

Natural Resource Information System

Sep 21 – Nov 21, 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.

NRIS began active prototyping with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to develop and deploy 24k soils data and map interpretations of the data through the NRIS thematic mapper. NRCS has produced a wide variety of analyses based on soil types that will be useful to NRIS users and effectively deployed over the Internet using NRIS data access tools.

NRIS began the final naming QA/QC process for the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD) project. NRIS, through an agreement with USGS, is the custodian of the NHD in Montana and is responsible for completing and QA/QC of the dataset.

Heritage staff began detailed planning to integrate the Stewardship Mapping data into the State of Montana's Tax Parcel data base.

Working closely with MT-FWP, the Heritage Zoologist has been meeting with various state and federal agencies to identify additional data on animal species of concern that needs to be acquired and incorporated into the Heritage databases. The ultimate objective of this process is to create a network of biologists who regularly submit data, and to improve the ease of data submission by using the Web.

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

NRIS completed and deployed a new data system in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) to allow Internet access to DNRC water rights data. The system provides powerful query and mapping capabilities to over 1 million places of use and points of diversion. The system can be found at <http://nris.state.mt.us/apps/dnrc/waterrightmain.asp>.

NRIS worked with the Riparian Wetland Research Program (RWRP) in Missoula to prototype integrating RWRP data into the NRIS Thematic mapper.

The entire Heritage web site was re-written to run on the main NRIS web server, eliminating our dependence on older technology through which the site had formerly been deployed.

Heritage completed and deployed the first version of an Element Occurrence web query program for the US Forest Service.

NRIS continued significant enhancements to FWP Montana River's Information System.

Additional coverages and features were added to the NRIS thematic mapper.

Staff worked with various watershed planning groups and individuals in the state to plan a watershed data meeting, with the goal of highlighting planners data needs and developing more effective techniques for NRIS to deliver data to those users.

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 1.2 million hits during this period. Staff also answered numerous mediated data requests.

The Heritage Program website received over 150,000 hits during this period, and heritage staff responded to 200 mediated requests.

Staff 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 posted new 2001 lists for Plant and Animal Species of Concern on the website.

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.

NRIS Managers met with directors of the Montana Association of Counties (MaCo) to provide an

overview of NRIS resources and identify opportunities to better serve county governments.

NRIS sponsored a booth and staff made a 90 minute presentation on the program to the Montana Association of Planners in Billings.

Heritage attended and gave presentations on the Stewardship Mapping project and innovations in web data delivery at the annual meeting of the Natural Heritage Network in Orlando.

NRIS Staff attended and presented at monthly Drought Monitoring Committee meetings.

Heritage ecologists presented the results of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed wetland inventory at the quarterly Wetlands Council Meeting. They also met several times with DEQ staff and other wetland specialists in the state to plan coordinated wetland assessment work beginning in 2002.

NRIS managers gave interviews with the news media, which resulted in several positive newspaper articles on the program during this period.

NRIS sponsored GIS Day activities, including teaching fifth grade classes at two Helena schools about geography and map making, and participating in a radio talk-show regarding NRIS services.

Heritage managers met with BLM biologists from across the state to present results and activities, and identify priorities for data development and products.

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

NRIS staff attended the Montana chapter of the American Water Resources Association conference in Missoula and made a presentation on the Drought web site at NRIS.

Staff attended two newly formed "I-Team" meetings, one relating to the development of a statewide transportation GIS coverage and the other relating to completion and dissemination of the cadastral GIS coverage. I-Teams are committees recognized by the Montana Geographic Information Council responsible for furthering the development of selected GIS coverages deemed essential to Montana GIS users.

Staff attended the quarterly GIS Interagency Technical Working Group Meeting.

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

The State Librarian facilitated planning meetings with NRIS staff for the purpose of developing a strategic plan that integrates with the plans developed for all other library departments.

Heritage successfully recruited a new Botany Manager for the program. Richard Caners will join the staff in December, coming from Winnipeg, Manitoba. This hire completes staffing of all current Heritage Program positions.

Heritage managers began updating the 1999 plan for development and dissemination of Heritage data, under the umbrella of the overall NRIS strategic plan.

Velda Welch, the Water Information System coordinator, resigned during the period, leaving two positions within NRIS vacant. Using input from staff gained during the planning sessions, we are in the process of rewriting the position description for Velda's position to update it and to add duties and tasks that are of importance to the success of NRIS today. We anticipate recruiting for this position within the next quarter, but may leave one position unfilled until an assessment can be made of our ability to support ten staff, given the core budget and existing contract situation.

The MSL contract with The Nature Conservancy to provide Natural Heritage Program services for the fiscal year 2002/2003 biennium was negotiated and signed.

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

Core funding agreements have now been secured with four of the five source agencies; the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education has not yet signed off on the contract.