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From: Ryan, Lori <lryan@mt.gov>
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Montana Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division Reaches a Decision Regarding Airway Beacon Program

HELENA — The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has reached a decision regarding the future of the Airway Beacon Program.

The 84 airway beacons in Montana were installed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in the 1930s as part of a national airway corridor network to assist pilots with night navigation. As advances in navigational technology became available in the 1960s the FAA began decommissioning airway beacons. The FAA withdrew all support of the airway beacons by the early 1970s.

Montana adopted 17 of the beacons and continued operation in southwest Montana where radio navigational aids did not provide complete coverage for night pilots. As navigational technology has advanced, however, the beacons have become obsolete as a navigational aid to night pilots.

To ensure the opportunity for public participation statewide, MDT Director Mike Tooley executed a charter that established a working group. The purpose of the Airway Beacon Working Group was to make recommendations as to the future of the Airway Beacon Program and to hold public meetings on those recommendations.

Three public informational open house meetings were planned and properly noticed. Meetings were held in Billings, Missoula, and Helena with a total of thirty-six individuals attending the three meetings.

MDT received a total of 125 written comments with 82 comments in favor of decommissioning all beacons and 43 comments in favor of keeping some or all the beacons operational.

After consideration of much input and information, MDT Director Mike Tooley has concluded that it is in the state's best interest to decommission all Airway Beacons except the MacDonald Pass beacon, which is a registered historic landmark. The beacons will be decommissioned using a phased approach that will allow the Strawberry Beacon and Spokane Beacon to remain operational not longer than June 30, 2019. A search will be conducted to identify an entity willing to adopt the MacDonald Pass beacon no later than December 31, 2021.

The Aeronautics Division will assist the Airway Beacons Working Group to determine if private individuals or foundations would like to assume ownership and responsibility for any beacons.

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