MONTANA WILDLIFE AND TRANSPORTATION

STEERING COMMITTEE

Meeting Notes

August 5, 2021

PURPOSE: To learn about and support the Data and Information Work Group's progress, identify how the interactive mapping will be used to make decisions, better understand MDT's commitment to this effort, and learn about MDT's processes to implement wildlife accommodations

Objectives:

- Provide guidance on the Data and Information Work Group's progress and explore the interactive mapping tool's use
- Understand MDT's commitment and concepts for development of a standalone pilot project
- Understand MDT's processes and options for implementing wildlife accommodation projects at various scales
- Determine agenda topics for the next steering committee meetings

ATTENDEES:

- Steering Committee (Committee): Ken McDonald (FWP), Charlie Sperry (FWP), Dwane Kailey (MDT), Tom Martin (MDT), Kylie Paul (MSWP), Stephanie Adams (MSWP)
- Agency Staff: Bill Semmens (MDT), Dustin Rouse (MDT)
- Data & Information Work Group (D&I): Adam Messer (FWP), Brian Andersen (MDT)
- Planning and Implementation Team (PIT Crew): Deb Wambach (MDT), Nick Clarke (MSWP), Hannah Jaicks (MSWP), Barb Beck (FWP)

AGENDA:

1. Introduction
    a. Charlie Sperry introduced Barb Beck, FWP Responsive Management Unit who is joining the PIT Crew as FWP's representative filling the vacancy left by Renee Lemon's departure
    b. Dustin Rouse attended the meeting to support the MDT presentations
2. D&I workgroup draft product
    a. Adam and Brian provided an update on the progress made by the D&I group since the May 12 Committee meeting.
        i. Modifications made to the title, definition, and weighting of the four needs assessment criteria (NAC)
        ii. Described scale related to wildlife criteria (NAC 2-4) at 5 km and related to human safety criterion (NAC 1) at 0.10-mile. The viewable scale of the product is proposed at 1.0-mile segments.
        iii. D&I asked the Committee to think about use of the product and what scale would be most appropriate for those uses
        iv. Adam and Brian walked the Committee through the criteria spreadsheet, weighting and ranking, data contribution and influence within each criterion
    b. Committee members provide feedback and ask questions
        i. Committee members liked the idea of viewing all four criteria rolled up together, and being able to examine each of the four criteria independently

- There was discussion on the ability to view the roll-up at one scale and drill down to the data behind each of the layers contributing to a criteria

ii. Clarification was provided on how layers that could fit under multiple criteria were addressed so as not to double-count a particular layer

iii. Discussed the intent of the product to provide data in an accessible format to support decision-makers and facilitate the exchange of expert knowledge, not replace the solicitation of expert knowledge

iv. Discussed the value in having a defensible and repeatable process that will allow maintenance and updates over time – product won't get stale or outdated

v. Committee liked that the analysis that does not penalize a portion of the state due to lack of data coverage and that the tool provides "on the fly" analysis dependent on scale of resolution (zoom in or out)

c. Committee members identify next steps; how does the SC want to approach thinking about how this product will be used?

i. The D&I group still needs to vet the final roll-up of all four criteria and edit the metadata to be more informative for the end user

ii. What other layers of interest can be brought into the product or part of the base map? Ideas included land ownership, conservation easements.

iii. Once vetted, the D&I group will share the final draft product with Committee and allow them to explore it

iv. Overall the Committee supported the direction and expressed excitement for the product, believe it to be a very smart product that will be very useful

Outcome: The Committee identified next steps:

- Identify how the product may be used by each entity, the public, stakeholder groups
- Identify other criteria to complement this "needs" tool for project identification and selection – what factors were incorporated into the product and what other factors are needed?
- What can be shared with and useful to the public, to agencies, to the Committee? Consider the potential for unintended uses by the public (e.g. avoid a road segment due to higher conflict, go to an area to observe wildlife)
- Work with the D&I group to understand product intent, use and limitations; develop guidance for use – who are the customers, what needs are we trying to serve, what are the limitations in use?

3. Update from MDT

a. Dwane reported that MDT Director Long and administrative staff are supportive of the partnership effort and working collaboratively to address wildlife and transportation issues.

b. MDT Director Long and FWP Director Worsech have a meeting scheduled for September 27th to review and endorse the MOA

c. Dwane walked through a conceptual proposal for pilot project implementation

i. Identify projects that are determined to be "reasonable and feasible"

ii. Set aside up to $500K annually for a feasibility analysis of proposed larger stand-alone wildlife accommodation projects

iii. These projects would be developed as public-private-partnerships (P3)

iv. The challenge of maintenance was discussed

- MDT accepts long-term major maintenance, removal, replacement

        - Day-to-day maintenance is desired through agreement with government entity or possible NGO that has demonstrated longevity, or by bond/trust
    d. Committee members asked questions and discussed
        i. Funding scenarios/mechanisms, project selection, and maintenance agreements were the primary topics of discussion

Outcome: MDT is committed to the effort and has proposed a concept for pilot project development

- MDT processes need to be defined and documented for predictability, transparency, and consistency to support the shared goal of creating a clear path to project development and implementation
- Agreements for maintenance, funding partnerships, and other aspects need to be developed or tweaked to fit this application
- Roles and responsibilities for all parties needs to be determined and documented – some may be project specific
- Funding options and match requirements need to be explored further. Initial ideas included federal funding, grants, private contributions, establishment of a trust/foundation for operations and maintenance.

4. MDT presentation on various highway planning, funding, and implementation processes for wildlife accommodations
    a. Dwane and Dustin presented a few process options for implementation of wildlife accommodation projects of various scales
        i. Baby Bear, Mama Bear, Papa Bear size projects were addressed and included process requirements, timelines, and examples
        ii. The level of effort, scope of the proposal, timeline should be commensurate with the project scale. Quality of proposal and plans also affect timeline.
        iii. If MDT design or funding is requested, additional time and effort are needed. MDT oversight of design and construction may be necessary in many situations, regardless of funding contributions.
        iv. Dwane provided a document outlining the process options
    b. Committee members ask questions and discuss
        i. MDT desired Committee endorsement for this approach to circle up with MDT administrative staff
            - The Committee was generally very excited by the proposal and provided endorsement for MDT to take the feasibility funding request to the Transportation Commission
        ii. Members of the Committee requested the document and some time to digest the proposal and pose questions, feedback, or seek clarifications

Outcome: Next steps were identified:

- MDT processes need to be defined and documented for predictability, transparency, and consistency specific to this application
- Roles and responsibilities, funding, maintenance agreements need to be developed or tweaked to fit this application for each project scale
- The Committee needs to develop criteria (e.g. Needs/Opportunity/Benefit, Implementation, Feasibility) and process for project identification and selection

- The role of MDT and the Committee in project identification and selection at each project scale needs to be identified
- Dwane and Dustin may meet with MSWP representatives to answer additional questions

5. Report out from each entity for the good of the group
    a. FWP provided updates on their wildlife movement and migration initiatives, noting that transportation is a component of that effort
        i. They noted that the proposed Recovering Americas Wildlife Act (RAWA)may be able to be used as a funding source for wildlife accommodation projects
        ii. The Migration Coalition group is interested in mapping and data sharing for wildlife movement and management
            - FWP is exploring this request related to scale of data and private landowner concerns
        iii. SO 3362 provided some funding for planning in four identified focal areas in MT – FWP recently added a fifth focal area
        iv. NFWF provides some funding for projects implemented in those areas
    b. MSWP provided updates on their coalition business:
        i. MSWP is excited to get projects on the ground
        ii. Highlighted their new website
        iii. Mentioned the addition of new member organizations to the coalition
        iv. Seeking to hire a new part time coordinator position
        v. Member organizations of the coalition are active in a few regional work groups, such as the Missoula Regional Connectivity Group.
        vi. Actively tracking and exploring funding options, especially at the federal level
    c. MDT did not have anything additional to share with the group beyond what was provided through their presentations today

6. Review and Close

ACTION ITEMS:

a. Meeting with two community-led efforts (Yellowstone Safe Passages and Missoula Group) scheduled for Monday October 18th, 3:00 pm via Zoom.
    1. PIT Crew will send out draft questions for Committee review and input
b. PIT Crew will send out draft Potential Uses for D&I Product document prepared previously by the Committee for further refinement and additions
c. PIT Crew will send out Dwane's presentation outline to members for reference
d. MDT will initiate process development, refinement, and documentation for pilot project identification and feasibility determination
e. The Committee needs to develop criteria (e.g. Needs/Opportunity/Benefit, Implementation, Feasibility) and process for project identification and selection
f. The role of MDT and the Committee in project identification and selection at each project scale needs to be identified and agreed upon
g. An interim D&I group-focused meeting may be scheduled at the time the D&I has the draft final product and roll-up ready for Committee exploration
h. The agenda for the December 7th meeting will include the following topics

1. Share and develop ideas for initial use of the D&I product by various user groups and ensure Committee efforts are supporting the D&I group timeline tasks
2. Share and further develop other criteria for identification and selection of projects
3. MDT will report out on Transportation Commission funding approval, and the initiation of process development and documentation
4. Discuss and document roles and responsibilities of MDT, the Committee, others in identifying and selecting projects at each scale