

NRIS Advisory Committee
March 21, 2005
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Functional Outcomes of Natural Heritage Program administration decision

- Closer interaction between the University research program/graduate students and the Natural Heritage Program
- Closer interactions between the Heritage Program and FWP
- Closer interaction among all partners in the Heritage Program
- Information availability to the public, esp. info collected and used by regulatory agencies
- The Heritage Program continues as a functional unit; cohesiveness; all components of the program remain together
- Long term financial stability for the program
- Maintain scientific data quality
- That final decision makes sense; consensus at least to the point that all partners can live with the outcome
- Focus on those issues/services that are unique and not provided by other agencies; avoid redundancies
- Political neutrality
- People – maintain the expertise that currently is on staff
- This is an opportunity to improve; better and stronger program
- All stakeholders have meaningful input to program management
- One-Stop; synergy with NRIS; avoid the consequences associated with fragmenting the NRIS program and resources
- Maintain cohesiveness while improving interactions among stakeholders
- Neutrality; unbiased priorities; the program is protected from a “regulatory image”
- Maintain/improve the diversity of information; maintain a focus on ecological information – on communities as well as species. The Heritage Program is the only place to get this kind of information and we don’t want to lose that capability.
- Maintain the core program and the core funding structure. The decision should not jeopardize the core program.
- Maintain/enhance the ability to exchange funding and services with the NHP and among the partners.
- The solutions must honor the various processes and functions that are necessary to acquire, process, store and distribute information.
- The Heritage Program needs the freedom to be entrepreneurial and innovative.
- Maintain data quality/integrity during the information gathering, analysis and dissemination.
- Build trust regarding the quality of the data and the product
- The Heritage Program mission is included within the mission of the host agency, i.e. the program is integrated and not just an appendage
- The core function and the core funding were visionary – protect them at all cost.
- Avoid the perception of bias. It is important that the public be able to trust the information provided by the Heritage Program – that the information is unbiased and from a reliable source.
- The Heritage Program needs the freedom and the autonomy to get its work done.

- The Heritage Program must be responsive to the end users.
- The program is isolated from politics.
- The Mission defines the work priorities, not vice versa.
- The data is protected from mis-use. The information serves the needs of the user but is appropriately buffered so that the information cannot be used in a way that might compromise the resource.
- Put the information to work; the information is available in a variety of ways and for a variety of applications
- The housing agency should have a track record of success with the Legislature in securing funding for the program.
- The Heritage Program, functioning as a unit, has unique expertise and a reputation for being unbiased. This kind of consulting service is available nowhere else.
- Don't lose the plant information or the invertebrate information from the mix.
- Define "strong" and "success" with regard to the Heritage Program mission.
- No new overhead costs; improved efficiency of administration.
- Respect the existing staff; should not have to interview for their positions.
- Maintain the ability to work with all of the partners.

Issues and Concerns

- Concern for the impacts to the digital library program and the corresponding concern for a broader public interest.
- Will partners continue to fund the projects?
- Agencies who might contract with NRIS but might not contract with FWP or the University for the same work.
- The core funding might be at risk.
- Staff security.
- Human resource issues – take care of the staff.
- State agency bureaucratic processes – budgets, hiring etc. – might be impediments to a smooth transition.
- Within a state agency, the Heritage Program might lose the ability to effectively work across political boundaries.
- The change has to make sense to the Legislature. All of us have to be able to champion the decision.
- Will the mission of the Heritage Program look like it is compatible with the mission of the host agency to the Legislature?
- Transferring 16 fte's will be a challenge and potentially compromise the ability to maintain program integrity.
- Management of the non-core services; it might be a challenge for the Library to administer those components.
- It might be difficult to maintain the entrepreneurial spirit and the associated autonomy.
- What are the most important pieces and how can we recreate a new entity around those components? Statutory authority and location could stay in the State Library, and only the contract transfer to another entity, e.g. the University, resulting in the least impact.
- If we change program administration, will other agencies continue to accept the product?
- If everyone is happy with the status quo, what is the driver for change?
- Is NRIS positioned to receive the program and support it?

- Wherever it goes, the program needs strong support.
- It is a risk to locate the program at an agency that has a regulatory arm – problems with perception and information integrity.
- What does transition mean for the long term? Even if transition is problematic in the short term, the longer term gains might make it worthwhile.
- Maintain data integrity; data quality is integral to the purposes for which the information is used.
- The host agency must be able to administer the contracts.
- How have transitions in other states worked?
- FWP is broadening its mission with a comprehensive wildlife plan. FWP has the ability to put resources into places that heritage cannot. There are concerns for the potential overlap and redundancy and the Heritage and FWP to be stepping on each others' toes.
- FWP and the Heritage Program, working together, should leverage state wildlife grant funds to maximize benefits for all of the stakeholders.
- We all recognize the value of the Heritage Program and don't want to lose it.
- Maintain cooperation and continue to produce what we get from the program.
- Agencies and HP should work together to identify respective strengths & roles of each, and avoid duplicating efforts. There are things that the HP is in the best position to do and should do - don't lose that.
- Maintain the expectation of open access to and reliability of the information.
- We should be thinking about changes – tweaks rather than wholesale change – that offer the potential for low risk/high return. Be careful about all of the “costs” associated with major change. Costs are more than just dollars. They include the potential for morale issues; loss of customers; loss of funding; increased administrative costs, etc. Be aware of the “law of unintended consequences”. Don't make major change without a thorough evaluation.
- Maintain the political insulation and the ability to work with the partners.
- The working relationship between the Heritage Program and FWP staff is great. The issue of overlap or competition is one of perception.
- Do a list of the pros/cons for locating the program with each of the potential agencies and identify the potential solutions to mitigate the cons. The mitigation strategies should be part of the proposal.
- Regardless of the recommendation, we need to think about opportunities to improve the program – better coordination and stronger network among the partners.
- Consider modular components
- Reaffirm agency commitments to the core program and core funding.

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