

Legislative Finance Committee

Oct. 4, 2017

Exhibit 32

Hello, my name is John Beaver and I am a consulting biologist and owner of WESTECH Environmental Services which is a small, private firm based in Helena. I am here to provide this committee with a business perspective on the value of Heritage program data. As background, WESTECH has been in business since 1977 and in fact, WESTECH served as an early office for the Montana Natural Heritage Program in the early 1980s while the program was getting off the ground. WESTECH works on large and small projects for industrial, state, federal, and non-profit clients throughout Montana and the west.

There are 4 main points that I want to convey to you.

First, WESTECH, and firms like WESTECH both in and out of Montana use heritage program and overall state library data on almost every project we do in the state, from pipelines to transmission lines, highways to gravel pits, hard rock to coal mines, and timber projects. Obtaining data from the state library program is almost always one of the first steps we go through when permitting a project. In the last week I, or someone in my office has accessed state library and heritage program data for a gravel pit permit, a rural water authority cost estimate, a conservation easement, and a proposed limestone mine.

Second, we work in many other states throughout the west and Midwest. I want to impress upon you that the Montana data are by far the most comprehensive, best organized, and easiest data to access of any state including California, Washington, and Oregon. I know that consulting and engineering firms around the U.S. find the state library data extremely useful and cost-effective. In fact, I and others will go to the Heritage database for information that we use on projects outside of Montana because the species descriptions and associated literature are in-depth and relevant in a variety of regions.

Third, what does this information mean for my business and my clients? Basically cost savings. Collectively, the Heritage data, as well as the other data at the state library, save hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars in reduced survey effort and data management costs. It is not unrealistic to say that these data can save large projects like major pipelines with multiple alternatives and land owners, hundreds of thousands of dollars. Why, because these data allow for high-level,

quality alternatives analysis without the need for on-the-ground survey, extensive data management, or bothering landowners for access to their property. As an example, I recently scoped a survey effort on a relatively short, rural water authority 50-mile pipeline near Glasgow. The heritage program wetland data allowed me to focus our survey effort only to areas of interest, which reduced the scope of this project from \$50,000 to under \$30,000; a \$20,000 savings for the water authority.

Finally, the Council should know that in other states, projects pay for the type of data that the state library provides for free. Fees for a large project with alternatives can be several hundred dollars. I do not hesitate to pay that fee even though the data are typically much lower quality than what we have here in Montana. I want to advocate and stress that the library's data are financially valuable, impartial, and biologically meaningful.

I fully appreciate that Montana is in a fiscally difficult position and that there are difficult choices to be made. However, the library program has already been cut 25%; further cuts will truly undermine the utility of this high-quality information that firms like mine have come to expect and rely on.

The state library and the Montana Natural Heritage Program are truly examples of efficient government that works and that provides valuable services. I urge you not to implement further cuts to these programs.

Thank you.

John Beaver

406.459.4150

jbeaver@westech-env.com

P.O. Box 6045

Helena, MT 59604