

MEMO

To: State Library Commission
From: Karen Strege
Re: NRIS Reorganization
Date: March 27, 2000

As you know, the NRIS program has been developing a strategic plan. A summary of the draft plan is enclosed with this memo. We will present the full draft plan at your meeting. The plan, if implemented, will require a change in the organizational structure of NRIS and therefore, a changed staff structure. The summary sheet enclosed lists the current number of staff positions along with the proposed restructure.

In brief, NRIS staff numbers 13. Only 5.4 of these positions are funded through the state's budget. The remainder, 7.6, are called modified positions and are funded through various contracts. After the restructuring, NRIS staff would number 11 FTE and 5.6 positions would be modified positions.

The proposed change is driven by a couple of important variables. First, NRIS can no longer rely on a large contract to pay most of the operations and personnel costs. For five years, the ARCO superfund contract allowed NRIS to hire staff to service the contract and to develop NRIS capabilities. This contract is no longer available. To replace this large contract, NRIS has developed a number of smaller contracts, some of which do not contribute to the core mission and distract staff from that mission. Such contracts also require extensive management and administrative time. Some of the present contracts do provide for the development of important data for the clearinghouse and we anticipate that NRIS will continue to seek and manage contracts that expand the quality and amounts of information available to Montana citizens.

Second, agencies have developed their own GIS programs and the requirements for GIS contracts have and will decrease. NRIS was a leader in deploying this technology in the state. However, as the technology has dispersed and evolved, agencies have hired in-house GIS staff and decreased their dependence on NRIS's contract services.

Third, the focus of NRIS must be on two functions: the development and delivery of the natural resource information. Information development means acquiring, integrating, and maintaining the accuracy of information. Plans for acquiring and encouraging the development of critical information are essential for NRIS's clearinghouse function. The means to deliver information, as we all know, has changed dramatically in the past three years. NRIS is still devoted to broad accessibility and customer service, but delivery tools are now primarily web based.

These variables do not shift NRIS's traditional mission; instead, these variables change how resources are deployed to meet the mission. I believe that resources need to be

restructured in the following ways. The artificial boundaries between Water and Land (GIS) information need to be dissolved organizationally. As required by law, NRIS will still offer a Water Information System. The proposal shows three functional areas – information development, information delivery, and administrative. Delivery and development are viewed as a cross-function team. With the emphasis taken off contract work and placed onto development and delivery, NRIS needs staff with skills in electronic delivery of information.

NRIS currently has four staff members working as GIS Programmer Analysts, Grade 15. The proposed structure would eliminate two of these positions. Current staff would be invited to apply for the two remaining positions. Two of the existing staff would be reduced in force. This is in accordance with state personnel policy.

The other position suggested for a significant change is the Metadata Coordinator. This position is currently funded by the Department of Administration (DOA) and is unlikely to be funded again in the 02-03 biennium. The person in the position, Kris Larson, has excelled in encouraging the understanding and use of Metadata in the state for the past three years. However, I believe that other funding sources are potentially available for this position and we will seek these sources during the next year.

The development of Metadata for spatial data is critical for the state. I believe that the State Library and NRIS have the responsibility to advocate for, and perhaps provide, Metadata records. The position of Metadata coordinator has the responsibility of encouraging data developers and their supervisors to recognize the importance of Metadata and to teach others how to integrate Metadata production into the development of spatial data. If we are not successful at funding this position, the advocacy role and the responsibility of creating Metadata records will be integrated into the work of many positions at NRIS. We will assign the coordinating role to a management position. The Metadata Coordinator will fulfill NRIS's contractual duties to the state and DOA until the contract expires June 30, 2001.

We have analyzed the existing position descriptions, consulted with the Personnel Bureau, and found that we do not have to ask the bureau to reclassify positions because of anticipated minimal changes. As you remember, the opposite was true in the reorganization of the LIS Department where we were required to write all new job descriptions because all the jobs were changed significantly.

If the Commission approves the plan and proposed reduction in force, we would immediately start transitioning to the new structure with the goal of making all major changes by July 1, 2000. This is a major change in the structure of NRIS. I understand that the Commission will most probably hear differing opinions about the draft plan and the reorganization and may not want to make a decision on April 12. If this were the case, I would ask that you consider a special teleconference meeting during late May to make this critical decision.