

Central Region Information Cooperative (CRIC) Status Briefing to ITAC – 2/9/2005

Background

This briefing provides an update on the activities and accomplishments of the Central Region Information Cooperative (CRIC). Group membership is comprised of two representatives from each Science Discipline, a research scientist and someone with an information management role, as well as members from the Central Region Geospatial Information Office (RGIO). The CRIC has set up an intranet containing current membership and other details about the group's activities:

<http://internal.cr.usgs.gov/cric/>

The CRIC has established some immediate objectives based on several documents important to the development of Environmental Information Science within the USGS.

Environmental Information Program Planning Team. 2004. U.S. Geological Survey Environmental Information Program Five-year Plan (External Review Draft).

Frank, Tony and others. 2003. Science Knowledge for the Future: An Information Strategy for the USGS (Internal Review Draft).

Frondorf, Anne and others. 2004. Science Plan for Environmental Information Science Future Science Direction (Internal Review Draft).

Interfaces

The CRIC is establishing close working relationships with as many other groups working toward information management goals. In general, these relationships are facilitated with concurrent membership on the CRIC and other enterprise teams. The CRIC is in a good position to respond accurately to requests for information and the process of collecting key business requirements through its membership that is representative of both information specialists and scientists from the Disciplines. Several of these relationships are listed here:

- E-Web/Web Advisory Group – The newly formed Web Advisory Group will be a key component in creating the highly effective Web and Intranet of the future. Two members of the WAG are also CRIC members and will serve as a direct interface to that group. The CRIC is already engaged in assembling business and functional requirements for the USGS Web and Intranet in the context of Central Region programs.
- Enterprise Geographic Information Management (EGIM)
- Publications Issues Group (PIG)
- Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC)
- Integrated Information Environment (IIE)

Objectives

The CRIC seeks to begin realizing the Environmental Information Science objectives outlined in these documents within the context of the Central Region geographic area and programs and moving toward common enterprise goals. The group will begin working toward a set of goals through effective communications between the Science Disciplines and the RGIO. To this end, the CRIC is pursuing the following strategic objectives:

- Assembling all available inventories of applications, information systems, and information science initiatives to produce a working list of important enterprise data sets, information management best practices, and available personnel expertise. During this process, immediate collaboration benefits are being identified and pursued.
- Identifying specific targeted information needs from the Science Disciplines to help prioritize activities and meet critical needs as soon as possible.
- Fully identifying all information science customers and establishing a communication strategy to continue the process of prioritizing information management activities and establish a feedback mechanism necessary for long-term quality assurance.

Initial Results

The establishment of the CRIC has been well received in the Science Disciplines and has been met with enthusiasm from the Central Region Executive Leadership Team. Sky Bristol, the current chairperson, and Craig Skalet have briefed Steve King on the group objectives and will continue to keep the other Regions up to date on progress. Ultimately, this effort will be best served in coordination with counterpart groups in the other Regions to achieve the strategic plan for Environmental Information Science in the USGS.

Current Activities

Metadata Workgroup

One of the major information management problems identified in the Central Region is the issue of appropriately managing metadata within scientific research projects. This problem has been demonstrated in projects such as the research efforts on the Mancos Shale in the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and has prompted the CRIC to begin working on this issue. A metadata working group has been created with membership from several groups of data specialists and representation from the Federal Geographic Data Commission (FGDC).

The following is a synopsis of the initial findings of the Metadata Workgroup:

Problem

Metadata is perceived as an unnecessary encumbrance that is drudgework rather than a real thought process. It is not necessary to answer the scientific objectives of the data itself. There is no articulated link between various data maintenance problems (e.g., legacy data availability) and lack of quality metadata.

Many systems containing metadata are considered to be a “black box.” Effort goes into the process, and no visible benefit is seen to the science. The metadata process is seen to be too complex with too much to document that appears to be unrelated to study objectives.

Possible Actions

- Identify existing examples of metadata use and value; document and market these efforts in multiple forums
- Develop new applications of metadata in Web-based search and other highly visible avenues
- Document “template” approach employed in the Energy Division of the Geology Discipline, test within other disciplines, and document and market the results
- Develop cross-discipline team to duplicate the template approach throughout USGS
- Identify and develop all available resources for metadata management including indices of standard thesauri (subject matter indices) and make these readily available
- Define a comprehensive data lifecycle process and standard methodology for long-term