

# Geospatial Data Act (GDA): Safeguarding Quality in the Acquisition, Management, and Dissemination of Federal Geospatial Data

Legislation introduced by Representative Bruce Westerman (R-AR) and Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), the Geospatial Data Act (GDA), H.R. 3522/S. 1253, has exposed a chasm in the geospatial community that could jeopardize chances to reform and improve the coordination and use of geospatial data. Organizations including the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and the National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS) support the GDA as introduced and are resisting efforts by other organizations to weaken these important provisions.

Provisions in the legislation seek to improve the governance of geospatial activities among federal agencies, as well as these entities' relationships with state and local government, universities, and the private sector. Transparency and accountability provisions affecting the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) and the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) are also included. Most significant is a clause in the bill that designates the Director of the Office of Management and Budget as Chairperson of the FGDC, a position currently held by the Secretary of the Interior and usually delegated to a lower-level official.

GRADE REPORT OF: National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI)			SEMESTER: Fall 2014		
Subject	Dept.	Grade	Subject	Dept.	Grade
CADASTRAL DATA	DOI	D+	CAPACITY	FGDC	C
GEODETTIC 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-

Procurement, or contracting with the private sector, is inherent to the GDA and its goal of making the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) a success. Provisions (Sections 11 and 12) that assure quality in the procurement of the collection, and acquisition of geospatial data were included to achieve the overall goals and objectives of the legislation. Moreover, the bills include a provision (Section 12) to preserve and comply with existing state law for licensing of professionals in surveying that protect public health, safety and welfare.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) found without management improvements, that *“the vision of improving the coordination of geospatial information and reducing duplicative investments will not be fully realized.”* It went on to warn, *“until there is effective coordination across the National Spatial Data Infrastructure, there will continue to be duplicative efforts to obtain and maintain these data at every level of government.”*

Since the federal government does not manage the licensing of surveyors or the resulting enforcement, there must be recognition of state licensing laws at the federal level so any federal regulations provide the public with the avenue to understand where their protection of health, safety and welfare resides. Too many GIS databases are built without an accurate initial base. If the initial data is not more accurate than the resulting application data, then the resultant compounding error in positions could significantly impact public health, safety and welfare in applications.

Federally initiated and funded geospatial projects and their respective data deliverables can and do make their way into state/county/municipal agencies that may then use such data as authoritative documents without being prepared under the responsible charge of a state-licensed professional. Recognition of state licensing laws for geospatial projects by the federal government would serve to not only expand the official use of the data by state and local agencies, but also to encourage and promote regional funding participation.

However, a new version of the bill (H.R. 4395/S.2128) has been introduced without the Section 11 and 12 safeguards for the private sector and the licensed professionals regulated by their respective states. NSPS urges Congressional support for maintaining Sections 11 and 12 of the original Geospatial Data Act (H.R. 3522/S. 1253), while opposing other legislation (H.R. 4395/S. 2128) that would weaken or eliminate Sections 11 and 12.

**ACTION REQUESTED:**  
**NSPS respectfully urges Congress to maintain Sections 11 and 12 of the original Geospatial Data Act (H.R. 3522/S. 1253), while opposing other legislation (H.R. 4395/S. 2128) that would weaken or eliminate Sections 11 and 12. For more information, contact John Byrd, NSPS Government Affairs Representative, at jbyrd@jmpa.us or (703) 787-6665.**