XORP SNMP Agent

Version 1.6

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1 Introduction

The SNMP standards [2] define the protocol used to communicate between SNMP managers and agents, as well as the structure of the management information being accessed (MIB). This document describes how XORP runtime data is made accessible to the SNMP agent, how it is decomposed in separate MIB modules, and how those modules are loaded/unloaded at runtime. Also, a MIB development framework is presented, which provides unified process to those writing new MIB modules for XORP.

2 The SNMP agent

XORP uses the extensible SNMP agent included in the Net-SNMP package [1]. Net-SNMP provides tools and libraries supporting the Simple Network Management Protocol. The package is comprised of an extensible agent (`snmpd`), an SNMP library and a set of command line tools to communicate with SNMP agents and managers.

Management information is viewed as a collection of managed objects, residing in a virtual information store, termed the Management Information Base (MIB). All managed objects in the MIB are arranged in a hierarchical or tree structure. Collections of related objects are defined in MIB modules. These modules are written in the SNMP data definition language, a subset of Abstract Syntax Notation One (ASN.1). New MIB modules that extend the Internet-standard MIB are continuously being defined by various IETF working groups.

In the context of this document, we'll extend the term MIB module to include the part of the code that instantiates the objects declared in the MIB definition file. Thus a MIB module consists of:

MIB module definition file This file is written in ASN.1 language, and is typically published as an RFC.

MIB module source code One or more source files that implement the data access routines that allow the SNMP agent to read or modify XORP's configuration settings.

The oldest version of Net-SNMP that was tested with XORP is 5.0.6. If an older version is detected by our `configure` script, XORP MIB modules will not be built.

2.1 Dynamically loadable MIB modules

One of the guiding principles in XORP design is extensibility. Protocols are implemented as independent Unix processes that may come and go. Each protocol will have one or more associated MIB modules, so those modules should be made available to the SNMP agent without requiring recompilation. Net-SNMP supports this strategy by allowing MIBs to be implemented as shared objects. If your system supports shared libraries, Net-SNMP will be compiled with support for dynamically loadable MIB modules by default. You can test if your Net-SNMP installation supports that option by looking for `dlmod` in the list printed by the command:

```
$ net-snmp-config --snmpd-module-list
```

There are three methods for loading/unloading MIB modules:

1. Using the dlmod directive in snmpd.conf
2. Sending SNMP set requests to the agent
3. Using XORP's IPC methods (XRLs)

The first option can only be used to load modules at startup. This is what the man page for snmpd.conf tells you...

```
DYNAMICALLY LOADABLE MODULES
If the agent is built with support for the UCD-DLMOD-MIB it is  capable
of  loading  agent MIB modules dynamically at startup through the dlmod
directive and during runtime through use  of  the  UCD-DLMOD-MIB.   The
following directive loads the shared object module file PATH which uses
the module name prefix NAME.

dlmod NAME PATH
```

To load MIBs using SNMP requests, a new row must be added to UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodTable. This involves finding an unused index to the table, setting the values of dlmodName and dlmodPath for that row, and finally setting the column dlmodStatus to 'load'. These steps are captured in the following lines:

```
$ snmpwalk localhost UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodTable
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodName.1 = STRING: xorp_if_mib_module
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodPath.1 = STRING: /scratch/xorp/mibs/xorp_if_mib_module.so
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodError.1 = STRING:
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodStatus.1 = INTEGER: loaded(1)

$ snmpset localhost UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodStatus.2 i create
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodStatus.2 = INTEGER: create(6)

$ snmpset localhost UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodName.2 s "bgp4_mib_1657"  \
>    UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodPath.2 s "/scratch/xorp/mibs/bgp4_mib_1657.so"
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodName.2 = STRING: bgp4_mib_1657
```

```
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodPath.2 = STRING: /scratch/xorp/mibs/bgp4_mib_1657.so

$ snmpset localhost UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodStatus.2 i load
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodStatus.2 = INTEGER: load(4)

$ snmpwalk localhost UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodTable
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodName.1 = STRING: xorp_if_mib_module
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodName.2 = STRING: bgp4_mib_1657
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodPath.1 = STRING: /scratch/xorp/mibs/xorp_if_mib_module.so
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodPath.2 = STRING: /scratch/xorp/mibs/bgp4_mib_1657.so
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodError.1 = STRING:
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodError.2 = STRING:
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodStatus.1 = INTEGER: loaded(1)
UCD-DLMOD-MIB::dlmodStatus.2 = INTEGER: loaded(1)
```

So far we've seen how to load MIBs when the agent is started, and at runtime using SNMP requests. But XORP processes communicate to each other via XRLs, and it would be much more convenient for a process to be able to use the same mechanism to communicate with the SNMP agent. For this reason each MIB module should implement an Xrl target. The module `xorp_if_mib_module` implements an XRL interface that allows loading and unloading MIBs. These are the XRLs to use for that:

```
finder://xorp_if_mib/xorp_if_mib/0.1/load_mib?mod_name:txt&abs_path:txt
finder://xorp_if_mib/xorp_if_mib/0.1/unload_mib?mib_index:u32
```

Dynamically loadable MIB modules written for the main SNMP agent can also be loaded by an SNMP sub-agent that communicates with the master agent via the AgentX protocol ([3]). This should be useful in the event that you configure XORP to run distributed across multiple hosts but with one master SNMP agent.

3 Connecting Net-SNMP with XORP

We have written a special MIB module (`xorp_if_mib_module`) that coordinates the communication between `snmpd` and XORP processes. This module provides several classes that allow XORP MIB modules to be architected as if they were each executed as independent processes (although they all run in `snmpd`'s process space). This should make MIB module design much easier to someone already familiar with the architecture of XORP processes.

The class that does all the synchronization between XORP and Net-SNMP is SnmpEventLoop, a subclass of EventLoop. This singleton class is responsible for registering XORP event's with `snmpd`, so that the agent can respond to XORP activity. Once this class is instantiated by `xorp_if_mib_module`, it can be used by all the other MIB modules as if it was their own EventLoop. Without it, MIB modules could not respond to XORP events, this is why this module must be loaded before any other, and should be the last XORP MIB module to be unloaded [1]. Typically you would use the `snmpd.conf` file to load it at start up time.

[1] There is a second reason for this requirement. Some runtime loaders will unload a dynamically linked library when the module that first loaded it disappears. In that case, unloading `xorp_if_mib_module` will also unload `libnetsnmpxorp.so` which is needed by *all* XORP modules. As you can imagine, that causes problems...

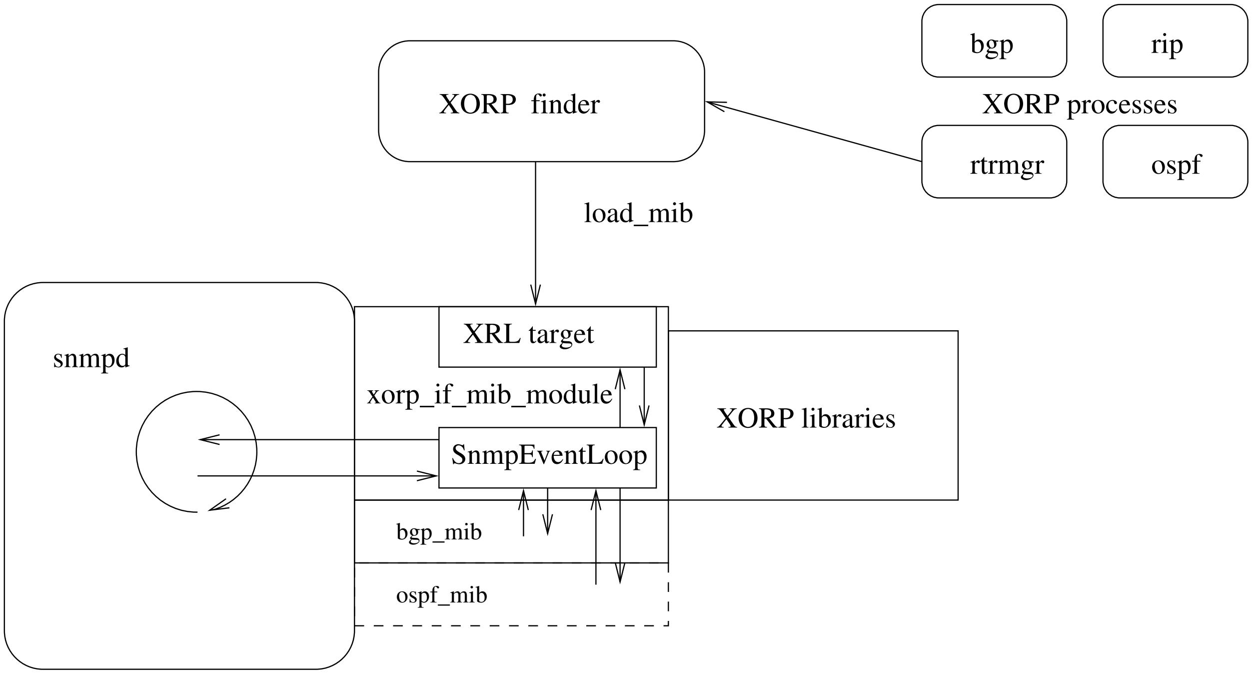

Figure 1: Functionality of xorp_if_mib_module

The XORP interface MIB module also implements the XRL target ([4]) that allows the loading and unloading of other MIB modules.

Figure 1 illustrates the functionality implemented by `xorp_if_mib_module`.

3.1 Modifying XORP's configuration from within a MIB module

MIB modules use XORP's IPC library [4] to communicate to XORP processes. Each MIB module has the responsibility to pull the relevant management information from the appropriate process (*e.g.,* BGP MIB data from BGP process). For that effect, the MIB module must use the XRL Interface supported by the XRL targets it needs to communicate to (see [5] for details on how to subclass XRL Interface Client classes). MIB modules, though, MUST not modify any configuration settings by accessing the process directly. The current state of configuration is maintained by the router manager process, so bypassing it would cause the real and the recorded configurations to be out of sync. Instead, configuration changes should be requested to the router manager via configuration commands, that is, XRLs such as the ones appearing in the template files (see xorp/etc/templates/*.tp).

Figure 2 illustrates how the MIB modules should read and change XORP configuration.

4 A reference implementation of a MIB module

So far we've talked Net-SNMP configuration. In this section we'll cover how to write a MIB module. Currently (July 2008) we provide a full implementation of RFC 1657, the MIB for BGP4. You will find the MIB module files in xorp/mibs/bgp4_mib_1657*. What follows is a description the tools and process

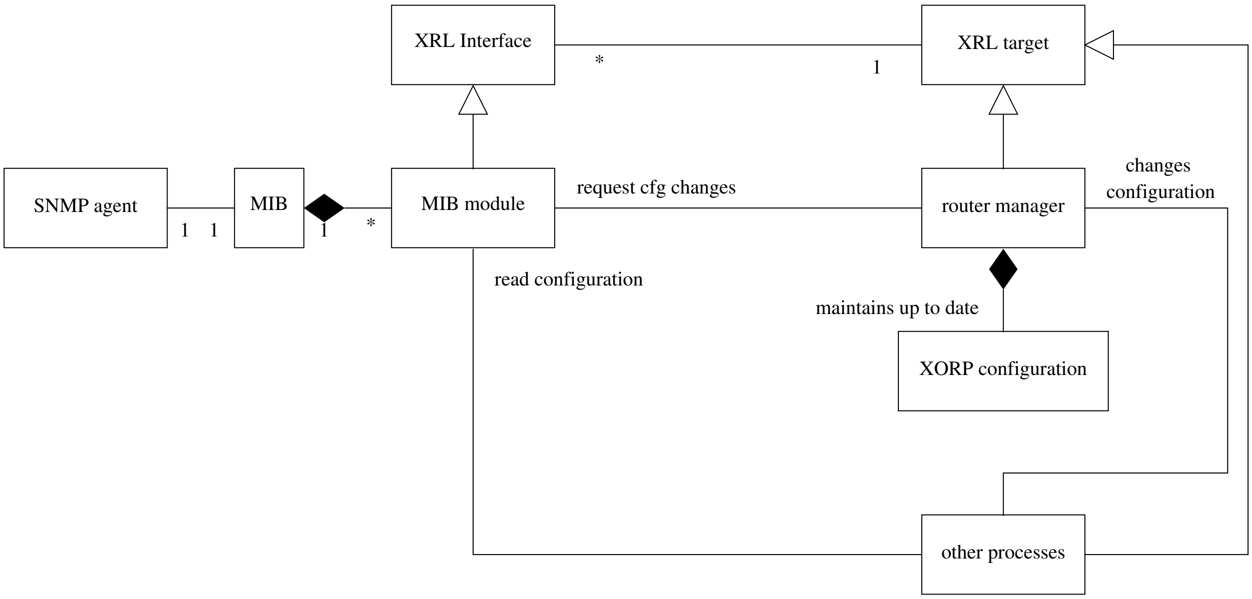

Figure 2: MIB module interactions with the router manager

followed to implement this module. You should refer to the kdoc documentation as well as the source itself for more details.

4.1 The textual MIB definition file

The first step to write a MIB module should be writing or getting the ASN.1 MIB definition file. If you are implementing an existing protocol, chances are that there is already a published RFC with the MIB definition for it. In this section we'll use BGP4-MIB to illustrate the process of writing a MIB module, which is published in RFC 1657 and you will find in xorp/mibs/textual/BGP4-MIB.txt.

You will also have to make your textual MIB file accessible to the Net-SNMP tools. See the `mibs` and `mibdirs` directives in the man page snmp.conf(5). One way to do this is to copy our MIB onto the default directory, and then set the MIBS environment variable:

```
$ cp BGP4-MIB.txt /usr/local/share/snmp/mibs
$ export MIBS=+BGP4-MIB
```

4.2 Net-SNMP handlers

Net-SNMP 5.x.x uses handlers to process SNMP requests. When a MIB module is loaded, it registers one or more handlers (callbacks) on a given OID in the OID tree. When a request arrives for that OID subtree, the registered handlers are called in sequence until the request is fully processed. There are multiple pre-written handlers (helpers, in Net-SNMP nomenclature) that deal with certain parts of the processing.

4.3 Using mib2c

Net-SNMP provides what is usually termed as "MIB compiler" (`mib2c`), a tool that will read MIB ASN.1 definition files and generate C code templates to ease the development of handlers. `mib2c` takes a configuration file as a parameter that will determine which helper handlers to use.

The MIB compiler is not installed by default with Net-SNMP. If you have Net-SNMP installed in your system and you invoke `mib2c` you'll probably get this message:

```
ERROR: You don't have the SNMP perl module installed.  Please obtain
this by getting the latest source release of the net-snmp toolkit from
http://www.net-snmp.org/download/ .  Once you download the source and
unpack it, the perl module is contained in the perl/SNMP directory.
See the INSTALL file there for instructions.
```

This is what it took to install it in a FreeBSD system:

```
$ pwd
/usr/ports/net/net-snmp/work/net-snmp-5.0.8/perl
$ perl Makefile.PL ; gmake ; gmake install
Writing Makefile for NetSNMP::default_store
Writing Makefile for NetSNMP::ASN
Writing Makefile for NetSNMP::OID
...
```

Now you can invoke `mib2c`. The following command says "create a template C file for bgpVersion, which is a scalar, and name it bgp4_mib_1657_bgpversion".

```
$ mib2c -i -c mib2c.scalar.conf -f bgp4_mib_1657_bgpversion bgpversion
writing to bgp4_mib_1657_bgpversion.h
writing to bgp4_mib_1657_bgpversion.c
```

In a similar way, if we want to generate C templates for a SNMP table we would use:

```
$ mib2c -i -c mib2c.iterate.conf -f bgp4_mib_1657_bgppeertable bgpPeerTable
writing to bgp4_mib_1657_bgppeertable.h
writing to bgp4_mib_1657_bgppeertable.c
```

Note that although there are other conf files, only the two presented in this section can be used with XORP's asynchronous architecture. You can find details on those files by omitting the -c option when invoking `mib2c`.

4.4 Using delegated requests

The asynchronous nature of XORP communications prevents handlers from processing SNMP requests synchronously. Handlers initiate XRL requests for other XORP processes, and return control to the SNMP agent before the reply is received. Net-SNMP allows that by providing the `delegated` flag in the SNMP request structure. The agent will not send a reply to a request for as long as that flag is set. In XORP MIBs, you would normally set the delegated flag when your handler is called, and clear it whenever the

XRL callback who receives the data from a XORP process is executed. There is an additional example of a delegated request in

`http://www.net-snmp.org/tutorial-5/agent/delayed__instance_8c-example.html`[2]

4.5 Caching tables inside the agent

SNMP is layered on a connectionless protocol (UDP). This means that no state can be maintained between two different requests. A consequence of this is that a table must be searched for *each* element on the table, regardless on whether the table is sorted or not. Now, how efficient is this search?

The code generated with `mib2c.iterate.conf` is designed to deal with unsorted tables, so a GET-NEXT request for a single element in the table produces num_rows calls to the user provided handlers, or $O(num\_cols * num\_rows^2)$ to read the entire table. Althought this is acceptable for most of the small tables typically found in MIB modules, it is prohibitive for large tables, such as `BGP4-MIB::bgp4PathAttrTable` ($\approx 100,000$ rows).

To address this problem, we have cached `BGP4-MIB::bgp4PathAttrTable` inside the SNMP agent process space in a sorted data structure. This eliminates the need to use XRLs to process an SNMP request, and reduces the complexity to read the entire table to $O(num\_cols * num\_rows * log(num\_rows))$. The configuration file used to generate the code for cached tables is `mib2c.array-user.conf`.

There are plans to include caching built in inside Net-SNMP. When that happens, this strategy may not longer be necessary.

5 Launching Net-SNMP via the router manager

You can have the rtrmgr process start the SNMP agent. In order to do that, you should modify your agent snmpd.conf (by default in /usr/local/share/snmp) to load xorp_if_module at start up. After that, you can modify your config.boot file to load MIB modules when the agent is started, or to do it whenever a particular protocol comes up.

See `${XORP}/etc/templates/snmp.tp` for definition of the SNMP configuration tree.

A Modification History

- June 9, 2003: Initial version 0.3 completed.
- August 28, 2003: Updated to match XORP release 0.4: Added information about caching tables inside the agent. Miscellaneous cleanup.
- November 6, 2003: Updated to match XORP release 0.5: No significant changes.
- July 8, 2004: Updated to match XORP release 1.0: No changes.
- April 13, 2005: Updated to match XORP release 1.1: No changes.
- March 8, 2006: Updated to match XORP release 1.2: No changes.
- August 2, 2006: Updated to match XORP release 1.3: Miscellaneous cleanup.

[2] This example uses the function `netsnmp_handler_check_cache()` which you will see that it's not used in our code. The reason is that it is incompatible with the code generated by mib2c.iterate.conf

- March 20, 2007: Updated to match XORP release 1.4: No changes.
- July 22, 2008: Updated to match XORP release 1.5: No changes.

References

[1] The Net-SNMP Project. http://www.net-snmp.org.

[2] D. Harrington, R. Presuhn, and B. Wijnen. STD 62: An Architecture for Describing Simple Network Management Protocol (SNMP) Management Frameworks, December 2002. This standard comprises RFC3411, RFC3412, RFC3413, RFC3414 RFC3415, RFC3416, RFC3417, RFC3418.

[3] M. Ellison M. Daniele, B. Wijnen and D. Francisco. Agent Extensibility (AgentX) Protocol. *Request for Comments 2741*, January 2000.

[4] XORP Inter-Process Communication Library. XORP technical document. http://www.xorp.org/.

[5] XRL Interfaces: Specification and Tools. XORP technical document. http://www.xorp.org/.