

AASC 1996 Meeting at Laramie, Wyoming

(a brief and partial accounting by Jim Zandlo)

In opening the meeting, current president Myron Molanau, Idaho, among other things pointed out need to actively use INTERNET communication techniques. In addition to e-mail, a listserv will be set up for AASC members this year.

Myron stated that the myriad of changes in federal government services, especially accompanying cutbacks and those due to National Weather Service (NWS) modernization, are and will cause impacts in the ways that state climatologists(SCs) do business. The modernization in particular will cause some data overload as NexRad (radar data, especially as precipitation data) and ASOS are archived for climatological use. Also state level specialized data networks may add to that overload. In addition, with job redefinitions in the NWS due to modernization, a request overload is being experienced by SCs. (Climate's what you expect, weather is what you get. - Myron)

Direct involvement of SCs in the meeting included a session where a panel of SCs discussed the 'health' and various other aspects of their respective programs. In addition individual SCs and the regional climate centers (RCCs) offered reports on their programs for the last year throughout the meeting. The RCCs, in particular, have been hard hit by severe budget reductions in the last year. The host entity for the Wyoming SC, the Wyoming Water Resource Data Center, gave an overview of their long-standing 'clearinghouse for data' which covers the whole hydrologic cycle (see http://www_wwrc.uwyo.edu/wrds/wrds.html), and Montana offered a similar presentation (see <http://nr.is.mt.gov/>). Ex-SC Paul Waite (Iowa) offered a partial history of the AASC, now in its 25th anniversary. Wayne Wendland (Illinois) offered a history of climate observations in Illinois. Nolan Doeskin (Colorado) announced with great pride, the delivery of the long awaited definitive, shiny, full-color, SNOW publication. Norm Canfield (Maryland) pointed out that media typically know more about SC services than do state agencies. Fred Nurenburger (Michigan) illustrated a technique to use the SURFER program to display and EDIT POINT data conveniently from within that program. Alaska's other climatologist (at Fairbanks) also has a homepage (see http://climate.gi.alaska.edu/AK_climate.html).

Many federal entities gave descriptive or status reports on their programs as they relate to state climatology.

The director, Ken Hadeen, and two assistants of the National Climatic Data Center (NCDC) discussed the huge influx of new ASOS (automated surface observing system) and NexRad data into the archive. Some problems associated with the changeover to automated observations were pointed out. With a change in job responsibilities with modernization, traditional data reports are actually coming in later than before. Other projects, such as the (19th century) fort data digitization project were briefly mentioned.

The NWS modernization was also addressed by a member of the NWS modernization committee, Bill Bonner, who stated that the National Academy of Science (NAS) and the

National Research Council (NRC) will be studying a myriad of issues to address the 'usefulness' of the cooperative program (CP is the dense network of long-term traditional manual observations) at the request and perhaps with the funding of the NWS. (It was later decided at the business meeting to send a letter on behalf of AASC members to NRC committee chair, Serafin, to reiterate the importance of continuity and consistency in the climate record and to point out that SCs as 'wholesalers' of climate data represent a much larger group of climate data users than their own number would indicate.)

The fact that snowfall and depth are NOT observed by ASOS is an issue with many climatologists. Scenarios for using the CP to fill-in this deficiency were discussed by NWS representatives, Andy Horowitz and Bob Leffler. More touch-tone phone devices for observers to dial-in observations and denser networks for forecasting and warnings were some low-cost enhancements offered as possibilities.

Also discussing the CP, Tom Blackburn offered more particulars on the costs and status of CP equipment. Grant Goodge pointed out that 1st order station data is no better than CP data. He gave several examples of the large number of bad data when QC is not done. Kelly Redmond pointed out the dual role of SCs as both 'retail' AND 'wholesale/reseller' users of CP data and that the estimated size of the user group should take that information into account (when modernization issues are discussed).

The director of ASOS, Vicki Nadolski, discussed many issues of ASOS. She pointed out that many instrument and program problems have been fixed. She provided a list of ASOS station status, including level of augmentation (such as manually observed weather types or snow observations). Tom McKee (Colorado) questions ANY/ALL tipping-bucket precipitation values. He went on to say that although dew-point values are unbiased there are still occasional nonsense values and he discussed a number of issues with the observation of temperature.

The Office of Federal Coordinator for Meteorological Services (OFCM), Staley, discussed the interagency efforts to reach common operating standards such as a handbook for surface weather observations and reports (the METAR is now on-line). He points out that non-climatologists tend to regard 'climate services' as climate change prediction or climate change information and NOT applied climatology as SCs practice.

PRISM, the topographically guided interpolation technique being developed in Oregon, George Taylor, and the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Water and Climate Center (WCC) (see <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov>) will be used under contract with NCDC to recreate a US-wide climate atlas. Beta versions of the PRISM will be available soon. PRISM now is able to use WGEN techniques to generate artificial weather data.

USDA Forest Service WIMS (Weather Information Management System), Roger Tucker, indicated that FTS (Forestry Technology System, a proprietary observing platform) data will be acquired directly by WIMS. The data will only be stored for one year then passed to the RCCs for long term storage if they so choose.

The Joint Ag Weather Facility representative, Ray Motha, pointed out that the National Ag Weather Information System (NAWIS) WAS authorized but never funded BUT is NOT dead in spite of closure of ag weather services. In the future RCCs will play a strategic role. The Sec. of Ag. has approved the rewrite of legislation which would include a national ag weather observing network, better links to SCs, extension service, and experiment stations. Data would be handled via UCAN services (Unified Climate Access Network - a multi-agency strategy for a nationwide climate access network) .

At the business meeting, it was pointed out that fledgling homepages for the AASC are now accessible (see http://snow.cit.cornell.edu/state_climate/aasc.html). A logo for the AASC is being sought and a brochure outlining the AASC function will be designed by a committee composed of Wayne Wendland (Illinois), Hal Kleforth (Nevada), and Jim Zandlo (Minnesota). The importance of timeliness in sending data forms (even partial shipments) to NCDC was stressed. Electronic balloting was discussed. Pam Nabor-Knox (Wisconsin) takes over as president (from NYC) with new president-elect Al Dutcher (Nebraska) and Secretary-Treasurer Mary Knapp (Kansas). A discussion on aspects of future meetings led to a desire for more technical reports, more depth, handouts and pre-prints, and, of course, more time to do all that. Next year's meeting will be in late July/early August in Prescott, Arizona.

Other potentially interesting INTERNET links from the meeting:

National Water Quality Database at <http://hermes.ecn.purdue.edu:8001/>

Dept. of Energy Environmental Restoration at <gopher://doe-wrc.ott.ohio-state.edu>

EPA at <http://www.epa.gov>

USGS at <http://www.usgs.gov>, <http://geology.usgs.gov>, <http://h2o.usgs.gov>, NAWDEX (Nat'l Water Data Exchange) at <http://h2o.er.usgs.gov/public/nawdex/nawdex.html>, etc.

An extensive list of servers can be found at http://www_wwrc.uwyo.edu/wrds/wrds.html (select "Hypertext 2 Other Water Information Servers").

A (paper) list of 'Water Resources Discussion Lists' from J.R. Makuch at the Water Quality Information Center, USDA is also available. The contact is wqic@nalusda.gov (or ask me for a paper copy, jzandlo@soils.umn.edu). The Universities Council on Water Resources WaterTalk listserv discussions can be viewed at <http://www.uwin.siu.edu>.