Wilderness Permit Systems and the Forest Service's Infra Database

Ann Suter, Project Leader

Infra Database

The Forest Service uses a database application called Infra (figure 1) to manage information on national resources, such as buildings, trails, roads, wilderness areas, and water systems. Infra, along with the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) and the Automated Lands Program (ALP), are major components of the Forest Service's corporate information management system.

Infra began as a way to monitor constructed features on National Forest lands. Over the past 10 years it has expanded to a system that allows forests and districts to enter, manage, and report all aspects of the land, from permits to surveys, maintenance, and leases. Infra can assist with billing, planning, and budgeting. On a national level, reports can be generated in a variety of business areas, such as deferred maintenance, real property inventory, and range and special use permit statistics.

Many wilderness areas operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, require visitors to fill out permits or register before entering. This information allows Forest Service personnel to track the usage of the different wilderness areas and to learn about use levels and patterns. The Visitor Use Permit System (VUPS), one of Infra's many management tools (figure 2), helps track wilderness usage. VUPS has been in place for 3 years and can

be modified for permit systems that range from simple voluntary registration to complex quota systems involving reservations and fees. As wilderness areas become more popular, a computerized permit tracking system allows greater accuracy and efficiency. An example of Infra's use in a computerized wilderness permit system can be found at the Inyo National Forest in California.
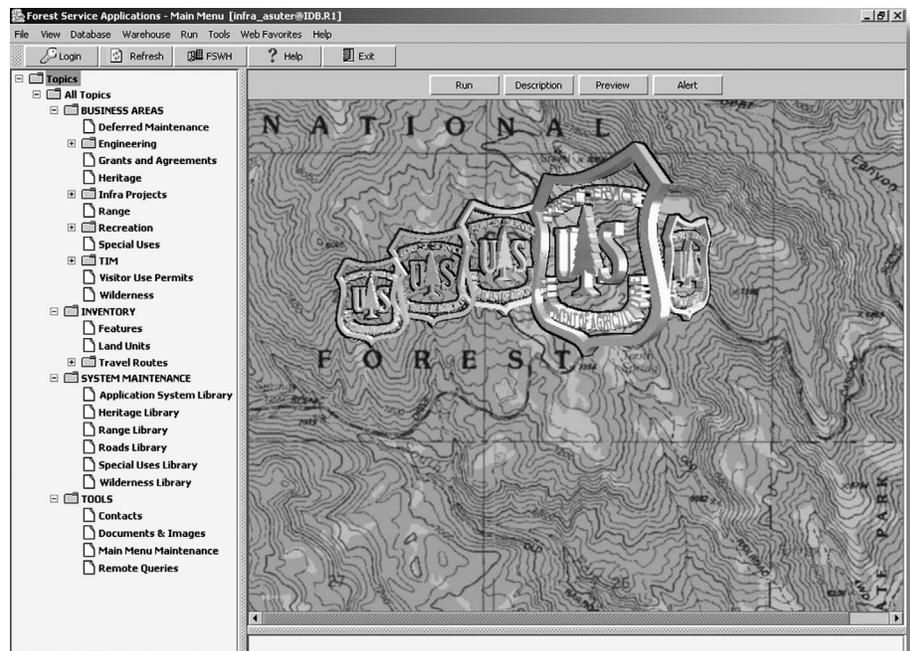

Figure 1—Main menu for accessing information stored in the Infra database. The user chooses from the topics on the left.
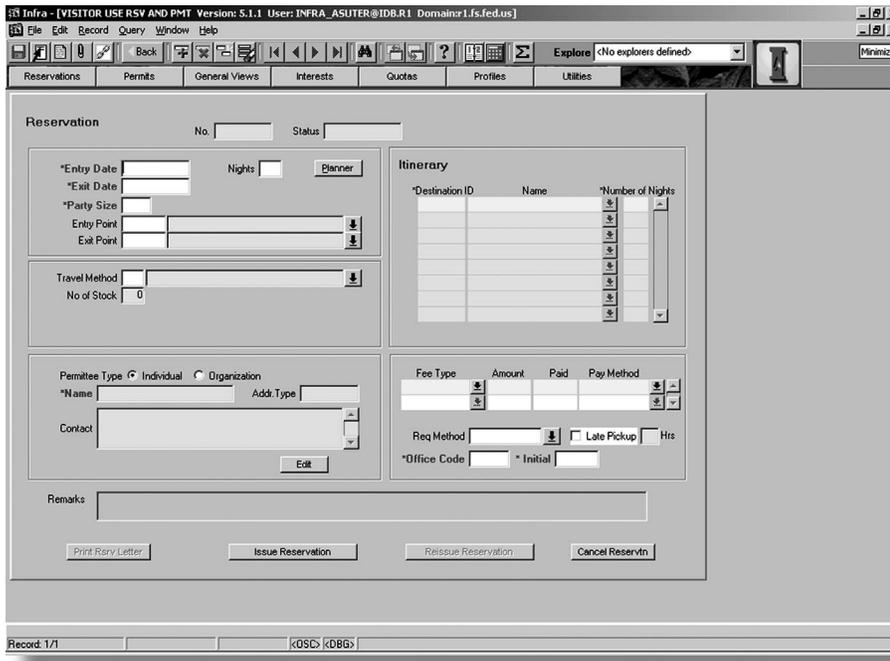
Figure 2—The Visitor Use Reservation and Permit template. Users can enter, search, update, and delete information.

During the permit season, the system is optimized to run efficiently while processing reservations and permits.

VUPS users on the Inyo National Forest have found the application easy to learn and use. As with most computer applications, the more often a person uses Infra, the easier it becomes. Generating custom user reports requires some knowledge of Microsoft Excel or Access.

Forest Service Oracle Client 3, a PC running the Windows 2000 operating system, and a 2-day training course are the requirements to start using Infra. A good way to get started is to visit the Infra Web site on the Forest Service's internal computer network: *http://pcs27.f16.r6.fs.fed.us/ Infra/* (figure 4). Another Web site with helpful information on the Infra wilderness application is: *http://infra.wo.fs.fed.us/infrahelp/ htdocs/wilderness/hh_start.htm*

Inyo National Forest

Seven wilderness areas covering about 1.5 million acres are within the Inyo National Forest. The Inyo has 64 trail heads and receives about 5 million visitors annually. Some of these trails have quotas for public and commercial use. The Inyo National Forest has found the VUPS to be a helpful management tool for their permit system. Infra allows Forest Service personnel to track quotas (figure 3), issue reservations and permits, and calculate fees. Infra also is able to incorporate wilderness-specific regulations into the permit system.

Because no two wilderness permit systems are exactly alike, the power of VUPS lies in its ability to be highly customized. Permit system managers can log into the system at the start of the season to define numerous opening parameters.
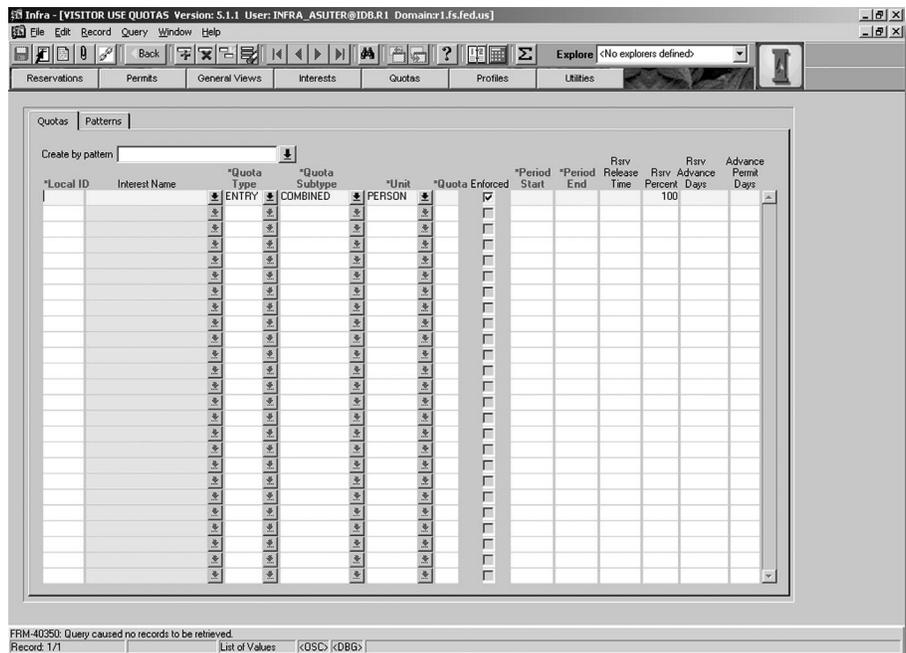

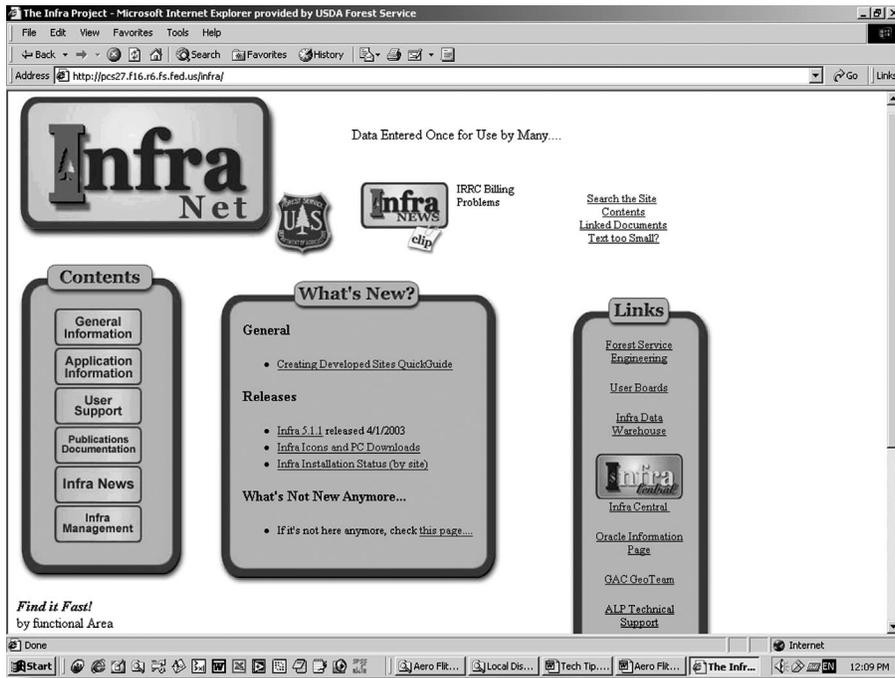Figure 3—The Visitor Use Quotas form allows users to keep track of the number of permits that have been issued.

In the Future

Because of the labor involved in manually inputting information from wilderness permits and registration, the Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC) was asked to look at the feasibility of optically scanning the permits. MTDC is investigating several technologies and services that would transfer scanned information directly into VUPS.

Figure 4—The Infra Web site on the Forest Service's computer network provides information on getting started with Infra.

About the Author

Ann Suter is a statistician for the Missoula Technology and Development Center's wildland fire chemical systems group. She joined the Forest Service in 1997 after serving 2 years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Jamaica, where she worked on reforestation and soil erosion control. She has a master's degree in international development from the American University.

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USDA Forest Service
Missoula Technology and
Development Center
5785 Hwy. 10 West
Missoula, MT 59808-9361
Phone: 406–329–3978
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E-mail: *wo_mtdc_pubs@fs.fed.us*

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For additional technical information, contact Ann Suter at MTDC.

Phone: 406–829–6772
Fax: 406–329–3719
E-mail: *asuter@fs.fed.us*