

Creating a Geospatial Information Strategy for Wisconsin

1. Need for a Comprehensive Strategy

The Wisconsin geospatial community encompasses professionals in a diversity of fields, including government (local, regional, state, federal and tribal), education, non-profits, and the private sector. Despite the diversity of viewpoints and interests, there is support for the development of a comprehensive strategy to guide the creation, accessibility and sustainability of a broad set of geospatial information framework layers, as well as the systems, processes and procedures through which geospatial data will be stored, accessed and utilized.

The purpose of this document is to outline a proposal for creating such a strategy, through the cooperative efforts of the Wisconsin geospatial community.

2. What is a Geospatial Strategy?

A comprehensive statewide geospatial strategy is a roadmap for completing, managing and making statewide geospatial data and services widely accessible. The strategy sets in place the vision, guiding principles and priorities for developing enterprise geospatial information assets, sharing these assets effectively and efficiently, securing ongoing funding to ensure sustainability, coordinating and communicating across the stakeholder community, and promoting increased awareness, knowledge and expertise throughout the state.

Wisconsin's most current geospatial strategy document, *Wisconsin Location Matters*, is from 2007. The key goals of the 2007 strategic plan were:

- Coordination. Implement mechanisms to improve program coordination and technical collaboration among GIS stakeholders.
- Data Development and Access. Build an effective and efficient structure to create, maintain, integrate, access and use geographic data.
- Geographic Information Services. Improve services for the acquisition, discovery, sharing and use of geographic information and technology.
- Funding. Establish funding mechanisms sufficient to operate ongoing programs and support new initiatives that address critical business needs.
- Education and Awareness. Increase awareness and knowledge of the geographic information.

Many of these *Wisconsin Location Matters* goals are still relevant, but the strategic plan needs to be updated to reflect the current technological, economic and political climate in the state.

A comprehensive statewide geospatial strategy will yield numerous benefits, including improved quality and reduced costs for geographic information, greater access to information, strengthened partnerships among stakeholders, increased awareness and understanding of the value of geographic information, and increased use of this information. A statewide strategy will benefit those organizations that produce and maintain data, due to increased return on investment through broader data use. The strategy will

also benefit consumers, including improved delivery of services to citizens as well as business growth and economic development.

3. An Opportunity

The time is right for the geospatial community to collaborate on the development of a new geospatial strategic plan for the state. Several recent developments—including the enactment of Act 20 and its impacts on the Wisconsin Land Information Program—highlight the need for the community to come together now to help shape geospatial strategy in Wisconsin. This opportunity may be lost if we do not act promptly or fail to arrive at a common vision.

3.1. Statewide Parcel Map. Act 20, the state’s biennial budget enacted July 1, 2013, has significant implications for geospatial information capability in the state.¹ Act 20 calls for the “creation, maintenance and updating of a digital statewide parcel map.” The term “statewide digital parcel map” refers not just to parcels, but to an integrated representation of many data layers combined together to portray land tenure and ownership across the landscape. The creation of this parcel map will bring together key enterprise layers of statewide geospatial data needed for multiple business functions across numerous levels of government and the private sector. The parcel map effort will be of great benefit to the geospatial community by showcasing the fundamental value of accurate, up-to-date geospatial data to promote efficient government, business growth, economic development and delivery of services to state citizens.

Parcels are of particular importance because they serve as the basis for many other geospatial data layers, such as municipal boundaries, school districts, land use and zoning, public lands, and emergency service districts. However, there are other enterprise geospatial layers that deserve attention as well, including aerial photography, street centerlines, elevation data, geodetic control, address points, hydrography, land cover, soils, and so on. The Wisconsin Land Information Association (WLIA), in collaboration with other groups, put together an inventory of selected statewide layers to begin to document business needs in the community.²

The digital parcel map initiative represents only one of several business plan implementations needed for critical geospatial data layers in Wisconsin. A comprehensive strategy is needed to define priorities for the development, access and sustainability of all of these layers. Act 20 opens the doorway to this dialog by providing a first concrete business case for geospatial data—parcels—but it would be unfortunate if the effects of Act 20 ended there.

3.2. WLIP Funding. Act 20 also significantly increases the funding available for geospatial activities in the state through the Wisconsin Land Information Program (WLIP). The Act created a segregated appropriation with anticipated revenue expected to rise from an annual average of \$2.4 million in 2013 to approximately \$8.4 million by 2015.³ According to a March 2013 memo written by Ed Eberle, Division Administrator at the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA),

¹ <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2013/related/acts/20>

² Status of Selected Wisconsin Foundational Layers, Draft of 12/6/2012. <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0Bz-PD1CO9M0LUkhMNnNFdkdc0U/edit?pli=1>

³ 2013 Wisconsin Land Information Program Report, <http://www.doa.state.wi.us/docview.asp?docid=10532&locid=9>

...much of the reallocated fee revenue submitted to the Department of Administration would be targeted for investment at the local level, likely in the form of Wisconsin Land Information Program strategic initiative grants. Eligible activities would likely include digitization of parcel mapping, surveying for PLSS remonumentation, indexing, and other activities to make a complete and accurate statewide digital parcel map.⁴

These are important priorities for WLIP revenue. However, revenue should also be used to address multiple enterprise geospatial initiatives contributing to an integrated and sustainable Wisconsin geospatial information system as a statewide asset. By developing a comprehensive strategic plan through an engaged community-based process, Wisconsin can move forward effectively in advancing enterprise geospatial information as part of the state's larger information infrastructure for business planning and decision making.

3.3. Deer Trustee Report. In July, 2012, Dr. James Kroll, a deer management consultant commissioned by Governor Scott Walker, issued a report on Wisconsin deer management. The report points to a need for improved statewide geospatial data and technology.⁵

The report argues that Wisconsin lacks a comprehensive geospatial database system, which limits the effectiveness with which geospatial information can be used in economic development, emergency response, and citizen services. The report goes on to state that

A statewide geospatial information system, similar to that developed for Texas, should be developed which provides seamless support to all state resource managers across agencies. This would include both access to and generation of geospatial data, and coordinated by the Wisconsin State Cartographer's Office. This would permit significant leveraging of research and development dollars by allowing data generated for a specific project to be used by all.

The high visibility of the Deer Trustee report within state government has raised awareness of the value of geospatial information and services. This increased awareness should be leveraged by the geospatial community to gain support for a statewide strategic planning effort.

3.4. Stakeholders. Stakeholders in the Wisconsin geospatial community have an important role to play in this effort. The memo written by Ed Eberle acknowledges this point, stating

The Department of Administration will be responsible for developing an implementation plan to create the statewide digital parcel map. During this planning process, we will seek input from county surveyors, land information officers, register of deeds, state agency GIS staff, and other stakeholders.

Act 20 was recently discussed at the 2013 Presidents' Council meeting, which serves as a discussion forum for various groups with a stake in GIS and land information, including the Land Information Officers Network, State Agency GIS Coordination Team, Wisconsin County Surveyors Association, Wisconsin Geographic Information Coordination Council, Wisconsin GIO, Wisconsin Land Information Association, Wisconsin Land Title Association, Wisconsin Real Property Listers, Wisconsin Register of Deeds, Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors, and Wisconsin State Cartographer's Office. Several groups

⁴ <https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B8tE1PSSkUt1ZXdCLVnfd0c1NHM&usp=sharing&tid=0BwFTRb4izOv4RVRPWWxyZFU4NDg>

⁵ <http://www.wistatedocuments.org/cdm/ref/collection/p267601coll4/id/5437>

at the Council meeting expressed support for the idea of communicating with the DOA to support moving forward quickly with the parcel map project, and one group (WIGICC) indicated that it had already forwarded such a letter.

The Presidents' Council could serve as the umbrella organization for a coordinated stakeholder discussion, which would then lead to a specific proposal being directed to DOA outlining stakeholder concerns and priorities. A similar model was used effectively prior to Act 20 being passed, when a summit was convened by WLIA in March 2013 to discuss the proposed 2013-2015 budget. To quote from the call for participation, the goal of the summit was

...to develop community-wide understanding and potential consensus on supportive advocacy as well as a legislative amendment to the budget to better secure the objectives of the Wisconsin Land Information Program and users of the data. We would like to develop a consensus to benefit the Land Information, Geographic Information and mapping professionals from local, state, federal government, general public and private industry throughout Wisconsin.

In addition to the Presidents' Council associations listed above, the summit invitation was sent to the Wisconsin Realtors Association, the Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin Regional Planning Commissions, the DOA CIO, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, WLIP Representatives, Wisconsin County Code Administrators, and the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Planning Association.

A similar group should be convened in the very near future to discuss the implications of Act 20 and the WLIP, and to arrive at a consensus course of action for a comprehensive strategic plan for the state. This proposal would then be communicated to the WLIP administration at the DOA. As such, inclusion of WLIP representatives in the process from the beginning is a key to success.

4. Proposed Course of Action

It is incumbent on the geospatial community in Wisconsin to come together to define common interests that can be used to develop a blueprint for a statewide geospatial strategic plan. The first step in this process should be to convene a strategy summit of stakeholders to discuss the following topics:

- What are the main components of the strategic plan? Potential components include:
 - Prioritization and identification of strategically important data layers.
 - Development of a business plan for the digital parcel map initiative—a plan that can be adapted to other key data layers as well.
 - Creation of a mechanism for allocating WLIP funds through the strategic grant process, including grant criteria, eligibility, and grant review process.
 - Ensuring that funding through the WLIP aligns with broad strategic goals.
 - Providing a sustainable mechanism for broad-based data discovery and access.
 - Facilitating the sharing of data with a minimum of bureaucracy and overhead.
 - Improving technical collaboration and program coordination between stakeholders.
 - Articulating the governance model for the geospatial community, including responsibilities for geospatial layers and systems.

- Improving awareness and knowledge of the value and uses of geospatial data and services.
- What is the process to create such a plan? An overview of how the process might be rolled out could be established, including:
 - Information gathering from statewide listening sessions.
 - Use of an outside consultant to help develop and write the plan.
 - Involvement of stakeholder organizations.
 - Timeline to complete the plan.
- What role should the WLIP/DOA have?
 - Will the DOA be able to provide financial support for the development of the plan?
 - Will the DOA be providing staff support such as a project manager?
 - How will information be communicated and discussed with DOA administrators?
 - What will the role of the DOA be once the plan is finalized and being used to drive business plans?

The result of the summit meeting should be a brief document outlining the community's vision for the strategic plan and the process to get there. It is not the strategic plan itself, but rather a plan for this plan. This document will be shared and discussed with DOA administration. The objective is to assist the DOA in developing a strategic planning process that is mutually beneficial, aligned to stakeholder needs, and tied to the parcel map implementation plan as required by Act 20.