

PROTECTING FEDERAL CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL GEOSPATIAL RESOURCES

A Paper of the National Geospatial Advisory Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) Subcommittee on Cultural and Historical Geospatial Resources conducted a research study in 2017- 2018. The objective of this research was to understand the issues and challenges associated with the protection and preservation of cultural and historical geospatial datasets and other derived geospatial information that is created, maintained, and/or managed by Federal agencies.

Subcommittee members conducted individual interviews with eleven Federal geospatial officers or those individuals responsible for managing and regulating access to culturally and historically significant geospatial data assets. The data collection effort took place between March and August 2018, targeting agencies with significant land holdings or land stewardship.

Each interview addressed three broad themes: data use policies, denial of data use requests, and views regarding the management of historically and culturally sensitive datasets in the Federal government. This resulted in the following findings:

- **Finding 1:** From the interviews, it is clear that there is a lack of consistency in defining and identifying geospatial data assets associated with sensitive culturally and historically significant resources across Federal agencies.
- **Finding 2:** The use of geospatial data associated with historic and culturally significant resources is highly regulated. However, the regulatory procedures are highly variable across agencies and states.
- **Finding 3:** Decisions to provide or deny access to the data is often made by individuals not well-versed in the geospatial sciences (GIS, database management, remote sensing, qualitative data analysis, etc.).
- **Finding 4:** Data created by individuals or contractors to manage field operations may be proprietary and not easily subject to regulation or oversight.

Based on these findings, the subcommittee recommends:

- **Recommendation 1:** Definitions of cultural resource spatial data.
- **Recommendation 2:** Guidelines on the management, access control, and exchange of geospatial data associated with sensitive cultural and historical resources.
- **Recommendation 3:** Data sharing agreements and strategies.
- **Recommendation 4:** Continue development of current spatial data transfer standards.
- **Recommendation 5:** Develop a training strategy and materials.

The full NGAC paper, *Protecting Federal Cultural and Historical Geospatial Resources: A Review and Recommendations*, is posted at: <https://www.fgdc.gov/ngac/meetings/september-2019/ngac-paper-protecting-federal-cultural-and.pdf>