

NRIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING  
MAY 14, 2002  
Montana State Library Conference Room

**ATTENDANCE:**

**Jim Hill**, Natural Resource Information Systems; **Duane Anderson**, Natural Resource Information System; **Sue Crispin**, Natural Heritage Foundation; **Bonnie Lovelace**, Department of Environmental Quality; **Janet Hess-Herbert**, Fish, Wildlife & Parks; **Mark Baumler**, Historical Society; **Tony Herbert**, Information Technology Services Division; **Dan Sullivan**, Department of Agriculture; **John Tubbs**, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; **Larry Mitchell**, Legislative Environmental Quality Council; **Kris Larson**, CEIC

The meeting was called to order at 1:10.

The single item on the agenda was the action item to recognize NRIS as a primary access point for framework data layers in Montana. Jim Hill received comments on the previous draft of the document from three committee members and he incorporated those comments into the current version. Hill summarized the comments received as follows:

Larry Mitchell commented that he is supportive of NRIS' role in data dissemination. Both Mitchell and Tony Herbert questioned whether NRIS' legislative mandate covers non-natural resource data. Hill explained that he presented the issue to the Library's attorney who researched the issue and reviewed the statutes. In the attorney's opinion, NRIS is within its mandate to provide access to data that may not be purely natural resource in nature in order to provide a comprehensive system for acquiring, storing and retrieving data relating to natural resources. By definition, framework data are necessary to provide this service.

Janet Hess-Herbert and Bonnie Lovelace agreed that it is necessary for agencies to be able to access data other than natural resource data in order for them to make decisions and having the information in one place is critical. Mitchell asked where you draw the line at adding new layers as they're identified and created. Hill explained that there are hundreds of data layers, but that the FGDC has guidelines for which layers are core data layers providing the foundation for GIS applications. Hill continued to summarize comments received and changes made to the document:

John Tubbs sent comments to Hill stating that the original document needed to place more emphasis on the benefits of NRIS as a point of access. Hill rewrote the last section of document stressing NRIS' role in data dissemination. Tubbs also questioned whether there would be staffing and budget needs relating to serving framework data. Hill explained that NRIS is not changing fundamentally how they do business,

that NRIS has always served the data layers now known as framework, and that there will not be any significant staffing or budget requirements at this point.

At the request of ITSD, Hill added background information to the document regarding the Montana Spatial Data Infrastructure and gave more recognition to the work that MGIC has done and the role of ITSD. He also made clearer the distinction between custodianship and distribution. He added that some agencies may serve their data directly over the web, but NRIS will still need to link to that information, as there is a great deal to be gained by providing the integration that NRIS can offer. He explained that the data integration and access that NRIS provides doesn't necessarily require that NRIS move the information into its clearinghouse. As certain agencies implement the technology to serve their data directly, NRIS will be able to link to their data.

Herbert said that he really appreciated the work that Hill has done to rework the document and feels it is a big improvement. However, he questioned the sensibility of using phrases like "fraught with problems," and didn't feel it was accurate to say that no other agency is mandated to serve as a comprehensive source of framework data. He felt that regardless of what the NRIS Advisory Committee decided today, the Data Access I-Team that was created by MSDI should discuss the issue of data access before the proposal is taken to MGIC. Hill explained that the Data Access team hadn't really gelled yet, and that he thought taking the issue to ITWG and MLGGC would allow for input from the GIS community. Hill also stated that he knows of no other agency that is mandated to serve as a comprehensive source of framework data.

Hess-Herbert said from the standpoint of a user, she doesn't want to have to go to several different places to get the information she needs. She likes to be able to go to the NRIS site and benefit from the integration of the different layers and she doesn't understand why there's such an issue about NRIS serving in this role.

Herbert stated that he endorses NRIS serving as the primary point for these layers, but he's worried about duplication of data and how it will all evolve over time.

Hill answered that, where possible, NRIS won't be duplicating the data at NRIS, they will just provide links to the information that will be housed at the custodial agency. Hill stated that the benefits of integration of data justify duplication of data when the custodial agency does not have the capability to serve their data. He also stated that the cost to an agency of developing the capability to directly serve their data may not be justified unless they have other business reasons to do so; in these cases, serving their data through NRIS is an alternative.

The Committee requested that the following changes be made to the document:

The second sentence of the action statement was changed to read: The Montana State Library therefore seeks recognition and support of the Natural Resource Information System as a primary access point for framework data layers in Montana. A third sentence was added and reads: NRIS shall provide direct access to these data and/or integration of these data through user interfaces and applications.

The fourth paragraph under Framework Data Models was modified to read: Access to individual Framework data layers through each custodial agency could be problematic. Some potential drawbacks include:

The first paragraph under The Proposed NRIS Solution for Framework Data Access was modified to read: NRIS seeks recognition as a primary point of access for Framework data in Montana. NRIS shall provide direct access to these data and/or integration of these data through user interfaces and applications.

The first bulleted item was changed to read: NRIS' legislative mandate (90-15-301, MCA) is to provide “. . . a comprehensive program for the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of existing data relating to the natural resources of Montana . . .”;

Bullet 6 and 10 were deleted.

Bullet 9 was changed to read: NRIS has the necessary staff, expertise and infrastructure to serve the Framework data layers and can offer an alternative to costly duplicative efforts to provide public access.

The Committee voted on the new proposal with the recommended changes incorporated. The proposal passed unanimously.