

Testimony for Montana House State Administration Committee Hearing on
SB 98 Montana Land Information Act

Good morning. My name is Bryant Ralston and I am the Montana account manager for a company called Environmental Systems Research Institute. ESRI is the leading provider of GIS solutions to State and local government in Montana.

I plan on covering three topics in my testimony this morning. First, that the GIS data created and maintained by the successful passage of this legislation is crucial to a wide range of diverse public and private agencies across our state. Second, that this legislation will help the State make better use of its existing GIS infrastructure, and third, that this legislation will better position Montana to leverage additional funding opportunities in the future.

GIS data powers many applications that the citizens of Montana rely upon on a daily basis ranging from hunting permits to property mapping. Today I will emphasize only two of these: economic development and public safety.

GIS can be used to assist in economic development efforts such as helping businesses identify suitable locations for their particular needs. For instance, GIS helps high technology businesses locate sites with adequate Internet connections, suitable office space at the right cost, and even the presence of suitable potential employees. Additionally our own "Montana home grown" companies have to do business in the global economy of the 21st century from their locations in Montana. Many of these businesses already utilize GIS. A good example is Great Harvest Bread Company down in Dillon. Right from their Dillon headquarters they utilize GIS for nationwide demographic analysis to determine suitable sites to open their new stores. These

businesses expect the state to have up-to-date GIS data. In today's knowledge based economy the old adage "location, location, location" still very much applies and GIS helps many businesses in Montana – both large and small – analyze, leverage, and, with the help of Internet GIS, find suitable locations for their success.

GIS is widely applied by all levels of government in Montana for saving lives. GIS helps emergency services professionals deal with the hazards we often face in Montana such wildfire, drought, flash flooding, car accidents, and yes even the occasional crime. First responders utilize GIS databases of roads, emergency services zones, and emergency facilities. These databases require maintenance by the State and the counties. GIS based information allows them to quickly identify the responding agencies, reach and respond to incidents, and preparing disaster mitigation plans. In the case of wildfire, GIS is particularly useful at helping to identify, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the all-too familiar effects of wildfire.

Another reason this legislation is important is that the funding provided by this bill would ensure that the investment in existing GIS infrastructure not be marginalized. This investment has already been made and the resulting GIS infrastructure including personnel, hardware, software, and the existing geographic databases of Montana are shared across practically every Montana State agency. Without funding for continued maintenance and development of these databases, the existing geographic resources of Montana cannot be kept current, accessible, and relevant to the mission of Montana's government agencies. Even today the value of *any* information is directly related to its currency, accuracy, and reliability, and Montana GIS databases are no exception. This

legislation will help ensure that long term maintenance procedures are in place so that this investment can continue to be utilized for the betterment of Montana's citizens.

Lastly, additional funding opportunities can be realized by the passage of this legislation. Many Federal funding programs require matching funds from the State and these will be more accessible if the infrastructure and business processes are in place for maintaining our own informational resources in Montana.

In closing, GIS is a compelling technology that helps improve the quality of governance but it relies heavily upon maintained, accurate, and standardized geographic data. Successful passage of the Montana Land Information Act will ensure that the funding is available to maintain this type of information and the applications that support both public and private business needs.

Thank you for your time.