

Geospatial Data Act of 2015 (S. 740)

Moving the National Spatial Data Infrastructure Forward



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Why the Geospatial Data Act is Needed

Geospatial data are just like the information on paper maps except for one very important difference. Because they are digital, they can be used in computer systems called geographic information systems (GIS) to analyze information, and also combined to create new types of information. When used like this, they help government agencies provide improved services (e.g. 9-1-1), and they also provide decision-makers with accurate information to make better decisions.

Geospatial data are in constant use throughout local, state and Federal government agencies. However, we have failed to collaborate over the past twenty-one years to build a shared National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) that meets the needs of all partners. Government agencies are creating the same data many times over in different forms and formats, and not effectively sharing information to the best advantage of the taxpayer. The states are the 'middle man' in this furry of activity and they clearly see the lost opportunities to coordinate Federal efforts for the benefit of local governments, while knowing that they can also roll-up local government data for use by Federal agencies. Doing so, would be the definition of good government, and S. 740 will 'set the stage.'

A key component of the NSDI is the concept of the Framework data layers which are:

- **Cadastral** – Information about land ownership.
- **Elevation** – The height of the land and depth of water bodies.
- **Geodetic Control** – The precise location of features in relation to other features using a common reference system for coordinate positions.
- **Governmental Units** – The boundaries and names of government service and management areas at all levels of government.
- **Hydrography** – The path of streams and drainage areas, and the location of water bodies and shorelines.

- **Orthoimagery** – Aerial and satellite imagery processed by removing inherent distortions to make them accurate like a map.
- **Transportation** – The path of roadways and rail lines, and the location of supporting features such as train stations and bus stops.

In 1994, Executive Order 12906 was issued by President Clinton to direct the development of the NSDI. Many of the requirements of EO 12906 were never acted on. OMB Circular A-16 also outlines Federal agency requirements related to the NSDI. It was originally issued in 1953, revised in 1967, revised in 1990, and revised again in 2002. A-16 Supplemental Guidance was also issued in 2010. Federal agencies have failed to implement many of the provisions of OMB A-16 as revised.

Congress asked the Government Accountability Office several times in recent years to evaluate Federal agency activities related to the NSDI. The GAO reports, including the latest March 2015 report can be found at: <http://www.nsgic.org/publications-by-others>. These reports identify many problems with Federal agency activities.

The [Coalition of Geospatial Organizations](#) (COGO) commissioned an Expert Panel to issue a Report Card on the U.S. National Spatial Data Infrastructure that can be found at the following link. http://www.nsgic.org/public_resources/COGO_Report_Card_020615_Distribution.pdf

The Expert Panel assigned an overall grade of C to the status of Framework Data and an overall grade of C- for the infrastructure required to support the data. See the Report Card on the back page.

What the Geospatial Data Act Does

At a high level, the Geospatial Data Act will make the following improvements to the NSDI.

- Codify the existing Federal guidance documents that created the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) and NSDI.
- Provide FGDC with the authority to make other agencies follow the rules.
- Provide Congressional oversight to make FGDC and the other agencies accountable.
- Require reporting that will allow Congress to track progress on the NSDI and find out where the money is really being spent.
- Provide a great deal more ‘clout’ to National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) and require the FGDC to address NGAC’s concerns – not just dictate what NGAC should work on.
- Require Federal agencies to coordinate and work in partnership with other Federal agencies, agencies of State, tribal, and local governments, institutions of higher education, and the private sector to efficiently and cost-effectively collect, integrate, maintain, disseminate, and preserve geospatial data.

Requested Action

NSGIC seeks bipartisan support for the Geospatial Data Act of 2015 (S.740) as introduced by Senator Orrin Hatch (UT) and Senator Mark Warner (VA) in the 114th Congress. It establishes a clear vision, assigns responsibilities, provides authority, and ensures oversight of Federal activities by Congress. These improvements will help ensure that the U.S. is able to build a robust National Spatial Data Infrastructure. Supporting the Geospatial Data Act of 2015 is also a critical step toward building more resilient communities by ensuring that they will have access to the consistent high-quality data that they need to do their job.

Please write, or contact your Members of Congress and ask them to support this important legislation.

“FGDC Has Made Progress on the NSDI, but Shortfalls on Key Initiatives Exist, and States Are Dissatisfied with Coordination Efforts.”

GAO Report 15-193

GRADE REPORT OF: National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI)			SEMESTER: Fall 2014		
Subject	Dept.	Grade	Subject	Dept.	Grade
CADASTRAL DATA	DOI	D+	CAPACITY	FGDC	C
GEODETIC CONTROL	DOC	B+	CONDITION	FGDC	D
ELEVATION DATA	DOI	C+	FUNDING	Various	D
HYDROGRAPHY DATA	DOI	C	FUTURE NEED	FGDC	D
ORTHOIMAGERY DATA	DOI & USDA	C+	OPERATION & MAINTENANCE	FGDC	C
GOVERNMENT UNITS DATA	DOC	C	PUBLIC USE	FGDC	C
TRANSPORTATION DATA	DOT	D	RESILIENCE	FGDC	C
OVERALL DATA GRADE		C	COMPREHENSIVE GRADE		C-

TO: Federal Geographic Data Committee
590 National Center
Reston, Virginia 20192

FROM: Coalition of Geospatial Organizations (COGO)
<http://www.cogo.pro>
See the full report for an explanation of each grade.

COGO’s Report Card indicates that the NSDI is not adequate for current or future uses.