



North Carolina
Geographic Information Coordinating Council
• Federal Interagency Committee

MINUTES
FEDERAL INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE – Executive Committee
February 2, 2012

Attending - Linda Rimer (Chair), William Beatty, Tom Colson, Matt Duvall, Doug Newcomb, Drew Piant, SMAC Rep - Silvia Terziotti, Staff - Tom Tribble
Missing - Lynn Phillips, David Wyatt

Linda Rimer welcomed the new members of the FIC Executive Committee.

Federal Land Ownership Data Layer

Tom Colson provided an update on the work of the Federal Land Ownership subcommittee. CGIA has an old statewide data layer of federal lands. He began by reviewing this dataset and some federal agency datasets. He is currently doing analysis of county parcel data to assess the county federal land ownership holdings. When he compared the federal datasets to county datasets, he noticed major discrepancies. Some of these are projection based differences. For specific parcels the difference may only be a couple of acres but statewide it adds up to a significant number.

He also discovered that counties are recording deeds of federal ownership that do not show up in the easily available federal records. He discovered from county records that the US Postal Service owns a lot of land, perhaps not a significant percentage of the overall federal land ownership but it still adds to the total.

He raised the question about whether the definition of federal land ownership should include lands to which the federal government holds an easement but does not own. Those properties are next to impossible to identify. Matt Duvall noted that he is just becoming familiar with this effort. He noted that one source of data for NRCS easements is the Natural Heritage dataset that is publicly available.

Tom Tribble read the definition that the subcommittee originally proposed.

“Real property that is owned, possessed, or otherwise in complete control of an agency of the federal government on a permanent basis. Excluded from this definition are those lands which are managed, have restricted-use easements, or jointly controlled by an agency of the federal government but which the federal government does not possess title, deed, or other ownership conveyance. Tribal lands are

considered a separate administrative entity and are not considered a federal land for the purpose of this definition.”

Tom C. said he has developed some ArcGIS queries to query each county’s tax records to identify federal land ownership. Data formats vary for each county but there is generally some consistency in the use of the term United States government.

His next step is to contact counties that do not make their parcel data publicly available to acquire their shape files and tax data so he can continue the analysis. He hopes to develop a Geodatabase schema to serve as a holding place in which to ingest county tax data as it is published and updated. For example, if, as expected, the Postal Service begins to divest itself of land, the Geodatabase would pick up those transactions.

Linda asked Tom C. if he would prepare a written report on what the subcommittee has done so far, including the definition of federal lands. She said it would be helpful to have a sense of the time frame for completing the subcommittee’s charge and the caveats or issues that complicate the effort to create an updated federal land ownership dataset.

Tom T. asked if the subcommittee planned to create a database of all the federal owned land. Or, will the product be the identification of the sources of the land that the various federal departments own.

Given the available data and the time constraints, Tom C. hopes to develop procedures so that a database could be completed once additional data are available. He envisions a database schema, a sequence of steps or SOP that describes how to ingest additional data to develop a federal land inventory for North Carolina. The process has been tested for a certain percent of the data but is not complete.

Tom C. asked if the county data should be the “tie-breaker” in the event of discrepancies between county and federal datasets. He suggested that counties have a better handle on federal land ownership data than the federal agencies themselves. He is skeptical that federal agencies regularly update their ownership information and thinks that counties have better data.

Tom T. suggested that the subcommittee include in its report the alternatives for building the dataset and recommendations for the best way for to collect and manage federal land ownership. The report could document the advantages and disadvantages of using federal agency records versus county tax records. County data may be the preferred source in the long run but accessing data for all counties and then maintaining the dataset may be more difficult. Conversely, it may be easier to update the statewide dataset in the short run by using federal agency data – compiling data from the Forest Service, FWS, Park Service, etc.

Tom T. suggested that we may need to assess the purpose of the effort. One goal is to update an old 1992 inventory and create a more accurate picture for 2012. He suggested that the general purpose of the data is for broad purposes and small scale mapping rather than detailed analysis. For detailed analysis of a local issue, users may need to go directly to the county data. He agrees with Tom C.’s approach that a Geodatabase schema and using the county data to maintain a statewide dataset is the long term solution.

Tom C. said that the subcommittee will submit a report to Linda by next week. He suggested that the report could list the pros and cons of alternative scenarios and solicit direction from the GICC on how to proceed. He acknowledged that pouring over the data for each county is time consuming. Tom said that dealing with counties that make their data available for download is fairly easy (about 43) but hunting the web sites or contacting counties is difficult. He was able to acquire data for 6 other counties. He noted that each county situation is challenging. Some only provide the parcel boundaries and the tax data must be acquired separately and joined. One disadvantage of using county data is once a dataset is complete, then updating the dataset might require visiting 100 county web sites to track changes.

Tom T. said that it was never his expectation that the subcommittee would actually create a new dataset, particularly using county data as the source. He also reminded the FIC EC that the GICC's Working Group for Seamless Parcels has been working for several years on an effort to develop procedures for building a statewide seamless parcel database. In theory, a tool would ingest county data on a regular basis. EPA has awarded the State a large grant to work on this effort but it is currently stalled and the time frame is uncertain. If and when this effort is concluded, then Tom C.'s idea of using county data to identify federal land ownership becomes much easier and more practical.

In the interim, the solution may be to pull together the disparate datasets from the various federal departments.

Linda agreed that the FIC will need to get direction from the GICC on the desired end product.

ACTION – Tom C. will provide a report on the status of the subcommittee's work to date to Linda before the February 8 GICC meeting.

Silvia Terziotti if the routine that Tom C. has written to pull out federal lands from the county tax parcel database could be used for other purposes and shared. Tom C. said that he using simple low tech Sequel code for this effort and it may not be of much value to others.

Drew Pilant and others praised Tom C. for his effort and acknowledged the effort involved.

Next FIC General Meeting

The members discussed the plans for general FIC meetings in 2012. Regarding the number of meetings, Doug Newcomb suggested three meetings and Matt agreed, noting that if the FIC does not meet at least three times there is the danger of losing momentum. Thursday April 26 was chosen as the date for the next general meeting, probably from 10:00-1:00. The first choice for location is somewhere east of Raleigh. Doug suggested that one of the FWS refuges could be the location.

Regarding the program, several topics were mentioned. Since the meeting will be held in the east, eastern NC issues would be topical.

- Matt could describe his work in Afghanistan. Matt said he would be happy to do that but noted that while he used GIS to some extent, his work was not GIS extensive.
- Geospatial tools that federal agencies are using to support department missions.
- Update on the activities of the Climate Science Center.
- The EPA Sustainability Atlas, an interactive decision-support tool / digital atlas.

- Emergency management activities at the federal level; perhaps an update on the bridges on the outer banks.
- The work of the Interagency Leadership Team.
- A report from Gary Merrill, the new USGS liaison to North Carolina, on his role and responsibilities.

ACTION – Doug will identify a proposed location for the April 26 meeting.

ACTION – William Beatty and Doug will develop a proposed program and agenda.

The members agreed to schedule another EC meeting prior to the April 26 general meeting to finalize the details for the general meeting and to get an update on the Federal Land Ownership work.

ACTION – Linda and Tom T. will identify a date for the next EC meeting, to be held prior to April 26.

GICC / SMAC Update

Coastal Orthoimagery 2012 Project. Linda reminded the members that Jeff Brown sent out an email last week with information about the project. Contacts have been signed with the contractors that will acquire the imagery and data acquisition will begin in February for 25 coastal counties. Tom T. reminded everyone that there will be an opportunity for federal agencies to buy-up and acquire CIR imagery and encouraged the members to share that information with their colleagues. Jeff Brown's email includes information on who to contact.

Drew mentioned that the document prepared by the Working group for Othrophotography Planning entitles "Using Color Infrared (CIR) Imagery: A Guide for Understanding, Interpreting and Benefiting from CIR Imagery" is an excellent resource. (see http://www.nconemap.com/Portals/7/documents/Using_Color_Infrared_Imagery_20110810.pdf)

USGS Liaison for NC. Linda reported that with Steve Strader's retirement, Gary Merrill will serve as the liaison for both North Carolina and South Carolina. Silvia reported that he will try to attend the next FIC meeting. Silvia said 25% of her time will be devoted to liaison activities.

Updates from FIC EC Members

Drew said the big focus in his lab is working on the EPA Sustainability Atlas.

Tom C. reported that the FGDC has released a new federal trails standard that includes comprehensive guidelines for federal agencies to manage trails data. It may be of value to other government agencies by taking the burden off of agencies to develop their own model. He noted that the State manages a lot of trails and the standard may be of interest to state agencies. The National Park Service plans to migrate their data to the new standard. The link to the standard is here: <http://www.nps.gov/gis/trails/>.

Linda asked if she should report this development to the GICC. The group said yes. Silvia said that she is serving on the SMAC's Working Group for Standards. She said that FGDC has become much more proactive and user oriented in coming up with standards that can be implemented more easily. Tom

said that he is developing a XML schema for applying the standard and will share that with the committee.

ACTION – Silvia will alert the SMAC about the release of this standard.

Matt is still getting reoriented after his return from temporary assignment in Afghanistan. He is working on converting the NRCS wetland determination inventory into a standardized GIS data format and building tools for highly erodible land determination to support Food Security Act tasks by NRCS field staff.

Silvia reported that USGS is working to promote imagery assets that are available online, including Spot imagery that is publicly available <http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/136/>. Tom encouraged the members to use the FIC list serv to disseminate information like this to the federal community in North Carolina.

She also reported that there are some updates to the Watershed Boundary Database (WBD). She recalled that NRCS was very involved in developing the 12 digit hydrologic unit delineations. Currently, there is no WBD steward in the state and she asked if the FIC needed to raise this issue with the SMAC about the mechanism for updating the WBD layer as well as the National Hydrography Database (NHD).

Tom C. said that he had been involved with the NHD effort with David Arnold, USGS NHD Coordinator for the southeast. CGIA is the defacto steward but no MOA exists to formalize that responsibility.

Matt said that he had been involved in discussions about stewardship of the WDB dataset. There has been a history of efforts to raising the profile of integrating the NHD with the WDB. A small committee that included DENR DWQ and CGIA attempted to engage the SMAC on the stewardship issue and raise the profile, without much success. Until the integration of the NHD with the WDB is complete, there will be no edits to the WBD. Matt agrees that the issue needs to receive new attention. He believes that significant resources are not required to edit and maintain the integrated data.

Tom C. reported that DENR DWQ is very interested in moving the NHD stewardship status forward. One obstacle to progress involves a regulatory issue. When the State publishes new “blue” lines based on the NHD, it changes the most recent USGS topographic map, which has an impact on water quality regulatory programs. Matt reported that his impression from discussion with DENR DWQ staff is that the State is committed to using WDB and NHD as the source for their regulatory decisions.

ACTION – Silvia and Matt will discuss the current status of WBD and HND and consider raising the issue with the SMAC at its April 11 meeting.

Adjournment

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.