

Natural Resource Information System (NRIS)

November 23, 2002 – January 24, 2003

Goal 1: To fulfill its mandate to be the source for natural resource information in Montana, NRIS acquires, integrates, maintains, and documents natural resource data and information needed for understanding, managing and utilizing Montana's natural resources, and environment.

In cooperation with Dept of Administration (DOA) and Dept of Revenue (DOR), obtained, processed and prepared for web distribution the DOA's Cadastral (land parcel ownership) GIS layer and the DOR's CAMA (Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal) database. The combination of these databases is a significant enhancement to the site that is receiving positive comments from users who have been awaiting this capability.

Obtained new climate and precipitation data and integrated into Website.

Continue to play an active role to encourage and support the development and refinement of priority datasets, serving on most of the Montana Geographic Information Council (MGIC) Implementation Teams (I-Teams) and chairing four. I-Teams are the working groups who identify the activities necessary to complete and maintain geospatial data layers. Priority datasets are the data layers identified by MGIC as most valuable and/or in need of significant work to complete.

The Natural Heritage Program published the Montana 2003 Animal Species of Concern List in cooperation with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

Goal 2: A broad range of user groups can easily locate data in effective formats. Users find that this information is augmented with related datasets to increase its value. Potential NRIS users are well informed of information available through the clearinghouse and trained in the use of NRIS tools. Staff assistance is available when needed to assist users in locating and utilizing data.

Use and Requests:

Web site use continues to grow. The NRIS web is now averaging nearly 1,000,000 hits per month.

Requests for staff-assistance in locating and obtaining data remain steady, even as web-site usage grows.

New Services:

Added Cadastral/CAMA map services to the NRIS Thematic Mapper.

Re-designed Thematic Mapper interface page into new format that is easier to use.

Deployed a prototype "Topofinder 2" interface based on new technology available from Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) and Adobe (the makers of the ubiquitous Acrobat Reader). The new interface is a large step toward providing our users intuitive access to geospatial information; however, the new technology requires users to download an SVG Viewer (similar to having to download the Adobe Reader in order to view PDF files). Deploying Topofinder 2 using this technology will enable us to gauge user acceptance of these requirements.

Continued updates and maintenance of the MT drought-monitoring page. NRIS maintains this comprehensive source of drought information as a service to the Montana Drought Advisory Committee. NRIS will soon make available through this site over ten years of Surface Water Supply Index (SWSI) data.

Outreach:

Prepared an email "flier" for distribution to all Legislators, advising them of the information and services available through NRIS, and providing an active link to the NRIS Thematic Mapper with their respective legislative district pre-selected. Legislators could then view a sample set of approximately ten data themes for their district.

Hosted December Friday Afternoon Seminar relating to the use of census 2000 data. The seminar series continues to be well attended, and is often covered by local news.

Assisting in planning and implementation of GIS Rotunda Day for the Legislature on January 14. Intended to inform legislators about issues relating to GIS, activities this year included a keynote speech by former Governor Geringer of Wyoming (a strong proponent of using information technology, GIS technology in particular, to aid in government decision making), an introduction by Governor Martz, and seven booths, each highlighting an issue linked to the use of GIS technology. NRIS hosted one of the demonstration booths on E-government and citizen access to GIS data.

Prepared demonstrations, posters, and a map gallery for "A Night at the Library" – an open house for Legislators also held on January 14. At the event, NRIS received a certificate of appreciation from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), presented by Chuck Gordon, from Bozeman.

Staffed a booth at the regional Noxious Weed Managers meeting in Butte, where NRIS staff received much positive feedback regarding the utility of NRIS data and on-line tools for weed managers faced with the need to prepare environmental assessments relating to weed control projects. Demonstrated access to section-based noxious weed data recently added to the NRIS Thematic Mapper.

Attended the Interagency Technical Working Group (ITWG) and Montana Local Government GIS Coalition (MLGGC) meetings in Bozeman.

Submitted several news releases relating to NRIS activities and new information available through the NRIS website.

The Fall 2002 Edition of the Natural Heritage Program newsletter, Optimolocus, was published in December.

The Natural Heritage Program is working to digitize and post previous reports to its web site. In the late fall, NHP posted 7 of its reports to the web site:

- The effects of fire on Lemhi penstemon (*Penstemon lemhiensis*) - final monitoring report, 1995-2000, *June 2001*
- Monitoring *Shoshonea pulvinata* in the Pryor and Beartooth Mountains, Carbon County, MT, *June 2001*
- Monitoring Ute Ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*), in Jefferson County, Montana, 1996-2000, *June 2001*
- Botanical survey of the Scratchgravel Hills, Lewis and Clark County, Montana, *April 1998*
- Conservation Status of *Lomatium attenuatum* Evert (Apiaceae) in Montana, *January 1998*
- Northern Bog Lemming Survey, 1993
- Preliminary Amphibian and Reptile Survey of the Ashland District, Custer National Forest: 1995, *May 1996*

Goal 3: In order to fulfill its mandate as described under Issues 1 and 2, NRIS secures adequate and stable funding.

Provided input to the preparation of testimony in support of the NRIS budget presented to the Education Sub-committee by the State Librarian. Attended and provided testimony at legislative budget hearings. Met with legislators to provide follow-up on issues relating to NRIS budget.

The sub-committee is proposing that Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) funds may be a way to augment the budget for NRIS. We have expressed some concern regarding this funding source, as it would put NRIS in competition with cities and counties for funding that has traditionally been used to support local infrastructure projects. However, we have had assurances that addition of NRIS to the program would be handled in such a way to negate that concern. As the first step in actually providing additional funding through this means, a committee bill has been drafted that would make NRIS eligible for TSEP funding.