

**Fall Meeting of the New Hampshire GIS Conservation Collaborative  
New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Concord, NH  
Monday, November 17, 2003**

**Draft Meeting Notes**  
*Prepared 12-8-03*

**Update on State Agency Changes Impacting GIS**

In Ken Gallagher's absence, Fay Rubin provided an update on state agency changes that are impacting GIS. Fay, Dennis Fowler and Ken Gallagher met recently with Peter Croteau, one of the four functional directors working under Bob Anderson at the Office for Information Technology. Peter is Director of Embedded Agency Applications. The meeting was a chance to bring Peter up to date on the GIS related activities at the state and how agencies are coordinating around GIS. He recognized that the state agencies were pretty well coordinated and were talking together on GIS. He indicated that the Office is interested in tackling the low hanging fruit – making sure that agencies are using the same software platforms, in this case ESRI. The Bureau of Emergency Communications is the only agency that is not using ESRI and there was some discussion about getting that agency to migrate to ESRI. The focus of much of the conversation was very technical – hardware and software. Fay, Dennis and Ken did spend some time emphasizing the importance of data coordination. In addition, Croteau endorsed the idea of developing a state agency job description for a GIS technician. Apparently, the lack of an adequate job description has made it more difficult to hire qualified GIS technicians at the appropriate job level. He seemed very interested in encouraging greater internet access to GIS data through GRANIT.

Fay reported that GRANIT had secured its core funding through state contracts, and was supplementing that with additional contracts including:

- DRED contract for work on the Connecticut Headwaters
- DES contract to produce the New Hampshire portion of the National Hydrography Dataset and a surficial geology data set for the coastal area
- Fish & Game contract to carry out updates to the Conservation Lands Data Layer
- Contract with NH Estuary Program for updates to the Conservation Lands Data Layer

Bruce Pardoe raised the issue of whether or not NHGCC or the GIS Strategic Plan should be recommending the creation of a high level Geographic Information Office in New Hampshire, in addition to the recommendation for a GIS coordinator. There was a lively discussion about this issue with Fay suggesting that is not appropriate for NHGCC to think that the GIS Advisory Committee would or could amend a plan that involved countless agencies and took many months of effort. Her position was that if NHGCC as a group wanted to suggest such a course, a letter to the GIS Advisory Committee stating the NHGCC's view would be appropriate, so that this suggestion could be included in future discussions. Dennis Fowler noted that GIS in NH works very well, with a high level of coordination among state agencies. The only major problem is money – lack of stable funding. He indicated discomfort with the notion of a high level GIS position/office, feeling that individual agency GIS needs are unique and that such a stand-alone office might dampen communication and coordination among agencies, which is the current hallmark of this work. Dennis had understood NHGCC to be a group that would do outreach to legislators and government officials to emphasize the importance of GIS with a goal of helping secure a more stabilized funding stream. He thinks that is an important role that could build support for the GIS system in the state. Racheal Stuart added that now is not the time to think

about expanding the state role. New Hampshire does not look to state government in the same way as other states. A focus on strengthening existing capacity is a good way to proceed.

Nancy Lambert asked if someone from Bob Anderson's staff might serve as a liaison to the Advisory Committee and the GIS community. Fay responded that Peter Croteau had agreed to serve as a liaison to the NH GIS Advisory Committee.

There was some additional discussion about how the Bureau of Emergency Communications data development funding was being used, and how the data were being shared. Dennis Fowler indicated that BEC's hands were tied because of the way that the 911 law was written, suggesting that there needed to be changes in the law to amend how that data sharing is moving forward.

### **I-93 Expansion & Mitigation Funding**

Cliff Sinnott provided an update on the I-93 Expansion Project and the Community Technical Assistance Program (CTAP) that is being created to help mitigate impacts to communities situated in the impacted corridor (actually is broader than the corridor, involving 27 communities). The concept behind the program is to provide technical assistance resources to communities in the I-93 area of influence to help them cope with the additional growth pressures and loss of resources that will result from this highway expansion. The agencies and stakeholders involved are currently working to define the Scope of Work. Stakeholders include: DOT, DES, the four RPC's, OEP, Cooperative Extension, NHCF, NH Audubon, the Forest Society, and EPA.

There were initially four committees established to help define the parameters of the Scope of Work: a Survey Committee to elicit community input, a GIS Committee to consider how best to apply GIS technology, a Conservation Technical Assistance Group to define how the SOW could help focus conservation efforts, and an Interim Advisory Committee to "bootstrap" this effort. The planning for this program is currently in a state of flux, with several new committees being constituted: Agency Committee, Advisory Committee, Community Advisory Committee, and Steering Committee. It is not clear yet who will implement the Scope of Work.

The CTAP will have \$3.5 MM to spend on technical assistance activities over five years. There have been many ideas put on the table, with the project currently suffering from being all things to all people. Project ideas include:

- Developing a corridor-wide conservation plan, perhaps not unlike the Forest Society's Reserve Planning.
- Developing orthophoto maps for the impacted region, which is part of a larger statewide effort. (This project seems the most certain idea of all suggested.)
- Creating a web-based Community Mapping Facility that could be seen as an extension of the Conservation Lands Viewer.
- Digitizing surficial geology maps for the region.
- Making Community Viz available to towns in the region, to help with future planning by considering alternative development scenarios.
- Creating a parcel mosaic data layer for the region.

Committee discussion has leaned toward developing a set of general tools early on that could be helpful to communities as they grapple with increasing development pressures. Upcoming activities will include: community public education meetings, RPC meetings with local land use board, and a public survey to get broader public feedback about the program.

The CTAP presents a number of opportunities to help advance the NHGCC Work Plan. While this effort will be geographically limited, it may build tools and elements that can later be used statewide. Bruce Pardoe asked if NHGCC could do anything to help advance some of the project ideas that are consistent with our Work Plan. Several people suggested that NHGCC might provide a Letter of Support to the Steering Committee or to Bill Cass encouraging the conservation planning, as well as development of key data layers, such as the parcel data layer. Darrel Covell suggested that the CTAP could be one place for NHGCC to shine, as a number of our members are representatives on these committees. It might be good to have these people weigh in at some of the public meetings, noting support of their individual organizations as well as the larger NHGCC.

The group decided that NHGCC should in fact write a letter of support encouraging a number of elements of the CTAP. Ann and Cliff will develop a draft letter. Fay noted that one of the criticisms of the GRANIT proposal to develop web tools was a concern for how such tools would be maintained longer term. If NHGCC were willing to help secure ongoing support for the web maintenance and could indicate that in the letter, it might be very helpful.

Dennis Fowler noted that Ansel Sanborn will be asking other agencies to consider helping cover the costs of the Digital Ortho Quads (DOQs).

### **NHGCC Member Exchange**

NHGCC members provided updates on recent GIS-related project activities:

- Cliff Sinnott reported that Rockingham Planning Commission has just completed a parcel map mosaic for its region (less 4 towns), which shows the pattern of development very clearly. Cliff estimated a cost of \$5-8,000/town to develop digital parcel data using existing tax maps. If using aerial photography to remap the town, he would expect costs to be \$30-40,000/town.
- Don Cooke indicated that he had worked with high school students from Stevens High School in the Upper Valley to develop a mosaic for Upper Valley towns.
- Cathy Poppenwimer reported that AMC has started a pilot project developing criteria for windpower siting and using GIS to show appropriate sites. AMC is expecting to work with 8-10 other conservation organizations in the Northeast to develop criteria at a larger regional scale. AMC's Mountain Watch Program is also using GIS to record community input on wildlife sitings in the Western Mountains Region, and is working with a UNH professor to show wildlife data at the town level.
- Cynthia Belowski noted that New Hampshire Audubon was ramping up its GIS capabilities. Jeff Normandin is relatively new coming on as GIS specialist. Audubon will be looking to enhance the wildlife data layers through its research, and to refine some of the mapping done as part of the Living Legacy Project and the Ecoregions Project. Audubon looks at GIS as a tool that can help it in its general planning. Audubon's new CEO, David Houghton, is a great believer in GIS. Jeff added that Audubon's Massabesic Sanctuary has just asked him about running a GIS workshop for sanctuary visitors.
- Nancy Lambert reported that Anne Deely at Cooperative Extension is developing an ARC GIS 8 Workshop, and updating all materials for this class. Cooperative Extension

is also developing a class on how to do a Build Out Analysis, and is piloting a Community Trail Mapping program.

Racheal Stuart asked if Audubon and Cooperative Extension had talked about ways to coordinate over GIS training workshops. Cynthia Belowski responded that Audubon needs to do a better job at reaching decision makers. Part of that involves understanding the kinds of tools that are out there. Audubon's Three Infrastructures Project uses these tools.

### **NH Fish & Game Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan**

Jim Oehler from the NH Fish & Game Department gave a presentation on the status of the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan. The Plan is a requirement of the federal government for those states taking advantage of the State Wildlife Grants Program administered by USFWS. The Plan will address the needs of the state's at-risk species and is due to Congress in October 2005. A number of GIS components will be included in the plan, including maps of current and potential habitats of at-risk species. Because there is so much interest in habitat mapping to support land conservation and other initiatives, the Department has fast-forwarded development of a coarse filter habitat map for the state, which will illustrate generalized habitat features (e.g. riparian buffers, unfragmented habitat mosaics, etc.) and benefit numerous species. Jim explained how the filter is being developed, and the various data layers to be included in the habitat map. He invited NHGCC members to join a meeting to help review the modified protocol and provide feedback and suggestions.

There were a number of questions about ways that volunteers might be engaged to help further develop the data layer. Darrell Covell explained that the fine filter modeling that will be a component of the Comprehensive Plan (i.e. modeling specific habitats for specific species) needs to be done by biologists, but other aspects, such as vernal pool identification, could be done by town volunteers. There was also discussion of whether and how other wildlife data for more common species might be gathered by schoolchildren and volunteers and input into a GIS database.

### **Advancing the NHGCC Work Plan**

Ann Wallace provided an update on NHGCC activities. First, we have contracted with communications consultant, Kelly Short, to produce two informational materials – a smaller brochure on NHGCC and a larger brochure outlining our GIS priorities. The brochures will each include examples of how GIS is being used to promote conservation and good planning in New Hampshire, incorporating examples from a number of NHGCC members. These are materials that members can use when doing informational and outreach meetings with targeted groups. Ann passed around a draft of the brochure. Dennis Fowler will scan both documents and email them around to the full group as a PDF file for fuller review and feedback. Ann also asked members if they would send in stories and graphics of GIS in Action. NHGCC will develop an archive of GIS stories and graphics that we can use when updating the current brochures or for other materials. Fay suggested that when people send in graphics we ask them to fill out a form explaining the image, and its derivation. Ann mentioned that the draft brochure does not include a web address for NHGCC. Fay offered to host a temporary web page for NHGCC on the GRANIT website.

Ann also explained that following up on our discussion at the May meeting several NHGCC members have been working to pool private funder dollars to support a *Fund for Geospatial Technologies* to be housed at NHGCC for the purpose of implementing Work Plan priorities

appropriate for private dollars. The Pardoe Foundation is willing to commit its GIS grantmaking dollars to such a fund over the next three years, and NHGCC is in discussions with the Charitable Foundation about similar multiple year support from the McCabe Fund. Other requests are outstanding with Jane's Trust and the Sweet Water Trust. The Charitable Foundation has agreed to serve as the fiscal agent for NHGCC.

One of the issues to be decided by the group is the decision making process for how to best allocate Fund grant dollars. Racheal Stuart noted that she would like to see us use the Fund as a way to help build the group's ability to collaborate – looking at what is most important for New Hampshire in terms of GIS development. Ann indicated that NHGCC would need some policy to guide the grantmaking process, and to decide how to make decisions if someone has a conflict of interest. The preliminary thought has been that the larger group would help establish overall priorities, and that a smaller selection committee, which might be comprised of people not requesting funding, might help make recommendations about allocation of grant funds. Nancy Lambert indicated concern that if the larger group is making decisions it could put members in a difficult position – using the analogy of the “fox guarding the hen house.” Someone else noted that there were no hens in the group, just foxes.

Members described several other grant allocation programs that could provide a model for NHGCC. Cynthia Belowski described the process used by the New Hampshire Estuary Program, which has a Committee comprised of many groups interested in coordinating project activities with Estuary Program financial support. That Committee uses an RFP process, but also allows committee members to make a proposal to do work that is supportive of the management plan. She thought this was analogous to the NHGCC situation. Dennis Fowler described DOT's Committee Process where each of its separate bureaus participates on the committee, each bringing forward proposal ideas to the larger group. Each bureau makes its case to the larger group, and the group as a whole makes decisions about how resources should be allocated. Projects are ranked, and votes are kept confidential. As a next step, Ann will develop several different decision making scenarios (perhaps including some combination of the two described). She will send these out to the NHGCC group for feedback and comment. As we think about the decision making criteria, the group also needs to distinguish between projects appropriate for private dollars versus those best targeted toward public funding, recognizing that there could be other projects that fall in more of a gray area.

Nancy Lambert asked if there would be any longevity to the Fund for Geospatial Technologies. She noted that longer-term money is much more helpful than one time grants. Ann indicated that we have been thinking about the Fund initially in a three- year timeframe, with most requests to date seeking two-year grant commitments. Many funders won't consider a request for longer than this. Racheal Stuart suggested that if this Fund works, it should have the potential to be renewed, noting the example of the longstanding Corporate Fund that NHCF administers for corporate donors. Ann suggested that the New England Grassroots Environment Fund is another such example of a Fund that was initially created for a three-year period and it now in year seven or eight with strong, ongoing funder support.

### **Further Prioritizing NHGCC Work Plan Action Items**

The group began a discussion of further prioritizing work plan action items. Several ideas were suggested before we ran out of time.

- Further enhancements to the wildlife data layer project, such as refinements to the data entry form or other such efforts to build the capacity to collect data from the field.
- Rather than small-scale enhancements to the wildlife data layer or the conservation lands viewer, Fay thinks there is a need for a larger, more comprehensive project to build a generic web viewer. This would require a fairly high-level staff person at GRANIT. There may be some potential to secure such a person with funds available from the I-93 CTAP.

### **Next Steps**

Because this question of how we prioritize work plan elements is critical to the Fund for Geospatial Technologies, Ann suggested that the group consider meeting later this winter to focus solely on this question. In the meantime, Ann will outline several different possible decision making approaches for a future Fund, which she will share with the entire group for feedback and suggestions. Additionally, Dennis Fowler will send around copies of the draft NHGCC brochures as a PDF file for member comment and input.