



# County Corner

www.co.flathead.mt.us

## The Flathead County GIS Department

The Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Department was established over 10 years ago under the Clerk and Recorder's Office. The department is currently housed on the top floor of the old courthouse and employs a staff of eight dedicated and talented individuals that provide mapping support for all of the county offices, other organizations at all levels of the government, private and professional organizations and the public.

Mapping support, however, actually encompasses a lot more than most can imagine. Yes, the department makes a lot of maps. But, where does this information come from and what information is available?

You might see a county vehicle out on the roads with a funny looking antenna on its roof. The two



Left to Right: Pete Wessel, Nathan Holm, Mindy Cochran, Ron Schlagenhauser, Cheryl Hohman, Denny Rea, Kelly Mountan, Liz Patefield.

### Flathead County GIS Program Manager TOM REYNOLDS



Tom Reynolds comes to GIS with a long technical background. He has both a B.S. degree in Engineering and a Master of Engineering in Aerospace. Having served 22 years in the military as both an engineering and research test pilot, Tom retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. He has been with the county for 10 years, the first 6 in the IT department and the last 4 as the GIS Program Manager. He is married to Laurie and has two adult sons, Chris and Matt.

individuals in that vehicle are actually using the Global Positioning satellites to obtain accurate GPS road location data. Other individuals in the office are looking over the latest subdivision information that is processed in the Plat Room and drafting this land information into a computer using a specialized GIS software program. Another individual is solely responsible for addressing within the county and is currently conducting an Addressing Improvement Program designed to make it easier for people and emergency services to find your house.

Did you ever wonder which fire station services your house, or to which school district you should send your children, or which congressional district you are in? All of this information and more is entered into the GIS software and stored on networked servers at the county.

The department maintains a web site that allows anyone to see this information, property ownership, taxation information, aerial imagery of their residence and more. This interactive mapping web site can be seen at HYPERLINK "<http://maps.co.flathead.mt.us>"

Most individuals find this information very useful, but other county and governmental agencies do also. GIS data is the backbone of the mapping software used in the Sheriff's

Office by the 911 dispatchers. When you call 911, the dispatchers have software on their workstations that shows where the call is originating (phone number and the address of the property). This information, coupled with the location of the responding fire department or ambulance, allows the dispatchers to quickly contact the appropriate responder and send them on their way to your house to deal with your emergency.

How does the fire department or ambulance find your home? The GIS department produces map books for individual fire departments that depict this location information, with address, on top of a topographical map.

Do you remember the Roberts Fire of 2003? The Sheriff's Office had to coordinate emergency evacuation zones in and around Glacier Park. Topological maps were overlaid with fire perimeters provided by the Forest Service to provide the Sheriff's Office, Emergency Services, and the fire teams with current situational information for planning and evacuation purposes.

The above provides a brief insight into the activities of the GIS Department. More and more, the department is becoming the center of activity in supporting all addressed-based functions of our county government.

*"The needs of the future take precedent over the demands of the present."*

— County Commissioners: Bob Watne, Gary Hall & Joe Brenneman