

WHY THE UNITED STATES NEEDS A NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL POLICY

America's ability to confront and develop solutions on major issues including climate change, healthcare, homeland security, pandemics, energy, resilient and sustainable communities, and the mortgage crisis depend, in part, on our ability to map, understand, analyze, and then act on information using geospatial resources.

Americans embrace a wide range of location-based technologies that make our lives easier and keep the world in a context that can be better understood. We are able to do this because of the \$30 billion per year geospatial technology market.ⁱ Companies like MapQuesttm and Googletm are universally known. What is less well known is that this thriving business owes its very existence to enlightened policy decisions by the United States. There has been an evolution in detailed street data, geospatial software, airborne and satellite sensing and imaging, and global positioning systems. Government has played an important role; however, as geospatial resources continue to evolve at a fast pace, national guidance and policies needed to bring order and efficiency to the development of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI)ⁱⁱ will lag behind.

Geospatial resources are critical components for priorities of the Obama Administration. Recent examples are: (1) *Data.gov*, an innovative public access tool championed by the Administration, includes a *geodata catalog* as a prominent feature; and (2) Executive Office of the President Memorandum M-09-28, "Developing Effective Place-Based Policies for the FY2011 Budget," recognizes that much of what government and its citizens need involves place-conscious planning and place-based programming.

With so much at stake, an organized approach to the NSDI utilizing technological advancements guided by a *National Geospatial Policy* is essential.

WHY DOES THE UNITED STATES NEED A NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL POLICY?

Because the United States taxpayers own or back nearly \$6 trillion in real estate mortgages;ⁱⁱⁱ

A national geospatial policy would enable the tracking of these investments to better understand and manage our economic health, and help prevent another mortgage-based crisis.

Because sea levels are predicted to rise and climate change has the potential of having a significant impact;

A national geospatial policy will ensure current, accurate and detailed information is available to government agencies, academia, and the public to anticipate and adapt to climate change and environmental issues.

Because our geospatial community leads the world;

The global geospatial marketplace is exploding, with emerging regional markets in countries of all sizes. A national policy would ensure that the U.S. geospatial business is competitive and leads the way.

Because there are more than 15 million unemployed Americans, and geospatial is 1 of 13 high-growth industries;

The U.S. Department of Labor targets geospatial as a high-growth sector because it will add substantial numbers of new jobs to the economy or affect the growth of other industries.^{iv} A national policy would accelerate innovation and skill set development, and put Americans to work in this growth industry.

Because we know that governments at all levels spend money on geospatial resources, but we don't know how much;

Federal agencies are not required to provide information on how much is spent on geospatial resources. More can be done to coordinate spending among federal agencies and in partnership with state and local government to minimize costs, and avoid creating duplicate or inconsistent geospatial data. A national geospatial policy would provide the necessary guidance and regulation to address this.

WHY THE UNITED STATES NEEDS A NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL POLICY

Because energy independence requires finding and thoughtfully developing domestic energy resources;

A national policy is needed to ensure critical data about traditional energy resources, as well as wind, solar, geothermal, and smart grids are developed and analyzed in standardized ways across the nation.

Because we need to understand the natural, social, and built surroundings of our world;

A national policy is needed to better support science, discovery, and planning for our future.

Because we aspire to make policy and operational decisions that are based on scientifically derived data;

A national policy will help ensure that data is created through peer-reviewed or other quality-assured processes.

Because U.S. law prevents the Census Bureau from sharing the address of your house with first responders, yet your cell phone lets advertisers know where you are right now;

The current interpretation of Title 13 of the U.S. Code restricting the sharing of geospatial address data between government agencies is a prominent example where technology and modern practice have outpaced policy.

Because we need to know where critical infrastructure is, but we need to strike a balance on who has access;

We must recognize there are legitimate benefits and necessary civilian needs for infrastructure information, but reasonable policy must be in place to determine what is available and to whom.

Because the federal government doesn't have an accurate and up-to-date map of public lands and rural areas;

A policy that defines a process to develop national requirements, with consideration of less populated places, will ensure more complete information and nationwide content.

Because Executive Order 12906 and the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-16 have not kept up with changes in technology and best practices;

A new national policy is needed to strengthen, enforce and expand the general principles in these two foundational documents and to support the Administration's Place-Based Policy directive.

BECAUSE THE QUESTION WE SHOULD BE ASKING IS:

"What is our national geospatial policy?"

Our nation faces important opportunities with expectations that geospatial resources will support evidence-based decision making at all levels. A *National Geospatial Policy* will lead to actions and decisions helping to realize the long-term purpose of the NSDI. A new policy will give direction to our current endeavors and will require the Administration to both encourage and enforce it. It will create a process for the development of procedures that will expedite the fulfillment of the NSDI. It will govern how the rest of the nation is engaged in the implementation of the NSDI. A new policy will define a course that will quickly and efficiently create the National Spatial Data Infrastructure, because our nation depends on it.

ⁱ Wigbels, Lyn, G. Ryan Faith, and Vincent Sabathier. "Earth Observations and Global Change." (July 2008): 8. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

ⁱⁱ National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) means the technology, policies, standards, and human resources necessary to acquire, process, store, distribute, and improve utilization of geospatial data (from Executive Order 12906).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Federal Reserve, <http://www.federalreserve.gov/econresdata/releases/mortoutstand/current.htm>, viewed Nov. 24, 2009.

^{iv} U. S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, <http://www.doleta.gov/brG/JobTrainInitiative/>, viewed Nov. 24, 2009.