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Remarks

by Thomas A. Downing, Chief, Cataloging Branch

Good morning. I am pleased to be with you this morning and will address four matters; the organization of the Cataloging Branch, the objectives of the branch, the cataloging backlog, and potential management initiatives that are intended to speed our bibliographic control of materials entering the workflow.

Organization of the Cataloging Branch:

The Cataloging Branch consists of three sections. The Monthly Catalog Support Section includes 3.5 full time equivalent employees, including a supervisor. This section is responsible for the production of the Monthly Catalog. Cataloging section 1 is composed of nine catalogers and a supervisor. Personnel within this section catalog monographs and maps. Cataloging section 2 is composed of a supervisor and 10 catalogers, 3 of whom are serials catalogers. We hope to hire one additional cataloger before the end of this fiscal year. We have no plans, nor do we have funds, to employ more than 20 catalogers. The Cataloging Branch also includes an administrative librarian for automation and an administrative librarian for cataloging.

Objectives of the Branch:

Our more immediate objective is to publish some form of acceptable bibliographic record to represent each title that has been received within the branch during the preceding month.

We also have an admittedly long-term objective to eliminate approximately 20,000 titles that are in the backlog. Achievement of these objectives will require that we consider various initiatives that will be described in just a moment.

Status of the Cataloging Backlog:

Because our backlog consists of materials that have been held for several years and also titles that have recently been received, our backlog figure fluctuates. For planning purposes, we consider our backlog to be approximately 20,000 titles. This is not a precise figure, but it is safe to say that our backlog does not exceed this number of titles.

We have two ways of processing this backlog; through commercial contracts and through our own efforts. Before our catalogers process materials in the backlog, however, we must assure that all current titles entering the workflow are processed as soon as possible. Because processing older materials is low on our priorities, we must consider commercial contracting to assist with the processing of these older materials.

We have a modest commercial contract for the cataloging of 2,000 titles in the backlog. 1,000 of these titles are NASA microfiche and 1,000 of these titles are FEMA Flood Insurance Studies. This contract is now half completed and, in addition to reducing the backlog, our experience with this contract should help us to prepare what we hope will be a more ambitious contract in the future, most probably during fiscal year 1995.

Cataloging Initiatives:

Our cataloging initiatives consist of several efforts. The first effort, and one which already has been successful, is to create a work environment that emphasizes production and recognizes catalogers for their initiative, hard work, and ability to balance their cataloging decisions with production requirements. As many of you know, cataloging is challenging work and requires decision-making on a title-by-title basis throughout each day.

Eight of our outstanding catalogers have been or will be recognized for their contributions within the pages of Administrative Notes. They serve as examples of all of those who have increased production of Monthly Catalog records within the most recent six months over the same 6-month period during the previous year. No matter how successful their efforts, however, their work must be supported by other initiatives.

These potential initiatives include determining the materials that absolutely must be cataloged at the full level, and expanding the categories of materials to be cataloged at less than full level. Other initiatives will involve determining how information can be shared more efficiently within LPS and how relevant records from various outside sources can be migrated to the Monthly Catalog via electronic transfer. Yet another consideration would be to publish editions of Monthly Catalog that contain significant numbers of records with data that are not equivalent to data within OCLC, but which would be adequate for purposes of a public catalog. While we acknowledge our commitment to OCLC, we are not obliged to publish OCLC MARC format records within the paper editions of the Monthly Catalog.

Each of these potential initiatives could increase the efficiency of our information processing and reduce operational expenses. As we continue to explore various options, we will consult with you and advise you of our efforts. As you can imagine, consideration of such initiatives will require time for fact finding and costs benefits analysis hence, it may be some time before we can provide you with proposals.

At this time I would like to introduce a person who is well known to many of you, Ms. Sheila McGarr. Sheila began her career at GPO in 1982 as a depository library inspector and worked in that capacity for five years before becoming the chief of the Depository Administration Branch. Sheila was chief of this branch for five years, and eight months ago was assigned to be Chief of Depository Services.