Council welcomed Devin Mendez, the new private-sector representative. Stapp also introduced Lesley Miller as the Montana State Library's new administrative assistant. No changes or additions were made to the agenda.

Business Items

Approval of April 23, 2026, Executive Summary

Timestamp: 00:03:37-00:04:00

Chair Stapp asked for corrections or additions. Hearing none, the April 23, 2026, Executive Summary was approved.

FY27-FY28 MGI Grant Reallocation

Timestamp: 00:04:02-00:06:35

Staff recommended reallocating the grant funds declined by Musselshell County, slightly more than $8,000, to the Montana Department of Revenue's FY27-FY28 grant award. The Department of Revenue had originally requested approximately $70,000 and received a partial award of approximately $33,000. Council discussion noted that the reduced Musselshell County award may not have justified the administrative burden and supported a future grant-subcommittee debrief on procedures for similar situations.

Motion: To approve the FY27-FY28 MGI grant reallocation to the Montana Department of Revenue.

Moved by: Maureen Celander

Second by: Nick Youngstrom

Vote: Unanimously approved. Motion passed.

Administrative Boundaries Theme Plan

Timestamp: 00:06:35-00:31:06

Meghan Burns presented the Administrative Boundaries Theme Plan. The theme includes statewide jurisdictional boundaries and election-related subthemes. Strengths include established update and publication processes and long-standing partnerships with local, state, federal, and tribal entities. Near-term priorities include more frequent working-group engagement, improved outreach and process documentation, complete inventories of datasets and applications, accessibility and consistency reviews, topology and alignment improvements, metadata validation, schema review, and more frequent publishing. Longer-term considerations include cross-training staff and evaluating statewide zoning data. Council members encouraged outreach through MACo and the GIS Managers Forum.

Motion: To approve the Administrative Boundaries Theme Plan as presented.

Moved by: Valentijn Hoff

Second by: Nick Youngstrom

Vote: Unanimously approved. Motion passed.

Elevation Theme Plan

Timestamp: 00:31:24-00:57:47

Troy Blandford presented the Elevation Theme Plan. Montana is transitioning from a statewide 10-meter elevation model to 1-meter LiDAR-derived elevation products, with statewide LiDAR collection substantially complete. Priorities include completing core products, producing statewide contours, improving web services and project inventories, coordinating acquisition and refresh cycles, maintaining national standards, shortening processing timelines where possible, and aligning elevation work with hydrography needs. Discussion addressed contour intervals, accuracy limitations, funding partnerships, and the need for ongoing refreshes as older LiDAR ages.

Motion: To approve the Elevation Theme Plan as presented.

Moved by: Eric Spangenberg

Second by: Maureen Celander

Vote: Unanimously approved. Motion passed.

Hydrography Theme Plan

Timestamp: 00:58:07-01:30:56

Troy Blandford presented the Hydrography Theme Plan and the transition from the frozen National Hydrography Dataset to the USGS 3D Hydrography Program, which derives surface-water features from LiDAR-based elevation. The plan recommends eventually consolidating hydrography and hydrologic units into a single MSDI surface-water theme. Priorities include coordinating with elevation collection, defining state-maintained attributes beyond the national model, improving local-resolution data, supporting watershed and catchment products, mapping culverts and other flow-control features, and pursuing basin-by-basin work as funding and partnerships allow. Council

discussion emphasized local emergency-response, infrastructure, water-rights, and planning uses.

Motion: To approve the Hydrography Theme Plan as presented.

Moved by: Valentijn Hoff

Second by: Maureen Celander

Vote: Unanimously approved. Motion passed.

Discussion Items

Montana State Reference Network

Timestamp: 01:32:13-01:43:03

Chair Stapp reported that the Montana State Library Commission directed staff to pursue ending MSL's involvement in the Montana State Reference Network. The subscriber-supported model has grown more slowly than projected, with approximately 80 subscribers and about $100,000 in annual revenue compared with the long-term goal of roughly 500 subscribers and $750,000. Legislative action is required to rescind the current authority, and MSL will continue operating the network under existing law until that process is complete. MDT expects to continue supporting the network, station partners, and educational users, but the future public subscription and operator-support model remain under discussion. MSL and MDT will coordinate future communications. MAGIP and MARLS representatives were encouraged to share stakeholder feedback.

Preliminary 2027 Council Meeting Dates

Timestamp: 01:43:05-01:54:35

The Council discussed a preliminary 2027 schedule: an online meeting January 14; an April meeting held with the Big Sky GeoCon in Great Falls; a summer business meeting and work session during the week of June 14; and the usual third-Thursday meetings in September and November. Staff will return with final dates for action at the November 2026 meeting.

NSGIC Annual Conference Planning

Timestamp: 01:54:55-02:09:00

Erin Fashoway reviewed plans and expectations for the NSGIC Annual Conference in Bozeman, including the conference schedule, networking opportunities, and Montana participation. Council members were encouraged to attend the full event when possible and use the conference for substantive discussions with state and national partners.

Geospatial Communications and Service Update

Timestamp: 02:09:00-02:41:12

Staff reviewed outreach and communication activities, stakeholder engagement, and recent service and support trends. Discussion highlighted the effectiveness of the strategic communications approach, strong participation across public meetings and conferences, and the volume of technical assistance provided to geospatial partners.

Geospatial Accessibility Best Practices

Timestamp: 02:41:47-03:48:45

Matt Trebesch and Nick Youngstrom presented work of the GIS Managers Forum Accessibility Working Group. The group developed guidance for static maps and interactive GIS applications, evaluation steps and checklists, an application inventory template, and an Esri application accessibility guide. The work responds to federal digital-accessibility requirements and draws on resources from other states, federal guidance, and direct work with Esri. Discussion covered alternative text, application ownership, inventories, testing, remediation, peer review, training, grant requirements, and statewide adoption. The Council supported publishing the materials as living best-practice documents, gathering broader feedback, and returning later for formal adoption and possible use in grant requirements.

Standing Reports

Financial Report and Collections Dashboard

Timestamp: 03:48:59-03:58:38

Staff reviewed the financial dashboard and third-quarter report; the fourth-

quarter fiscal-year closeout was still underway. Recording fee collections continued to trend above recent comparison years. Discussion addressed county-level reporting, a possible missing February submission, delays and corrections in Department of Revenue data, and recent automation of the dashboard. Staff agreed to investigate the anomaly and the updated data connection.

State GIS Coordinator Report

Timestamp: 03:58:42-04:21:52

Fashoway reported that the annual review of the Geospatial Information Plan was complete and no update was recommended. Strategic-plan implementation continues through architecture modernization, web-content restructuring, development of governance policies and best practices, and evaluation of each MSDI theme. Ten of twelve grant contracts were in place; Musselshell County declined its award, and the first in-person grant kickoff training was held August 11-12. Fashoway also discussed federal metadata standards, emerging AI-related data needs, and the importance of coordination before adopting alternate standards. Custer County received a National Association of Counties Achievement Award.

Council Member and Partner Updates

Timestamp: 04:21:52-04:37:50

Council members and partner organizations provided updates.

MAGIP: The 2026 Big Sky GeoCon in Whitefish drew more than 200 registrants and approximately 20 sponsors. Planning is underway for the April 12-16, 2027, conference in Great Falls. Liz Jewers was elected vice president, Alexa Morris became secretary, and planning continues for GIS Day, training, and collaboration with MARLS and other organizations.

Valentijn Hoff: The University of Montana GIS certificate program is again without a dedicated coordinator, although courses are being covered. He also noted a drone LiDAR collaboration with Chief Dull Knife College.

Maureen Celander: MACo will meet September 27-30 in Helena. Counties are closely watching data-center development and possible legislative

changes, with likely increased demand for water and hydrography information.

Joe Kauffman: MARLS approved and signed an MOU with MAGIP, launched a new website and member portal, and hired Cotton Law Firm for lobbying support. Tisha Staley is the contact for coordinating a possible February workshop.

Nick Youngstrom: State IT integration work continues, with GIS still largely outside the centralization effort. The GIS Managers Forum is continuing governance discussions and planning October workshops.

Devin Mendez: Introduced himself as a recent Montana resident and private-sector representative working for WET Environmental Services after prior service with USGS.

Allen Armstrong: Reported continued BLM progress on parcel-fabric contributions, Surface Management Agency data, the BLM road network, a new public content portal, and nationwide authoritative datasets.

Recognition

Timestamp: 04:37:53-04:39:45

Chair Stapp announced that Erin Fashoway will receive a Governor's Award for Excellence for her work negotiating the State of Montana's Esri contract and achieving savings that supported the new GIS architecture and related agency collaboration. Council members congratulated Fashoway.

Public Comment

Timestamp: 04:39:53-04:40:07

Chair Stapp called for public comment. None was received.

Adjournment

Timestamp: 04:40:07

Chair Stapp adjourned the meeting.

Next meeting: November 19, 2026.