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MEMO

To: Montana Geospatial Information Advisory Council

From: Erin Fashoway, State GIS Coordinator

Subject: Montana Spatial Data Infrastructure (MSDI) Theme Plans Public Comment

Date: 11/19/2026

The following MSDI Cadastral Theme Plan was developed in support of Goal 4, *Continue to Improve the Collection, Maintenance, and Dissemination of Authoritative Geospatial Information*, of the Montana GIS Coordination Strategic Plan, in consultation with the MSDI Cadastral Working Group.

The plan was released for public comment from September 30, 2026, through October 30, 2026.

All public comments received during the comment period were reviewed and considered. Where appropriate, comments were incorporated into the final version of the Theme Plan. Attached are the public comments submitted for review.

Recommendation: Adopt the MSDI Cadastral Theme Plan.

Public Comment

Subject: MSDI Cadastral Draft Theme Plan

Open: 9-30-2026 Close: 10-30-2026

Comments collected through Microsoft Forms and email

Submitted time: 2026-09-30 11:42

Name: Ross Carlson

City: Butte

Email: rcarlson@bsb.mt.gov

Comment:

[emailed direct to Jeff Hedstrom]

“With our parcel fabric now living in a feature service, we would like to talk more about preferred delivery method to you. Jeff, did you say that you harvested the parcels from the other 4 of 5 independent counties via authorized access to that their feature services and that we were the only ones who zipped up and emailed you the data in a file geodatabase? We would like to consider moving toward feature service for delivery to you. This also might help enable some of MSLs goals to publish parcel updates semimonthly as per goal 4 (Lines 124-129) of the cadastral theme draft plan hot off the presses.”

Submitted time: 2026-10-01 15:57

Name: Allen Armstrong

City: Billings

Email: ajarmstrong@blm.gov

Comment:

[emailed direct to Jeff Hedstrom]

On behalf of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), I am writing to express our strong support for the Montana Spatial Data Infrastructure (MSDI) Cadastral Theme Plan. As a core partner in maintaining the Cadastral National Spatial Data Infrastructure (CadNSDI),

BLM relies on this framework daily to support efforts such as land management decisions, oil and gas lease sales, land exchanges, public easements and rights of way, and public land boundary integrity across Montana. The plan's goal of incorporating all currently missing General Land Office (GLO) surveys into the CadNSDI is one we are particularly invested in, as this work will significantly contribute to the overall spatial accuracy of the cadastral framework.

The BLM is committed to our continued partnership with the Montana State Library, collaborating on the input of historic survey control and prioritization of the remaining survey gaps. Support from our staff is available to increase overall capacity and share in the responsibilities of producing authoritative data for all users.

We also recognize the value of the plan's broader goals, particularly improving topology accuracy between public lands and parcel data and developing a better mechanism to detect public land ownership changes. These efforts directly support BLM's responsibility for accurate, up-to-date public land records, and a more consistent, timely dataset benefits both our internal operations and the many external stakeholders who rely on this framework for land use planning, emergency response, and resource management.

BLM fully endorses this plan and the Montana State Library's continued leadership in coordinating the Cadastral Framework Theme. We look forward to continuing our collaboration on GLO survey integration and public lands data maintenance, and we encourage decision-makers to provide the support needed to carry this plan forward over the next five years."

Submitted time: 2026-10-02 09:41

Name: Brian Colesworthy

City: Choteau

Email: bcolesworthy@tetoncountymt.gov

Comment:

"I support the direction of this plan. From the planning, floodplain, and addressing side here in Teton County, there are a few areas I would like to see given additional consideration.

My biggest concern is having property address verification listed as a longer-term goal. Accurate physical addresses are important for county operations and emergency response and are also a crucial part of elections, helping place voters in the correct precincts and

voting districts. I would like to see this moved into the earlier priorities, with county addressing staff involved in verifying the information and keeping physical addresses separate from mailing addresses.

It would also be helpful to have a straightforward process for counties to report incorrect ownership, addresses, or parcel mapping and track those corrections through completion. Knowing who is responsible and receiving confirmation when an issue is resolved would make this easier on our end.

I support publishing parcel updates twice a month. However, it would also help to show when the underlying ownership and mapping information was last updated so users can tell how current it actually is.

For survey control and mapping improvements, please consider rural counties with limited staff and GIS resources. Counties with significant mapping needs should have a way to receive assistance even if they do not have the capacity to prepare a competitive grant application.

Lastly, I would encourage offering basic training and guidance earlier in the schedule, including simple instructions for submitting corrections and routing conservation easement documents.

I appreciate the work being put into this plan. These improvements would help smaller counties keep information accurate and make better use of the statewide data."

Submitted time: 2026-10-02 10:06

Name: Scott Weinrich

City: Cut Bank

Email: 4495fs@gmail.com

Comment:

"I own property in Cut Bank, Montana (previously outside city limits, later annexed in). A recent cadastral survey showed why stronger PLSS/township-corner control matters. With few nearby survey markers, control had to be brought in from farther away, which caused major cost overruns and took much longer than expected. Better statewide survey markings and prioritized corner acquisition would keep routine property-line verification more affordable for individual landowners, so they're more inclined to hire a survey company instead of facing the kind of long-distance control pulls I incurred.

Separately, some public cadastral / ownership web pages still do not reflect our updated property line adjustments or current ownership. Improving the accuracy and timeliness of ownership and parcel-boundary display (including fixes to Orion/Cadastral ownership queries) would help private landowners rely on the statewide data.

I support the draft Theme Plan's goals around township-corner control, CadNSDI completeness, and more frequent, accurate parcel/ownership updates."

Submitted time: 2026-10-05 08:10

Name: anonymous

Comment:

"Please make a version of the cadastral that is offline capable."

Submitted time: 2026-10-15 14:17

Name: Alison Kennedy

City: Bozeman

Email: AKennedy@mt.gov

Comment:

[emailed direct to Jeff Hedstrom]

"I had a chance to read over your draft plan and have a few thoughts for you.

(Lines 116-123) Investigate improvements to the Orion Data Service: the example you cite is the beneficiary owner showing up. I know the PRSs (formerly PVSs) were instructed to enter them as owners for a time, but I thought that decision was reversed. There are uniform standards of data entry for things like ownership, but those standards have changed over time. For instance, there was an ongoing debate about whether a trust or the trustees of the trust should listed first in the ownership. I'm not sure if it's ever been settled, but the likelihood of anyone going back and fixing ownerships that were entered using what is now the wrong method is low. Higher level discussions are needed for the standardization of data entry and its impacts outside the DOR. Beneficiary owners being a great example of unintended consequences.

(124-129) Publish parcels semi-monthly: it only takes our GIS analysts a few minutes to send updates to you and can accommodate a more frequent submission schedule. Most of

the analysts have been instructed to hold off on sending tax year 2027 updates to you until January, similar to the rest of the AT Pro data. We aren't strict on this because the big 5 obviously send their updates in before then. Even if we were to push out the GIS updates early, there can be significant lag time between when a split is filed at the Clerk & Recorder's office and when it makes it to our GIS analyst's desk.

(161-168) Facilitate a seamless parcel data initiative: will need to keep county boundary dataset current and adjusted to CadNSDI. Will need to have ability to update boundaries as needed-state boundary might be changing, and county boundary will have to change with it. There are known errors with the written legal descriptions of counties and the county boundary dataset. County boundaries go through unsurveyed lands-not an issue with public lands, but there are private lands mixed in. Until the US government surveys the section and township boundaries, no one can say for certain where the county boundary is and whether a parcel is located wholly within one county or is split the boundary.

(176-179) Conservation easements: currently, the Clerk & Recorder's office is supposed to give us any newly filed conservation easements, along with the other documents they provide us. PRS staff at the DOR is supposed to work with the GIS analysts to identify the parcels and acreage of easement on each parcel, then the GIS analyst is supposed to map the easement, and the GIS unit sends them along to you. Right now, any one of the people in the chain might not know that they need to be on the look out for conservation easements and how to handle them. I would say this is especially true in smaller counties and counties that don't have a lot of conservation easements. Within DOR, this can fall to the bottom of the priority list as conservation easements don't change the assessed value of a property.

Many of your goals are trying to get the cadastral data closer to a real-time land records database as that is how people view the cadastral data. However, from the DOR perspective, cadastral data is a yearly snapshot of taxable property."

Submitted time: 2026-10-28 09:47:13

Name: Jay Springer

City: Havre

Email: jspringer@heberlyeng.com

Comment:

“Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft MSDI Cadastral Theme Plan. As a professional engineer and land surveyor working in north-central Montana, I support improving the accuracy, consistency, and availability of statewide cadastral information.

My primary concern is how these improvements will reach smaller communities and rural counties with limited staff, funding, and GIS expertise. Please consider the following concerns and possible solutions:

(Lines 266-272) The draft recognizes that mapping improvements have largely followed successful grant applications rather than areas of greatest need. Communities without grant-writing capacity may continue to fall behind. The proposed prioritization model should consider data deficiencies, local staffing capacity, and public-service needs. State-assisted applications and regional projects could help underserved areas participate.

(161-168) Resolving county-boundary discrepancies, correcting parcel information, and improving conservation-easement routing may require time from already stretched county offices. The final plan should identify responsibilities, estimate local workload, and provide technical assistance or funding. Standard procedures and shared regional support would help make participation manageable.

(170-175 & 263) The draft schedules additional SQL database resources for year five. Small offices also need basic assistance using cadastral data, understanding its limitations, and reporting errors. Short training sessions, plain-language guides, and a clear support contact should be available early in implementation.

(125-129) Twice-monthly parcel publication would be useful, but users also need to know how current the underlying information is. Clearly displayed source dates, update dates, and a straightforward error-reporting process would help. Reported errors should receive acknowledgment and a way to track their resolution.

(258-262) The draft places verification of incorrect property addresses among longer-term goals. Address discrepancies can complicate permitting, utility coordination, and emergency-service planning. Consider an earlier pilot effort with local addressing authorities to identify and resolve discrepancies while preserving the distinction between property, mailing, and emergency-service addresses.

(101-106 & 188-194) Improved survey control and parcel alignment will benefit planning and preliminary engineering. The final plan should also explain that mapped parcel lines do not establish surveyed property boundaries. Accessible accuracy information and

guidance on when professional surveying or records verification is needed would help prevent misuse.

Statewide targets alone may not show whether smaller communities' benefit. Annual reporting should identify areas improved, remaining deficiencies, correction turnaround times, and assistance provided to communities with limited resources.

I support the plan's overall direction. Pairing its technical goals with practical assistance, fair prioritization, and clear responsibilities would help ensure that Montana's smaller communities can participate in and benefit from these improvements.

Thank you for considering these comments."

Submitted time: 2026-10-28 11:12:17

Name: Ethan Ostby

City: Billings

Email: ethan.j.ostby@imegcorp.com

Comment:

"After reading the plan, all of it sounds very reasonable to me. I don't believe I read anything that I would disagree with or have enough knowledge to make suggestions on."

Submitted time: 2026-10-28 11:42:41

Name: Alicia

City: Glasgow

Email: alma_ann@hotmail.com

Comment:

"Cadastral was a great tool! Until they changed It completely. Please go back to the old version. I no longer use what a great tool used to be and can be again."

Submitted time: 2026-10-29 11:37:42

Name: Brian Huotari, PLS MDT

City: Glendive

Email: BHuotari@mt.gov

Comment:

“(Line 81), the 3 - 5 yr plan looks good. (90/107/110) Appreciate the funding and focus to restore TWP corners. (127) Good focus to update parcels more often. (140/158) A pet peeve of mine is that the BLM doesn't record their surveys in the county in a timely fashion.

Overall, looks like a good plan.”

Submitted time: 2026-10-29 11:38:00

Name: Troy Jensen, PLS

City: Sidney

Email: tjensen@benchls.com

Comment:

"I support the draft Cadastral Theme Plan, particularly its goal of expanding PLSS survey control. I recommend a voluntary, compensated submission program to accelerate acquisition while reducing costs.

As a Montana Professional Land Surveyor, I have performed county-administered MGIA projects recovering existing PLSS monuments and collecting GNSS coordinates, at costs of approximately $500–$1,000 per recovered corner. Surveyors routinely recover and measure these same monuments during other work. The state could obtain much of that information more economically by accepting qualifying observations already collected in the field.

I propose paying Montana-licensed surveyors approximately $150–$200 for each newly accepted corner lacking existing, acceptable survey-grade control. Approximate GIS positions would not disqualify a corner. Payment would follow state review and acceptance and would compensate submission of existing field information—not a separate recovery project. Observations of corners already under accepted control could be submitted without payment as independent checks, with significant discrepancies flagged for review.

The State Library already maintains a public control database, mapping viewer, and submission procedures. These could support a streamlined electronic process accepting qualifying RTK GNSS observations using the Montana State Reference Network (MTSRN).

Requirements should preserve appropriate accuracy and documentation without imposing lengthy additional occupations or field procedures beyond normal professional surveying.

This approach directly supports Goal 2 (page 4), increasing township-corner control from approximately 18% to 25%, and could accelerate the longer-term 35% objective identified in the Parking Lot (page 8). It also supports Goal 1's prioritization efforts and the plan's spatial accuracy, completeness, and timeliness measures (pages 4, 6–7). The plan notes that statewide acquisition could take more than 80 years at current resource levels (page 9); leveraging routine surveying could shorten that timeline while leaving MGIA grant projects available for remote or underserved areas.

I encourage the State Library to pilot this approach using eligible existing cadastral-improvement funding, subject to authorization. The pilot should measure accepted corners, total cost per usable corner—including administration and verification—and time to incorporation into the statewide framework. I believe this is a practical way to advance the plan's goals with available resources."

Submitted time: 2026-10-29 10:58:48

Name: Wallace Gladstone

City: Billings

Email: Wallace.J.Gladstone@imegcorp.com

Comment:

"(Lines 107-115) Please delete lines 107 through 115 and replace them with the following: Acquire PLSS corners for the state through Land Surveyors, ensuring that PLSS corner coordinates are incorporated into COS, plats, ROWs, and other documents required for submission to state and county officials."

Submitted time: 2026-10-29 14:53:37

Name: Joe Kauffman

City: Sidney

Email: bigskysurveying@gmail.com

Comment:

"(Line 8) I'm not sure how often the public land changes. Would this also include private property?

All in all, I think the overall plan and goals is perfect."

Submitted time: 2026-10-30 13:38:00

Name: Dan Stahly

City: Bozeman

Email: dstahly@seaeng.com

Comment:

[emailed direct to Jeff Hedstrom]

Just made some notes as I read through this, and not exactly what you are asking for. As far as priorities and goals go, I think this is very well done, understandable, and don't have any feedback.

(Lines 42-44) Just a comment: With modern survey deliverable techniques such as using published coordinate systems for data collection and legal land title mapping, the vast majority of surveyors have the capacity to deliver mapping in the form of .shp files. The implication of this is (incoming) owner parcels would need no adjustment. Also worth noting is that many parcels are defined or controlled by the PLSS. (1) This effort would also help with several other plan topics, such analyzation of survey control, township corner acquisition, and publishing parcels semi-monthly. (2) Survey deliverables such as .shp file polygons could be processed at the local level, for example, requiring them when submitting to County ELS or Planning for review.

(80) Just in case you still need to add private sector support: "The Cadastral MSDI framework has become a critical tool in the land record research process, allowing land surveyors to be more efficient with research and field observation planning and deployment." Dan Stahly, Professional Land Surveyor

(179) I was not aware that there was no formal process for notification of conservation easement recordation. If they are US held (NRCS) easements, they require a survey plat/modern/certified legal description and collection of coordinates for all controlling PLSS corners. Unfortunately, the local conservation easement brokers rarely practice this.

However, they do follow the practice of allowing the County to review the easement deed prior to being recorded.

(107-115) The goal of 25% Township corner coverage would greatly benefit from this data, as most large conservation easements are controlled by the PLSS.

(273-277) Theme challenges identify partner conservation easement data providers, I suggest communicating with them on how even minimal controlling corner data collection can benefit both entities.

Thanks again for leading the charge, and I hope my comments illustrate support for all your efforts. Feel free to reach out any time.