

Marmot and Prospector – A Statistical Review

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Abstract

Public and academic libraries of the Marmot Library Network in western Colorado joined the Prospector regional union catalog hosted by the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries. Growth in patron-initiated resource sharing between Colorado Front Range/Wyoming and Western Slope libraries is analyzed in terms of circulation counts, lend/borrow ratios, load balancing issues, and collection development challenges.

Keywords: library resource sharing; union catalog; Marmot Library Network; Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries; INN-Reach; Prospector; Colorado; inter-library loan; patron-initiated ILL

Introduction

In 2011, eleven public and five academic libraries of the Marmot Library Network joined the Prospector regional union catalog hosted by the Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries. This project, substantially funded by the Institute of Museum & Library Services, supports patron-initiated resource sharing between Front Range and Western Slope libraries. This statistical review covers the first 14 months of the project.

The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant application through IMLS claimed that resource sharing among Marmot libraries in 2010 was a solid foundation on which to expand resource sharing across Colorado:

“[Marmot] implemented patron-initiated holds (PIH) in 2007 and significantly increased interlibrary lending on the Western Slope. PIH statistics reflect the success of interlibrary lending among Marmot libraries:

- 255,061 holds were filled by all Marmot libraries in 2009.
- 54% of 243,394 public library holds were filled by out-of-district materials.
- 78% of 3,871 academic library holds were filled by other-institution items.”

The grant application proposed 2 goals, 5 objectives, and 4 outcomes. Most were achieved in the first year of the project; two are the focus of this paper (underlined phrases serve as section titles below):

Objective 3: Double ILL traffic between the Western Slope and the Front Range and increase the resources available to rural library patrons.

Outcome 4 – Rural library users on the Western Slope as well as metropolitan users on the Front Range will have access to unique statewide resources.

“Double ILL traffic ...”

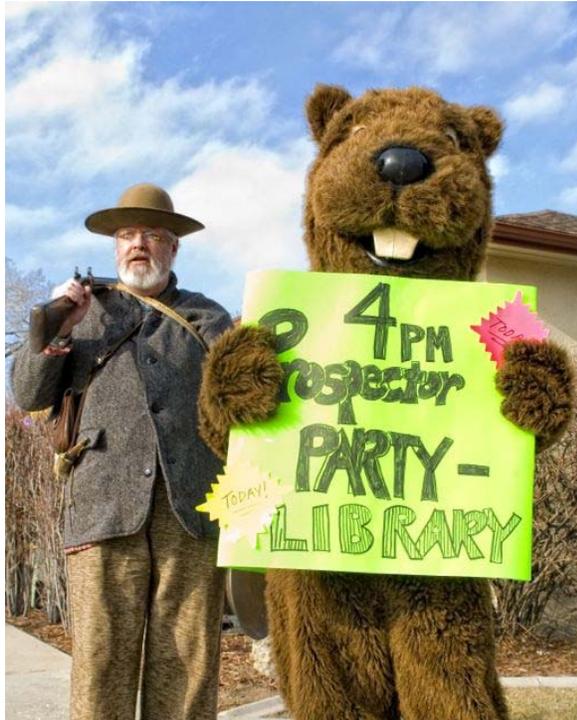
Most libraries served by Marmot have observed significant increases in courier traffic since implementing Prospector. Legends of having to make space for more courier bins, to increasing courier stops from 3 to 5 days per week, and anticipating rising courier costs based on volume (not to mention fuel surcharges) are only offset by stories of readers delighted by easy access to a huge regional collection.

The statistical foundation of this growth begins with data tracked in one Millennium system shared by 21 public, academic, and school libraries west of Denver.

Chart 1 shows recent increases in holds filled. Intra-Marmot Holds Filled (blue) increased 21%

from 2009 to 2010, and 21% again from 2010 to 2011. Prospector Holds Filled (red) account for half of the 41% increase in all holds filled from 2010 to 2011.

Can we conclude that joining 15 Marmot libraries to 25 other libraries in one union catalog resulted in over 60,000 new circulations on the Western Slope? Perhaps.



One unexpected feature of the INN-Reach software that powers Prospector is this: when INN-Reach selects one Marmot library to fill a request by a reader from another Marmot library, the hold is pushed into the Marmot system as an item-level hold. Some of the circulations graphed in red are in fact intra-Marmot holds processed by Prospector.

How many of these new circulations (red) may have been due to promotion of the new service – parties, posters, press releases, and even features in the Marmot online catalog leading users to Prospector? Available data do not answer this question.

“... the Western Slope and the Front Range ...”

Chart 2 shows 14 months of activity by 4 sets of libraries. Data points are stacked to highlight incremental activity as Marmot libraries joined Prospector from February 2, 2011 (Marmot Day).

The blue foundation represents 7 public libraries on the Front Range; the red layer 11 Marmot publics, the green layer 17 academics and specials; and the purple icing on this layer cake 5 Marmot academics. Marmot members joined Prospector in 4 cohorts from February to August 2011.

The net growth is small. Compare month 1 (Jan 2011) with 13 (Jan 2012) and 2 (Feb 2011) with 14 (Feb 2012).

“... rural library users ... as well as metropolitan users ...”

Soon after joining Prospector, libraries became concerned about inordinately high lend/borrow ratios.

A product manager at Innovative said this always happens when a library joins an active INN-Reach system. Before patrons are even aware of the new service, library staff are barraged by requests from libraries already actively participating. After patrons of the new member library start placing requests the load tends to level out.

The Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries, which hosts Prospector, took advantage of one INN-Reach setting to ameliorate this problem: Marmot libraries were placed at the bottom of a paging priority list, with the plan that requests would eventually increase to a normal level and Marmot libraries could be positioned in a normal position in paging priority.

The Alliance also implemented INN-Reach “regional paging”, so that Front Range libraries would get paged to fill Front Range requests, Western Slope libraries would get paged to fill Western Slope requests, and requested materials would cross the Continental Divide as little as possible. This feature probably does nothing to balance lend/borrow ratios, but it should mini-

mize the carbon footprint of this resource sharing activity.

Unbalanced lend/borrow ratios continue to be a concern. Chart 3 plots 14 months of Marmot academic libraries. In May 2011 Colorado Christian University (CCU) lent eleven books for every one they borrowed. In February 2012 the CCU ratio had settled down to 2.1. The trend looks good, but to this day all Marmot academics except Colorado Mesa University (CMU) lend more than they borrow.

Even if Marmot academics might be approaching a fair ratio, five publics are still providing generous service to readers across the region. Chart 4 shows these libraries apparently converging on a 3-to-1 ratio.

Other Marmot publics (Chart 5) are bouncing around a 1.0 ratio, with Mesa County Public Library District (MCPLD) and Basalt Regional Library (BRL) enjoying the biggest advantage in this resource sharing arena.

Charts 3, 4, and 5 sort libraries from top to bottom by average lend/borrow ratio during the 14-month period surveyed. CCU is the most generous academic, and Wilkinson Public Library (Telluride) is the most generous public.

To put charts 3-5 in perspective, Chart 6 graphs “stable” Front Range public libraries that have participated in Prospector for years; and Chart 7 graphs the most generous Front Range academic libraries.

These groups of Front Range libraries that have shared resources via Prospector for a decade are apparently still not in a “stable” pattern. One has to wonder what might cause such wide variations in lend/borrow ratios from month to month, but this paper does not address that question.

“... unique statewide resources ...”

The title of this section comes from the LSTA grant application, Outcome 4: “Rural library users on the Western Slope as well as metropolitan users on the Front Range will have access to unique statewide resources.” The growth in Pro-

spector activity reported here seems to indicate that readers across the state are benefiting. A new challenge is to better balance collections, and minimize Prospector’s carbon footprint.

Marmot libraries have not yet seen Prospector-related courier cost increases. (Courier costs are established each year based on previous-year volume.) Come 2013 libraries might have second thoughts about the value of this popular service.

One recent effort to balance the load is to encourage net lenders to post lists of titles most frequently requested, and to urge collection development librarians to acquire more of what their customers are getting from other libraries. But this campaign had barely begun by the time this paper was written.

At the Prospector Directors meeting in Denver (Nov 17, 2011) I called attention to inordinate lend/borrow ratios. At least one director said this had been discussed many times. Except for a now-defunct subsidization of Denver Public Library by the Colorado State Library for providing statewide ILL service, no cost model for compensating net lenders has ever been implemented. Still it seems good to acknowledge net lenders, and state a rationale that makes sense to stakeholders in those institutions.

Figure 8 lists Prospector libraries sorted by lend/borrow ratio in Q3 of 2011. Lend/borrow ratios under .75 are in green; lend/borrow ratios over 1.5 are in red; and lend/borrow ratios over 3.0 are in bold red. Six Marmot libraries (“M” in column 1) hit uncomfortable peaks in Q2 (compare charts 3 & 4, above). Otherwise, Marmot libraries are scattered across the spectrum.

It’s easy to assume that relatively rich public libraries in resort towns, Telluride, Vail, Aspen, and Steamboat Springs, attract an excessive number of loan requests. CCU has a specialized collection that tends to attract requests for books on Christianity. But what is it about the Western State College collection that results in a 2.0 lend/borrow ratio, like that of the University of Northern Colorado? And what does Adams State College have that puts their lend borrow ratio of 1.5 close to that of the University of Colorado at Boulder?

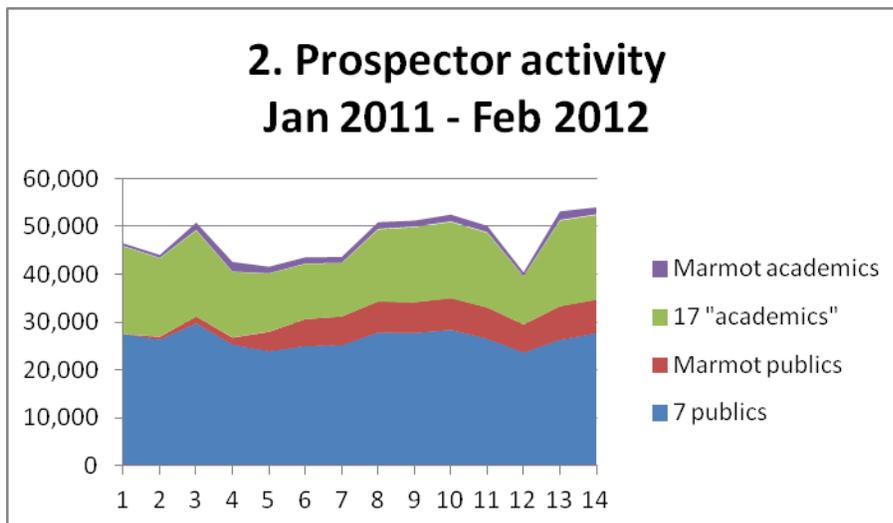
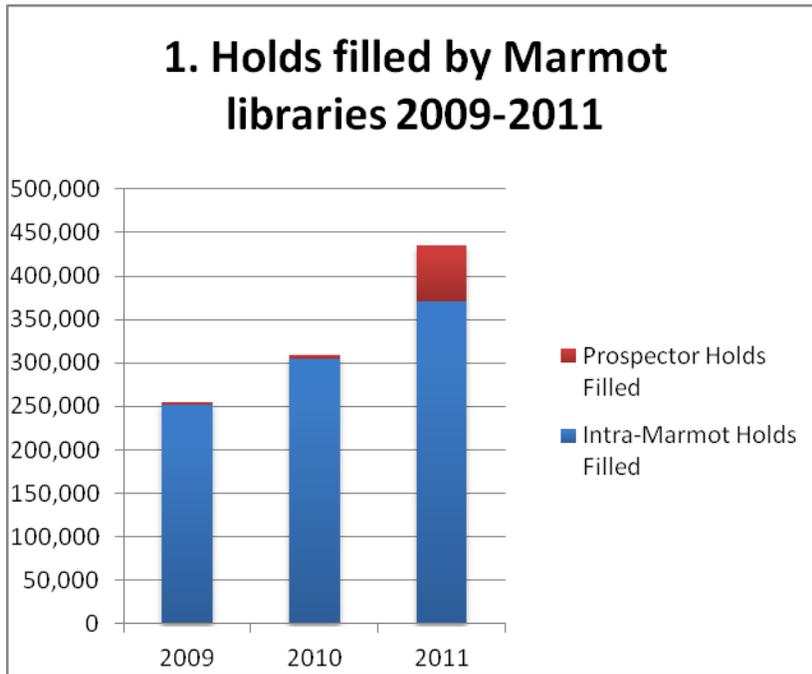
Conclusion

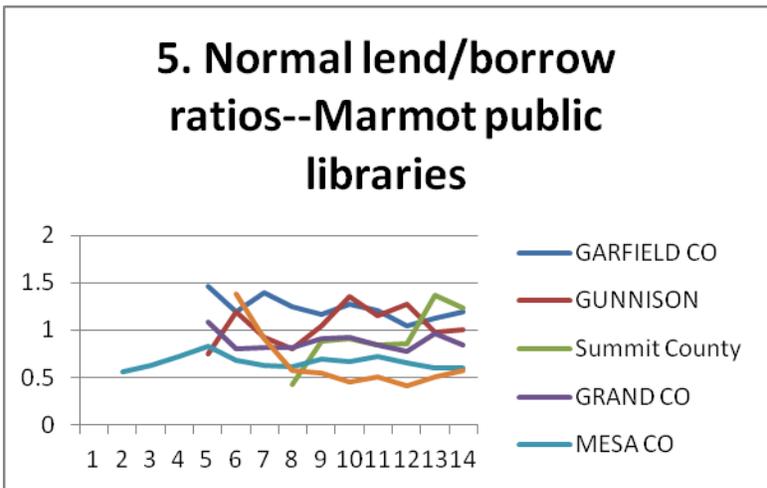
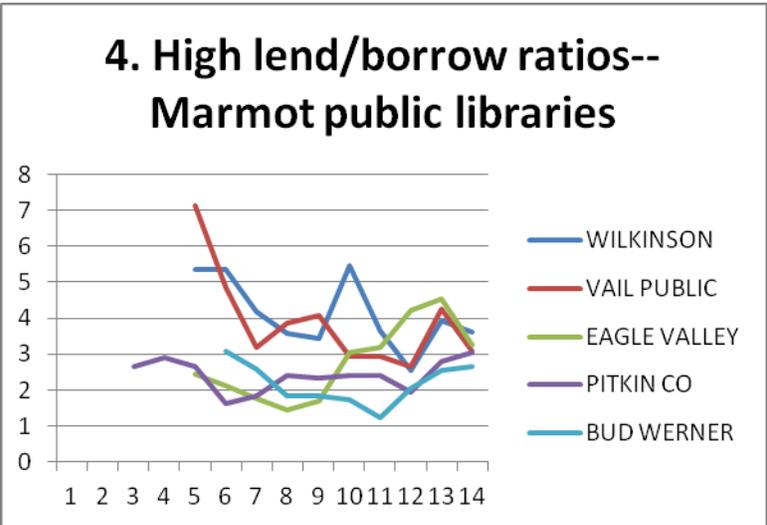
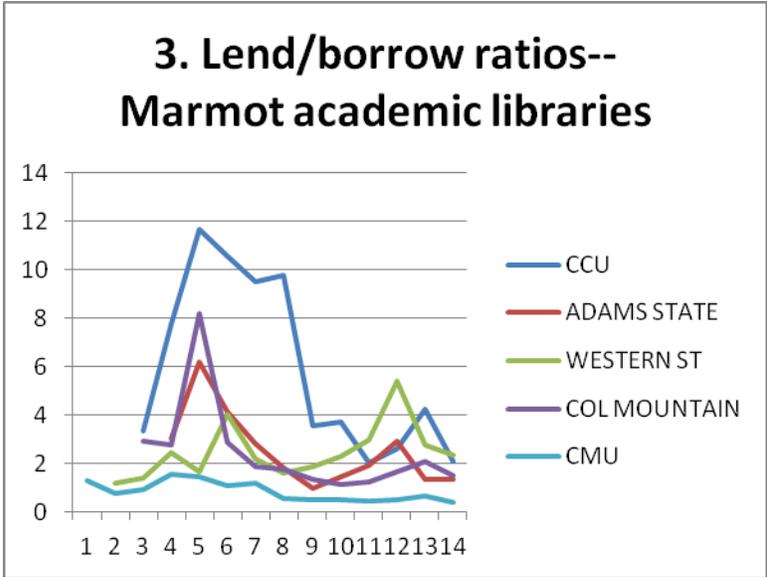
Regarding grant Objective 3, ILL traffic between the Front Range and the Western Slope increased, but available data do not show whether the increase is literally double what it was before. Marmot libraries saw an increase of 41% in holds filled, double the 21% increase that was handled among Marmot libraries.

easily getting materials from all over the state. Whether readers are actually benefiting from access to a greater shared collection is outside the scope of this paper.

Concerns about lend/borrow ratios continue to prompt efforts to balance the load more fairly, but we have only begun to work on techniques such as coordinating collection development.

Regarding grant Outcome 4, rural library users as well as metropolitan library users are more





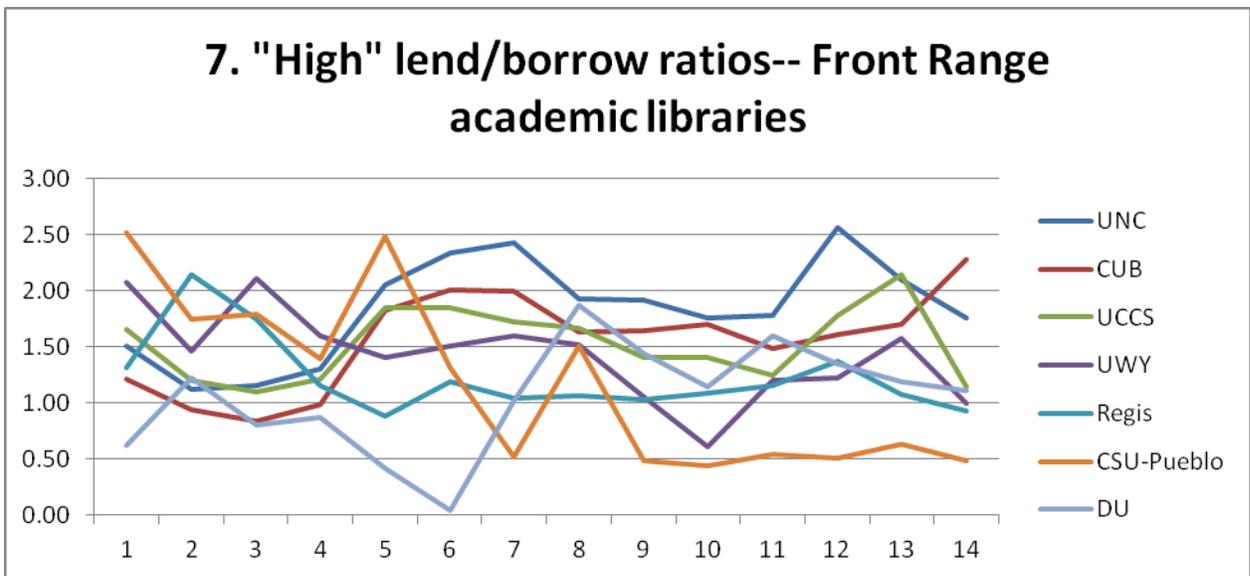
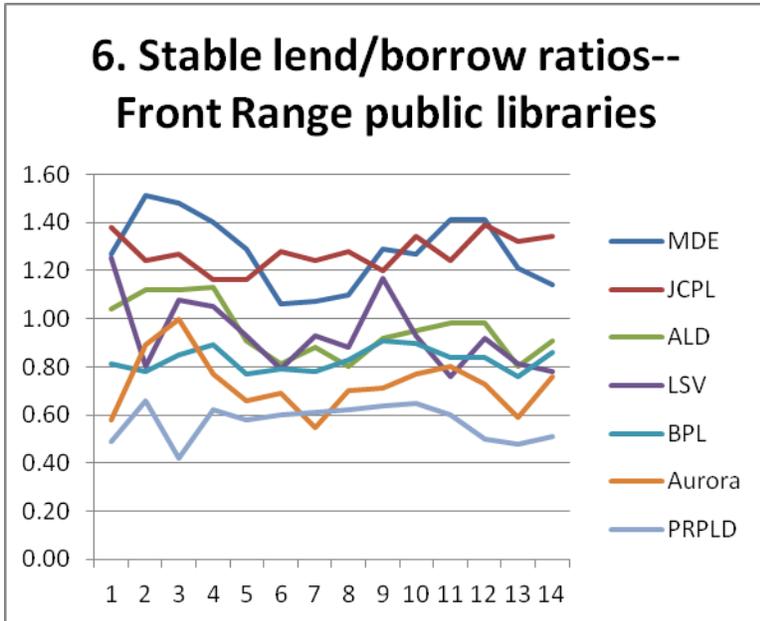


Figure 8.

	L/B Ratio 2011	Q1	Q2	Q3
M	CCU	3.4	9.7	5.5
M	WILKINSON		5.4	4.0
M	VAIL PUBLIC		5.5	3.5
M	PITKIN CO	2.7	2.3	2.2
M	WESTERN ST	1.3	2.4	2.0
	UNC	1.3	1.8	2.0
M	BUD WERNER		3.1	1.9
M	EAGLE VALLEY		2.3	1.9
	CUB	1.0	1.5	1.7
	CU-L	1.4	1.4	1.6
	UCCS	1.3	1.6	1.5
M	ADAMS STATE		4.0	1.5
M	COL MOUNTAIN	2.9	3.6	1.5
	DU	0.9	0.5	1.3
M	GARFIELD CO		1.3	1.3
	JCPL	1.3	1.2	1.3
	MDE	1.4	1.2	1.2
	DU-L	1.3	1.2	1.1
	UWY	1.9	1.5	1.1
	Regis	1.7	1.1	1.1
M	GUNNISON		1.0	1.0
	LSV	1.1	0.9	1.0
	CSU	1.0	1.2	0.9
	ALD	1.1	0.9	0.9
M	GRAND CO		0.9	0.9
	BPL	0.8	0.8	0.9
	CSM	1.1	1.0	0.8
	AUR	0.8	0.9	0.8
M	Summit County			0.8
	Aurora	0.8	0.7	0.7
M	MESA CO	0.6	0.7	0.7
	PRPLD	0.5	0.6	0.6
	CC	1.3	0.9	0.6
	CSU-Pueblo	1.9	1.6	0.6
M	BASALT		1.4	0.6
M	CMU	1.0	1.4	0.6
	UCHSC	0.6	0.7	0.5
	Colorado Publicati	0.5	0.4	0.4
	FTL	0.4	0.6	0.3
	DPL	0.0	0.0	0.0