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ALA Task Force on the Environment Discusses Global Change
Issues and Resources

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The American Library Association's (ALA's) Task Force on the Environment (TFOE), held a special information program, "Global Change Data and Information: The Roles of Libraries," during the ALA 114th Annual Conference, June 23-28, 1995 in Chicago. The TFOE is one of several issue-oriented groups in ALA's Social Responsibility Round Table.

"Libraries and information centers are major gateways to data and information centers," states a recently published report entitled The U.S. Global Change and Information System Implementation Plan. The roles played by libraries of all sizes and types have been to collect and make available global change research data and information. The skills and knowledge of librarians and information specialists have been recognized as "critical to many users who need to navigate the vast amounts of printed and electronic data and information," the report states.

The TFOE used this recognition of libraries and librarians as the basis for the topic and content of its program this year. "It is just a strange coincidence that the Northeast part of the U.S. has been enveloped in a span of record-breaking high temperatures... However, such 'extreme events,' as they are noted in the world of climate models, may be part of the growing body of information to indicate global change may be a real phenomenon." Fred Stoss, as an organizer of the program, was referring to articles appearing in the SCIENCE journal "If the Mercury Soars, So May Health Hazards," which contained a prophetic side bar, "Cities Could Face Killer Heat Waves" (Science, Vol. 267, 17 February 1995), and "Studies Say --Tentatively--That Greenhouse Warming is Here" (Science, Vol. 268, 16 June 1995). The emergence of this information provided dramatic support in arguing the importance of this topic for the Task Force's meetings.

The United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) was established to provide a coordinated, interagency effort to observe, understand, and predict the effects and impacts of global environmental change. The data and information generated as a result of this interagency effort is discipline-specific, resulting from observations in the physical and life sciences, surveys from the social and policy sciences, and other modeled or temporal or spatial data. Regardless of their origin, global change information transcends agency and international borders.

Providing ready access to this vast store of global change data and information is a major goal of the USGCRP. The USGCRP established the U.S. Global Change Data and Information System (GCDIS), as a means to develop, link, and share data and information services between agencies and other users. The function of the GCDIS is to provide a forum for the exchange of data, information, and ideas across disciplines and boundaries.

The author, who is CDIAC's Coordinator for Communications and Networking, provided an overview of the USGCRP and the GCDIS. He also described the various data products, publications, and special information services of CDIAC as examples of the commitment of federally-funded global change research activities. CDIAC is supported by the U.S. Department of Energy's Environmental Sciences Division.

Roberta Rand, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Data and Information Management Coordinator, was on hand to describe in more detail the operation and activities of the Library Information Subgroup of the Global Change Data Management Working Group. "The LIS provides the library and information center perspective and expertise for the design, evaluation, and promotion of GCDIS," Rand stated. Libraries will be called upon to provide distribution channels for GCDIS systems and will serve as important points-of-contact for the complete range of user communities from school and university libraries to special libraries and corporate information centers. "More than any other means of information dissemination, libraries reach all ages, all professions, all institutions, and all geographic locations," said Rand.

Rand also described the relevance of this topic to the library community with excerpts from a special double issue of the journal, *Library Hi Tech* (Vol. 13, nos. 1-2, 1995), devoted to global change and the role of libraries. This series of articles describes what is being done and being planned to address the data and information needs related to the critical issues of the earth's changing environment. Rand served as editor of this special issue of *Library Hi Tech*.

Betty Coyle, from ConQuest Software, Inc., provided a description of the GC-ASK Pilot Project. GC-ASK stands for Global Change - Assisted Search for Knowledge, and is a prototype search system linking databases that are diverse in content and format, while enabling users with varying levels of skill, needs, and methods of access to obtain relevant information from the vast array of resources. "GC-ASK provides a new tool for users to obtain information by using natural language inquiries and a common user interface," Coyle noted in her description of GC-ASK. GC-ASK clearly demonstrates the data and information initiatives of the GCDIS mission through the development of software that is commercial, off-the-shelf, client/server oriented, and adheres to common standards. Now in a prototype version, GC-ASK is available for users over the Internet.

Jerry Curry, from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, discussed the difficulties researchers have in accessing and acquiring highly - specialized, global, change-related data. Curry oversees the user services activities of the ORNL Distributed Active Archive Center (DAAC), one of nine such archives sponsored by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Earth Observing System Data and Information System (EOSDIS). "EOSDIS is an effort to provide a one-stop search and order system allowing the user to simultaneously search the data holdings of the nine different DAACs," Curry noted. EOSDIS is not a static system -- it is adapting to a variety of interfaces on the Information Super Highway, including the Internet's World Wide Web. Electronic access to global change data and information is increasing at a tremendously rapid rate. The role of the GCDIS information centers, data repositories, and data archives was reiterated by Curry. "While the existence of a digital library is far off, digital data centers are much closer to reality," he noted.

The TFOE program was moderated by Patty Owen, Hudson Branch Manager of the Pasco County (Florida) Library System. Patty is an active member of ALA and the Special Libraries Association, where she served as Chair of SLA's Environment and Resource Management Division.

SIDE BAR FOR ARTICLE

WWW Sites of interest:

CDIAC <http://cdiac.esd.ornl.gov/cdiac>
EERC/UTK <http://www.ra.utk.edu/eerc/>
EOS <http://eos.nasa.gov>
GCDIS <http://www.gcdis.usgcrp.gov>
GC-ASK <http://ask.gcdis.usgcrp.gov:8080/>
USGCRP <http://www.usgcrp.gov>

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world. It 55,000 members represent all types of libraries -- public, school, academic, state and special libraries -- serving persons in government, commerce, armed services, hospitals, colleges and other institutions. ALA is the chief advocate for the people of the U.S. in achieving and maintaining high-quality library and information services by protecting the right to read, educating librarians, improving services, and making information accessible to everyone.

The Task Force on the Environment is one of several constituent groups of the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table. The author serves as the current chair of the TFOE. For further information about this program and the ALA Task Force on Environment contact Frederick W. Stoss at the Energy, Environment, and Resources Center, Pellissippi Research Institute, The University of Tennessee, 10521 Research Drive, Suite 100, Knoxville, TN 37932; 615/974-8410, stoss@utkvx.utk.edu

SIDE BAR TO ACCOMPANY ALA ARTICLE

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Planning for 1996

The TFOE business meetings were busy making plans for the 1996 ALA Annual Meeting, which will be held in New York City over the Fourth of July Weekend. The programs discussed included fresh topics of importance to the TFOE and include a proposed tour of the Region 2 EPA Library.

TFOE program: Socially & Environmentally Responsible Investing

This program will focus on how environmentally and socially responsible investing is monitored. New York is home to many corporate research organizations that measure the environmental and social performance of major corporations. The Investor Responsibility Research Center, the Council of Economic Priorities, and the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility are all headquartered in New York City. The proposed program will focus on the "CERES Principles" (formerly called the "Valdez Principles") and how they serve as a driving force for guide corporations towards responsible stewardship of the environment.

Library Open House: U.S. EPA Region 2 Library with presentations from various EPA librarians about specific EPA resources and information programs. This event will provide an excellent opportunity for TFOE members to meet various members of the EPA Library staff and to establish important networking and communication links to this vital environmental information resource. The EPA Region 2 Library is located in the JFK Building and is about a half-hour walk or a 10-60 minute cab ride, depending on traffic).

The ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table would like to do a program on ergonomics and safety/health issues in libraries. TFOE's contribution, in addition to co-sponsoring the program, will be to assist in the development of a special safety and health information guide on the issues relevant to our libraries.

If there is any interest... Fred Stoss would be most happy and willing to take some time (after the Annual Meeting) to lead an expedition to the famed waters of the Beaverkill and Willowemoc Creeks in Roscoe, NY and fly fish the Beaomoc waters, starting at the fishing hole most frequently encountered in fly fishing literature -- The Junction Pool.

TFOE is going to pursue the granting of an award for an outstanding children's environmental book. Patty Owen (Pasco County - Fla. -Public Library) is leading the way on this. Patty would like to see national recognition given to children's books related to the environment and natural resources.