

AGREEMENT NUMBER:

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REPORT TYPE:

Interim Project Summary Report

COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS:

State of North Dakota - Information Technology Department
State of Minnesota - Department of Administration/Land Management Information Center
State of South Dakota
Minnesota Governor's Council on Geographic Information
Minnesota Geographical Information Systems/Land Information Systems Consortium (MN GIS/LIS)
International Water Institute
Red River Basin Decision Information Network
Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation District, MN
Richland County Water Resource District, ND
North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension Service
North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS)
Richland County, ND
Wilkin County, MN
City of Wahpeton, ND
City of Breckenridge, MN

PROJECT NARRATIVE:

The state of regional coordination throughout the Southern Red River Basin continues to grow. As more people become aware of the efforts of the CGISTC to cooperate in coordinated GIS activities throughout the region, more and more interest abounds. This interest particularly increased when exposing the possibilities of cost sharing for resource acquisition and data distribution techniques through such elements as custom developed internet mapping application and the utilization of WFS and WMS.

Coordination remains a tricky task in that member GIS operations vary in degree region-wide, from organizations just establishing a GIS and those organizations seeking to fine tune the systems already in place. When making coordination decisions, solutions for bridging the disparity between member organizations must prevail, however not to the detriment of any.

In cases like this resources and information on "how to" from organizations with well instituted GIS empower other organizations not involved with GIS at that level, providing a framework or path-way for them to follow; this may lead to a faster track to the same destination while avoiding pinpointed pitfalls previously encountered by other organizations already.

Another element that helps overcome the disparity between member organizations is the development of a modular element (application or system) ready made for future use by any organization when they are able to do so. Such an example is the development of an Internet mapping application for data discovery and

distribution to be shared and used by all members but only as members can take advantage of it. The application works regardless of the number of members using it and is developed with each members unique needs in mind so that when the time comes they will be able to seamlessly plug into the application.

With regard to the regional scope and the types and applications of data covered by this project, the prevailing entities involved tend to be counties and municipalities throughout the Southern Region of the Red River Basin. A regional scope with a focus on local units of government relies heavily on the parcel data layer for much of its business processes. Every department in some way, shape, or form eventually accesses information contained in the parcel layer for the effective discharge of required duties or practices. Since this is the case, the focus remains on a regionally coordinated effort to establish best practices for parcel mapping and the subsequent distribution of parcel data to internal users and the general public region-wide and beyond.

At this time the most appropriate best practice could well be the inclusion of an outside expert on GIS. Bringing an outside expert with an objective perspective on the state of GIS for both the members of the group and the group as a whole, disarms the member organizations to the point of talking objectively with each other, enabling them to form a strategy and solution for the future state of GIS throughout the region. Within this, new best practices emerge and are adopted through newly forming committees such as a standards committee, etc. Where members would be reluctant in the past—not fully comfortable with what this newly forming group was all about—they now engage in activities beneficial to the stability of the group such as serving on committees and participating in planning.

Additionally, with regard to best practices and the use of outside expert resources, individual and group situation assessments, conceptual designs, and implementation plans have been identified and adopted as a best practice by the CGISTC. This practice needs to continue as we seek to fold in new members who may exhibit low level or high level GIS implementations within their organizations. This best practice will first, bring benefit to those new members in the form of an assessment, design and implementation resource, second, give our group the tools necessary to make GIS resources available to others throughout the region and third, enhance the effective and efficient implementation of a regionally coordinated GIS.

With regard to governance, the strategic formation of various committees for spreading the decision-making burden also constitutes a best practices approach to governing. Currently the CGISTC meets monthly to discuss issues pertinent to the group. The meetings remain fairly informal and no organizational charter or set of by-laws exists. However, the group has accepted to work under a set of guidelines spelled out in an MOU signed by member organizations. The group is

governed by the guidelines of the MOU and by open communication with members to seek group consensus on any issue set before the group.

NEXT STEPS:

The goal of this project was to further establish the already cooperative activities of the CGISTC and it remains our greatest intention to see the efforts of this project continue from year to year. Additionally, through the group and individual organization situation assessments, conceptual designs, and implementation plans, this group intends to follow through with the use of such information as a road-map to continue future activity of this project.

Currently the situation assessments for the CGISTC as a group and the member organizations have been completed, leaving the conceptual design and implementation plan elements yet to be completed. Once those remaining two elements are finished, the CGISTC and the individual members can set to the task of fulfilling various attainable implementation items. The next phase then, includes implementing action plans listed in the implementation plan and continually reassessing the process so as to stay on track with the stated implementation process and within the bounds of the conceptual design. Beyond that we will conduct re-assessments and enhance the conceptual design and add to the implementation plan only as necessary.

With regard to any requirement the CGISTC has, there are likely several. Gaining access to technical expertise will remain a requirement of our group either in the form of trainers for internal staff training or in the form of outside consultants to provide specialized expertise in the areas of application development and analysis.

Further requirements in the area of software, hardware, and infrastructure remain probable. The use of a Wide Area Network (WAN) or Virtual Private Network (VPN) connected to a shared server for Internet mapping applications and to serve as a floating license library for member users use of various software products is an eventual need.

Areas that need work pertain mostly to outreach. A resource guide to outreach would be most welcome. For example, what kinds of outreach have been done in the past, how effective were they, what kinds of cost are involved with the various types of outreach, etc. A tool such as this would prove very helpful in developing an outreach campaign.

FEEDBACK ON COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS PROGRAM:

I think, from what I have seen the program strengths are that it offers very similar categories of involvement from year to year but with a different focus. By that I mean, that one year I could seek to develop in coordination efforts at the local level, while the next year (not necessarily as an applicant), I might participate in the enhancement of state level initiatives through their application. Also, if one

year I am unable to apply for funding in coordination, I may be able to apply for something that has been identified as an implementation action plan for our group, furthering the overall aims of the group in that way. As for weaknesses, the time-line for application completion seems strenuous. The 2006 CAP announcement came just prior to the holiday season. This makes it difficult to coordinate the kinds of meetings necessary to initiate a large scale cooperative project; many schedules are riddled with vacation this time of year and contact with people can be difficult. However, in general, the month and a half application time seems sufficient if not coincident with a period of major holidays.

The program makes a difference in that it helps make GIS happen for many. Even if that help comes indirectly as a result of a developed application made available for local use, a system or approach to coordination that can be adopted and applied in several organizational instances nation-wide, or by providing centralized data resources such as those delivered to and through the National Map or Geospatial One Stop.

The assistance was more than adequate for our needs. We could have done more with more but then so could everyone else. In our case we were able to bring in an outside expert to consult us through the assessment, design, and implementation process. Members from the CGISTC needed to add monies to bring this about but that in turn also solidified their commitment to the project.

The only thing I would consider doing differently would be the timing of the CAP announcement to not coincide with the December holiday season.

This is the first time our group has participated in the CAP. I have nothing to reference to with regard to missing elements or program concerns other than those already identified above.

This group will do this again and it's difficult to say exactly what would be done differently. When we enter this process again, we will make sure the calendar is clear of any other projects that may need more immediate attention.

Respectfully Submitted,

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