

## Montana NHP Partners Committee Summary of February 27, 2006 Meeting

### Financial Update & Planning

- The Committee reviewed the current status of NHP core funding:
  - NHP requires 10 – 10.5 FTE to provide core services relied upon by users. The total annual funding requirement, including non-personnel operating costs, is \$633,000 - \$668,000.
  - The current state contract totals \$303,000/yr, which supports about 4.5 FTE.
  - Supplemental funding for core services from federal, state and private sources currently totals around \$125,000. The balance of funding to sustain NHP positions must come from projects, which require significant core staff time to secure and manage.
  - An additional \$205,000 - \$240,000 is needed to effectively support NHP core services.
- Proposal supported by the Committee: To pursue \$150,000 increase in NHP state core contract (legislative appropriation to the State Library) for the FY08-09 biennium and an additional \$90,000 in supplemental core funding from various sources.
- The Committee discussed several proposals about how the state contract increase might be structured:
  - Proposed: That contributions from the “big four” state agencies to the core contract (DEQ, FWP, MDT, DNRC) be equalized, based on usage figures that show heavy reliance of each on various NHP services. There was general support for this but any decision was deferred until the upcoming NRIS Advisory Committee meeting.
  - Proposed: That increases in University System funding be sought directly from UM, which will be administering the NHP contract, rather than through the University System overall. This funding would be direct support of the NHP, and would not run through the State Library contract. There was general support for this idea.
  - Proposed: That half of the \$150,000 increase be sought from the General Fund, which currently comprises one of the smaller sources of funding for the NHP core contract. Committee members did not object to this approach, but suggested also considering an increase request from RIT funds (where there is currently a surplus, although questions have been raised regarding NRIS’ eligibility or priority).
- To address the core funding shortfall in FY07 (the second year of the current biennium), NHP staff introduced four proposals to help fund critical “core data projects,” each of which requires \$30,000 - \$35,000 in additional support to complete in FY07. Partners were asked to seek “project funding” from their agency to help achieve these priority objectives, including:
  - Completing a new **Natural Heritage Information Portal** that would provide partners with extensive Web access to NHP data through a state-of-the-art spatial (map) interface.
  - **Major update of distribution data on Animal Species of Concern** by incorporating a large backlog of new data and producing up-to-date distribution mapping – from detailed observations to statewide range – for 144 animal species.
  - **Documentation of Montana’s aquatic and terrestrial ecosystem types** through ecosystem mapping and descriptions, for broad application in resource planning and management.
  - **Enhancement of Animal, Plant and Ecology Field Guides on the Web**, including more photos, management-related information, and the addition of Invertebrates and Aquatic Ecosystems.

### **Interagency Data Coordination**

Bryce Maxell proposed creating a statewide Biological Data Work Group to improve the efficiency of data transfer among various agency databases and the NHP. The Work Group would provide a forum to identify 15-20 data fields common to most biological databases and establish data field standards. Benefits would include enhancing access to data and saving time and money in collecting and consolidating data. Committee members discussed the idea and there was good support. Heritage staff will work with Steve Carson of FWP to review and summarize the structure of major biological databases in Montana, and with NHP Partner Committee members to identify appropriate participants for the Work Group. A first meeting was targeted for fall or early winter of 2006.

### **Finalized Strategic Plan**

The Final NHP Four-Year Strategic Plan was presented and copies distributed. A Preamble was added, per the Committee's suggestion at the November meeting, emphasizing the important contributions of partners. A strategy was also added under Goal 1, Objective B ensuring close coordination with FWP on developing and managing data for the state's Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The Strategic Plan is also posted on the NHP Website.

### **Update: Transfer of NHP Contract to University of Montana**

Sue Crispin reported that negotiations of transfer agreements and a new core contract are going well, with no major surprises or concerns – just many details to be worked through. Highlights include:

- The transfer of the contract is currently scheduled to take place on July 1, 2006 – coincident with the new fiscal year. This change is administrative only, and will have no visible impact on the NHP's operations or services.
- The University will accept transfer of all current funding/project agreements held by TNC at the originally negotiated overhead rate, or the appropriate off-campus UM rate – whichever is lower. Any agreements that cannot be transferred from TNC to UM will be completed by TNC through subcontract with the University.
- The NHP office and staff will remain based in Helena at the Montana State Library, and will remain operationally part of NRIS, as required by statute. Space will be provided at the U on an as-needed basis.
- The University will provide 100% of overhead revenues for the first two years to be retained by the NHP to cover existing administrative needs and transfer costs.
- Staff salary levels will be maintained, and the University will contribute 25% of the Director's salary.

### **Next meeting**

Chair: Janet Hess-Herbert volunteered to chair the next meeting.

Date: Tentatively planned for May, to follow up with the state budget request process.

NHP Partner Representatives Attending 2/27/06 Meeting:

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Janet Ellis	MT Audubon	jellis@mtaudubon.org
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Staff present:

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