

Natural Resource Information System

Period Nov 21, 2001 – Jan 25, 2002

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 work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to develop and deploy 24k soils data and map interpretations at NRIS.

Continued 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.

Completed and deployed a new interactive web product in cooperation with the MT DNRC that provides public access to the DNRC's Water Rights Database. This database includes over 1 million points of diversion or use. The NRIS application provides query, reporting, and interactive mapping capabilities to these data.

Integrated another 1,100 digital aerial photos into its statewide inventory.

Updated the Groundwater Information Center well database at NRIS (data on over 170,000 groundwater wells in Montana).

Entered new species and community data collected during the 2001 field season into the Heritage data system.

Heritage staff began the process of migrating the Heritage databases to a new platform being developed by NatureServe, the international affiliate organization. Staff placed an order for the new custom software and developed specs for the required Oracle server.

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

Heritage staff began prototyping a new web application to provide users with web access to precise occurrence data for Species of Concern. This work is financially supported by US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, and is currently being tested by Forest Service botanists.

The Heritage Program published and distributed several reports, including an *Inventory of Ecologically Significant Wetlands in the Upper Yellowstone Watershed*, *Biological Survey of a Landscape in Montana's Glaciated Plains*, and *Sensitive Plants in Weed Management areas on the Helena National Forest*.

The NRIS web pages (Water and GIS) took a combined load of nearly 1.6 million hits during the two month period. The Heritage site logged an additional 100,000 hits during this period. The NRIS website established a new annual record with over 7.2 million hits in 2001. Staff also answered numerous mediated data requests.

Staff created and posted first drought map series for 2002, and continued to add to and enhance the new Montana Drought 2001 web page. Staff created this page for the statewide Drought Monitoring Committee.

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

Added coverages and features to the NRIS thematic mapper.

Several new Heritage reports were posted on the Website Posted in Adobe pdf format for viewing and downloading. Also posted was a map-rich document entitled *Vegetation patterns in the Salmon-Selway Ecosystem*, developed by the Craighead Wildlife-Wildlands Institute.

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 the monthly Drought Monitoring Committee meetings.

Attended and lead several newly formed "I-Teams" for framework data development, including hydrography, hydrologic units, elevation, imagery, geology, and soils. Prepared draft strategic plans for all groups.

Attended the quarterly GIS Interagency Technical Working Group Meeting, which included an I-team roundtable and update.

Attended and presented at a coalition of watershed planners for the Clark Fork basin.

Attended and presented at two meetings related to interagency wildfire response activities and data provision for these efforts.

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

Held a meeting of the NRIS Advisory Committee at which the group began in a process of redefinition to focus more on providing strategic and policy-level support to NRIS.

Continued to integrate the results of recent strategic planning efforts into the agency consolidated strategic plan. Modified existing plan to conform to the structure of the consolidated agency plan.

New Botany Manager, Richard Caners, began work in December, attending national-level Heritage Methodology Training in Arlington, Virginia along with Systems & Services Manager Allan Cox.

Katrina Dixon, NRIS GIS technician, has resigned effective February 1, 2002. Katrina moves on to a fisheries biologist position at the US Fish and Wildlife Service; her great attitude and work ethic will be missed.

The position description for the currently open Water Information System position was rewritten and benchmarked in preparation for recruitment. FWP has offered to share funding for the position, which would then play a greater role in maintaining FWP databases.

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

As of 50% completion of fiscal year 2002, NRIS has expended 54% of its core personnel services funding. While this slight overspending of core funds can easily be corrected in the remaining months of the year, the fact that NRIS continues to expend core funds at a high rate while two positions are

vacant is of some concern. We are evaluating the possibility of not filling one of the open positions this year in order to reduce our dependence on contract funding.