MONTANA WILDLIFE AND TRANSPORTATION

STEERING COMMITTEE
Meeting Notes
August 5, 2020

PURPOSE: To hear updates and provide direction on priorities in the work plan, including the Data and Information Work group, communications, and funding.

Objectives:

- Provide feedback and direction to the Data and Information Work Group
- Finalize the Guide to Stakeholder Engagement and outline a process for responding to public inquiries
- Understand the status of the funding white paper

ATTENDEES:

- Steering Committee (Committee): Mike Tooley (MDT), Tom Martin (MDT Proxy), Ken McDonald (FWP), Kylie Paul (MSWP), Stephanie Adams (MSWP)
- Agency Staff: Bill Semmens (MDT)
- Planning and Implementation Team (PIT Crew): Deb Wambach (MDT), Renee Lemon (FWP), Hannah Jaicks (MSWP); Nick Clarke (MSWP); Laramie Maxwell (MSWP)
- Data & Information Work Group: Liz Fairbank (MSWP), Gabe Priebe (MDT), Adam Messer (FWP)
- Guests: Brooke Shifrin (MSWP)

AGENDA:

1. **Introduction**

2. **Data and Information Work Group**
    a. **Presentation on work group's draft mission statement, targeted product, and criteria**
        - Work group members: Paul Sturm (MDT), Gabe Priebe (MDT), Brian Andersen (MDT), Liz Fairbank (MSWP), Joshua Theurer (MSWP), Andrew Jakes (MSWP), Justin Gude (FWP), and Adam Messer (FWP).
        - The Data and Information Work Group has met twice and developed a first draft of a mission statement, targeted product, and prioritization criteria.
        - The draft Data and Information Work Group Mission Statement was presented and discussed. The document consists of a mission, targeted products, and prioritization criteria.
        - The Data and Information Work Group wants feedback from the Committee to make sure they are headed in the right direction.

    b. **What is the Committee's feedback and direction?**
        - Clarification of how the criteria are prioritized:

    - MDT asked if the criteria are prioritized or if they are all equal value. The work group responded they have not ranked the criteria as they are at the conceptual stage.
    - The work group will do a follow-up exercise to determine weights of each criteria. The list of criteria could be modified. Although, the first two criteria might rise to the top.

- MSWP asked if this would be an adaptive tool where layers could be added in the future, if there is a way to ensure up-to-date data is added into layers, and if the criteria layers could be turned on and off.
    - Yes. The work group noted conditions are constantly changing (e.g., traffic volumes) and there needs to be a process for including dynamic data.
    - MSWP noted it would be useful to look at individual layers or pull one layer out. MSWP asked if there could be a layer that shows overlap between wildlife-vehicle conflicts and important areas for wildlife passage.
    - Yes. The overlap of certain layers will help inform priorities.

- MDT asked if the public facing map would include MDT's existing wildlife accommodations. This would be a way to show progress. The work group responded they had not discussed this idea, but it sounded like it could be a good addition.
    - MDT noted that using MDT highway projects as a criterion may limit prioritization of areas for wildlife and transportation. For example, thinking broader, a map of priority areas could inform the nomination of projects. The planning horizon needs to be more than five years.
    - MSWP raised consideration of having criteria such as highway planning projects and community support be more secondary criteria that could be used to determine opportunities moving forward, but not influence were areas of need are occurring.
    - The Committee's charter states the scope as state highways so county roads should be removed from the work group's scope.

- Clarification about the use of the forthcoming map as a tool:
    - MDT expressed confusion because sometimes the product sounds like a priority map and sometimes a tool to determine priority projects. The work plan asked for a tool to determine the need for wildlife accommodations, not a map of priority projects. The language needs to be modified to reflect a tool. It should be a tiered approach and follow the workplan and recommendations under Theme 4.
    - Replace "ensure" in the first criterion to "address" because there is no way to ensure human safety.
    - MSWP asked if the language should be changed so it's not a priority map, but a map of needs based on conflict and/or movement hot spots. Then the Committee would come up with additional criteria to help inform prioritization of projects.

    - MDT responded the tool is a starting point to determine the need for wildlife accommodations. This is an iterative process. This tool would inform decision making, but it would not drive decisions in and of itself. The Data and Information Work Group representatives agreed the language can be clarified. The main goal at this stage is to identify areas with the greatest need and not to create a list of high priority projects. The tool should be clear about the purpose: it is a tool to be used in decision making, not a decision maker.

- MSWP suggested the work group brainstorm and list the ways this tool could be used, determine which are feasible, and then share a summary with the Committee. They want to know what would be most useful for MDT's decision making. How will FWP use this tool? If there are new federal funding opportunities for wildlife and transportation, this tool could help get projects ready for these competitive opportunities.
    - MDT responded that they could use the tool immediately by district staff to nominate highway projects for the future. They would be able to see which areas are a high priority for wildlife and incorporate that information in their nominations.
    - At some point, there will be federal funding designated for wildlife accommodations and this tool would be useful to pursue that funding.
    - Beyond MDT, other NGOs and stakeholders could use the tool to approach MDT or the Committee to partner on a project or focus fundraising efforts.

- MSWP suggested removing Criterion 6, which is to focus on areas within the MDT highway improvement planning horizon or where non-government resources can be procured, because it is limiting. There is a need to think about equity because there may be areas where there is high need, but not private funding or community support. First, consider need and then think about MDT planning horizons and NGO resources and other criteria to inform efforts.
    - MDT noted there are several different planning horizons from right now to decades. The tool could inform Tentative Construction Plan (especially projects beyond five years) and planning studies.
    - FWP suggested that instead of Criterion 6, add a description of how this product would be incorporated in the MDT planning process.
    - MDT agreed with this suggestion.

- MDT asked how the tool could be used by FWP and MSWP:
    - FWP could use the tool to prioritize conservation easements. For example, if there's a possible conservation easement project on a ranch that connects one side of the highway to the other side. The conservation easement could ensure there will not be a subdivision in case there is a need and desire for a wildlife accommodation.
    - MSWP could use the tool to identify communities that may have a need for wildlife and transportation projects in the future. The NGOs can help with community outreach and conservation easements through land trusts.

- MSWP suggested the Committee create a list of uses for the tool. Look to what other states have done.
- The Center for Large Landscape Conservation is working on documenting what other states are doing – this could be helpful for this list. They will share the information with the Committee.
- MDT asked if a list of uses for the tool would help the Data and Information Work Group. The work group responded that it would.

- MSWP noted that a communications plan could determine how to communicate data and information especially if a portion of the tool is going to be public. It will be important that there are not false expectations or concerns for what it means to identify an area of need.

c. Next steps

- The Committee will review and add comments to the draft mission statement over the next two weeks.
- The Committee will create a list of potential uses for the tool.

3. **Communications**

a. The PIT Crew will have a draft white paper on communications resources within each organization for the November meeting.

b. Draft Guide to Stakeholder Engagement

- The PIT Crew revised the guide based on Committee feedback at the June meeting and sent the draft back to the Committee. There were no additional edits or comments.

- The purpose of the guide is to develop a framework for stakeholders and members of the public to engage with the Committee because there is high interest in wildlife and transportation.

- What is the Committee's feedback on the revised draft Guide to Stakeholder Engagement?
  - FWP noted the guide makes it sound like we're soliciting projects. A better way to engage interested people would be the tool that will come out of the Data and Information Work Group. This guide should describe that process (e.g., if they have data, want to collect data).
  - MSWP noted the intent was to provide guidance on the inevitable project ideas from stakeholders and public. Wordsmith to clarify and avoid making it sound like the Committee is soliciting projects.
  - MDT suggested it could be helpful to encourage ideas that are well-formulated and thought through.
  - FWP suggested channeling project ideas into a data layer to show people their ideas are being taken into consideration. For example, FWP channeled public access input into a map.
  - MDT suggested adding a bullet about funding to the project ideas portion of the guide. For example, if a stakeholder has funding ideas, that can be helpful.

- MSWP asked how this guide fits with being proactive. It would be easy to get sidetracked on too many project ideas or have projects that might not be of the highest need rising to the top due to public push. Figure out how to provide opportunities for public input while also showing the Committee is being proactive to determine needs and priorities.
- MDT noted there should be a frequently asked questions page.
- FWP asked if someone has money for a wildlife accommodation, how would that fit in MDT's process? The guide should include a description of the planning processes and timelines whether it would be funded by public or private money.
- MDT responded that if someone develops a new subdivision, they must pay for highway improvements leading to the subdivision. Private funding for wildlife accommodations would follow that model. State law is not clear about public and private partnerships. It is possible, but not simple.
- MSWP raised the concern that private funding should not be a barrier to mitigation since that could put communities with less resources but who may have a higher need at a disadvantage.

- What will the process be for receiving, reviewing, and responding to public comments?
  - The Committee should think about this process for the next meeting.
  - MSWP suggested looking at what other states are doing.

- What are the next steps for the guide?
  - The PIT Crew will send to the Committee again for edits.
  - The Committee will provide edits and comments.

c. Communicating the roles of the Committee, PIT Crew, and work groups - Skipped this item due to time constraints.

d. Update on wildlife movement discussion at the Private Lands/Public Wildlife Council meeting

- The PL/PW Council will host a private landowner panel at their next meeting. The purpose is to hear and discuss private landowner concerns about wildlife movement. Several of the council members are interested in wildlife and transportation issues and would benefit from a presentation about the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Steering Committee's work.
- PIT Crew members will follow up with their respective Committee members to confirm the Committee wants to present and to plan for a presentation.

4. **Funding**

a. MSWP has taken the lead on a funding white paper. Brooke Shifrin works for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition and is a co-coordinator of Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage. Brooke provided an update on the funding white paper.

b. MSWP formed a subcommittee that is working on the white paper. The outline includes a vision statement, executive summary, key issues, existing funding sources including

the most recent updates to the federal transportation bill, grant opportunities and match requirements, private funding and philanthropy, creative ideas to generate revenue, maintenance, and a conclusion with recommendations on the Committee's next steps. The final product will be ready before the Committee's November meeting.

c. MDT noted Brooke is on the right track. Lynn Zanto is working to provide information that could be folded into the white paper. They provided a reminder about the need for maintenance funding.

d. FWP noted it would be helpful.

e. MSWP thought the document will be informative. They suggested including information about the general cost of various wildlife accommodations.

5. **Review and Close**

ACTION ITEMS:

- The Committee will review and provide edits on the following documents:
  - Data and Information Work Group's draft mission statement
  - List of potential uses for the Data and Information Work Group's targeted product
  - Draft Guide for Stakeholder Engagement
  - August 5 meeting notes

- The PIT Crew will have a draft white paper on communications resources within each organization for the November meeting.

- MSWP will share the funding white paper prior to the November Committee meeting and provide a presentation at the November meeting.

- PIT Crew members will follow up with their respective Committee members to confirm and get input on giving a presentation on wildlife and transportation efforts in Montana at the next Private Lands/Public Wildlife Council meeting in late fall.