Recdata a valuable management tool

THANKS to the huge effort of CALM staff across the State, the first stage of the department's Recreation and Tourism Information system (RATIS) is well under way.

This first stage, known as RECDATA, is slowly taking shape as a complete inventory of every recreation asset across the State, whether it be a rubbish bin or a million-dollar visitors' centre.

According to Jim Sharp, CALM's Director of Parks, Recreation, Planning and Tourism, the idea of RECDATA was initially the brainchild of Wanneroo acting district manager Alan Sands and landscape architect and planner Tracy Churchill of Recreation Planning and Design section.

They saw the system as one that is both owned and used by districts, and visualised those officers in the field, who are responsible for the day-to-day management of national parks and other CALM-managed lands and waters, being able to use the recorded data as a valuable management and planning tool.

Tracy and Alan's idea was pushed forward in priority as the result of a request from the Auditor General's office for information on the value of the Department's assets in the field.

The project began late last year with the appointment of Arvid Hogstrom, who was employed to co-ordinate the development of RECDATA.

With valued advice and assistance from Wayne Schmidt, Alan Sands, Tracy Churchill, Karen Shaddock, Regional and District staffs, and a host of other CALM people, a manual was prepared to guide Regions and Districts in their collection of asset information.

Work on this phase of the inventory database also benefited from the input of Rick Tomlinson from Information Management Branch and the support of Financial Services Branch, in particular Melissa D'Silva, who is responsible for the overall co-ordination of CALM's asset register.

As can be appreciated, the data collection task is enormous in extent, and rangers, recreation officers and other field staff have spent many days, even weeks, shouldering the tedious responsibility of recording such aspects as location, dimensions, values and condition of assets under their control.

This required a huge workload to be added to an already overflowing works program.

In order to manage such large amounts of data, the expertise of Steve Rowlands from Como's Information Management Branch was employed to modify a standard Microsoft Access database, so as to make input and subsequent withdrawal of data as simple as possible.

The tedious task of inputting the data as recorded in the field was handed over to Susan Hunter (pictured above with Mike Bodsworth).

Susan was contracted specifically for the task of entering data relating to more than 700 recreation sites across the State.

Once all data has been put in to the system, it will then be fed back to districts via diskettes or paper copy in the interim.

With the development of the department's intra net across the State, it is planned to make the withdrawal and updating of asset information a process that can take place across CALM's expanding computer network.

A majority of districts have completed the initial data collection, and it is recognised that those districts outstanding will be making every effort to complete the data collection in the near future.

Any enquiries about the system, or queries from districts experiencing problems with data collection should not hesitate to contact Matt Sapsworth of CALM's Park Policy and Planning Branch, who is coordinating the ongoing management of RECDATA.