The Importance of Metadata for Archiving and Promoting Spatial Data Discovery

What is Metadata?
Metadata is data about data. Metadata describe the content, quality, and condition of a data set or product. The importance of metadata lies in its ability to maintain, organize, and provide information about spatial data.

Why Create Metadata?
Just as the World Wide Web is viewed as the information superhighway, metadata are increasingly becoming the vehicle for finding spatial data over the internet. Scientific data is often published in the form of journal articles but is not always archived in a format that makes it available for long term use. Standardized metadata records preserve institutional knowledge and can extend the life of your data. Metadata records are required to submit data sets to a clearinghouse archive. Many funding agencies now require the development of metadata.

What is a Clearinghouse?
A clearinghouse is a secure archive that provides access to data over the internet using catalog and communication standards developed by the International Standards Organization (ISO) and the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC). You can think of a clearinghouse as a digital library. Over 40 international clearinghouse nodes are established to support archiving and data access activities. The Z39.50 protocol has been adopted by these nodes to perform discovery, browse and query operations against distributed and potentially heterogeneous catalogs of metadata. This permits the discovery of services or information content based on field and full-text search.

How Can You Participate?
• Make creating metadata part of the process of developing your data.
• Use the ISO/FGDC metadata standard.
• Put metadata on a web page for future “harvesting” to a clearinghouse node.
• Send metadata to an existing node.
• Set up your own node.

Discover and Access Data through Clearinghouse Gateways
Gateways and portals allow users to visualize a virtual global network of compatible geographic information services and work towards their integration over the Web.

Tools
• Z39.50 protocol
• XML (Extensible Markup Language)
• Web Mapping Services supported by the Open GIS Consortium and ESRI’s ArcIMS
• Several metadata authoring tools are available to develop formal metadata that meets international standards. ESRI’s ArcCatalog combined with the Metadata Parser (MP) from the US Geological Survey are two tools preferred for use of use and integration with clearinghouse nodes. For a complete list of commercial and shareware utilities visit: http://www.fgdc.gov/standards/metadata.html

Helpful References

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