

Natural Resource Information System

May 19 – July 13, 2001

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.

Continued actively working with Census 2000 Public Law data (population figures) and Summary File 1 data in cooperation with the Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC) in order to provide the means to quickly disseminate these data as they are released from the national office.

Continued to process DOQQs received from the USGS - --

The Heritage Program began several new data collection projects, focusing on grassland birds in northern Valley County, plant species of concern in coal-bed methane fields eastern Big Horn County and in weed-treatment areas in the Helena National Forest, the vegetation communities of Glacier National Park, bats species of south-central Montana, habitats of Red Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, wetlands of the Milk River watershed, and wetlands of the Missouri headwaters area.

Heritage staff compiled data on acreage and characteristics of wetlands protected and restored since May, 2000 from various public agencies and land trusts to create a Wetland Legacy tracking database for the joint DEQ-FWP Wetland Legacy Program. The purpose of the database, which will be maintained in conjunction with the Heritage Program's Wetland Inventory and Stewardship Mapping projects, is to track progress toward Wetland Legacy program goals statewide.

Heritage obtained and deployed four new GPS units for 2001 fieldwork to achieve greater precision and ensure accuracy in field data collection.

Heritage and FWP staff began developing a plan to better integrate databases and data management for Montana's native wildlife species, particularly those of conservation concern.

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

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

- Heritage program Stewardship data through NRIS thematic mapper
- DEQ application for access to NHP data
- Census 1990 and 2000 block comparison data through NRIS thematic mapper

Continued work on DNRC water right data access system.

Began significant enhancements to FWP Montana River's Information System.

The water and GIS web sites were very busy as usual during the period. The NRIS web pages (Water and GIS) took a combined load of nearly 1,164,000 hits during this period.

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.

Heritage staff deployed an improved Montana Bird Distribution Database over the web, in a joint project with FWP and Montana Audubon. It allows the public to enter official sightings of birds, which will be compiled and published in the next edition of the Montana Bird Distribution Atlas. The database can be searched on-line by geographic area or bird species.

Heritage completed four project reports: "Inventory of Important Biological Resources of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed" (which included an interactive CD with map data), "The Effects of Fire on Lemhi Penstemon," "Monitoring of Ute Ladies' Tresses in Jefferson County," and "Monitoring of Shoshonea pulvinata in the Pryor and Beartooth Mountains."

Answered numerous mediated data requests.

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.

Attended and presented at monthly Drought Monitoring Committee meetings. Demonstrated the draught web site (maintained by NRIS) to the Environmental Quality Council.

Attended an interagency fire response planning meeting to determine the role to be played by NRIS in supporting involved agencies and organizations. NRIS played a significant role last year and our ability to do so again this year figures into the plans of those who have direct responsibility for fire response.

Began working with library and planning faculty at MSU to plan and conduct an outcome-based evaluation of NRIS' web services and resources. This assessment is in accordance with the requirements of our grant from IMLS to serve GIS data and tools over the web.

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

Interviews of two candidates for the User Services and Support Section Manager took place in early July. Although each of the two candidates interviewed had strengths that would benefit

the program, neither had the combination necessary to meet the minimum criteria. As this was the second recruitment for this position, indications are that we will not attract a person with all the skills and abilities necessary to fully meet the position description at the salary offered. We will now re-evaluate the position to determine which of the attributes desired can be offered instead through existing staff, with the intent that the PD possibly be re-written to fit in with a modified section structure.

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

Began the process of developing interagency agreements with the five source agencies to facilitate the transfer of funding mandated by the legislature to support NRIS core services. We will attempt to develop a single agreement that is acceptable to all source agencies. Early comments from two agencies indicate agreement with our assessment of the scope of "core" services, as opposed to specific services performed under contract. DNRC, however, has expressed some concern with the limitations on services to be provided as core. Negotiations continue.

Heritage secured end-of-FY agreements with FWP Department for continued support of stewardship mapping and interagency data coordination/development for animal species of concern.