

## Providing Public Input to the Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission

### ⇒ **What is redistricting and what role does the commission play?**

Redistricting is the act of drawing new political boundaries, including the districts for the Montana Legislature. The five-member Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission has authority under the Montana Constitution to draw the boundaries of congressional and legislative districts every 10 years. Using population data from the most recent U.S. Census, the commission will draw districts with approximately the same number of people in them. Because Montana has only one congressional district, the commission is now focused on redrawing state legislative district lines.

### ⇒ **How does the commission decide how to draw the new map lines?**

The commission is bound by the U.S. and Montana Constitutions and has adopted the following criteria based on state and federal laws. Mandatory criteria are set out by law, while the discretionary criteria are traditional redistricting principles selected by the commission to use to provide further guidance on where to draw lines.

#### *Mandatory districting criteria for legislative districts*

- Population equality and maximum population deviation – (The ideal size for each legislative district is 9,894 people. The commission further agreed that any deviation from this ideal may not exceed plus or minus 3%.)
- Compact and contiguous districts
- Protection of minority voting rights and compliance with the Voting Rights Act
- Race cannot be the predominant factor to which the traditional districting criteria are subordinated

#### *Discretionary districting criteria for legislative districts*

- Following the lines of political units
- Following geographic boundaries
- Keeping communities of interest intact

### ⇒ **Why does the commission want to hear from me?**

The commissioners need input from you to help them understand your community of interest and why they should attempt to keep it intact. Montana is a broad, diverse state. Knowing what makes your area distinct from or similar to nearby communities is valuable to the commissioners when they draw and judge proposed maps.

### ⇒ **What is a “community of interest”?**

According to the commission’s criteria it “will consider keeping communities of interest intact. Communities of interest can be based on Indian reservations, urban interests, suburban interests, rural interests, neighborhoods, trade areas, geographic location, communication and transportation networks, media markets, social, cultural and economic interests, or occupations and lifestyles.”

### ⇒ **What should I tell the commission?**

The commissioners want to know your ideas about how your district boundaries could be drawn in a way that follows their criteria. For example, to comply with federal law, each district needs to have approximately equal population. If your town needs to be

split into two or more districts, how would it be best to divide it? If your town has to be combined with other communities to form a district, which communities are most similar to yours or which communities are dissimilar enough that they should be placed in a different district? Consider providing the commission with answers to the following questions:

- ❖ What defines your community of interest?
- ❖ What are the boundaries of your community of interest (geographic or otherwise)?
- ❖ Why should the commission consider keeping this community together or keeping it apart from another community?

When providing comment, keep in mind the commissioners must follow their criteria when judging where to place district lines. So when you write to or speak with the commissioners, be sure to include how your ideas fit one or more of the criteria.

All comments are sent to each commissioner and become part of the commission's permanent public record that is available to everyone to view.

⇒ **Can I send in a map?**

Maps are helpful to illustrate points you want to make about your suggested district or community. Be sure to label the maps clearly and include relevant boundaries such as mountains, rivers, county lines, and roads.

⇒ **When can I comment on the maps the commission creates?**

The commission plans to travel the state to take public comment on several draft maps in the spring and summer of 2012. The commission must finalize a map by the end of 2012 in order to submit the plan to the Montana Legislature in early 2013 for additional comments. More information about public hearings on draft maps will be available in early 2012.

⇒ **How do I contact the commission with my thoughts?**

By mail: Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission  
PO Box 201706  
Helena, MT 59620-1706

By e-mail: [districting@mt.gov](mailto:districting@mt.gov)

By fax: 406-444-3036

⇒ **How can I find out more about the commission, draft maps, and public hearings?**

To find out more about redistricting, the commission, or its work visit [www.leg.mt.gov/districting](http://www.leg.mt.gov/districting). As draft maps become available, they will be posted to the site for you to access. The site also allows you to sign up for e-mailed updates to stay informed about the commission's work in the future.