

OOTF 2: the Friday report

Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada

November 4, 2000

Saturday Highlights

- ✿ *The US GeoData Alliance and Canadians GeoConnections initiatives, and their links with GOMINFOEX*
 - ✿ *GOMINFOEX planning – time to make decisions, and leave with concrete action commitments*
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What have we decided so far?

We agree that we have made great strides in the past two years.

Now, we share a common desire to solidify GOMINFOEX.

But some tough questions remain:

How solid *should* it be?

How liquid *can* it be?

What are the pluses and minuses of the possible ways to create a more defined GOMINFOEX?

Down to the Basics: The Issue Plenary on Friday Afternoon

Paul Schroeder of the University of Maine at Orono, Will Hopkins of the Cobscook Bay Resource Centre, Paul Boudreau of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Norval Collins of CEF Consultants Ltd. of Halifax took the floor at the beginning of the plenary. They all have had continuous involvement with GOMINFOEX and Out of the Fog 1; they addressed the group as individuals, to bridge today's sessions with the big questions for Saturday morning.

Paul Schroeder's involvement with GOMINFOEX is because of his personal commitment. He mused on the concept of GOMINFOEX as **self-organizing**. No one has been excluded; no one has been forced to be included. GOMINFOEX has tried to meet in various locations around the Gulf, and he would like to see this continue. Paul then spoke of his concept that all of the different groups around the Gulf should be able to join hands. We should see ourselves around the Gulf in a common way.

Will Hopkins spoke of how overwhelming OOTF 1 was because of the way its information was presented, in five or six models over 2 1/2 days. People were getting excited with the idea of one-stop shopping but realized it's inappropriate. Will started going to the action committee meetings, and found that people were saying that **low key and low cost** is probably the way to go. Will pointed out the value of the human level at GOMINFOEX — it allows us to continue doing what we do best.

Paul Boudreau began by saying how intrigued he is with the potential of GOMINFOEX; it's collaborative, cooperative, non-competitive, and innovative. We should be able to use the Internet better. He may work for the government, but he doesn't really like big agencies. **We don't need to be big in order to do what we have to do with GOMINFOEX.** We can do web

continued on back page

Getting Down to the Nitty-gritty: The Break-out Sessions

The following reports summarize the results of participants' work in both the morning and afternoon break-outs. The results from Group X and TEK have been rolled into one report; results from the morning WQM, Aquaculture, and Salt Marsh groups, and the afternoon session which combined these three themes, are reported separately.

Aquaculture

The aquaculture group started off with identifying the interest groups – researchers, regulators, industry, and the public. Four issues were identified:

- **Costs involved with access to information.** If GOMINFOEX were keeper of an inventory, users could have direct access through links to other sites. There needs to be a tool to collect everything together.
- **Quality control;** we need interpretation and associated standards. Even if there isn't an excellent quality control mechanism in place, we should know where the information comes from so that we can make our own decisions. We also need to know who's using the information that we are making available.
- **Confidentiality.** Who needs the information? For what purpose? The answers to these questions affect how accessible the information should be. There are layers of information that are useful to different user groups. Certain data, such as water temperature and oxygen levels, should be easy to access.
- **What information is needed and what is available?** Where is the site, what is the size of the site, what are the license numbers? The information is available but who has the time, expertise, and work power to put it in? People in different jurisdictions have their information in different forms. We need to come up with a more

regionally useful method for putting information on the web.

Water Quality

The water quality group identified four primary concerns:

- **Locating** information – you cannot use what you cannot find;
- **Access** – both finding information, and policy and ownership decisions that need to be made when contemplating sharing information;
- **Legacy data.** What do we do with older data? How do we capture data? How do we keep data alive so that it doesn't become legacy data?
- **Methods/Standards, QA/QC.** Need to improve volunteer standards, as well as design and carry out better studies.

GOMINFOEX should provide a clear path to data for all user groups.

Salt marsh

The salt marsh group focused on:

- **Resources are a limiting factor.** The needed information is all there, but how is it managed and relayed to the different stakeholders? Technology is okay, but we need an outreach mechanism.
- Electronic forms are useful to distribute information, but **if the audience is the general public we need to be broadly accessible.** We also need to look at our needs as researchers,.
- Why are salt marshes important? We need to be able to explain this to people.

- There are questions of translations and misunderstandings between cultures. Issues have different meanings for different people.

Water Quality, Aquaculture, and Salt Marsh (afternoon)

The afternoon Water Quality, Aquaculture, and Salt Marsh group spoke of two key things to do in the near future:

- the need in the next 6 months to **develop a formal plan or proposal to create a clear identity for GOMINFOEX.** Perhaps specific people with specific tasks can be hired who would have a goal of six months to go forward to the next stage.
- the need for a **project contact list** in the database.

Group X

Discussions in Group X, aka Group Miscellaneous ranged widely over many topics, strangely enough.

- How do you access funding resources from the government, local grants, private sector? What about venture capital money? We need to get people with good ideas with no money involved with people who do have the money.
- Sustainability of information exchange: What about permanency of information? This relates to the standards issue, too: How do you feed back information into the system to update it? Information needs to move forward, but we also need to look at the past.

- Infrastructure: How do you get access? How is information distributed? How do you build so that higher levels can feed down? **The infra-structure can be multifaceted; we recognize that we have plenty of tools to get the information out there.** For example, e-Atlas is trying to further easy use of a database integrated with an index tool. We need to engage existing library networks (with the idea of data cataloguing);
- Scale: Look at the macro level (Gulf of Maine), but also look at community levels and individual levels.
- Education: literacy, advocacy, and citizenry. How do you create an organization in which individuals can get easy information access? We need someone facilitating the **circuit rider concept**. There should be more people out there teaching teachers and others to use the internet.
- We need to leverage relationships, overcome barriers and create change. We need to facilitate the emergence of “good ideas” through outreach. Lots of good work is happening; we in the room may know about it, but who else does?

TEK and CBM

TEK initiatives look for a balance between science and local knowledge, and often follow a framework of Participatory Action Research – research with an action associated with it, that will help solve a problem. Participants in these efforts want change, and often thus are the ones to suggest the program. Although a powerful tool, there are downsides, including fragmented information.

Reports using the data from TEK should stay with the community, not

the researchers. There is a two-way exchange to TEK which needs to be translated to scientific terms, and from scientific terms to broader terms. There are huge amounts of ecological knowledge out there, as well as history in data that hasn’t been developed into an ecological framework. A **wealth of data is out there that can be mined, documented, and analyzed.**

From a review of two case studies of efforts to merge scientific & local knowledge, the necessity to prepare guidelines/codes of ethics to protect proprietary information emerged. We should develop and share guidelines that would include items like:

- Minimize the numbers of fishermen in clusters;
- Omit certain types of data; don’t share all of a database;
- Reverse data in context of storm or analysis;
- Know the intentions of people asking for the data;
- Have a consultative process to define analytical content, and
- Consider cost recovery processes.

The Fishermen and Scientists Research Society may be able to help here: <http://www.fsrns.ca>.

Those involved in community-based management need:

- to share methodologies – how has someone else done a project?
- specific information for individual projects;
- to know what has been done elsewhere;
- a Gulf of Maine virtual library;
- cross-border baseline mapping data with useful smaller scales;

- to know what data is associated with maps and how do we get that data, and
- to know **what** projects are going on, and **where**, in the Gulf of Maine region.

During discussions, a list developed of items the participants saw as desirable or necessary in facilitating data exchange. These included:

- control of access to our individual data;
- figuring out how to develop archives/metadata as a missing step;
- a system with efficient access to data and develop relationships to identify, send, reserve, and use the information;
- a distributed network. We need to identify info-nodes and connect them to other info-nodes to develop network of access. It was stated that “We would all like to have this if we could just get someone else to do it”;
- a critical mass of participants;
- a long-term view of data survival. We need to have a method in which information can survive;
- a simple pathway to content and provide contact with people who can solve the problems, and
- a technological advance that can package data in useful, comprehensive ways.

Participants felt they needed to know more detail about how GOMINFOEX is working; they wanted posted studies so that others can find them. If this isn’t being done, then in their view GOMINFOEX can’t work. GOMINFOEX also needs to put more effort into putting resources into publication of projects on its site.

Break-out group reports, continued from previous page

Other points were raised relating to specific GOMINFOEX initiatives:

- We need a common coordinates type of database, e.g., the participant's map on e-Atlas. We can't just **identify** data; we need to know who else is doing projects and where.
- We need more effective outreach from GOMINFOEX. We should use the Gulf of Maine Times to get information out there, and also make use of their web site and people finder program.
- We need an INFONAG – someone to remind us to do things!
- GOMINFOEX must be self-regulated.
- We need a volunteer monitoring database and coastal network database on the Gulf of Maine site.
- GOMINFOEX needs to play a convening role, bringing relevant parties to the table.

Down to basics (continued from page 1)

searches that get rid of our need for a table of contents! We should use resources available on the web, such as custom ads that pop up when doing a search, to achieve our goal of facilitating access.

We also need people contact. Paul believes that we are the best in the world in experience, knowledge, and commitment — we shouldn't do what already exists.

Norval Collins noted GOMINFOEX is probably a dichotomy in every part of its existence. It brings together a diverse group of people in a way that isn't a competition.

The question facing this group is to decide if we can agree on something that we can each spin off in some fashion; we need to keep working together at the community level. There is still information out there that **should** be more accessible. **People don't ask for the information because they don't know that it's out there!** There's also a problem with finding people as well as information . . . but if you can find the right person, the faster you will be able to get the information that you want. Can

we find an effective demonstration project that would get us started and that could model some solutions?

Other participants then jumped into the fray. Chris Brehme (to whom we apologize for the last name mistake in yesterday's paper!) stated that in going to the quarterly GOMINFOEX meetings he has realized that **people** are the most important thing; data is secondary. Aviva Rahmani asked about centralized bureaucracy, noting that you can hire a few people to do specific tasks in the short term to see if it works.

Seth Barker stated that GOMINFOEX has been a learning process for him; as this kind of exchange continues, we will keep continuing what we are doing whether GOMINFOEX is here or not.

Maxine Westhead stated that she can see clear actions that we can all be part of, and is glad that OOTF 2 has come down to the real work in comparison with OOTF 1. Chris Brehme agreed; he felt inspired and hopes that others would to.

Robert Branton commented on the warm group of people who make up

GOMINFOEX; there is a ready-made focus group and he looks forward to their feedback.

Ted Ames said that the opportunity we have right now is neat — we don't need an enormous database but there should be a web page with a list of issues and contact names.

Maxine Westhead noted that listservers are useful — you can ask questions!

Laurie Murison mentioned that trans-boundary issues can be a problem, as is living in a remote location and having access to only one computer. If this could be made easier, she welcomes it. You would then be able to get more people from remote populations involved.

Norval Collins pointed out that we are focusing now on community needs at different levels, which is great, but where is the science element in our decisions? Is science being adequately addressed?

Paul Boudreau replied that there is a hybrid culture being developed; e.g., government agencies are now looking at data from the Integrated Oceans Observatory System which can benefit from the work of GOMINFOEX. The discussions are just at a different level.

Paul then reminded participants to “Be careful what you ask for because very often you'll get it”. He pointed out that lists of contacts, keywords, web pages, all electronically searchable, are already available on the Gulf of Maine People Finder (<http://www.gulfofmaine.org>)— as are on-the-fly listservers. He was also foolish enough to be enthusiastic enough to admit that he likes the INFONAG idea — and that he would like to take the opportunity to be the first!

Strangely, there seemed to be a common consensus that Paul really was the right person for the job!