

EXHIBIT 5
DATE 3-10-05
SB 98

March 9, 2005

Representative Larry Jent
Chairman, State Administration Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620

Representative Jent,

The private businesses co-signing this letter strongly support S.B. 98, the Montana Land Information Act, and we urge the members of the Montana House of Representatives to pass this legislation. The companies co-signing this letter provide GIS services, data and products that would directly benefit from the enactment of this legislation.

Montana is the only state in the Western US that is developing integrated statewide geographic data models for critical and constantly changing map layers of transportation, addressing, private land ownership cadastral layers, and critical structures for emergency services. Those efforts have advanced through collaboration among dedicated individuals representing all levels of government and the private sector, and strong leadership by the Montana Department of Administration and state GIS coordinator. Montana is often the envy of other states in their ability to advance multi-jurisdictional solutions. Montana has also maintained a nationally recognized GIS clearinghouse at the Natural Resources Information System at the Montana State Library, housing hundreds of map layers used by our companies and the citizens of Montana and those beyond our borders. Few states have the breadth of participation that Montana exhibits in its efforts.

Montana's current position nationally for coordination of geographic information is very strong. In 2002 the National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) produced an assessment document called the "State Model for Coordination of Geographic Information Technology." Nine states (KS, MI, NJ, NY, OR, UT, VT, VA, and WI) fully met the criteria presented in the coordination model. Montana, along with eleven other states (AZ, AR, IN, KY, ME, MN, NC, SD, TN, TX and WA), satisfied all but one of the criterion. Sustained funding was the one criterion that most all states identified as a weakness in their programs.

Supporting the business functions of many public and private sector activities will likely require the integration of multiple geodatabases into integrated solutions. These solutions require hard work, inter-governmental cooperation and public-private partnerships. A stable funding base for state and local government GIS is absolutely essential to the continued success and growth of GIS in Montana. The cooperative efforts where Montana has demonstrated national leadership require long-term maintenance and continued development. We have many rural counties in Montana, and literally thousands of critical business functions that would not have access to adequate geospatial technology without the stable funding proposed in SB 98. GIS map layers and associated databases are critical public infrastructure, and they should be funded as such just as we fund highways, water and sewer and other public infrastructure. National studies have shown that geographic information is an important factor in over 80% of all public and private business functions.

We urge the members of this committee to recommend passage of the Montana Land Information Act, S.B. 98 and continue Montana's national leadership in geographic information systems.

Sincerely,

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