Chapter One

RIGHT-OF-WAY BUREAU ORGANIZATION

MONTANA RIGHT-OF-WAY OPERATIONS MANUAL
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Chapter One
RIGHT-OF-WAY BUREAU ORGANIZATION

1-1 RIGHT-OF-WAY BUREAU FUNCTION

1-1.1 Function and Operation of the Right-of-Way Bureau

The Right-of-Way Bureau is the organizational component of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) that is responsible for designing right-of-way, acquiring land for highway facilities, managing acquired land, and providing assistance and payments to individuals, businesses and utilities that are relocated as a result of highway construction. Organization charts for the Department, the Engineering Division and the Right-of-Way Bureau may be found in the Right-of-Way Forms Database.

In carrying out these responsibilities, the Right-of-Way Bureau seeks to further MDT’s mission: “to serve the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasize quality, safety, cost effectiveness, economic vitality and sensitivity to the environment.”

The Bureau coordinates its activities with the objectives and schedules of the Department and maintains liaison with other units within the Department and with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) concerning property acquisition and other Bureau programs. The functions or programs carried out by the Bureau in meeting these responsibilities are described below:

1. Property Acquisition. The Right-of-Way Bureau performs all operations related to the acquisition by negotiated purchase of interests in real property needed for transportation purposes, including the valuation of property interests as well as communication and negotiation with property owners for the purchase of real property interests. However, once negotiations have proven to be unsuccessful in acquiring a property, and the Department has adopted a resolution to condemn, acquisition becomes the responsibility of Legal Services of the Department through the use of a legal settlement or condemnation.

2. Relocation Assistance. The Right-Of-Way Bureau conducts a program of relocation assistance that provides advisory services and financial assistance to aid in the orderly and successful relocation of persons, businesses and nonprofit organizations that are displaced by transportation projects.
3. **Property Management.** The Right-of-Way Bureau provides the necessary real estate management services for all property interests that are owned or controlled by the Department. These services include the rental, lease and sale of all types of property interests held by the Department, including administrative property that is determined to be in excess of present or future needs.

4. **Utility, Railroad and City/County Water and Sewer Agreements.** The Right-of-Way Bureau develops policy and procedures and secures agreements for the removal, relocation or adjustment of utility and railway facilities when necessary to accommodate highway construction. These facilities include, but are not limited to, electric power, telephone and telegraph lines, gas, water, sewer and oil pipelines, and railway facilities, including grade separation structures and signal devices. The Bureau also is responsible for developing policy and procedures governing the occupancy of highway right-of-way by public utility facilities (see Volume III of the *Right-of-Way Bureau Manuals*).

5. **Control of Outdoor Advertising.** The Office of the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief advises the Districts concerning policy for the control of advertising. The Right-of-Way Bureau programs and monitors available funds for the program and maintains files for all controlled signs. This program, through the Districts, involves the issuance of special permits for signs that conform to specified criteria and the purchase and/or removal of signs that do not conform to these criteria.

1-1.2 **Purpose and Use of the Right-of-Way Operations Manual**

The *Right-of-Way Operations Manual* is Volume 1 of MDT’s *Right-of-Way Bureau Manuals*. It provides users with information on the organization of Montana’s Right-of-Way Program and the functional and operational units that carry it out.

This Volume is designed to meet the FHWA’s requirement for a Right-of-Way Operations Manual (23 CFR 710.201). The Department will update its *Right-of-Way Operations Manual* periodically to conform to Federal and State real estate law and will submit these updates to the FHWA for approval. In accordance with FHWA requirements, the Department will certify that its *Right-of-Way Operations Manual* conforms to Federal and State real estate law on or before January 1, 2006 and every 5 years thereafter.

In addition, the conduct of right-of-way activities will be consistent with the provisions of the current Partnership Agreement between the Department and the Montana Division of the FHWA. The agreement commits MDT and FHWA to pursue effective, innovative
and cooperative Federal-aid Highway Program management methods for ensuring the delivery of quality transportation products and services in full compliance with State and Federal laws and regulations.
1-2  GENERAL ORGANIZATION

1-2.1  Organization

1-2.1.1  General

The Right-of-Way Bureau is 1 of 6 Bureaus in the Department’s Engineering Division. The Engineering Division is responsible for the planning, development and construction of highway projects.

1-2.1.2  Right-of-Way Bureau

The Right-of-Way Bureau is composed of Headquarters and District Office components. The Headquarters component is responsible for developing right-of-way policy and procedures, providing technical expertise, providing general oversight of District Office right-of-way activities, and managing and allocating right-of-way resources. The Headquarters Office is located in Helena and consists of the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief, the Operations Manager, administrative support and a number of functional Sections, including:

- Design/Plans Section,
- Appraisal Section,
- Acquisition Section,
- Real Estate Services Section,
- Special Programs Section,
- Access Management Section, and
- Utilities Section.

1-2.2  Right-of-Way Bureau Chief

The Right-of-Way Bureau Chief is the lead Departmental right-of-way official and is responsible for the overall management of the right-of-way function. The Chief reports to the Administrator of the Engineering Division. The Bureau Chief is responsible for:

- policy and procedure development, including maintaining the Right-of-Way Operations Manual and other directives;
- training, including the budget for training;
The Bureau Chief has responsibility for direct supervision of the Access Management, Special Programs, Utilities and Real Estate Services Sections at Headquarters. In addition, the Bureau Chief has the authority to adjust right-of-way staff temporarily among the Headquarters and District Offices, based on workload, and to require training for Bureau and district staff as needed.

1-2.3 **Operations Manager**

The Operations Manager reports directly to the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief and is authorized to act in his or her absence. The Operations Manager is the liaison between Headquarters and the District Offices on acquisition and appraisal matters. The Operations Manager has responsibility for:

- direct supervision of the Design/Plans, Acquisition, and Appraisal Sections in Headquarters;
- general quality control oversight of District right-of-way operations, policy and procedures;
- assigning of acquisition projects;
- tracking and approving of projects; and
- conducting the annual joint quality assurance review with the FHWA and reporting its results to the Administrator of the Engineering Division.

1-2.4 **Administrative Support**

Administrative support for the Office of the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief consists of secretarial and other clerical staff as required.

1-2.5 **Operations**

Right-of-Way operations are decentralized. The District Office component consists of staff located in each of the Department’s 5 District Offices. These offices are located in Missoula, Great Falls, Butte, Glendive and Billings. The District Office staff is
responsible for carrying out field right-of-way operations, including appraisal, negotiation, acquisition and relocation, as well as for preparing preliminary cost studies and estimates.

In addition, the Bureau has a continuing relationship with Legal Services on various right-of-way issues. The Bureau wishes to foster open lines of communication with Legal Services and encourages informal communication between the respective staffs at an early juncture as a way to minimize problems later. However, when issues arise of a nature or magnitude requiring a formal legal opinion, or other written interpretation, Right-of-Way personnel will make these requests through their supervisor. These requests must be in writing and will come from a section supervisor through the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief.
1-3 DESIGN/PLANS SECTION

1-3.1 Function

The Design/Plans Section is responsible for the design of right-of-way plans, right-of-way limits, easement limits, construction permits and utility plans. The Section also:

- develops right-of-way cost estimates;
- prepares legal descriptions, deeds and exhibits required for right-of-way acquisitions;
- resolves boundary problems; and
- determines the appropriate method for taking particular properties.

In addition, the Design/Plans Section determines which takings will involve Federal-aid funding and establishes policy for implementing corridor preservation and access management plans adopted by the Department.

1-3.2 Organization

The Design/Plans Section is composed of the Design Manager, 2 design units (Training and CADD Coordination); 1 deed and descriptions unit that has a consultant plans coordinator and an administrative assistant. Each unit has a supervisor as well as designers, civil engineering specialists and design plan technicians, as appropriate. Their duties are as follows:

1. **Design Manager.** The Design/Plans Section is managed by the Design Manager. The Design Manager is directly accountable to the Operations Director and through him or her to the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief for the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the Section.

2. **Design Supervisors.** Each Design Unit is under the direction of a supervisor. It is the supervisors’ duty to assign projects and tasks to the various designers, review the work of subordinates and ensure proper development of right-of-way plans. In addition, 1 supervisor has a primary duty of checking plans; the other supervisor has a primary duty as lead CADD operator.

3. **Design/Deeds Checker Supervisor.** The Deeds Unit is under the direction of the design/deeds checker supervisor. This supervisor assigns projects and tasks to the unit, reviews their work and ensures the proper preparation of the legal
instruments used to transfer property interests to the Department. The design/deeds checker supervisor has final authority over plans, deeds and exhibits. This supervisor is under the general direction of the Design Manager.

4. **Consultant Coordinator.** The consultant design coordinator coordinates and reviews the work of consulting firms preparing right-of-way plans for MDT. This person also prepares Access Control Resolutions and reviews all executed deeds prior to recordation. This coordinator is under the general supervision of the design/deeds checker supervisor.

5. **Designers and Design Plan Technicians.** Civil engineering specialists, designers and technicians design the right-of-way and prepare the right-of-way plans and deeds. These positions are under the supervision of the appropriate unit supervisor.

6. **Administrative Assistant.** The administrative assistant arranges programming of funds for right-of-way activities, monitors project accounts and requests modification to the right-of-way programs as necessary to provide adequate funds. This person also researches files for plans and obtains necessary copies for sale to the public or for interdepartmental use. In addition, this person maintains the section's right-of-way plans and related document files, processes title memorandums and performs clerical work for the Design/Plans Section. This position is under the direction of the section supervisor.
1-4 APPRAISAL SECTION

1-4.1 Function

The Appraisal Section is responsible for the valuation of interests in real property to be acquired by MDT. It is responsible for:

- developing appraisal policies, procedures and special instructions;
- providing technical education for the training and continuing development of staff appraisers;
- arranging for services of outside (fee) appraisers, when needed;
- providing technical assistance to staff and fee appraisers;
- reviewing all appraisals prepared for the Department;
- making determinations as to the compensation the Department should pay for each parcel of real property to be acquired and testifying in court in support thereof; and
- monitoring the quality of appraisals that are prepared for the Department.

1-4.2 Organization

The Appraisal Section is staffed by the section supervisor and a number of review appraisers, as needed. Their responsibilities are as follows:

1. **Right-of-Way Appraisal Supervisor.** The Appraisal Section is under the supervision of the Right-of-Way Appraisal Supervisor. The Supervisor is directly accountable to the Operations Manager and through him or her to the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief for the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the Section. It is the responsibility of this position to:

   - develop appraisal policies, procedures and special instructions;
   - allocate appraisal workload among staff and fee appraisers and monitor the progress thereof; and
   - check appraisals, appraisal reviews and determinations of just compensation submitted by the review appraisers to verify that these
products conform to established appraisal standards and are based on proper legal premises.

Additional responsibilities include providing liaison and coordination between the Appraisal Section and the District Right-of-Way Sections regarding appraisal and appraisal review matters and providing technical appraisal training and advice to staff and fee appraisers, as needed. The Supervisor has the authority to use the review appraisers to balance the entire right-of-way review appraisal workload.

2. **Review Appraisers.** The primary function of the review appraisers is to review appraisals that were prepared by department staff and fee appraisers. As appropriate, they may approve appraisals or seek revision. They use approved appraisals to determine the amount recommended to be paid as just compensation for property to be acquired. The review appraiser makes the actual determination of just compensation.

Review appraisers perform complex appraisals, as needed, and provide training for Department staff appraisers and fee appraisers. The review appraisers also conduct independent appraisals in special cases, perform special cost studies and advise appraisers on technical appraisal matters.

Review appraisers in Helena are responsible for managing all appraisal contracts and reviews in the Butte and Great Falls Districts. In the other Districts (Missoula, Glendive and Billings), the District where the work is located has this responsibility. One review appraiser is usually assigned the responsibility for initiating all consultant contracts for appraisal and appraisal review.
1-5 ACQUISITION SECTION

1-5.1 Function

The Acquisition Section is responsible for the acquisition of real property for MDT. It is responsible for:

- developing acquisition policies, procedures and guidelines;
- for establishing property acquisition priorities and schedules;
- for reviewing acquisition activities to ensure conformance with applicable Federal and State laws and regulations;
- for reviewing and approving administrative settlements;
- for providing relocation assistance to persons who are displaced by Department projects;
- for coordinating the processing of right-of-way parcels for condemnation; and
- for providing education and training for staff negotiators.

In addition, this Section provides liaison and coordination among other organizational units of the Right-of-Way Bureau, MDT and the FHWA in matters concerning right-of-way negotiations. This Section manages the Local Public Agencies Program for acquiring right-of-way for local government projects receiving Federal funds and coordinates actions to resolve damage claims from landowners. It also is responsible for overseeing the acquisition policies and activities of the District Right-of-Way Sections in coordination with the respective District Administrators.

1-5.2 Organization

This Section is staffed by the Acquisition Manager and several acquisition agents. Their responsibilities are as follows:

1. **Acquisition Manager.** The Section is under the supervision of the Acquisition Manager, who is directly accountable to the Operations Manager and through that position to the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief, for the fulfillment of the functional responsibilities of the Section. The Acquisition Manager is responsible for the development of the Department’s acquisition and relocation policies and
procedures as well as for the fulfillment of the other responsibilities of the Section.

2. **Acquisition Agents.** Acquisition agents under the direct supervision of the Acquisition Manager are responsible for assisting in the management and supervision of independent contractors and for providing relocation assistance to persons who are displaced by highway projects. Agents also assist the Acquisition Manager in developing the Department’s acquisition and relocation policies and procedures.
1-6 REAL ESTATE SERVICES SECTION

1-6.1 Function

The Real Estate Services Section is responsible for:

- administering MDT’s Property Management Program;
- managing the Land Records Management Program, which ensures proper management of and safeguards the Department’s public and private records;
- supervising the Audit and Compliance Program;
- authorizing payments for land and improvements;
- determining special assessments and miscellaneous right-of-way expenses;
- maintaining land acquisition statistics; and
- disposing of, leasing and permitting the use of excess land owned by the Department.

The Property Management Program includes encroachment control, clearing the right-of-way of acquired improvements, perfecting ownership records of land titles on state-owned property, and collecting and maintaining records of rents and accounts receivable. Property management tasks also include creating, issuing and processing right-of-way easements, land use licenses, special recreational and parking leases, land sales, exchanges, abandonments, transfers of jurisdiction, wetland mitigation, special land use studies, timber sales, air space agreements and clearing contracts.

The Audit and Compliance Review Program consists of internal audits to ensure conformity with State and Federal laws and regulations, accounting rules and departmental policies. Audit duties include complex internal, contract, compliance and performance audits. The Real Estate Services Section also prepares formal reports of audit findings; reviews, organizes and follows up on results; and presents and defends those results, as required.

1-6.2 Organization

The Real Estate Services Section consists of the Real Estate Services Section Supervisor and 2 units. The property manager, excess land (right-of-way) agent and an administrative support position comprise one unit. The other unit is staffed by the
compliance specialist and several administrative support positions. Their responsibilities are as follows:

1. **Real Estate Services Section Supervisor.** The Section is under the supervision of the Real Estate Services Supervisor, who is directly responsible to the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief for the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the Section. The Real Estate Services Supervisor is responsible for the development of the Department’s policies and procedures concerning property management, fulfillment of the other responsibilities of the Section, and delegation of work assignments, monitoring work progress and reviewing work performed by the Section staff.

2. **Property Manager.** The property manager handles the disposition of buildings and other improvements on right-of-way acquisition projects, maintains records of excess land owned by the Department, and handles the rental, lease or sale of property owned by the Department.

3. **Compliance Specialist.** The compliance specialist performs detailed reviews of right-of-way settlements to ensure that proper procedures have been followed and that the files contain sufficient documentation to support each settlement. The position also performs audits of complex right-of-way transactions and other special audits as required.

4. **Administrative Support.** The administrative support staff is responsible for a number of duties, including:

   - maintaining the permanent records of the Right-of-Way Bureau, including the microfilm function;
   - processing tax reimbursements;
   - recording deeds;
   - performing other parcel closing activities;
   - assisting with auditing right-of-way acquisition payments and procedures;
   - processing right-of-way acquisition payments; and
   - maintaining right-of-way acquisition statistics.
1-7  SPECIAL PROGRAMS SECTION

1-7.1  Function

This Section is responsible for:

- conducting all specialty acquisitions, including acquisition for maintenance sites, wetlands, environmental mitigation sites, small sites and Motor Carrier sites;
- preparing right-of-way estimates and various studies, including access, irrigation, stock pass and route location;
- preparing valuation estimates and appraisal reports for excess lands;
- providing right-of-way training;
- controlling outdoor advertising, including monitoring, record maintenance and enforcement;
- keeping the Right-of-Way web page updated; and
- maintaining the Right-of-Way Operations Manual in accordance with FHWA regulations.

1-7.2  Organization

The Special Programs Section consists of the Special Programs Section Supervisor and 2 teams. The teams are staffed by appraisers to accomplish the assigned work program. Their responsibilities are as follows:

1. **Special Programs Section Supervisor.** The Special Programs Section Supervisor is responsible to the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief for the fulfillment of the Section’s functional responsibilities, as discussed above. Duties include developing policy and procedures, assigning the workload, establishing priorities and schedules, providing guidance to Section staff, monitoring work progress, reviewing work quality and coordinating with other appropriate Department units. The Special Programs Section Supervisor is charged with carrying out the Bureau Chief’s responsibility to determine training needs for all Bureau personnel, including managing the training effort with the University of Montana and with other outside training sources.
2. **Appraisers.** In addition to the Special Programs Section Supervisor, the Section includes a number of appraisers. The appraisers appraise property to be acquired as excess land (other appraisals are conducted by the appraisers in the District Offices). Appraisers also conduct ownership studies and prepare cost estimates. Some appraisers are assigned various responsibilities for outdoor advertising control, like permitting and surveillance. From time to time as needs may dictate, these appraisers may be assigned to help other districts with excessive workloads.
1-8  ACCESS MANAGEMENT SECTION

1-8.1  Function

The Access Management Section is responsible for the development and administration of the Department’s Access Management Program and subprograms to ensure the effective, efficient and legal administration of program operations and activities. The purpose of access management is to sustain the safety and capacity of the highway network, maintain the flow of traffic, preserve the public’s investment and reduce maintenance costs through the implementation of a sound access management policy. The Special Programs Section conducts access management studies needed to plan and develop access control projects.

1-8.2  Organization

The Access Management Section consists of the Access Management Manager and additional staff, as needed. Their responsibilities are as follows:

1. **Access Management Manager.** The Access Management Manager is responsible for developing policy and procedures to implement sound access management practices for the highway network, including the development of an appropriate access model for specific sections of roadway. This involves developing, establishing and maintaining engineering criteria and guidelines; assessing the ongoing effectiveness of program policies and administrative rules; facilitating program planning; developing short-term and long-term goals and objectives; and evaluating overall program effectiveness and efficiency. The Access Management Manager assigns tasks and supervises Section staff in carrying out their duties.

2. **Access Management Staff.** Staff will be assigned to the Access Management Section as needed. Duties will include the preparation and review of project-specific control plans, preparing and maintaining access control inventories, drafting duties, simple engineering duties, information gathering and other support activities as assigned.
1-9 UTILITIES SECTION

1-9.1 Function

This Section is responsible for:

- obtaining cost estimates and securing agreements with utility and railway companies for the relocation and adjustment of their facilities, as required for highway construction;

- conducting direct negotiations with utility and railway companies to acquire portions of their operating rights-of-way for highway purposes; and

- developing policies and procedures governing the occupancy of highway rights-of-way by public utility facilities.

1-9.2 Organization

The Utilities Section is composed of the Engineering Manager and 3 teams. The teams are staffed by civil engineers, utility agents and support staff, as needed to perform the work of the Section. Their responsibilities are as follows:

1. Engineering Manager. The Section is under the supervision of the Engineering Manager, who is directly responsible to the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief for the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the Section. The Engineering Manager develops policy and procedures; prepares, monitors and revises the railroad/utility budget; supervises work schedules; and provides oversight of field utility/railroad relocation activities.

2. Engineering Officers, Utilities Section. The duties of the engineering officers in the Utilities Section are divided among three units. One engineering officer’s unit is responsible for handling matters relating to cost estimates and agreements with utility companies. The second unit performs a similar function with regard to highway/railroad agreements and secures the necessary easements over railway rights-of-way. The third unit is responsible for reviewing and tracking all agreements and program information. The duties include processing utility and railroad payments. The engineering officers are under the direct supervision of the Engineering Manager.

3. Utility Agents. The Utilities Section staff also includes utility agents, who are responsible for providing field liaison with utility and railway companies. The utility agents are under the direct supervision of the Engineering Manager.
4. **Administrative Support.** There is one administrative support position for the Utility Section.
1-10 DISTRICT RIGHT-OF-WAY SECTIONS

1-10.1 Function

There are 5 District Right-of-Way Sections located in Missoula, Great Falls, Butte, Glendive and Billings. These Sections are responsible for providing the field services required for acquisition and other right-of-way functions that are performed in the field. Right-of-way functions include:

- the appraisal of and negotiation for interests in real property needed by the Department;
- management of appraisal contracts and reviews;
- relocation of displaced persons, and
- preparation of preliminary studies and cost estimates.

In addition, initial sign permitting is performed in the Districts; sign surveillance, monitoring and removal are Headquarters’ duties.

1-10.2 Organization

The District Right-of-Way Sections consist of a Section Supervisor and a staff of right-of-way agents to accomplish the assigned work program. Their responsibilities are as follows:

1. **District Right-of-Way Section Supervisor.** The Section is under the supervision of a Section Supervisor, who is responsible to the Right-of-Way Bureau Chief for fulfillment of right-of-way responsibilities. The District Right-of-Way Section Supervisors receive line supervision through their respective District Administrators.

2. **Right-of-Way Agents.** Each District Right-of-Way Section has right-of-way agents on its staff. The agents conduct studies and prepare cost estimates, appraise property to be acquired (except for appraisals of excess land, which are prepared by the Special Programs Section), and negotiate with landowners for the purchase of real property for highway purposes. The responsibility for managing appraisal contracts and reviews differs among the Districts, based on workload and staffing considerations, and are as follows:
a. Missoula District. This District manages its own appraisal contracts and reviews. One review appraiser has this responsibility.

b. Billings District. This District manages its own appraisal contracts and reviews as well as those in the Glendive District. One review appraiser has this responsibility.

c. Great Falls and Butte Districts. The review appraisers in Helena are responsible for managing all appraisal contracts and reviews in the Butte and Great Falls Districts.
1-11 DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

1-11.1 Project Management System

The Project Management System is a Departmental system that tracks project delivery using specific work functions. It shows the progress of every project (both in terms of activities and expenditures), performance measures and time frames. Right-of-way activities tracked include preparing preliminary right-of-way reports, preparing preliminary and final right-of-way plans, route studies, negotiating for agreements and easements, appraising right-of-way, preparing deeds, providing relocation assistance and numerous others.

As of the publication date for the Right-of-Way Operations Manual, the Department is replacing the Project Management System manual. A complete program directory will be available when the new system is completed.

1-11.2 Project Tracking System

The Project Tracking System is designed to allow the Right-of-Way Bureau to track all acquisition activities from the initial appraisal assignment to completion of negotiations, or negotiations failing, and then to condemnation. Information tracked includes appraisal assignment date; assigned appraiser; appraisal type; appraised amount, negotiated or settlement amounts; and other activity completion dates. Fields in the system can be searched to retrieve information as desired. The Project Tracking System provides information for the State’s Project Management System, described above, and for performance assessments. The information also is used to generate reports for status meetings and project delivery.

Additional information concerning the Project Tracking System may be obtained from the Right-of-Way Bureau Operations Manager.
REFERENCES


