Natural Resource Information System (NRIS)

April 2, 2003 – May 27, 2003

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.

Continued to play an active role to encourage and support the development and refinement of priority datasets, serving on most of the Montana Geographic Information Council (MGIC) Implementation Teams (I-Teams) and chairing four.

NRIS staff continued working with USGS representatives from Denver to discuss, plan, and begin implementing the USGS "National Map" application from the State Library. The National Map is a project of USGS aimed at providing users an electronic version of their topographic quadrangle maps on demand via the Internet using the most recent and highest quality data available. MSL, the Department of Administration, and USGS recently entered into a MOU whereby MSL will serve as the National Map portal for Montana. Prototyping and testing is currently underway

The Natural Heritage Program has successfully migrated its databases from an old DOS-based system to a new ArcView/Oracle based data management system. This conversion effort took several major steps that spanned more than a year. The new system will provide a more flexible, accurate and powerful information management and distribution system.

The Natural Heritage Program completed the 2003 update to the *Montana Plant Species of Concern* report. The 2003 Animal Species of Concern report was completed earlier this year, in conjunction with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MT-FWP). All publications of the Heritage Program are available in full-text format on the MSL/NRIS web.

The Natural Heritage Program, in collaboration with the MT-FWP and the Montana Audubon Society, published the Sixth Edition of *Montana Bird Distribution*.

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.

Use and Requests:

Web site use continues to grow. The NRIS web site is now routinely averaging over 1,000,000 hits per month (nearly 1.3 million in April). April saw over 60,000 user visitor sessions, for an average of about 1,950 per day. Each visitor 'sessions' last about 13.5 minutes, for a cumulative average use per day of our site equaling nearly 440 hours.

Requests for staff-assistance in locating and obtaining data have remained steady, even as web-site usage grows, averaging approximately 1700 requests

per year. Recently the rate of requests has upturned slightly; this could be problematic for existing staff if requests for staff assistance continue to climb.

New Services:

Added two new framework data layer web pages, one for Tiger 2000 road data and one for USGS National Land Cover Data. Framework data layers or themes are those that have been identified by the GIS community as critical for most GIS applications. Also, completed and deployed a new Montana National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) data access home page at http://nris.state.mt.us/nsdi. The NSDI is the set of framework data layers identified by the Federal Geographic Data Commission (FGDC) as top priority for all states.

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. NRIS recently made available through this site over ten years of Surface Water Supply Index (SWSI) data.

The Natural Heritage program is now testing a preliminary version of a new Web application to provide biologists in state and federal partner agencies with extensive access to detailed biological data managed by NHP. Full rollout to partner agencies – including customized training – is scheduled for early summer. Tools to provide broad public access are in the design phase, and will be coming on-line later in the year.

Outreach:

NRIS and Natural Heritage staff attended the Intermountain GIS User's Conference in Coeur d'Alene, ID, from April 7-10. Staff presented three papers and two four-hour workshops on various topics.

Presented an NRIS Seminar on Noxious Weed Mapping.

Presented an NRIS Seminar on the Water Quality Monitoring system.

Presented an overview of the new NHP web application for biological data at the annual conference of Natural Heritage programs and NatureServe, their international affiliate organization.

Submitted several news releases relating to NRIS activities.

Presented an NRIS demonstration to a group of alternative high school youth; a Natural Heritage information workshop to UM Dillon Biology class; and a presentation on managing biological info to a GIS class at MSU Bozeman.

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

NRIS will complete FY 2003 in good fiscal condition, having adequate core funding and excess contract funding for the current staffing load. Open positions and a significant grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services have contributed to the surplus; this will change in FY 2004 as we enter the new year

with full staff and the IMLS grant coming to an end. The merging of the LISD and NRIS budgets, incorporating budget cuts mandated by the Governor and the legislature, will combine to make budget planning a little uncertain for the next few months.

Special Personnel Note:
Cedron Jones, GIS Mapping Technician for the Natural Heritage Program, is retiring after more than 18 years with NRIS – virtually since its inception. He was instrumental in creating and implementing the Stewardship Mapping Project – for public and conservation lands and designations in Montana – which continues to be one of our most valuable and requested datasets. Cedron's contributions will be missed.