Out of the Fog Action Committee Meeting

Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans Regional Office, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

June 11, 1999

Present: Paul Boudreau, Norval Collins, Patrice Farrey, Bill Forsyth, Warren Gash, Dave Lincoln, Denise McCullough, Bill MacDonald, Dean Meggison, Jeanne Meggison, Maggie Mooney-Seus, Paul Orlando, Joe Pelczarski, Chris Wenzell-Brehme, Paul Schroeder

Terms of Reference Discussion

The meeting opened with a brief discussion of our general goals for the Gulf of Maine Information Exchange. GoM information exchange should have a strong web focus, but there are lots of components. We should explore other mediums, such as the GoM Times. We should not lose sight of issues such as how to deal with technology vs. people; web tools vs. databases. There has been lots of talk about adding hardware to schools, but no talk of the information coming through the hardware. We must try to keep a good balance as we move forward. This will be our challenge.

Action Items Discussion

- Items 4, 5 and 6: complete
- Item 7: working towards (see Goals)
- Item 8: ongoing
- Item 9: Change date to Sept 99. We need to develop a work plan outlining our goals and objectives. It is important that we flesh out our ideas so that we can get an institutional leader on board. However, if we know someone who is interested, it may make sense to bring them on board to help us develop goals. We could consider a political champion to generate a high level of interest and press, but there is a danger in using a politician because they may put a twist on our work to meet their political goals. It could remove the power from us. Brainstorming possibilities: New England Aquarium, Governor Angus King, Evan Richert (Maine SPO), Jeff Taylor (NH SPO).
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- A logical choice for institutional leader is the Gulf of Maine Council. The Action Committee should make a presentation to the GOMC at their next meeting in December. The Secretariat is moving to New Hampshire for the next two years. Perhaps Jeff Taylor could work the information exchange project into his work plan. We could use the write-up from GOMC public discussion (took place on June 10, called 'the forum') to generate interest.

- The consensus is to look to GOMC/Jeff Taylor as champion. Additional work needs to be done to get the proposal together. The Island Institute (MacDonald), New England Aquarium (Mooney-Seus) and DFO (Boudreau) will work on pulling together a presentation for the GOMC in December. We should hold a joint meeting with the DIMC in September.

- Dave Lincoln reported that his Gulf of Maine fisheries portal would probably be ready for demonstration at that time to show what information is not available. We need an integrated

presentation to make to the Council. Lincoln fisheries would be a piece, Island Institute would be a piece and NOAA/NOS will provide support to help integrate presentation.

- Action item 11: #7 carry out a strategic plan will include 11, we have decided on to take action, rather than no action
- Action Items 12, 13, 14: nothing to date

Add to Action Items
15. Commitment to e-Atlas: change the name to e-atlas. (Orlando and Wentzell-Brehme; Island Institute has a 2 year deadline to do what they are doing.) Deadline ongoing with short-term products.
16. Elevation bathymetry map (Lincoln). An integrated product at broad scale at first, then go to finer-scale. Starts with what we have, know sources of data and zoom in. It can be done, it is a question of scale and utility. Deadline: 2 years.
17. Community self discovery initiative (Schroeder and Hopkins)
18. Participant characterization/needs assessment - start with GOMMEA educators, then tailor to other user groups. (Meggisons)

Discussion of Goals
Farrey presented short-, medium-, long-term goals:

Short-term Goals
To increase the participation in the Action Committee consortium and to improve data and information exchange by taking advantage of existing webtools including silly-word, SAL, database matrix, etc. Continue to inform partners of present work through the 'outofthefog' listserver, the http://www.gominfoex.org website and scheduled meetings.

Medium-term Goals
Prepare a detailed work plan which expands the Out of the Fog Action Matrix including a cost-benefit analysis of 'action' vs. 'no action', identification of an institutional leader to champion the project, and a schedule to review progress.

Long-term Goals
Establish an information exchange system for the Gulf of Maine region that has the ability to respond to evolving information needs and has the resources to sustain itself over the long-term.

The group had consensus on the short- and long-term goals. There was discussion on the medium-term goals, particularly in regards to how the group will continue to meet, due to limited funding. Potential options include: conference calls, video conferencing, the Fundy Forum, meeting in both the US and Canada with a cross-over delegate and a follow-up meeting in both places or the formation of subcommittees to move projects forward. Does the group have the resources to achieve its long-term goals?

Sillyword Experiment Discussion

Boudreau handed out a progress report on the number of hits obtained from the sillyword "GOMINFOEX". It is working as well as it worked last time. Infoseek has fixed its search engine so it only finds unique words. Overall, search engines continue to find things in random patterns. Some search engines do not pick up the sillyword for up to 2 months, others find it in 24 hours.

The more people who are linked to a website increases the likelihood that the sillyword will work. Submitting the page also seems to help. Gash (GOMC webmaster) put in on the GOMC website with three different ways (metatag, body and comment). Excessive use of the sillyword will probably have a negative effect.

The group discussed linking everyone's websites together, for the short-term, to increase the likelihood of being found through the sillyword. The website list could be written in html code and emailed to all for posting. A webring, which is a standard thing that you circulate around but is not as obtrusive as a list of links (has to go through a moderator), is another possible solution. Neither of these are good long-term solutions. These should only be considered to jump-start the sillyword experiment. Group consensus was that we would not promote the links/ring idea, although folks are welcome to do that if they like. We will let this evolve over time without depending on centralized list maintenance.

Domain Name

Farrey reported that Bruce Wyman of the New England Aquarium has reserved the "www.gominfoex.org" domain name. The OOTF report will be posted on the site. The one pager explaining the sillyword experiment can also be posted there.

There may be an expectation that any webpage will have minimal links (at least); if we do not include any, it be could turn people off. We could possibly link to the Gulf of Maine Council homepage. It is important that the www.gominfoex page explain that it is a network, how to participate in the network, terms of reference and the silly-word. But remember that our links ARE the sillyword! We should include a 'search' feature that has 'GOMINFOEX' typed in to get people going on the silly-word search. It also makes sense to link to the GOMC homepage, especially if they become the institutional leaders.

Brief discussion of whether to create a listserve with subscribe/unsubscribe. The group consensus was that this is not necessary at this point.

Artwork/Logo

Farrey reported that Aviva Rahmani has done a few preliminary sketches. They could be scanned in and posted on the gominfoex site for folks to comment on.

SAL Discussion

The basic idea is that folks add to the task list, which is password protected. Should we add an action items list to a SAL on the gominfoex site? The group consensus was that we should wait on this.

The OOTF Action Committee members should use the GOMC SAM and calendar located on the GOMC homepage. The GOMC SAM could be flagged for GOMINFOEX. Folks should update meetings on the GOMC website calendar.

Other Actions Taken
GOMMEA Educators Survey
GOMMEA will undertake a survey of educators to assess user needs and hold a conference. They plan to distribute the survey at the October 15 educator's conference at the Southern Maine Technical College. The technology aspect will be integrated into this conference. If folks have interest, the Meggisons will take care of Maine, Mass, NH. They need a NS, NB connection. Forsyth (NS educator) agreed to help identify appropriate N.S. participants.

The survey questions will focus on learning more specifically what is available. It is important to work closely with librarians because there is no easy way to access teachers. Some teachers have computers, some not; some knowledgeable, some not. GOMMEA Board did not feel that the previous survey was well suited to educators because it was too technical. For example, most did not understand the difference between raw data vs. synthesized, etc. Need to find the language to present to different groups. They would like to modify/simplify the previous survey and distribute it and get a lot of feedback. The New England Aquarium offered to compile results. This educator's model could be adapted and used in future with other groups.

Fisheries Project
Lincoln is working on constructing a site for fishermen. Send favorite GOM and/or fishing sites to Lincoln (davelinc@aol.com); he will put into a spreadsheet and compile. He will put it up on a website and continue to construct it over six months or so. All are interested to learn what sites people like to use.

Gulf of Maine e-Atlas Idea
Orlando (NOAA/NOS) discussed the background for the Atlas idea. The concept started with David Keely's proposal to have a series of products for GOMC 10th celebration. This evolved through email, conference calls, etc. to a GOM Atlas. The Atlas concept started as a paper idea. The Island Institute has already done a few things in paper along those lines. The Action Committee agreed that it should be called an e-Atlas to reflect the desire to have a sustainable electronic exchange function. There is some agreement on pieces (theme, build on existing systems, matrix). We must choose a theme (fisheries, habitat, salt marsh or shorebirds) to allow everyone to come to the table to rally around theme and decide how each group can participate and contribute. Define temporal/spatial framework. Product with several components will meet a large user group.

The e-Atlas concept will build on the work of the New England Aquarium (OOTF workshop and survey) to work with existing user groups. Identify theme, list out major questions that user groups might be interested in, identify the web product necessary to answer this question, identify which groups can contribute what. This is inclusive and builds on everyone's strengths. Direct all efforts in the same direction.

The e-Atlas concept has many different components:

1. State of the Gulf essays: data around themes, presented with graphics, with text interpretation. Island Institute proposal is along these lines, NOAA's State of the Coast is along these lines.
2. Information exchange: catalog information pieces, i.e. EDIMS/REDIMS. There is still no 2 way flow of information
3. GOM e-Atlas: spin off of CA&DS project (http://cads.nos.noaa.gov/). CADS has all NOAA data for coastal, estuarine and offshore areas. Can retrieve GOM data, download, etc. Components allow users to access and use information. It is Map Objects based. It allows user to call up particular layers and overlay: geography's, population, pollution sources – theme data sources. It has been compiled within a consistent spatial framework that allows data to be merged/overlayed. An e-Atlas with an interactive mapping component would serve a user who isn't served right now.
4. Sustainable Development indicators: Collins handout. Problems with indicators: 1) data intensive, 2) hard to determine what indicators should be.

There is a continuum on which potential products would fall. There is a continuum of 1) websites, 2) products with an analytical capability which are issue specific or tell a story (Island Institute type product); 3) enhanced issue/CADS type product; and 4) primary source/census page or primary data.

The e-Atlas has strong international potential (Canada). Katie Ries (NOS/GPAC) allows support for NOS to run effort beyond US boundary. DFO/NMFS/Woods Hole meet annually to exchange data. Are they ready to exchange over Internet? Island Institute is interested in transboundary issues because of interest in fisheries (lobster broodstock, herring). Want to spread into other species and ecosystem approach, but deliver products along the way, probably single species specific. Mass data online through massgis.com. Can make maps online. Mike Butler is a good contact at ACZISC who is interested in opening data access; could help Island Institute get St Croix watershed data.

Webinclude software could be a powerful approach to bringing other pieces together. The e-Atlas a good tool to push a 20-year progress. There will be a lot of products that will be ready to come online in the near future.

Next steps: Continue to meet face to face and conference call with folks who are interested. NOS wants to continue to be involved, as well as McCullough, the Meggison's, Island Institute, etc.

Lincoln proposed going about the e-Atlas idea by focusing on creating a bottom sediment/bathymetry/elevation map to show the dynamic system. We should try to get DOD data, put it on a broad-scale to begin with and work towards finer resolution. NOAA, USGS, EPA all have sophisticated info/data, but it can't be overlayed. Something we may want to look at. By developing capacity to make that map, will have capacity to do lots of other maps. Others felt that this might take resources away from information exchange. OOTF could be the advocate for NSDI to pull the elevation/bathymetry map layer. Combine existing maps into one layer to set up the base for the next generation of 4 dimension GIS. Allow us to model in the 3 dimension plus time. If it can't be done,

keep it in the back of your mind. Where is the data? We need a benchmark for the e-Atlas project – this will give us something tangible to mark our progress.

It makes sense to organize a conference call and invite the full list serve to participate. Continue to flesh out this idea.

Sustainable Indicators
Collins presented information on sustainable indicators software. It has an urban focus and requires you to define data, bring in other data, provides a facility to post sustainable community indicator on a central webpage to be shared with other communities. Sits on top of Word and Excel, runs in Windows. Has features that help people to understand data – how to generate data, understand quality of data. It is in the final stages of development. Some versions will be available in the near future. It may make sense to do a pilot project to develop sample files for coastal community and see how it contributes and whether it will fit into e-Atlas project. High potential for coastal communities if it meets its potential. Cost: ways to get it free, a cost to develop it to work in the coastal side of things. Origin of software was state of the environment reports, not indicators.

Collins and Boudreau will investigate and get back to the Committee. Island Institute will look into using an intern to establish a PenBay pilot site. Intern could work with PenBay Network; it would provide a land-based component to the Institute's work. The software is probably not ready to be tested on students because it needs the development of the initial coastal context before it can go to students.

How does this relate to the EPA Index of Watershed Indicators: Scale of 1-6 for watershed?

There was general discussion about the importance of remembering that indicators convey a lot of information quickly, but the indicator must follow some sort of sequence, such as pressure/state/response model. Indicators must be chosen carefully, they must be equal, on the same time/space scale and follow sequence. If indices are a goal of the Gulf of Maine, a lot of that can be done through a spreadsheet with a few sorts. Comparability is difficult. NOS' CADS is available already at the same time/space scale. Do not need fancy software to do this.

Indicators are a strong educational tool because they force people to answer their own questions. They are built around accessing particular data sets. It is necessary to locally build in local data sets and links to those. There are no magic answers to the problems of indicators.

Community Self Discovery Protocol
Schroeder reported he is working with Will Hopkins. The Sustainable Communities software might fit well with this work. Whatever process you use, community should start by defining whom they are and where they want to go. There could be interest in forming a working group to explore this further.

Strategic Planning
The New England Aquarium will refine goals and float them to the group. NEAq will build on the work of the OOTF Action Committee and develop a draft strategic plan. There is a need to add detail to the

terms of reference and add a timeline. Draft strategic plan will be something in the 5 page length. There is also a need to define responsible parties in the plan.

Funding will be included in strategic plan, but plan should have a 'no direct budget option'. We should account for people's time in the budget, in terms of what we have contributed.

Other Business
Missing partners: maintain as an agenda item. Remember that we refer to partners both at the table and in the broader context.

Meetings:
- October: Island Institute informed group of a Coastal Caucus in the fall; 'tidal' representative from Maine that is approx. 100 folks, get 50% of them together. Meet outside of the 'hearing' process; provide a technology briefing and to thinking outside the Maine boundary. Invite outsiders to participate??? Maine SPO will be invited.
- November: DFO ecosystem characterization meeting in Dartmouth/Beford Institute.
- TBA: OOTF II could be in association with Coastal Zone 2000. Folks should keep open for opportunity. Don't wait longer than a year, don't want to lose momentum. Beef up educational portion. Build on work and momentum.
- June 2000: Canadian Institute of Planners for June 2000 conference on the water.

Responsibilities/Other Actions from June Meeting
- Farrey to follow-up on administrative stuff: float minutes to OOTF listserver, update Action Items list, add Forsyth to the listserve (forsytw@gov.ns.ca); post OOTF materials to date on the gominfoex.org site. This will include OOTF report, one pager on sillyword, terms of reference, sketches, add the search function for sillyword and minutes.
- Please email information on new action items including title, objective and deadline to Farrey (pfarrey@neaq.org)
- Boudreau flag the GOMC/SAM stuff to GOMINFOEX
- Boudreau to follow-up in promoting GOMINFOEX sillyword.
- OOTF Action Committee meeting to be scheduled the second or third week of September. It will be organized by the Island Institute and linked with the GOMC Working Group meeting. (MacDonald lead; Boudreau, Mooney-Seus and Farrey will support)
- OOTF Action Committee to present a proposal at December GOMC meeting to propose that GOMC serves as institutional leader. Orlando from NOS will help OOTF folks pull integrated demonstration together to show the pieces of the info exchange.
- Meggisons to distribute survey to educators (classroom, camps, K-14) in Oct. The New England Aquarium will compile results of survey.
- All send websites to Lincoln, favorite sites, fisheries related.
- Orlando and Wentzell-Brehme take the lead on the e-Atlas. They will organize a conference call to continue the e-Atlas discussion. Solicit interest from the OOTF listserver.
- Lincoln to follow up on pulling together an elevation water depth map

- Collins and Boudreau to follow-up on Sustainable Initiatives and get relevant info to group. Island Institute (MacDonald) to follow-up with this for PenBay.
- New England Aquarium (Mooney-Seus and Farrey) develop strategic plan draft and float to group; build on progress, establish timeline, etc.