

Natural Resource Information System

Revised Report

Period January 20- March 23

Goal 1. Acquire, integrate, maintain and ensure accuracy of spatial and natural resource data and information needed for managing Montana's natural resources and environment.

Activities:

Began actively working with Census 2000 Public Law data (population figures) in cooperation with the Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC).

Participated with the Montana Geographic Information Council (MGIC), the Montana Local Government GIS Coalition (MLGGC), and the Interagency Technical Working Group (ITWG) in the OMB I-Teams. The purpose of the I-Teams is to identify critical GIS data layers for the state, report on their status, and ensure that one primary contact is ultimately responsible for acquiring, updating, and maintaining the data.

Heritage Program ecologists compiled records of rare plant communities in the Pryor Mountains from several information sources.

Heritage staff produced an updated statewide "Stewardship Map," a spatial database documenting public lands and public and private conservation easements in Montana. This work is supported by a partnership of state and federal agencies, state land trusts, and two private foundations, and will be continuously updated.

Began developing a wetland conservation tracking database for the new Montana Wetlands Legacy, a partnership of state, federal and private interests involved in wetland conservation.

New Heritage Zoologist John Carlson led interagency workshops to update the state list of Animal Species of Concern, and to develop a statewide Sage Grouse conservation status assessment.

Goal 2. Effectively disseminate natural resource data and information, ensuring broad accessibility, utilizing current technologies, and maintaining a strong emphasis on customer service.

Activities:

Deployed a variety of new web accessible datasets and programs including:

- the 2001 Montana drought site (<http://nris.state.mt.us/drought>)
- Updated 30 meter DEMs developed with data from NRCS
- Montana Bird Distribution Database, on the Heritage Website; in addition to accessing information on a decade of bird sighting records statewide, the public can now also enter their own sightings into the database (partnership with Montana Audubon and Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks).
- Completed a beta-version of web-accessible Heritage data layers, now being used and tested by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's Minerals Division.

- The updated Heritage Stewardship map was incorporated into the NRIS Mapper.

Heritage acquired specially designed software called EcoArt which makes it possible to quickly create reports on Montana's natural communities.

The water and GIS web sites were very busy as usual during the period. The NRIS web pages (Water and GIS) took a combined hit rate of nearly 890,000 hits during this period. The Heritage web pages took another 94,000 hits in January and February – about 1500 hits per day.

Continued to add to and enhance the new Montana Drought 2001 web page. Staff created this page for the statewide Drought Monitoring Committee. The page has been well received and heavily used.

Answered numerous mediated data requests, including 151 by Heritage staff.

Goal 3. Ensure that NRIS products, services, and expertise are broadly known, effectively used, and highly regarded by those who require natural resource information and spatially referenced data.

Activities:

NRIS/Heritage staff made presentations and/or represented the program at the following meetings:

- Wetland Council
- Montana Wetland Legacy Partnership
- Water Quality Sub-Group.
- GIS Users' Group
- Marketing Workshop given by The Nature Conservancy
- Northern Rockies Ecosystem Partnership/Kendall Foundation workshop
- Northern Rockies Ecoregional Planning Workshop
- Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) Meetings

Other activities:

- Published the winter quarter edition of the Montana GIS News.
- Participated in National Spatial Data Infrastructure Clearinghouse Teleconference.
- Provided training to state employees taking the Advanced ArcView GIS workshop on NOAA's Metadata Collector for ArcView.

Goal 4. Establish, maintain, and continually improve the program structure, resource(s), staff and operation required to successfully implement NRIS mission, vision and goals.

Activities:

Three key staff positions were filled in Heritage: John Carlson began as Zoologist/Program Manager in February, and Whitney Weber will start as GIS/Database Coordinator in April.

Allan Cox will return to NRIS as the Systems & Services Manager for Heritage in May.

In early April, three Heritage staff will attend Heritage Core Methodology Training given by ABI, which supports and represents the Heritage network. This is a weeklong training offered twice yearly in Arlington, Virginia.

NRIS, in conjunction with Program 1, is in the final stages of recruitment for an agency web manager. Two top candidates have been identified and will have on-site interviews in the first week of April. We hope to have a selection made shortly thereafter.

NRIS began recruitment for the manager of the newly formed User Services and Support Section. Screening and interviews will commence in April.

Staff participated in the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) workshop on Outcome Based Evaluations. The workshop helped NRIS to critically look at the program from perspective of patrons and others of influence.

Goal 5. Secure adequate and stable funding to successfully accomplish NRIS' mission and goals.

Activities:

The proposed 2002/2003-biennium budget remains intact as the legislative session draws nearer to closing. At this point, it is unlikely that the budget will be adjusted, with the exception of global changes (affecting all budgets) made by the legislature to address overall general fund deficiencies.

Both the core budget and the contract budget are adequate for the remainder of FY 2001. One significant concern is the failure of DEQ to provide \$20,000 in funding that is built into the NRIS budget as core. Negotiations are underway to obtain those funds, and prospects are good that DEQ will follow through; if they do not, the NRIS equipment budget will be under-funded for this year.

Many of the current contracts can be carried into the next fiscal year, and discussions are underway with several users to establish new contracts for the coming biennium.

The Heritage Program secured funding from BLM for several two-year partnership projects that will improve data on habitat-specific bats and grassland birds, focused on south-central Montana and northeast Montana, respectively, and for an inventory of globally-rare plant species in southwestern Montana. Another partnership project with the USFWS will document plant community diversity and succession related to land management practices on the CMR National Wildlife Refuge and The Nature Conservancy's Matador Ranch.