

Out of the Fog Action Committee  
Wednesday, March 24, 1999  
Urban Forestry Center, Portsmouth, NH; 10 am to 4 p.m.  
Minutes of Meeting

Present:

Seth Barker, Chris Brehme, Paul Boudreau, Ted Diers, Patrice Farrey, Will Hopkins, Dave Lincoln, Maggie Mooney-Seus, Joe Pelczarski, Aviva Rahmani, Paul Schroeder, Dave Sewall

RSVP Regrets: Norval Collins, Paul Dest, Dan Farrow, David Keeley, Dean and Jean Meggison, Katie Ries, Billy Spitzer, Nils Stolpe, Bruce Wyman

Meeting Chaired by Maggie Mooney-Seus

Out of the Fog Final Report Distribution

Patrice Farrey reported that more than 100 Out of the Fog reports had been distributed: 55 copies to workshop attendees, 21 to individuals requesting the report, 25 to members of the RARGOM committee, and 10 copies to NOAA/NOS office. Additional copies will be sent to Aviva Rahmani (3 copies to distribute to environmental artists), and Paul Boudreau (25 copies to distribute to Gulf of Maine Council (GOMC). To request a report, contact Patrice Farrey at pfarrey@neaq.org.

Bruce Wyman, New England Aquarium's webmaster, will be posting the OOTF Final Report on the (<http://www.neaq.org/>) website.

Terms of Reference:

Paul Boudreau previously circulated "Gulf of Maine Environmental Information Exchange Initiative Draft Terms of Reference" to all on the 'outofthefog' listserv describing the goal of information exchange in the Gulf of Maine. There was considerable discussion about the title and the use of the word "environmental" in the Terms of Reference. It was decided that in this context the term "environmental" was used in a broad comprehensive manner, and that this is made clear in reading the Terms of Reference, particularly the "who" and "what" categories. Several suggestions were made to make additional edits to the Terms of Reference:

"what": to include further explanation of the word "environmental";

"where": should include 'air' in addition to 'lands and waters', delete the last part of the sentence 'within 12 miles/20km from the high water level';

"when": change 'annual review' to 'systematic review'. It was recognized that it is important to build in a mechanism for continued communication, have an annual summer report or some sort of periodic benchmark to announce and review progress. There will be an open workshop every three years.

Silly Word Experiment

Paul Boudreau updated the committee on the progress of the sillyword experiment, which grew out of an informal discussion at the Out of the Fog conference. A sillyword is a unique word (could also be a

comment or a metatag) that is found in a home page to help people find information. To date, several webmasters have taken part in a sillyword experiment, by adding "GOMOOTF" to their websites. In searching for GOMOOTF, the results have been mixed but encouraging. There are at least 6 sites (federal, state, private, and non-profit) and at least 10-12 pages that are found in the search. No search engine has been able to find them all (remember to try the Dogpile search engine!).

Other committee members also participated in the sillyword experiment. The discussions revealed that 1) the frequency of use of the sillyword in the webpage affects the number of hits, but the hits are often redundant; 2) not all pages which use the sillyword are being found; 3) using a metatag vs. a comment affects a search engine's ability to find the page; 4) submitting the webpage after the sillyword is used will help search engines find it; 5) the number of webpages linked to a website affect the search engine's ability to find the page. It does not, however, matter how many webpages you are linked to.

It was recommended that the sillyword experiment be continued. However, it was suggested that the 'sillyword' acronym be changed to something that will have some meaning to people when they read it. Using strictly a silly word could cause folks to diminish the importance of what it really is. The Action Committee conducted an internet search on GOMINFOEX, GOMINFOX, GOMIX, GOMEX. All but GOMINFOEX produced some hits, therefore GOMINFOEX (Gulf of Maine Information Exchange) was chosen, to ensure that it was truly a unique word.

It was recommended that the Action Committee reserve the sillyword GOMINFOEX as a domain name on the web, at an estimated cost of \$150. The New England Aquarium offered to explore this and cover the cost of reserving the domain name, if it falls in this price range. Further discussion revealed a desire to use the domain name to establish a Gulf of Maine Information Exchange page <<http://www.gominfoex.org/>>. The New England Aquarium agreed to look into hosting this, with a minimum commitment of one year. It was agreed that the page would contain the revised Terms of Reference, a description of sillyword experiment and instructions on how to participate (to be completed by Paul Boudreau), and the Out of the Fog Final Report.

#### Strategy to Move to Phase 2 of the Sillyword Experiment

- 1) Incorporate the new sillyword "GOMINFOEX" into webpage (all)
- 2) Encourage webmasters incorporate the new sillyword "GOMINFOEX" into their websites. Provide guidelines for participating in sillyword experiment (see 4) (Boudreau).
- 3) Promote conscious periodic links between those in the information exchange (all).
- 4) Generate guidelines on the sillyword experiment to explain its purpose and guidelines for getting involved (Boudreau). Post this on <<http://www.gominfoex.org/>> (Neaq).
- 5) If phase 2 is going well, write an article for the June edition of the Gulf of Maine Times (Boudreau).
- 6) Continually assess progress; if phase 2 continues to go well, consider additional press releases and get word out to the listserves (Fundy Forum, Gulftalk, coastnet, fishfolk, and others) (Farrey)
- 7) Create a text file to send to webmasters so they may add the gominfoex.org link to their webpage. (Ted Diers/Boudreau)
- 8) Draft ideas for a logo for the Gulf of Maine Information Exchange. Suggestions included developing something with a lighthouse, the Gulf of Maine, a graphic and text (Aviva Rahmani/others???)

### Strategic Action Matrix (SAM) or Searchable Action List (SAL)

Paul Boudreau introduced a few new ideas that the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment (GOMC) has been experimenting with to improve information exchange. In using these tools, users would enter the system and be assigned their own password in order to post and update information on the database. It was suggested that the Action Committee visit the following sites: Database of contacts: <<http://www.gulfofmaine.org/cdb/index.html>> the calendar of events: <<http://www.gulfofmaine.org/cgi-bin/Calendar/calendar.cgi>>, and the Strategic Action Matrix: <<http://www.gulfofmaine.org/sam/index.html>>

The Strategic Action Matrix is a list of actions of the GOMC and its members. It tracks the actions of the various partners.

When reviewing these sites, consider whether any of these provides a good model for the GOMINFOEX to adopt to improve communication tools and improve information exchange. Feedback on the utility of creating something similar to this is encouraged.

The Action Committee discussed the idea of creating a Strategic Action Matrix or a "searchable action list" (SAL). The SAL is a self determining register of actions. Each group/person is responsible for listing and carrying out their actions; they list it in the SAL, which in turn links to their site on the WWW. Each person/group which makes an entry on the SAL receives a password, so they can update their information as needed. The SAL does have a master password, which would enable the Action Committee to delete any inappropriate entry that was not working to improve information exchange in the Gulf of Maine.

The group felt that the use of a tool such as the SAL would be a better approach than establishing a single page with a list of important links. The ASCIZC example was cited as one that uses the latter, and it is very staff and resource intensive. Other concerns cited regarding creating one page with a list of links were maintenance issues, info can be outdated quickly, other sites are doing it, and if something happens to it, all is lost.

The Action Committee wants to develop a strategy to work with how the Web works; i.e. to use the technology and information that exist to develop an exchange at a low cost (the SAL and sillyword). Webmasters can be contacted and asked to link to one another. If they are interested, it will evolve naturally, much like the web itself. Each individual webpage should link to its areas of interest and maintain that list. Those who participate in the GOMINFOEX should make an effort to link to each other. The hierarchy is inherent, the SAL just allows it to happen.

### Emerging hierarchy of how people can be involved:

- 1) List in contact directory
- 2) Participate in sillyword experiment
- 3) Participate in the SAL
- 4) Take initiative to collect data in community

To move the idea of the SAL forward, the Action Committee proposed:

- 1) All Action Committee members visit the <http://www.gulfofmaine.org/sam/index.html> and provide feedback
- 2) Secure gominioex.org domain name, and establish page (<http://www.gominioex.org/>)
- 3) Modify GOMC SAM to a GOMINFOEX SAL and test it
- 4) If it works, go forward, invite broader participation

The discussion of the SAL led the Action Committee to identify a few ideas which could be developed into guiding principles of the group:

- 1) empower the members of the information exchange coalition
- 2) ensure a long term existence
- 3) make connections (who to link to)
- 4) identify projects (content)
- 5) if necessary, raise money to hire the appropriate agency to continue to move info exchange effort forward.

#### Action Committee Goals

Need to develop short term, medium term, and long term goals for the Action Committee. The Terms of Reference serve as the long term goals. Patrice Farrey and Maggie Mooney-Seus will work some short and medium term goals to circulate before the next meeting.

#### Funding Suggestions

Should there be a need in the future to do something more formal/structured, funding sources will be identified. A few suggestions were made during the workshop including: Weblab (grant from PBS) give \$10,000 to \$50,000 grants to establish a website which focuses on public access and interactive approaches to the net (Aviva Rahmani for more details). In addition several of the funders who participated in the Out of the Fog conference indicated an interest in supporting efforts to promote better communication possibly through electronic-based information/data exchange.

#### Identifying communities

There was a great deal of discussion about how we should approach promoting better information and data sharing. Will Hopkins and Paul Schroeder discussed their work at the community level (Cobscook Bay region of Downeast Maine). It was agreed that GOMINFOEX should work on defining a strategy for "a community self discovery protocol." Each group can identify who is in their community, how they define their community and then work from the local level and bridge to the next level. This would link well with the SAL idea. The Action Committee is considering information exchange from a Gulf of Maine wide scale. The Action Committee needs to keep in mind that we are thinking in terms of the large scale user group, but eventually this will all have to link and connect to local communities of users, who do not yet exist as users. Paul Schroeder and Will Hopkins will provide Action Committee with a one page write-up of there concept for future discussion on this matter.

### Gulf of Maine Atlas

Idea stemmed from David Keeley, Maine State Planning Office, with input from Dan Farrow at the NOAA/NOS office. Maggie Mooney-Seus explained that if the Atlas is developed it may be organized around a theme, and placed on the internet and could provide interactive real time data. The Island Institute is in the process of putting a print Atlas onto the internet. Maggie Mooney-Seus will follow-up with David Keeley and NOS to discuss status of this project as neither were able to attend this meeting. Will Hopkins, Dave Lincoln, Paul Boudreau and Chris Brehme of the Island Institute expressed an interest in being involved in future discussions should they take place. It was recommended that Denise McCollough, Brad Butler and Mike Conner be invited to participate if this moves forward. Anyone else who is interested in exploring this idea, please contact Maggie at mmooneys@aol.com.

### Review Action Items from Out of the Fog Report (pg xi)

It was agreed that the Action Items, since they were published in the Out of the Fog workshop should not be altered. However, it was agreed that in moving forward, a strategic plan will need to be developed to refine Action Items and define goals and objectives for future activities.

Comments of the Action Items included a suggestion to change #9 to read "Identify responsible parties to carry out actions." It was suggested that the Institutional leader be an advocate, spokesperson who understands technology. Final decision on this was deferred.

Discussion on # 12 revealed that the seal of approval puts judgment on who can join the information exchange consortium, and therefore does not fit with the direction in which the Action Committee is evolving. GOMINFOEX does not want to exclude anyone at this point. If someone is interested in participating, they are welcome. Decisions will be made based on utility. We need to be flexible enough to allow people to participate without being a member. However, we will begin by defining and approaching a target audience consisting of individuals and organizations that have already expressed interest in or are currently involved in information and data exchange via the internet.

The group added an item to the Action Item: "Identify parties responsible for specific tasks", which stemmed from the discussion of # 9.

### Wrap-up

The Action Committee should stick with the "integrated distributed rule," so that each individual website can have a seal of approval taking the onus of judgment away from the consortium. We are working towards establishing a new model which is not resource intensive; provides great access; and allows large scale integration through the use of the sillyword. This approach actually empowers people to become involved.

Missing partners need not be defined. The Action Committee will consist of all members of the outofthefog listserv. This will allow all interested parties to monitor the progress of the Committee and participate in projects and initiatives of interest. Anyone interested in improving Gulf of Maine data and information exchange, who wants to add a name to the outofthefog listserv, should contact Patrice Farrey at pfarrey@neaq.org. Action Committee will try to meet quarterly.

Next meeting proposed: June 11 in Yarmouth Nova Scotia.