

NRIS Advisory Committee
9:00 a.m., November 13, 2008
Montana State Library,
Grizzly Conference Room
1515 E. Sixth Ave., Helena

ATTENDEES:

Members: Mark Baumler, Evan Hammer, Janet Hess-Herbert, Stan Sternberg and Dan Sullivan.

Staff: Allan Cox, Sue Crispin, Gerry Daumiller, Jeff Dobb, Steve Jeffery, Jim Kammerer, Duane Lund, Diane Papineau, Jennie Stapp and Marlys Stark.

Visitors: Ron Moody and Joyce Funda, Jens Bolstad, Nathan Carter, Larry Flynn, Susan Ockert, Marlin Sander.

Chairman Stapp called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

State Librarian Darlene Staffeldt welcomed everyone to the meeting and then all attendees briefly introduced themselves.

Natural Resource Information System (NRIS), Library Information System (LIS) and Natural Heritage Program (NHP) staff members present introduced themselves and gave a summary of some of their duties. Diane Papineau is with NRIS and handles orientation and outreach as well as working with the GIS Portal and maps. Steve Jeffery is with LIS and works with both NRIS and NHP to perform outreach with all natural resource agencies and has been developing our natural resource collection and trying to get it online for access by everyone. Duane Lund, who has been with NRIS for 17 years, handles a variety of things including the management of the national hydrography dataset stewardship, and NRCS support. Jeff Dobb is also with NRIS and is working primarily on the Portal, web applications, and server administration.

Allan Cox of NHP summarized some of the work of NHP including working with the partners' committee which meets twice a year (March is next meeting) and involves the collection of principal data contributions, users, agencies and so on as well as core funding. The user survey summary is available with more than 360 responses. They have received encouragement to develop weed mapping but need a buy in from the partners before they will be willing to proceed. NHP is involved in predictive modeling with FWP (Fish, Wildlife and Parks); they have more than 600 species in their database and continue survey work. The transition from the Nature Conservancy to University of Montana has gone very well with just a few bumps regarding administration and finances. The latest version of Tracker has been released.

Gerry Daumiller has resigned the NRIS manager position to go back to his GIS Analyst position with NRIS. He mentioned his hopes for the new NRIS manager. Jim Kammerer is the LIS program manager. Jennie Stapp is the Digital Library Administrator and is the first person to fill this position from the library rather than from NRIS. She aims to support NRIS work within the context of the library. She is currently managing the screening of 12 applicants for the NRIS

manager position and working on filling a web intern position also. In addition she has been working with Tom Marino (Web Developer) to clean up orphaned NRIS web.

MSDL VISION REVIEW:

In 2003 the Montana State Digital Library was created to include NRIS, Library Information Services, and the Natural Heritage Program. This was part of a process to better understand user information needs and to be better able to meet them for a variety of users. The 3 main focuses are state publications, information services and natural resources. Steve helps with the integration and focus. The digital library should be used as a reference tool, all NHP studies and reports are available online and searchable through an online catalog. The digital library should work with public libraries. The new approach is from services users see as they come in to the library.

GIS PORTAL OVERVIEW:

In 2006 NRIS was charged to create the Portal with \$75,000 placed in the budget by the Governor's office. The first public version of the Portal was released in September. The software is based on ESRI's Portal Toolkit software but is customized for Montana. People can register as users and create metadata records. Information is currently being added by GIS producers around the state. All of NRIS' information as well as most of FWP's and many others are being entered. The portal has both simple and advanced searches. Certain data can be viewed in the portal map viewer. There are also website links to a lot of other sites. The goal is to have different GIS stewards manage different sections of the site. We need to know what data others are willing to share with the public and need to educate others concerning how to share. Contributors can just put in the record without the download link, can include contact data and can restrict access to particular groups. Lots of features are planned for the next generation of the portal.

Current NRIS applications may also fit within the Portal. We want to completely replace the current Digital Atlas. New software is envisioned while keeping some of the old features. This will make the Digital Atlas more user friendly for the public. A problem with the Digital Atlas is that it is based on old software that ESRI doesn't support anymore. Data users can receive information when what they are interested in is updated.

We need to find out if shape files need to be maintained or not. We need to decide if NRIS is going to be doing more services or the data will be more downloadable. We also need to be sure that the public actually wants all the functionality and features.

Janet Hess-Herbert suggested the need for a user survey to determine which components of NRIS legacy applications are most used and most valuable so those become the focus for upgrading.

NRIS WORK PLAN:

The goal is maintaining services. GIS environment has changed so we need to make sure our approach is applicable. The planning process is on hold with the transition of the NRIS manager. We are continuing the process of outlining where NRIS fits with focus on tools to make information available to a broad range of users, based on the strategic plan for MSL.

Goal one is a collection development policy for natural resources. It defines the kind of information and in what format data will be collected. The primary focus has been GIS data but will grow and expand. We need to identify gaps and deficiencies in the current data and conduct user surveys about services and what information they need and would use. We need to determine how we will archive geospatial layers and other data.

Goal two is to decide how to provide access to information. A lot of services are based on outdated software and data and are time intensive. We will sunset some applications and try to better provide access to those data sets.

Goal three, regarding consultation and leadership, is to perform outreach to gather information on user data needs, train users on the use of NRIS, update data, put on seminars and lectures, post information and more. Topics for seminars are needed and ideas produced by work groups should be passed on. We need to be involved to understand the needs of our clients.

Goal four is to participate in data coordination activities where NRIS staff should serve on committees and boards as well as attend conferences.

Goal five would be for the IT (Information Technology) staff to receive cross training and for reports to committees to continue. An e-newsletter is a possibility to consider. Notification of new software and updates should be sent out. Proposed data strategies should be chosen and we should be able to ask for support from other agencies.

The NHP 2 year work plan is available and the MSL strategic plan for 4 years is online.

CURRENT NRIS FUNDING PICTURE:

We received general fund money for the portal. RIT funds have decreased and the current Governor's Executive Budget shows NRIS moving completely off of RIT funds and onto General Fund. This will mean that NRIS would no longer be put in a position to compete with our partners to receive those funds. Funding for our core funders remains the same.

OPEN TOPICS:

Montana State Library Commissioner Ron Moody stated that NRIS is important to how the library operates and therefore quality is important and the data is very important. It is an asset that needs to be owned by everyone.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.