



THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

ND's 511 System: *Weathering Your Drive*

By Mark Schneider

If you drove to visit family this holiday season, were the roads clear of snow and ice, or did you find yourself having to slow down for hazardous driving conditions?

When you are in need of current weather and road conditions in North Dakota, the information is just a free phone call away. By simply dialing "511" on your home or cell phone, you can access detailed route specific information, regional summaries, and seasonal load information 24 hours a day/seven days a week for the entire state.

Road construction can be a hassle if you haven't planned ahead and allowed extra time to reach your destination. The 511 system may provide an alternate route around road construction. Mile-marker reports give you very specific road conditions for localized areas of travel. When highway patrolmen and other travelers make real-time reports about road conditions in the state, their information is relayed to 511 and updated for future travelers along that specific route.

North Dakota's 511 system is paid for by the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) and holds the claim of being the first



511 system in the U.S. The North Dakota Congressional Delegation and the University of North Dakota cooperated in 1995 to acquire funding through the Federal Highway Administration and then worked with the NDDOT on developing the 511 system. In 1996, UND began providing 24-hour operational support for "#SAFE," the first wireless information service using one number to provide statewide traveler information.

In 1998, Meridian Environmental Technology, Inc. based in Grand Forks, took over for UND providing North Dakota's 511 system with 24/7 operational support. A large portion of Meridian's staff is made up of both current and past professors and students from UND. In addition to supporting North Dakota's 511 system, Meridian also supports the 511 systems in South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Nevada.

In 2001, the Federal Communications Commission used the UND/Meridian/#SAFE System as a model for the standardization of a national 511 system, which is now accessible to 35 percent of the U.S. population. Before the end of 2007, well over 50 percent of the U.S. population will be able to use "511," with service to the entire country, the ultimate goal.

The NDDOT Website provides 511 information at http://www.dot.nd.gov/divisions/maintenance/511_nd.html. By accessing North Dakota's 511 system via the Internet or by phone, travelers are also able to obtain information for South Dakota, Montana, and Minnesota. This allows travelers access to continuous road condition information when driving from Missoula to Minneapolis for example. So the next time you are traveling on North Dakota's roads, or out-of-state, and are unsure of current conditions, take a minute or two to pick up the phone for a free, informative call.

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