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Montana State Library Announces Reading Room Closure

(HELENA)--- The lower-level reading room of the Montana State Library will close to the public on Monday, July 10, 2017. Because of cuts to the State Library budget of nearly \$310,000 in fiscal year 2018, and anticipated cuts of an additional \$680,000 if revenue triggers are hit in mid-August, the State Library Commission voted to close the reading room and replace it with more targeted public access services that will be located on the main floor. The cost-savings measure will save the State Library more than \$100,000 in rent and related costs. The Department of Administration intends to find other occupants for the space.

Those regular patrons who come to the State Library to access the internet, to read the newspaper, and for a quiet place to study and work will feel the loss of the reading room. In addition to closing the reading room, the State Library is adopting other significant cost-saving measures, including eliminating 12 positions from its 44-member staff.

“This is a difficult time for the State Library. We are saddened that we no longer have the resources necessary to support the needs of these patrons,” said State Librarian Jennie Stapp. “But by closing the reading room, we can save two staff positions that will be able to continue our important work to manage and provide access to our unique collections of information about Montana.”

Stapp explained that well over 90% of the State Library’s collections are available online to information seekers around the world.

“Much of our collections are born digital,” said Stapp, referring to collections about Montana’s land, water, animals, plants, and habitats, which are now created in a digital format as opposed to being available only in print. For example, the Montana State Library’s Natural Resource Information System, the Water Information System, and the Montana Natural Heritage Program were created by the State Legislature in 1983 to help manage the State’s natural resource data. All of these programs’ information – from 1983 forward – is available through web applications and web services quite literally at people’s fingertips.

The State Library has also nearly completed a decade-long project to digitize its collection of state government publications. This collection dates to the 1880s and documents the reports of Montana state government intended for the public. Through a partnership with the Internet Archive, nearly 35,000 publications are also available online. Similarly, the State Library will return its print collection of federal documents to the Federal Depository Program and will become a “digital only” Federal Depository Library as another cost and space-saving measure.

People now expect to find the information they need online, especially the kinds of information in the State Library’s collections and State Library staff have worked hard over the years to

support patrons' evolving needs. Policy makers, economic developers, educators, entrepreneurs, natural resource managers, and many more people around the state and the world use the information from the State Library's collections on a daily basis. Ensuring people have access to this information online will continue to be a priority for the State Library in the future.

The State Library staff hopes that patrons will still come to the State Library to meet the staff of information professionals. A small reading room with a limited number of computers will be available on the main floor of the State Library. Here patrons may continue to access talking book library services, digital state and federal publications as well as geographic, natural resource, and Natural Heritage data and tools.

Through its statewide programs, the Montana State Library empowers Montanans; enhances learning in families and communities; builds 21st Century skills; and provides opportunities for civic participation. For more information about the Montana State Library, visit <http://msl.mt.gov>.

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