

ITAC Meeting Highlights

Feb 11-13, 2003

IT information exchange-Caribbean District SA, John Parks.

- One of DOI security mandates calls for elimination of backdoors into our networks. This means WRD would have to discontinue the use of modems, wireless networks, etc. ITAC needs to make Bureau aware of WRD's dial-up needs and negotiate security solutions that will be acceptable to DOI so that this functionality is not lost. An example of a legitimate need [network redundancy] can be found in the Caribbean District office. During hurricanes when the WAN is down, they use 13 dial-up lines to transfer data to cooperators.
- John Parks recommends the use of Dreamweaver over Frontpage. Clean up scripts find hundreds of unneeded page tags in documents generated with Frontpage.
- An Information Kiosk developed by John Parks it is located at the National Rainforest Visitors Center (El Yunque) in Puerto Rico. The Kiosk uses touch screen technology to provide the public with information from all USGS Disciplines including Hydrographs from NWISWeb. The Kiosk uses "Mapserver" a free Internet mapserver, similar to ArcServer. The initial development effort cost about 50K but could now be reproduce for less than half the cost.
- John Parks evaluated data transfer technologies for Hurricane Mitch projects. EMWIN satellites were selected as best solution for data transfers [between DCP equipment and NWIS databases] after being compared with DRGS, Radio and Internet lines. EMWIN works well for the 240 sites in Central and South America but it is not currently designed to handle the number of sites WRD has in the USGS.
- RAS (Remote Access Server) was tested as an emergency mechanism to communicate with remote Active Directory Servers during a WAN outage. Test were found to be promising.

Town Hall Meeting- ITAC meets with Caribbean District Staff

- ITAC's recent achievements: Influence Bureau on implementation plan for Microsoft's Active Directory (AD); revamped implementation of SLEDs; guidelines for Home Computing; training needs for SAs; improving WRDs communications with GIO office.
- USGS Chief Technical Officer, Kevin Gallagher, speaks to District Staff, his first time visiting a WRD District. He made staff aware of Bureau IT issues they are normally not exposed to but are affecting their everyday work environment: OMB's FY04 Budget cuts, ITMR Study, Network Security Drivers (7), Microsoft Enterprise Agreement, Centralized deployment of Active Directory and DOI Secretarial Order for IT Capital Planning.
- NWIS 4.3 Beta released at end of February-general release is expected mid March. Includes bug fixes and turns UV editing back on within Hydra/ADAPS. SWUDS is being beta tested at 3 Districts.
- NWISRT and NWISWeb cyberseminars available March 18 and 20th. Email on how to sign up will be sent out soon from NWIS.
- Q&A Session with District Staff (See answers at [http:// www.nwis.er.usgs.gov/cpac](http://www.nwis.er.usgs.gov/cpac)):
 - 1) When will the IT Freeze be lifted?
 - 2) When will we be able to serve longer periods of UV data and daily values (other than the current 1.5 years or historic streamflow)?
 - 3) What is the status of dumping data into STORET?
 - 4) When will we see detailed reports from BASIS+?
 - 5) Is the rumor true that DOI plans to develop a Department wide financial system?
 - 6) Does NWIS plan to develop an MS Windows client interface?
 - 7) Is AD really the greatest thing since sliced bread?

RTFAST Presentation by Dianne Lopez-Trujillo: Real-Time Flood Alert System is a GUI, user friendly, java based application that serves data imported from ADAPS and other agency databases, to provide its users with up to the minute alerts of streamflow and flood stages.

Oracle Presentation by Harry House

- There is a lack of understanding within WRD regarding understanding and appreciation of the power and potential of currently licensed Oracle software.
- The Bureau has no support structure in place for this enterprise software, which was cost recovered from Districts in FY02. WRD paid \$131K in FY02. In FY03 enterprise Oracle license will be paid by the Bureau, it is unknown how this cost will be handled in FY04.
- ER IT (Eastern Region Information Team that reports to the Regional Director) is contemplating a Database Management position to handle these types of issues and serve as a database consultant to Project Chiefs. WRD previously addressed this issue by funding a small percentage of Harry House's time.
- Sites have limited development expertise and will choose whichever database application they feel more comfortable with: Access, Ingres, Oracle, SQL.
- If Oracle servers are to be used to serve data to the public a centralized approach would be more cost effective.
- Should the Bureau, or WRD produce guidelines to facilitate standardization of data models among databases? Currently, ITAC believes, that whenever possible sites are shadowing the data model used by NWIS. Is this enough guidance?

MS Enterprise Agreement (EA)

- USGS to pay ~\$1.6M in FY03 for Microsoft license. The EA states that the USGS owns 8,450 desktops. The Microsoft is under the impression that USGS owns more than 8,450 license and that sites will have to "true-up" to cover all the desktops at their sites. WRD SAs must make sure they understand the difference between a scientific desktop and an enterprise desktop to avoid unnecessary "true-up" cost.
- ITAC will analyze whether the EA really offers WRD any cost savings.

Active Directory

- ITAC passed motion: DIS drafting a memo stating WRD (NT TAC) will support the local implementation of Active Directory. Some members of NTTAC will continue to participate in testing of Bureau centralized model.
- The Bureau is putting together a new group, ADIP (Active Directory Integrated Project) Team to evaluate all factors involved in a centralized AD implementation (Networks, Security, etc). ITAC informally proposed that the GS ADA group (formerly know as the Lighthouse group) be abolished and that active members of this group be moved into the new team. The ADIP will have a better cross section of expertise, more authority, and be an officially funded Bureau group instead of sporadically funded volunteers.
- Hardware firewalls are currently in place between Bureau networks (at the VPXs). This firewall configuration does not lend itself to a centralized AD implementation. AD needs to talk "freely" between networks. DOI now realizes that network issues need to be resolved first, before moving ahead with the centralized AD model.
- BLM has approximately the same number of employees and offices as the USGS with only 20 AD domain controllers. They have been successful with the centralized AD model within their Bureau.

IT outsourcing-The USGS does not expect IT to be a target until FY05.

Lotus Notes - ITAC is drafting a recommendations memo to hopefully improve the Lotus Help Desk's customer service and suggesting an alternate approach to handling of quotas.

Consolidation of Web server- ITAC memo recommending that sites use NatWeb to serve [certain] web pages is in its final stages. DOI has mandated that we reduce our points of presence (POPs) to the Internet. This is one proactive approach WRD can take. NatWeb has a fully funded good support structure.

NWIS Future Plans

- RCSers and Regional SW Specialist will review the "rollout" schedule of NWIS-RT.
- Rsynch was selected as the preferred method to transmit data from the district NWIS server to national NWISWeb systems; it will replace the NWISWeb ftp functionality currently on the NWIS servers.
- Sniff-Spikes may be expanded to include other real-time parameters (QW, reservoir levels, GW levels, etc)
- One of NWIS's new development activities includes an assessment of a potential move to Oracle.
- A diagram of the various stakeholder groups that influence NWIS priorities and offer technical review was presented to ITAC. Sites also need to understand who to go to, when requesting NWIS enhancements.

Consolidation of ftp servers- The CTO, Kevin Gallagher agreed to fund and work with WRD to evaluate solutions for consolidation of ftp servers and its impact to Districts. A RFC memo will go out to sites to ensure we have a full list of ftp requirements. Feedback will be used in the selection and design of a solution.

WRD Publications Update

- USGS Product Warehouse Simple Search is operational.
- The CLP program has saved DOI lost of money when upgrading applications. Upgrade cost, which are usually over \$1K, can be minimized by purchasing one year of maintenance from the CLP at \$156.30.
- DIS to pursue discounted contract for DreamWeaver.