Montana State Digital Library
June 2006 – July 2006

Natural Resource Information System (NRIS)

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.

- The 2005 National Agricultural Imagery Program (NAIP) color ortho-photography was made available via the NRIS image service and the Montana Digital Atlas, completing the process of adding this important data to the clearinghouse. NRIS has begun processing the Color Infrared version of the NAIP photographs into our spatial databases in order to offer them similarly through the clearinghouse.

- At the June meeting of the Montana Land information Advisory Council, MTNHP was named the "Steward" of the statewide land cover database for Montana. MTNHP stepped forward to accept this designation which gives MTNHP the responsibility to lead the effort to develop and maintain a reliable statewide land cover database for the state.

- NRIS submitted information to the Montana Land Information Council to renew its stewardship of the National Hydrography Dataset and the orthoimagery portions of the Montana Spatial Data Infrastructure.

- Natural Heritage Program staff added 513 new Element Occurrence records to the BIOTICS database, and revised/updated more than 4,400 Bald Eagle observation records. (Observation records form the foundation for Occurrence records).

- Natural Heritage Program staff completed updates of Natural Heritage Status Ranks for both plants animals, based on a review of new/recent data and input from many agencies and biologists. A new "Threats" assessment was added to the Plant report and a new Habitat categorization was added to the Animals report. All status rank changes were documented in the BIOTICS database. The Natural Heritage Status Ranks, summarized in Species of Concern Reports, serve as a primary reference for agencies and the private sector conducting environmental reviews and assessments, and are also used by a broad range of professionals and the general public.

Goal 2: A broad range of user groups can easily locate data in effective formats. Users find this information 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.

Services:

- NRIS concluded its 2006 NRIS Online Survey. The purpose of the survey was to find out who patronizes NRIS and for what purposes, to gather feedback regarding current NRIS websites and services, and to inform decisions about possible future NRIS service offerings. We received 407 responses with overwhelmingly positive

feedback regarding the usefulness of current and proposed services. A brief summary of the survey results is provided as a separate document.

- NHP staff demonstrated the new Natural Heritage Information Portal (NHI Portal) application to a number of groups and individuals. Staff also completed a "Beta version 2" of the NHI Portal, which has a more user-friendly interface, as well as a location search functions that allow users to search for geographic locations by name, township/range, latitude/longitude, or by entering their own GPS coordinates. This new version will go on-line as the principle version of the application in early September.

- MSL hosted training on the ESRI portal toolkit product for five Dept of Administration staff and five NRIS staff. This complex software will be implemented on MSL's GIS servers this fall to create a one-stop portal for registering and locating geospatial data assets held by Montana organizations.

- Natural Heritage Program responded to 154 Species of Concern reviews and other requests during June and July (an average of 4 reviews per business day). Staff biologists also provided consultation and expertise to various agencies and the public, both from the office and while in the field.

- NRIS staff filled approximately 147 online data requests this period in addition to about 65 questions and problems that came in via telephone and e-mail.

- The Regional Director of the U.S. Forest Service presented the Montana Natural Heritage Program with a Technology Transfer award for "extraordinary accomplishments in providing research, information and learning tools regarding aquatic and terrestrial plant and animal species and ecological communities for Forest Service resource specialists." It's always nice to know that our efforts have been successful and valued!

- Seven NRIS staff spent a total of 899 hours working under contracts with other agencies, including Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Montana Dept. of Justice, Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality and the Montana Dept. of Public Health and Human Services.   The NRIS projects manager spent about 27 hours during June and July working on reports, invoices and contract renewals for work being performed under these agreements.

- Natural Heritage Program staff completed and published three reports:
    - 2006 Montana Plant Species of Concern
    - 2006 Montana Animal Species of Concern (electronic format only)
    - Yellowstone River Wetland/Riparian Change Detection Pilot Study

    NRIS Web States: **nris.mt.gov** averaged 3207 visitor sessions per day in June and 3181 visitor sessions per day in July. The five most requested pages were:
    Montana Maps <http://nris.state.mt.us/gis/gisdatalib/mtmaps.aspx>
    Montana Geographic Information Clearinghouse <http://nris.state.mt.us/gis/>
    NRIS Home Page http://nris.state.mt.us/
    Interactive Applications <http://nris.state.mt.us/interactive.html>
    Montana Land Ownership Maps http://nris.state.mt.us/gis/ ownmaps.asp

- NHP Web Stats: nhp.nris.mt.gov averaged 875 visitor sessions per day in June and 860 visitor sessions per day in July. The five most requested pages were:
  NHP Home Page http://nris.state.mt.us/
  Montana Bird Distribution <http://nhp.nris.mt.gov/mbd/>
  Plant Field Guide <http://nhp.nris.mt.gov/plants/guidebook.asp>
  MT Heritage Program Publications <http://nhp.nris.mt.gov/reports.asp>
  Observation Forms - <http://nhp.nris.mt.gov/ Observations/Observations.asp>

Based on the number and length of visitor sessions recorded, the NRIS/NHP web sites together are being browsed for over 800 hours per day.

Outreach:

- NRIS participated in meetings of the Montana Land Information Advisory Council, the Information Technology Managers Council, The Information Technology Board, the Groundwater Steering Committee and the Governor's Drought Committee.

- Natural Heritage Program staff met with staff from MFWP Wildlife and Information Services Division to develop coordinated data management and dissemination procedures for a number of Species of Concern that are managed by MFWP (e.g., Canada lynx, Bald eagle)

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

- NRIS and NHP managers met with Montana Department of Transportation managers in an attempt to come to agreement on the MSL request to increase agency funding support for the programs. MDT management made it clear that they support the program and the level of funding requested, but that the funding must be prorated between the funding agencies on a usage basis. Staff are analyzing how to meet this requirement and then continue discussions with all funding agencies in support of this EPP item.

- The Department of Public Health and Human Services' Environmental Public Health Tracking program failed in its application to renew grant funding from the Center for Disease control, effectively ending the EPHT program in Montana. This ends a two-year relationship in which NRIS has been performing GIS work for the EPHT program.

- The Natural Heritage Program contract was successfully transitioned on July 1 from The Nature Conservancy to the University of Montana. Staff, service, projects and activities have continued without interruption, thanks to cooperation from all parties to the agreements and to the ongoing efforts of staff.

Library Information Services

LIS Goal 1: State employees have the information that they need to make good public policy recommendations and decisions.

- LIS staff gave an overview of library resources and services at the New Employee Orientation for state government workers.

- LIS staff participated in MSL long range planning discussions.

- MSL filled the position for LISD web programmer/analyst. The name of this new hire is Chris Stockwell. He was hired 7/17/06. This hire advances all four LISD goals.

LISD Goal 3: Montana citizens have easy access to a comprehensive collection of state publications.

- MSL renewed access to the OCLC Digital Archive tool to facilitate continued collection of electronic state publications. As of the end of July, the state publications repository contained 1207 publications.

- The new LISD web programmer/analyst has been doing new hire orientation with managers and staff. In this process, he is being introduced to the goals, objectives, and vision of the MSL and his position.

- To document the results of this orientation for complete development, he is in the process of preparing a comprehensive Use Case for upgrading the management of state agency publications by the MSL. A Use Case is a software planning tool. This tool enables visualization of the functionality needed by various players in an automated system. For MSL, a preliminary list of the players includes librarians, state employees, state agencies, MSL staff, Commission, and the public. The initial Use Case will be a discussion draft, which can be used by MSL to specify the functionality needed to enable it to achieve its objectives, goals, and vision related to state agency publications.

LIS Goal 4: Users have easy and comprehensive access to information through the library.

- The LISD web programmer/analyst built a training and testing server using an excess workstation and some free Microsoft Express software. This server includes Windows Server 2003, SQL Server 2005 Express and Visual Studio C# Express. Cindy Phillips, MSL Network Administrator, provided necessary assistance.

- The LISD web programmer/analyst reviewed SharePoint as a potential tool for team collaboration within the library and for use by library users or libraries.

- LIS counted 2057 separate visits to the physical collection during the months of June and July. This includes workshop and orientation attendees from both LIS functions and other agency uses of the library's conference rooms.

MSdL Personnel Notes:

- MSL hired Lucinda "Cindy" Phillips to the Network Administrator position. Cindy has a long history in desktop and network support, most recently as the jack of all trades computer support person for the Helena College of Technology.

- MSL hired Chris Stockwell to LIS's Programmer Analyst position. Chris comes to us from Pennsylvania where he worked for the Seimons Corporation.   He began work at MSL on July 17.

- Jon and Dana Nehring and big brother Isaac welcomed a new baby, Annika, to their family.