MONTANA WILDLIFE AND TRANSPORTATION

DATA AND INFORMATION WORKGROUP

9:00am – 1:00pm, Thursday, April 22, 2021

Meeting Notes

Purpose: Continue to work through the process of ranking and weighting data layers, one criterion at a time

Objectives:

- Learn about refinements to the human safety and property damage analysis
- Determine next steps for the wildlife and habitat connectivity analysis
- Start exploring data layers for the struggling or at-risk wildlife populations criterion
- Plan for the presentation and exercise at the Steering Committee meeting on May 12
- Plan for the next work group meeting on May 27

Attendees:

- D&I Work Group: Liz Fairbank (MSWP), Andrew Jakes (MSWP), Gabe Priebe (MDT), Paul Sturm (MDT), Brian Andersen (MDT), Justin Gude (FWP), Adam Messer (FWP)
- Planning and Implementation Team (PIT Crew): Renee Lemon (FWP), Nick Clarke (MSWP), Deb Wambach (MDT)
- Additional Staff: Brian Klapstein (MDT), Tyler Creech (MSWP)

Agenda:

1. Introduction

2. Criterion: Human safety and property damage
    a. Paul shared his research on thresholds for the bell curve representing the relationship between traffic volume and wildlife vehicle conflicts.
    b. Brian Klapstein noted they updated the analysis to only include state highways, incorporate the bell curve for traffic volume, and make the ranking changes from last meeting.
    c. Outcome: The group agreed with the changes.

3. Criterion: Wildlife and habitat connectivity for large mammals
    a. Adam showed the group the data layers and initial analysis.
    b. The group discussed connectivity layers, distinguishing wildlife movement and connectivity, the challenge with data layers that do not cover an entire species' range, the challenge of missing data (national parks and reservations), the relative importance values, and whether layers should be used for more than one criterion.
    c. There was significant discussion about whether to include the pronghorn connectivity model because it only covers a portion of pronghorn range in Montana. One solution is to include that layer in the analysis for only the geographic area covered by the pronghorn study. Other areas within pronghorn range but outside the pronghorn study area would not be ranked based on that layer. There was similar discussion around the black bear connectivity model. Paul questioned whether eastern Montana should be valued less because of the lack of grizzly bears.

d. Outcome: The group agreed to keep the large mammal distribution layers and species-specific connectivity models, move the non-species-specific connectivity models under the multi-species benefits criterion, and add traffic volume data using the repelled curve to represent the barrier effect. The group also agree to start with the 5 km. resolution. Adam will email the group requesting input on ranking and weighting the layers, and use this information to update the analysis. Adam will also explore different ways to address data layers like the pronghorn connectivity model that do not cover the entire range of a species and Paul's question about limiting the number of layers used in an area to only those that that apply to that area.

4. Break

5. Criterion: Struggling and at-risk wildlife populations (did not get to this agenda item)

6. Break

7. May 12th Steering Committee Meeting
    a. The meeting is 1-4pm, but Data and Information Work Group will be from 2-3pm.
    b. Adam and Brian agreed to attend and present at the meeting. Renee will follow up with Liz to see if she is available.
    c. The steering committee does not have a clear idea of what the working group has done. The goal is to share the overall concept for a high-level audience while providing enough detail, so it makes sense. The group agreed visuals and maps would be helpful.
    d. Start with the needs assessment criteria and have the steering committee run through the weighting exercise of the four criteria which will be sent ahead of time.
    e. Then, walk through Criteria 1 and 2, noting the group is making progress on all four. It would be more efficient to put all the data for both these criteria in one mapping application.
    f. Talking points for answering the question, "how can the steering committee support the work group?"
        i. Ask the steering committee about their goals and expectations for the work group.
        ii. Ask if the work group is on the right track. Specifically, ask about the work group's broad-brush approach that will result in identifying stretches of highway that are of greatest need rather than specific project locations.
        iii. Check in on the timeline. Note the group is planning to have the end-product by the end of 2021.
        iv. Ask if the steering committee would like to have a follow up meeting with the work group.

8. Next meeting on May 27
    a. Make the meeting 4 hours long.
    b. Topics are debriefing on the steering committee meeting, setting a timeline for the project, wrapping up Criteria 2 (discuss how to address data layers that do not completely cover a species range and portions of the state with different species assemblages), and starting on Criteria 3.

9. **ACTION ITEMS:**
    - Criteria - Adam will send email instructions for needed input on criteria 2, 3, and 4. Based on that input, Adam will put together data layers and complete the initial GIS work for criteria 2, 3, and 4. Also, Adam will explore different ways to address data layers that do not completely cover species ranges and portions of the state with different species assemblages in the analysis for Criteria 2.
    - Steering Committee Prep - The PIT Crew will request that steering committee members fill out the weighting exercise and then get the results to Justin so he can summarize the information. Adam and Brian (and possibly Liz) will attend and present an update at the steering committee meeting on May 12.