

A Geospatial Vision for Wisconsin

Geospatial Strategy Working Group

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The Importance of Statewide Geospatial Data



A section of County Highway A washed away in the floods of June, 2008. U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Paul Gorman/Released (www.defenseimagery.mil 080609-F-6967G-137) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

Access to statewide geospatial data is essential for Wisconsin to move forward with its efforts to streamline governance and grow the state's economy.

Geospatial data is location-based information that can be put on a map. Examples include tax parcels, streets, addresses, aerial photography, elevation, floodplains, zoning, and land use. This information is critical to the operations of government, private businesses, non-profits, and the citizens of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin has a rich history of geospatial data stewardship at the county level. Through the

Wisconsin Land Information Program (WLIP) administered by the Department of Administration, counties currently collect fees and receive grants that together total over \$9 million annually for geospatial activities.

Wisconsin is poised to secure an increased return on investment through integrated statewide geospatial data. Act 20, Wisconsin's 2013-15 budget bill, will increase the county grant fund of the WLIP from \$2 million to \$7 million annually. The Act also directed the state to develop, by 2017, a public-facing statewide tax parcel dataset from county sources.

Under Act 20, the state is beginning to develop the resources necessary to compile and distribute statewide geospatial data. These efforts need to continue, not just with parcels, but with other foundational datasets through continued statewide prioritization and a vehicle for public access to these datasets.

Leadership through the state's Geographic Information Officer and State Cartographer provide the first tier of support for such strategic efforts. But as the pace of progress quickens, there is a need for a mechanism to prioritize the state's geospatial initiatives and investments.

The Need for a Geospatial Council

To ensure that WLIP investments are leveraged strategically and for the benefit of all, a council must be established to advise and, in specified circumstances, direct the state's Geographic Information Officer (GIO).

This council's operations must be open and transparent. It must have equitable representation of stakeholder voices representing data-producing organizations as

well as the user communities that will benefit most as the state moves forward with its geospatial initiatives.

Membership must be extended to: county land information officers, registers of deeds, real property listers, land surveyors, state agency representatives, statewide geospatial associations, realtors and land title associations, municipal and town associations, regional

planning commissions, federal agencies, tribal members, and members from the private sector, non-profits, and academia. The State Cartographer must have a position on the council.

The council will advise the GIO in the following areas:

1. strategic priorities related to funding and geospatial data, initiatives, and projects;
2. accountability of WLIP functions, including return on investment, process improvements, and reporting;
3. updating state statutes and administrative rules affecting geospatial data production, stewardship, maintenance, and distribution; and
4. community issues, stakeholder involvement, education, outreach, and communication.

"A statewide geospatial information system.... would permit significant leveraging of research and development dollars by allowing data generated for a specific project to be used by all."

Dr. James Kroll, Deer Trustee Report (2012)

Moving Forward Through Engaged Prioritization

Geospatial data is developed with the tax dollars of Wisconsin's citizens. For this reason alone we need to ensure that benefits are shared by everyone, including the public and professional users in government, the private sector, academia, and non-profits.

Timely access to statewide geospatial data is essential for Wisconsin to move forward. This data enables data-driven decision-making in areas as diverse as taxation, healthcare delivery, emergency management, hunting, transportation planning, and economic development.

Without access to such data, important initiatives will never get off the ground. Negative effects include lost economic growth, lost revenue, and less effective decision-making. As a state we cannot allow opportunities to pass by due to lack of investment in critical geospatial data.