**ICUC Committee Conference Call: December 18, 2014**

**Participants**

Ron Kozlowski (U Maine BioMediaLab), Jim Latimer (EPA), Abe Miller-Rushing (DOI), Kathryn Parlee (EC) and Christine Tilburg (GOMC)

**1. Basic App Discussion**

Christine Tilburg began the call with a brief discussion of what ESIP envisions with respect to the ICUC app (“Capturing Change in the Gulf of Maine”). She stated that the app works to perform two different functions. The first function is as a means of informing users about the closest monitoring stations to their geolocation (Example: If Christine is in her front yard the app would let her know that the Saco River Conservation Corridor monitors water quality near her location). The second function is to encourage users to take images from specific locations and upload them to create a photo library of change in the Gulf of Maine. The group had a brief discussion with respect to geotags of photos and using existing picture post locations. Abe Miller-Rushing stated that if the places are fixed the geolocation would already be known.

The ICUC contract (~$45K) has four main elements:

* Overall coordinator
* Outreach/Communication
* Field coordinator
* Smartphone app design.

Ron Kozlowski wondered if the group has spent time thinking about the social aspect of an app like this and how to encourage continued use by ranks, points, etc. He used the app “Waze” as an example of an app that has users come back to it frequently (<https://www.waze.com/>). With the Waze app users get points for letting people know if there are hazards or speed traps along routes. Jim Latimer asked if this is the same program that directs people to shorter routes in neighborhoods and is receiving negative press as such. Another popular app Ron mentioned is “lobster diver” (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/lobster-diver/id416577542?mt=8>).

**2. What the app needs to do and how to get there**

Kathryn Parlee mentioned that it is important to have a good sense of what we want the app to do AND how we want it to look. Abe agreed and stated that we need to be very conscious about who our audience is. We need to serve the app in a way that will have it used. For example it makes sense to communicate with our volunteer groups already serving their information through ESIP’s tool. Christine agreed and stated that ESIP’s volunteer organizations are very interested in having their data served in a more public fashion. *(****Action to be taken: Christine needs to revisit this).***

Christine wondered if there is a way to see what science apps are used the most. Ron mentioned the website about 8 apps turning citizens to scientists (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/8-apps-that-turn-citizens-into-scientists/?page=2>). He cautioned that although there are reviews and ratings for apps in the app store these can be misleading as apps are promoted that have backers that pay the app store.

Ron stated that we need to make an app that is free, easy to use, and encourages users to come back. Ron discussed some of the benefits of using Facebook authentification or other program log-ins (like Google+) that make it easy for the user. Ron mentioned that a big complaint of users is that some apps require you to remember a log-in and passcode specific to the app.

**Increasing Return Visits**

The group then discussed how social media can be used to encourage return visits. One example is by letting user’s collect “points” for each visit. Another example Ron provided is the Sugarloaf app that records how much skiing the users are undertaking over the course of the season. Kathryn liked the idea of making visiting the app a competition. Ron stated that it is often the case that people download and use apps for a little while and then forget they have them. Therefore it is important that apps come back to the user automatically (example: when someone new visits a picture post).

**Technology Concerns**

Ron discussed some of the major differences between “native” apps and “hybrid” apps. He stated that it might be better for the ICUC app to be a “hybrid” app. This type of app is served through the parent organization server and then is wrapped to be displayed on multiple operating systems. Among other things, this makes it easier to make changed via web-based languages. Christine agreed that any post-project modifications will need to be through Jim Cradock (IT) and it’s therefore important to keep this in mind. Kathryn asked if it is possible to see the difference between a “native” app and a “hybrid” app.

**Next Steps**

Christine stated that she doesn’t have a lot of experience in this area. She would find it helpful for the group to create a list of “well done” apps to review and discuss. The group thought this would be helpful, particularly if the group focused on citizen science apps. The group agreed to submit a brief list of potential apps the first week of January. Christine and Ron will get together to discuss logistics of the next call and “seeing” these apps off of Ron’s computer. The group will then get together for a call the second week of January.