



Inventory & Monitoring Program

NPSpecies Redesign and Update – 2013 Frequently-asked Questions

Updated July 17, 2013

In 2012, staff in Fort Collins began a comprehensive review of [NPSpecies](#) (part of the [IRMA Portal](#)). Based on user interviews and accumulated user feedback, in 2013 the IRMA team began a redesign and update of NPSpecies with the goal of making the application easier to use and more streamlined. Here are some FAQs that might be helpful.

What is NPSpecies?

- NPSpecies houses the master park species lists for the National Park Service. It is a web-based application that provides parks, and NPS, a way of building, managing, maintaining, and sharing park species lists.

Why is NPSpecies important?

- A fundamental purpose of the National Park Service is protecting and maintaining biological diversity within parks. Park managers, planners, and scientists need basic information on the status of species occurring in parks as a basis for making decisions; working with other agencies, the scientific community, and the public; and for the long-term protection of park ecosystems.
- Basic information about whether a species occurs in a park can promote regional and range-wide understanding of species distributions and allow for landscape-scale conservation planning.
- Parks are reservoirs of biological diversity and provide ample opportunities for discovery. Evidence-based species lists can be a bridge between science and outreach--a means of involving both the public and the scientific community in understanding and new discoveries.

We keep our own species lists. Why should we use NPSpecies?

- Developing and maintaining a common resource for park species information is a fundamental need of NPS as a land management agency.
- NPSpecies is used for a variety of analyses and reports at multiple scales. It is essential that the system reflect the best information available, including data from your park.

Does the current system really need a redesign?

- Several aspects of the current system make it complex and unwieldy.

- In the current NPSpecies framework, species list changes or additions are not immediately visible to public users. This is due to a requirement that lists be certified in their entirety (e.g., reviewed by taxonomic or subject-matter experts) before they become visible to the public. This requirement, which will be discontinued, has resulted in a backlog of pending list changes.
- Many parks have not been using NPSpecies to keep their species lists up to date. The general feeling is that the current system is too complicated and the process for making changes is unclear and time-consuming. We want to make NPSpecies something that everyone—even infrequent users—can use without a steep learning curve.
- The current system hasn't been able to handle some of the specific needs parks have. For example, one park may need to affiliate species with park sub-units. Another park may want to use specific abundance designations. The inability to meet these needs has meant that, out of necessity, many parks have managed their lists locally in spreadsheets, Word document, or other formats. The downside to this is the information is not stored in a standard way and is not available to other users, the broader NPS community, or the public.
- Technology has changed and we have made great strides in developing tools and functions for other aspects of the IRMA Portal since the current system was designed. By applying these newer approaches and technologies we can significantly streamline and optimize NPSpecies.

How is NPSpecies changing?

NPSpecies is changing to a lighter, simpler, more flexible system.

- Park species lists are recognized as being works in progress. Lists are expected to change frequently as new information comes in and as taxonomy changes.
- The previous requirement to certify park species lists has been eliminated. While this certification process was an important part of establishing the basic species lists for vertebrates and vascular plants, the focus is now on updating, expanding, and improving lists on a continuous basis.
- NPSpecies is becoming more dynamic by inviting species list suggestions and feedback from scientists, naturalists, park staff members and members of the public who may have more recent information to share. Rather than posting a species list that is certified and static, the approach is moving towards: “Here’s our bird list to the best of our knowledge. Thanks for your interest, and let us know if you see something that should be changed or added...”
- Although park species lists will still be managed by designated park “gatekeepers” who enter and review new material, we hope to engender a more open approach by providing users with an easy way to submit comments, suggestions, or new information.

NPSpecies is easier to find, understand, and use

- The user interface and menus will be simplified and more intuitive.
- Formatted, printable species checklists, as well as more detailed park species lists will be available from the NPSpecies home page.
- Parks can customize NPSpecies so they can track, search, and sort lists based on park-specific attributes.
- A “suggestion” form will allow NPS staff, cooperators, and the public to submit suggestions or additions to park lists.
- Parks can grant access to non-NPS partners and cooperators so they can add or edit park species records.

What happens to all the information already entered into NPSpecies?

- Data in the current system will be migrated into the new NPSpecies.

Who will manage NPSpecies information for my park?

- This will vary from park to park. In many instances, Inventory and Monitoring (I&M) network staff have been the primary stewards of NPSpecies data. Now that NPSpecies is becoming simplified and more flexible, we hope that parks will take a more active role in list management and upkeep.
- Parks designate one or more “points of contact,” or POCs, to be the primary data steward(s). POCs can then grant editing permissions to other staff members.
- Some parks lack natural resource staff or expertise and may wish to have I&M network staff continue to fill the role of data stewards. Other parks have very knowledgeable staff with the ability to maintain their lists. Or, a hybrid approach may be the solution, leveraging the skills of those who have expertise within certain species groups.

When will I see the changes?

- Development is underway, with an initial release expected in late summer, 2013.
- The development is iterative—the first release will have basic functions, and each subsequent release will incorporate more features. This way we can get your feedback on each release and make mid-course corrections more easily.

I have used the NPSpecies desktop application to manage data. What is happening to it?

- Once we convert to the new NPSpecies we will no longer support the desktop tool. Any data you have in the desktop should be uploaded to NPSpecies by August 15, 2013. If you need help with any data transfers, contact Alison Loar (alison_loar@nps.gov)

Our network has used REST calls to pull data from NPSpecies. Will this still be possible?

- The REST services configured to the current NPSpecies will be maintained until December 31, 2013; however, data will not be kept current and will be a static data set

created at the time of transfer to the new NPSpecies. Once the new NPSpecies is released, revised web services and tools will be available.

Who is in charge? Who decides what happens and how it looks?

- The NPSpecies team in Fort Collins is leading the effort, and includes Margaret Beer, Alison Loar, Simon Kingston, Marianne Tucker, and Dan Kocol. Kurt Herrmann is the lead developer. John Boetsch, Data Manager at the North Coast and Cascades Network, has provided much background material as are staff from the [Biological Resource Management Division](#).
- There is an NPSpecies User Group that is responsible for helping set priorities, providing ideas, guidance and feedback, and communicating progress to co-workers. The current group members are:
 - I&M network staff: John Boetsch , Gordon Dicus, Patrick Flaherty, Mark Hart, Jenn Keefer, Kelly Kozar, Nora Murdock, Laura O’Gan, Gareth Rowell, Geoff Sanders, Allison Snyder, Helen Thomas
 - I&M Ecologists: Tom Philippi, Bill Monahan
 - BRMD staff: Peter Budde
 - Park Natural Resource Staff: Tom Remaley, Sean Mohren, Janet Rock
 - FWS Staff: Peter Dratch, Kaylene Keller, Todd Sutherland

Several User Group members are from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). FWS is also interested in developing a bureau-wide species application and their needs align very closely with ours. Just as FWS has been able to leverage the Data Store (their version is called ServCat), we hope to develop a species solution that both bureaus can use.

How can I participate? How can I let you know some of my ideas?

- If you’re interested in joining the user group, send an email to Margaret Beer. We have conference calls the second Wednesday of each month (at 1pm MDT) and may have some calls more frequently as development progresses.
- You can see the current list of NPSpecies ideas on a web-based application called Trello (<https://trello.com/board/npspecies-ideas/50d100cd0a9347af7f002b88>). If you would like to edit or comment on these “cards,” contact Margaret Beer.
- You can contact anyone on the development team or user group and let them know your comments or concerns
- You can sign up to be an early tester of the application. We need people to put it through its paces starting this summer. Again, contact Margaret Beer if you’re interested.