# Natural Resource Information System (NRIS)
July 17 – September 18, 2002

**Goal 1:** To fulfill its mandate to be the source for natural resource information in Montana, NRIS acquires, integrates, maintains, and documents natural resource data and information needed for understanding, managing and utilizing Montana's natural resources, and environment.

Added a variety of new GIS data layers to our inventory and provided access through the GIS data page. Layers added include updates of national park service lands, national wildlife refuges, Census 2000 data, high priority abandoned mines, wind speed and power information, and MT highway maps.

Began extensive work on integrating raster data into the NRIS spatial database (topographic maps, aerial photos, etc.). Serving these layers through the spatial database will provide a greatly enhanced vehicle to deliver these data, improving our ability to integrate the data with all other data in the clearinghouse and providing the ability to serve the data through our automated data access tools.

Began conversion of Heritage database to "Biotics", a new ArcView-based software platform that provides a customized environment for input and management of Heritage spatial data. This conversion will bring great improvements in data accuracy, accessibility, flexibility, documentation, and consistency.

Inventory of primary datasets in the clearinghouse is approximately 85% complete. Much remains to be done, however, in organizing and inventorying numerous project level (non-statewide) data (estimated 50% complete). Efforts will be refocused on completion of the organization and inventory of primary statewide data holdings; however, due to resource limitations, completion of this project will be delayed.

Development of a comprehensive data plan is behind schedule. Although most of the information to be summarized in such a plan is now available, consolidation of this information in a single document has not been completed. Efforts will be refocused to complete this project.

NRIS staff continue to play an active role to encourage and support the development and refinement of priority datasets, serving on most of the MGIC Implementation Teams (I-Teams) and chairing four.

**Goal 2:** A broad range of user groups can easily locate data in effective formats. Users find that this information is augmented with related datasets to increase its value. Potential NRIS users are well informed of information available through the clearinghouse and trained in the use of NRIS tools. Staff assistance is available when needed to assist users in locating and utilizing data.

Web site use continues to grow. The NRIS web site took over 2,000,000 hits during the two month period.

Requests for staff-assistance in locating and obtaining data remain steady, even as web-site usage grows. NRIS and NHP received 292 mediated requests and completed 268 requests during the period. NRIS users as well as staff report satisfaction with the new on-line Request Tracker. The recently developed system provides users the ability to make data requests via the Internet, then return at a later date to modify, augment, or track the progress of their requests. The system is also a work load allocation and tracking tool for NRIS managers.

Developed first working model of new Arc-IMS-based framework for providing "deep-access" to Heritage data via the web (Arc-IMS is the latest software tool provided by ESRI for the purpose of serving spatial data via the Internet). The Forest Service and BLM are funding this effort to give agency biologists full desktop access to extensive and detailed data on their lands in an extremely powerful spatial environment.

Heritage Program and FWP reached agreement on a plan to create an integrated data system for native species, building on the Heritage observation and occurrence databases. This will form a cornerstone of the Department's new native species diversity initiative.

Completed a Heritage report on the vegetation and plant species of concern in Powder River County, a partnership project with BLM. Participated in BLM meeting to develop broad-scale assessment and planning tools/information.

Deployed a user survey through the NRIS website to measure user satisfaction and to receive direction regarding data acquisition and the development/refinement of data discovery, access and dissemination tools. The survey will run for the month of September. Results will be reported in the NRIS annual report.

Continued updates and maintenance of the MT drought monitoring page. NRIS maintains this comprehensive source of drought information as a service to the Montana Drought Advisory Committee.

Continued to host a Friday Afternoon Seminar series (one per month). The August seminar relating to improved access to NRCS soils data and the September seminar relating to rural addressing for e911 purposes were both well attended. The e911 seminar was covered by KTVH-12 news.

Attended and presented at the quarterly Interagency GIS Technical Working Group meeting in Lewistown. The NRIS role in serving Framework data in Montana was discussed.

Sponsored a booth at the Venture Outdoors conference in Billings. The booth highlighted access to natural resource information for recreation purposes.

Attended and presented at a meeting of the Yellowstone River Coordination Council meeting in Billings. NRIS will host information supporting this organization's goal of fully understanding the impacts of projects affecting the river.

Attended and presented at a Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) tribal information forum in Billings.

Provided an article relating to increased and improved data holdings at NRIS to both the GIS User and Big Sky Libraries newsletters. Provided an article regarding the Heritage Program for the MACo newsletter.

Attended the transportation data layer working group meeting in Missoula. This group supports the development of a process for integrating transportation data from various data producers into a comprehensive statewide data layer.

Submitted three news releases relating to NRIS activities.

**Goal 3:** In order to fulfill its mandate as described under Issues 1 and 2, NRIS secures adequate and stable funding.

Used the framework data discussion document recently approved by the Commission as the basis for a presentation/discussion at the Interagency Technical Working Group (ITWG) meeting in Lewistown, but determined that additional discussion is needed before presenting the issue to the Montana Geographic Information Council (MGIC).

Entered into discussions with ITSD relating to the roles of NRIS and ITSD regarding geospatial data dissemination in Montana.

ITSD is now advocating negotiations between MSL and ITSD to resolve whether all GIS activities currently carried out by the two agencies should be combined within one agency or the other. However, we feel that GIS coordination tasks currently carried out by ITSD may not be within the general mandate of the Library, while, on the other hand, we feel strongly that information discovery, access and dissemination are definitely the job of the Library. Because we feel that combining all GIS activities within either agency is not the right answer, we have developed a matrix of tasks and activities relating to GIS and geospatial data in an attempt to better define the roles of NRIS and ITSD, to be used as the basis for further discussions. Related issues include access to electronic information in general, and ultimate control of the data (which agency should manage the servers and data storage).

Resolving these issues becomes more important as we approach the legislative session.