

Online ecological and environmental data

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There is such an overload of information on the internet that trying to find credible, scientific information in the ecological and environmental sciences is a very difficult task. This practical, compact book is an excellent resource for earth and life science librarians who are interested in the type of datasets that are available on the internet.

The common thread amongst the range of organizations that are described in this work is that they all provide access to collections of original data in their specific fields. Each chapter deals with a different organization, and each discusses how that organization obtained its data: whether as peer-reviewed data from individual researchers; data from government projects; or data from satellites. The projects that are described vary from collections on global environmental change to collections on the fish and fisheries in a particular region of the United States. The aim of all of these organizations is to make the data widely available to researchers. Each chapter also discusses the future direction of the organization and provides the URLs to the relevant websites.

The first chapter deals with the provision of global environmental change information to the research community, and focuses on the behind-the-scenes at a data centre which collects and disseminates such data, the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN). Background is given about the setting up of projects to obtain specific data, the process of acquiring the data, and the archiving and cataloguing of the data once it is received. Then, once these steps are complete, the next stage is the transformation of the data into forms that are accessible to the public. And finally the chapter provides examples of the products and services offered by CIESIN, such as the Gridded Population of the World (GPW) dataset, and Environmental Treaties and Resource Indicators (ENTRI) dataset.

The second chapter describes an information retrieval tool, the Global Change Master Directory, which guides researchers to the variety of global change data that is available on the internet. The directory covers a range of earth science datasets that provide data dealing with global change, and describes the sets and provides their locations. This chapter focuses on information retrieval within the directory, particularly the development of controlled vocabulary for efficient retrieval of the records, and explains the search and browse facilities available.

The remaining chapters describe their various fields of interest, background to the types of data that are collected, and the websites that present the data. The third and fifth chapters cover *environmental data*. There is (1) the National Environmental Data Network, which draws together various data-collecting programmes on acid rain, and (2) Syracuse Research Corporation, which produces a number of chemical information databases that deal with the impact of chemicals on health and the environment.

The fourth and sixth chapters deal with *ecological data*. There is (1) the National Biological Information Infrastructure which provides a portal to the biological resources data for the United States, and (2) the StreamNet project which collects data and grey literature on the fish and fisheries in the Columbia Basin in the United States.

This is a very useful work for librarians specializing in the environmental and ecological fields. Although there is a strong slant towards the United States, with some of the sites focusing on local research, several sites that are global in their coverage are also included. The book creates an awareness of the data available to researchers on the internet and

is informative about how the information is processed before being utilized by the public. This book is also of interest to those who want to know how such projects can be set up, managed and made available using the internet.

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