

Coalition of Geospatial Organizations

December 17, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker-Elect
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Leader and Mr. Speaker-Elect:

The undersigned organizations respectfully request the **establishment of a subcommittee in the House and Senate with primary jurisdiction over Federal geospatial activities**

In recent years, there has been explosive growth in the use of geospatial data in the U.S. economy. The Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC)'s 2006 Annual Report noted that as much as 90% of government information has a geospatial information component. The Geospatial Information and Technology Association reports that up to 80% of the information managed by business is connected to a specific location. While a 1993 survey by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) found total annual geospatial expenditures in Federal agencies alone was close to \$4 billion, there is no current, accurate accounting of the government's annual investment. A recent study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimated that at least \$30 billion is generated by geospatial-related companies annually. The geospatial sector has steadily increased by 35% a year, with the commercial side growing at an incredible rate of 100% annually. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that the geospatial sector is one of the three technology areas that will create the most jobs in the coming decade.

Despite this extraordinary growth and the near-ubiquitous presence of geospatial data in government and the private sector, Congress does not have a committee or subcommittee with primary jurisdiction over geospatial activities. Rather, responsibility for oversight and authorization of Federal geospatial activities is spread among more than 30 House and Senate committees and subcommittees.

The Coalition of Geospatial Organizations (COGO) is a coalition of 16 national professional societies, trade associations, and membership organizations in the geospatial field, representing more than 30,000 individual producers and users of geospatial data and technology. We are writing to respectfully request that a subcommittee with primary oversight jurisdiction over Federal geospatial activities be established in both the House and Senate so that taxpayers' investment is both efficient and strategic.

Geospatial activities have benefited from oversight by Congress and the Executive Branch on a bipartisan basis. The following are a few highlights:

- Executive Order 12906, "Coordinating Geographic Data Acquisition and Access: The National Spatial Data Infrastructure", was issued by President Clinton on April 11, 1994. This created the

National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) as a strategic investment of the Federal government and established the Department of the Interior as the lead agency in the FGDC.

- A National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) report, requested by Congress, was released in January, 1998. “Geographic Information for the 21st Century Building-A Strategy for the Nation” called for a reorganization of the Executive Branch agencies in order to improve coordination within the Federal government and with state and local government, the private sector, and the academic community.
- Two hearings were held in 2003 and 2004 by the Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and the Census of the House Committee on Government Reform. These hearings identified the challenges and shortcomings of current Federal geospatial coordination. This subcommittee was later disbanded.
- At the request of the House Subcommittee, the Government Accountability Office investigated Federal geospatial activities and reported “efforts have not been fully successful in reducing redundancies in geospatial investments” and “federal agencies are still independently acquiring and maintaining potentially duplicative and costly data sets and systems. Until these problems are resolved, duplicative geospatial investments are likely to persist.”
- In response to these hearings and the GAO report, the Bush Administration established a “Geospatial Line of Business” initiative. However, it has not been able to accurately account for annual Federal geospatial expenditures.
- In 2008, DOI Secretary Dirk Kempthorne established the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) to “provide advice and recommendations related to management of Federal and national geospatial programs, the development of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure, and the implementation of Office of Management and Budget Circular A-16 and Executive Order 12906”.
- In July of 2009, the House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held an oversight hearing entitled “Federal Geospatial Data Management.” This subcommittee identified that the Federal government spends billions of dollars each year to acquire and manage geospatial data, which go into making maps for consumers, state and local officials, and emergency responders, among others. The subcommittee also found that DOI has estimated that up to half of the federal investment in geospatial data is redundant. The subcommittee examined how the Federal government manages the geospatial activities of its various agencies, and how information sharing between federal, state, and local governments, and between the public and private sectors, can be improved.
- In August 2009 and June 2010, OMB published memos on “place-based” policies, more appropriately referred to as “geospatial”. Within these memos, these policies sought to leverage investments by focusing resources in targeted places and drawing on the compounding effect of well-coordinated action. Effective geospatial policies can influence how rural and metropolitan areas develop, how well they function as places to live, work, operate a business, preserve heritage, and more. Such policies can also streamline otherwise redundant and disconnected programs. Between now and 2050, the expected population growth – of nearly 140 million people – will require, among other things, the construction of more than 200 billion square feet of new housing, business space, and retail development and major new investments in all forms of physical infrastructure. The new construction will constitute an estimated two thirds of all development on the ground in 2050.

We believe the oversight, coordination, efficiency and utilization of geospatial data to enhance the quality of life of the American people would be enhanced by the **establishment of a subcommittee in the House and Senate, respectively, with primary jurisdiction over geospatial activities**

Whereas the FGDC is chaired by and the NGAC reports to DOI, a subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources would be appropriate. Given that geospatial activities are part of the mission of more than 40 Federal agencies, and primary responsibility for OMB Circular A-16, Executive Order 12906 and Geospatial Lines of Business rests in OMB, a subcommittee in the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs would also be appropriate.

COGO is not asking that a new and dedicated subcommittee be created. However, including geospatial in the name and mission of an existing House and Senate Subcommittee would be timely and appropriate action in the 112th Congress.

The member organizations of COGO deeply appreciate your consideration of this request and we pledge our assistance with the important issues Congress will address in the coming months. If you have any questions, please contact John Palatiello, Executive Director of MAPPS a member organization of COGO, (703) 787-6996 or john@mapps.org.

Sincerely,

