

GIS TECHNOLOGY FOR CONSERVATION MEETING
JANUARY 17, 2001
CONCORD, NH

Minutes

Welcome and Introductions

Ann Fowler Wallace welcomed everyone to our second meeting of the group, briefly touched on where we left off at our last meeting, and noted that we have a few new faces joining us today. She asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Purpose of the Meeting

Bruce Pardoe then chaired the meeting and walked us through the agenda and purpose of the meeting. He summarized some areas of need highlighted at our November meeting: need for more basic data to augment GRANIT – such as digitized plot maps; need for ongoing and sustainable maintenance of data; would be useful to have data submitted to GRANIT by accredited organizations or in acceptable format; services are needed to help towns or conservation groups prepare in-depth studies; the effectiveness and utility of GIS and access to resources needs to be promoted; training is needed and in demand. Bruce also noted that since November, the funders have talked amongst themselves about ways to expand outreach to other foundations and donors to help expand the pool of possible GIS technology funders.

Marcy Lyman added that coming out of the November meeting, she had a question about the level of infrastructure investment (both hardware and software) needed in the conservation community. She hoped that we could address that question today.

Report on Recent Surveys

Ken Gallager provided an update on the preliminary findings of the GIS Advisory Committee's survey of GIS use in NH that was sent to public agencies, regional planning commissions (RPC's), several schools, and a handful of nonprofits and private businesses. The survey was primarily directed at assessing GIS use in governmental agencies, including the RPC's. Survey results were handed out to meeting participants with Ken highlighting key points. Regarding organizational capacity of hardware/software to run GIS, the survey indicated that most agencies have up-to-date technology that could run GIS software. That said, of the 147 responses, 55 respondents indicated they have current access to GIS, whereas 92 do not have current access.

Several issues were illuminated in the survey. First, the issue of training was a high priority, with great demand expressed from all sectors for additional training, and some commentary that the respondent agencies were struggling to keep up with training needs. Respondents were clear that training needs to be ongoing. The survey also pointed to an interest in data sharing among respondents – particularly around base map data.

Dan Sundquist provided background and an overview of the Forest Society's recent needs assessment survey sent to the land trust community regarding geographic information land conservation services in NH. Survey goals included: 1) assessing the experience and needs of the land trust community re geographic information (access, technology, potential uses); and 2) identifying a repertoire of services that could be provided by the Forest Society at a break-even fee basis. The needs assessment was coupled with an RFP to the land trust community seeking pilot projects for the Forest Society's GIS services.

Dan noted that the surveys indicated an extreme sense of urgency to get ground map information. Most land trusts were looking for ground level information – the basics. Of the 19 responses to the survey, most of the 19 do not have GIS technology capability in-house. The Forest Society is also hoping to follow up with those who did not fill out the survey, to round out its understanding of GIS needs. Cheryl Fischer asked about other constituencies beyond the land trust community. Dan noted that SPNHF had recently sent out a newsletter that highlighted its GIS Services capacity, and had been inundated by calls from public agencies, conservation commissions, conservation districts, etc. interested in these services. This response to the article reaffirmed the Forest Society's interest in moving ahead with GIS services, and is causing it to rethink needs of public conservation agencies, which it had originally thought it might look at in year two.

Both Ken and Dan felt that there was very little overlap in the two surveys that were completed.

There was a question about how far the Forest Society could see itself expanding in terms of services to the conservation community. Fay Rubin indicated that Complex Systems regularly provides GIS services to land trusts and the conservation community. She thinks that a lot of the basic interests and needs could be satisfied with web-based tools that currently exist to a minimal degree. Such a web-based system would be available to both "users" and "viewers." Dan indicated that he thinks there is a need to do more complex GIS modeling to develop highly tailored data sets. He would like to see work done developing modeling methodology. Another issue was raised around data interpretation, and the need to provide support to avoid misinterpretation of data. This was an area identified for possible "services".

There was a question about the availability and quality of the RPC's as service providers. Dan's survey indicated some mixed experiences of land trusts getting GIS data from RPC's. Ken Gallager thinks that the RPC's would be delighted to see other service providers created in NH, as they are under-resourced and understaffed.

Dan Sundquist noted that the Forest Society got 9 proposals back from their RFP for GIS Services. He provided some examples of the kinds of ideas submitted.

Brainstorming project/proposal ideas

The meeting moved on to a discussion of proposals ideas that participants had been thinking about and might present to funders now or at a later date. Bruce Pardoe asked people to go around the table and share their ideas.

Project ideas included:

- Establishing a GIS lab for 11th and 12th graders at Souhegan High School (Melissa Chapman);
- Funding data development at GRANIT – including digitized parcel maps (Ben Silberfarb);
- Development of base map information, perhaps with outreach to Cartographic Associates and Sewall Co. (Don Cooke);
- Enable viewers to have web access to GIS data using ARC Explorer and ARC IMS as hosts (Don Cooke). Don would be willing to work with Fay Rubin to help advance this notion and to provide technical assistance;
- Provide better awareness and understanding of services available through a Technology Fair (Marcy Lyman);
- Take a Technology Fair on the road to other meetings including NH Association of Conservation Commissions, LCHIP, etc. (Dan Sundquist, Frank Mitchell);
- Funding to help implement the Strategic Plan for a Geospatial Technology and Resource Center to be coordinated with UNH Complex Systems and UNH Cooperative Extension. As a first step, UNHCE will ask Pardoe and other funders to support a mobile lab for expanding its training and outreach capacity. Lap top equipment in the mobile lab could be used for training, and also could be accessed for community projects on a lending basis (Nancy Lambert);
- Supporting expansion of Orton Family Foundation’s Community Mapping Program to NH, in association with Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) (Helen Whyte);
- Support for NH community/ies interested in being limited release site for Orton Family Foundation’s Community VIZ software (Helen Whyte);
- Developing higher end GIS applications and developing modeling protocols, such as for NH Fish and Game Wildlife Habitat and in support of an Ecosystem Reserve Plan (Dan Sundquist, Fay Rubin);
- Expand ability to do visual impact assessments in NH (Dan Sundquist and Fay Rubin);
- Support efforts to acquire certain critical data: tax map information; conservation lands update; soils mapping data and other data tools for training and education (Dan Sundquist and Fay Rubin);
- Take Warner’s GIS system and generalize the utility to be used for any town in the state (Jim McLaughlin);
- Secure more data on watersheds using ARC Explorer, and package some of existing data to get out to watershed groups (Jeff Schloss);

- Develop applications and advanced GPS training to support statewide inland shoreland inventorying (Jeff Schloss);
- Develop process for conservation groups to borrow GPS units and survey properties and enter data into GRANIT Registry using web based access; (Frank Mitchell);
- Digitize baseline documentation for Office of State Planning conservation easements and get into GIS to support stewardship efforts and coordinate with conservation community to develop framework for digitizing baseline information (Laura Pfister);

There was extensive discussion of the Technology Fair idea and quite a bit of interest. Cheryl Fischer suggested the idea of creating a Planning Committee. Marcy Lyman suggested that the Charitable Foundation could provide resources to help coordinate such an event. The audience for the Fair should be broader than the conservation community – to include municipalities and others. Nancy Lambert cautioned that it is important to be able to have places to send those newly interested in GIS and related technologies. We should be careful not to go out and encourage new demand and interest in services if we have no place to send people for education and training. Frank Mitchell suggested that the NHLCCIP is planning a land conservation conference, which might be one venue for the Technology Fair road show. The group recognized the future value of the Technology Fair idea, but there seemed to be consensus that this is not a near term priority.

Providing tax map data to GRANIT was idea broached by several people, Ken Gallager indicated that this would require additional legislation and funding. Ann Wallace reminded people that at the November meeting, we had asked if there were not ways to provide incentives to communities to make this data available in digitized form. Don Cooke noted that if NH can resolve the education funding issue, the Office of Taxation may be in a position to roll out new tax maps statewide – this information could be gathered using ortho photos which could be digitized.

Next steps: where to go from here

Bruce Pardoe asked if participants were interested in continuing to meet on a periodic basis. He suggested that one way to keep the group going would be to have one of the member groups provide administrative services. He also suggested that we might want to expand the group to include other NGOs and funders.

Nancy Lambert indicated that she would be interested in hearing from the funders at an upcoming meeting. She noted that there are lots of smaller pools of funds available, and wondered if it might be possible to create a larger funding pool to support GIS technology in NH.

Fay Rubin endorsed the idea of meeting every six months, and other meeting participants agreed. The group discussed the idea of meeting in May and October, dates that seemed to correspond with several foundation deadlines. Meeting before the GIS Advisory

Committee worked well organizationally. Ann Wallace suggested that we might invite a representative from ESRI to join our next meeting given the focus on funding and resources. Ann will also reach out to other foundations to invite their participation in the May meeting, as she did for this meeting. ESRI has a regional office in Danvers, Mass, and Ann will follow up to identify the appropriate person.

The meeting was adjourned with an informal lunch available for all.