



A Strategy for Providing Access to Library Materials via the Internet

- Project White Paper -

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U.S. Department of Energy
Bonneville Power Administration
Fish and Wildlife Group
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Title: A Strategy for Accessing Library Materials via the Internet

Work Statement Task #: 3.2(d)

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Primary Author: Gretta Siegel, CRITFC

Task Description:

Task 3.2: Provide improved user access to the materials described in Task 3.1 including:

(d) Develop a strategy for providing access to the StreamNet Library Catalog via Internet, including an analysis of providing access to electronically stored documents.

Product: A strategy for providing access to library materials via the Internet.

Background

The StreamNet library catalog has been under development since the fall of 1994. The original vision was to include only materials having links to data in the StreamNet (then CIS) datasets. Materials were cataloged for 2 years with this understanding. The resulting 'library references module' was then made available on diskettes via the Distributed System. Once the cataloging of most of these materials was in hand, it was decided to also catalog BPA and NPPC documents, regardless of links between cited data and the documents. During this time period, the development of the collection at the CRITFC library continued with numerous donations, purchases, and subscriptions, and it was deemed to be of value to develop a strategy for cataloging the bulk of this material.

The librarian's recommendation was to catalog as many of the documents as possible using an international bibliographic utility (OCLC) which would ensure that the catalog records would conform to global standards (MARC format), and would be loadable into a variety of library software packages over the course of time. The intent was that this catalog would become available to primary users - i.e. fish and wildlife scientists and managers in the Columbia Basin region - through some form of a wide area network. The strategy was, and remains, that the StreamNet references module and the larger library catalog would at some point merge into one comprehensive catalog, or, at the least, be made available to users via a common gateway.

For review purposes, the materials collected under Task 3.1 are as follows:

- a) Documents used as source materials for data compiled in Objective 1 (StreamNet datasets),
- b) Documents published by BPA under the Fish and Wildlife Program ,
- c) Additional books, journals, agency reports, grey literature, research reports, and documents that are applicable to management of the region's aquatic resources.

Issues

The general issue can be subdivided into several specific questions. These are as follows:

1. For materials collected under 3.1a, how do we create a searchable web interface?
2. Who should do the work of cataloging the bulk of the collection (3.1c) onto OCLC?
3. Where do the materials collected under 3.1b fit into the scheme of things?
4. Should we purchase our own library software or load our MARC data onto a host catalog at a remote site?
5. Who will provide technical support for library software?
6. Given that we have opted to use our own library software, how do we port the catalog to the Internet?
7. Should we scan documents to provide full-text access? If so, how?
8. How do we provide a merged product or a common gateway?

During the first half of FY 97 several actions have already been taken to address the above concerns. Other actions are planned. These will be summarized according to the questions stated directly above. For each, the question will be restated, followed by a summary of the action taken or a recommendation for future action and, as appropriate, a rationale for the decision.

Question 1

For materials collected under 3.1a, how do we create a searchable web interface?

Recommendation or Action Taken

This was accomplished through the implementation of phase one of the project's Technical Applications Strategy, whereby datasets from the DS were ported to the project's web site. This was accomplished by Doug Reece and Duane Anderson, with input by Gretta Siegel.

Rationale

This strategy fits with the overall objective of an integrated StreamNet data system.

Question 2

Where do the materials collected under 3.1b fit into the scheme of things?

Recommendation or Action Taken

In the interest of time, these materials were cataloged on the same system as the data referenced sources. It is recommended that they also be cataloged onto OCLC.

Rationale

The decision to catalog these items into Access was one of expediency. However, they are part of the main library collection and library users will expect to find them on the Textworks catalog. Also - materials cataloged on OCLC automatically become part of the wide world of library holdings. Further, since the BPA library is minimizing their role as a fish a wildlife library, we should consider making these items available via standard library lending networks. Cost is not a significant issue as it will not entail much additional effort to add these references to OCLC and then to the main catalog.

Question 3

Who should do the work of cataloging the bulk of the collection (3.1c) onto OCLC?

Recommendation or Action Taken

Approval was granted in the fall of 1996 to hire a temporary staff person with solid OCLC cataloging experience to a) assist with establishing protocols for cataloging this collection and b) catalog the majority of the materials. This action has been taken and major stides have been made in cataloging materials.

Rationale

Responsibilities for the StreamNet librarian have multiplied, including supervising the move to a new location. It was therefore necessary to hire someone who could give full attention to this complex task.

Question 4

Should StreamNet purchase library software or load MARC data onto a host catalog at a remote site?

Recommendation or Action Taken

After detailed exploration of the available alternatives, it was decided in December of 1996 to purchase Windows-based library software products from Inmagic, Inc. These included DBTextworks, DBSearchworks, and Library Guide.

Rationale

Mounting on a university library catalog would have provided instantaneous web access as well as built-in technical support, great public exposure, and some political advantage. Unfortunately, there were technical issues with the entities who were interested in cooperating on this. There

were also issues concerning the availability of staff. In the interest of moving ahead, the decision was made to use Searchworks. Experience to date suggests that this was a good decision.

Question 5

Who will provide technical support for library software?

Recommendation or Action Taken

The StreamNet librarian is getting technical support from the vendor, which expires in 45 days. If more is needed a support contract could be considered.

Rationale

There is no one on staff at CRITFC or PSMFC who can provide the level of technical support needed for this product. The library staff is committing the necessary time to master these programs. Once the system is running smoothly there should no longer be a need for technical support.

Question 6

Given that we have opted to use our own library software, how do we port the catalog to the Internet?

Recommendation or Action Taken

Had we chosen to load our MARC data onto a host catalog at a remote site (i.e., via a university), Internet access would have become a moot point. However, given the choice to use our own library software, the issue of Internet access needs to be addressed. Several web interfaces exist which will allow the catalog to be accessed via the Internet. Currently we do not have the information necessary to make a decision. To make an informed decision we should undertake an exploration of the available options with an eye towards a June-July 1997 decision.

Rationale

Software development is moving quickly in this arena. There is no pressing need to make a decision without first evaluating the options. The issue must also be looked at from the perspective of other demands that are, at least in the near term, of higher priority.

Question 7

Should we scan documents to provide full-text access? If so, how?

Recommendation or Action Taken

The issue of full-text access to documents has come up in several contexts. The recommendation at this point is as follows:

1. Post any reports that are produced by the StreamNet project to our web site as full-text documents.
2. Identify documents that are pertinent to our mission that are already available full-text on the net, and provide linkages to these via the StreamNet web site.
3. Initiate discussions with the Council and BPA regarding the potential for providing access to reports from select ongoing and future BPA-funded Fish and Wildlife Program projects. This would require an agreement with project sponsors to deliver electronic versions of documents to the StreamNet web coordinator. (It may also be possible - and advantageous - to link these documents to the project tracking database.)
4. Identify rare and/or valuable documents within the collection and work with Oregon State University on a joint project to provide a searchable full-text interface to these.
5. Identify commonly requested/used documents that are a) not copyrighted and b) difficult or expensive to photocopy and include them into the OSU joint project.

It is recommended that actions on items 1 and 2 be initiated immediately and that items 3, 4, and 5 be pursued during FY 1998. In order for item 3 to be implemented in a timely fashion, discussions with BPA and the Council should occur prior to the development of FY 1998 project contracts.

Rationale

It would be costly, inefficient, and unnecessary to try to make all documents available full-text. By having a catalog and a tracking system in place, StreamNet staff will be better able to assess which documents are appropriate for this treatment.

The idea of having electronic versions of Fish and Wildlife Program documents provided to StreamNet is in line with the strategic objective of having StreamNet serve as a primary means for storing and delivering Program-related data and information.

If timely access can be provided to needed documents, this will be a vast improvement over past practices. The desire to provide electronic access to these documents must, of course, be viewed in the light of other commitments and the availability of resources.

Question 8

How do we provide a merged product or a common gateway?

Recommendation or Action Taken

2. Export the library catalog data into Microsoft Access and then load the entire set onto the web, thereby giving up the distinction between data related documents and other holdings, or
3. Load the StreamNet Reference module into Textworks, and then put the whole module on the site, with the same basic result as in 2). Note that this would also involve exporting a subset of the database to the SQL server in order to maintain links with the StreamNet online database.

The recommendation at this point is to explore the options to see what works the best, is the most facile, and provides the most useful end result.

Rationale

There is no compelling need to make this decision prior to experimenting with the alternatives.