



Joint Appropriations Subcommittee -Long-Range Planning

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES & CONSERVATION

HB14

02/04/2021, 8:30 AM, RM 317B

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Sue Clark and I am the Deputy Forestry Division Administrator for the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). I am here to report on the Department's Eastern Land Office Facility and Shop proposal located on page 2 of House Bill 14.

DNRC Forestry and Trust Land Management Divisions share staff and locations throughout the state to deliver upon our respective missions. We implement our programs through a network of six land offices and several unit offices, located across the state. Our eastern most land office is in Miles City, and the space is occupied by DNRC's Forestry and Trust Land Management Divisions along with the department's Conservation and Resource Development Division. Our proposal requests an approximate 6,000 sq. ft office facility along with a 2,500-3,000 sq. ft shop on 6 acres of state-owned trust land.

There are both short and long-term benefits associated with this proposal including: enhanced access and adequate space to provide better public service to Montana citizens and lessees; more modern and efficient office space including increased storage and conference room capacity, as well as the ability to centrally locate all Eastern Land Office staff; and the opportunity to expand operations, which is especially needed during busy fire years. This proposed re-location will also greatly improve fire coordination, response, and delivery with DNRC's interagency partners, stakeholders, and the public by incorporating enhanced technology and necessary space to provide wildland fire training to local government and host other necessary public meetings. Specifically, the shop will allow DNRC the ability to better accommodate wildfire suppression resources during busy fire years, along with the capability to provide essential amenities like restrooms, shower facilities, drinking water, and vehicle washing capabilities in order to better prevent the spread of noxious weeds. Lastly, it will allow for much more efficient and effective routine and heavy maintenance of equipment, to include agency vehicles, county cooperative vehicles, and the County Assistance Team (CAT) apparatus, all of which incorporates a plan for adequate winter storage on the recently acquired land.

The proposed facilities will be adjacent to and co-located with multiple natural resource related government agencies and partners, including Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, the Bureau of Land Management's Miles City Field Office plus their Montana-Dakota District Office, the Miles City Community College Agriculture Advancement Center and the Miles City Inter-agency Dispatch Center, which will provide advantages to all agencies.

While the current lease has been in existence for several decades, there are growing limitations and inefficiencies that hamper DNRC from providing desirable services to the citizens of Montana. Currently, accessibility is challenging, as there is minimal parking which results in traffic congestion at times. Once inside the building, there is little to no room to meet in private with public citizens and interagency partners. Additionally, there is limited storage, which has led to utilizing the only ADA compliant restroom as a janitorial and office supply storage closet. Lastly, DNRC's current equipment compound resides off-site, elsewhere on BLM property, where all fire and other equipment is stored outdoors, year-round. With no shop to perform routine and time-sensitive maintenance on program equipment, coupled with no water supply to fill and wash fire equipment at this compound, the agency's fire readiness logistics are impractical.

Providing safe, comfortable workspace is vital to ensuring that our offices can continue to provide the services and resources that Montanans rely on from DNRC. HB14 would provide the necessary funding needed to accomplish these efforts. With that, Mr. Chairman, I stand available for questions. Thank you.