

2/3/2023

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Attn: Janet Rossi
202 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Westerman,

The National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) is fully supportive of the recently released discussion draft concept for amending the Geospatial Data Act of 2018. In our view, there are multiple aspects of the concept that are particularly necessary: A change to the governance structure for the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI), the inclusion of regular studies on geospatial data investments and their impact, and the increase of the Federal Geographic Data Committee's (FGDC) budget to appropriately match their role in the support of coordination of geospatial data efforts at the federal level.

First and foremost, a change is needed in the governance structure for the NSDI. It has been almost 30 years since Executive Order 12906 was signed to envision the NSDI. At this point, it would be reasonable to think that we would have established a complete NSDI across the country. Despite great efforts by many over the years, that is still not the case. A shared geospatial infrastructure of data, technology, processes, policies, and partnerships to support an inclusive, consistent set of geospatial resources with fidelity to adopted standards has not materialized. It is clear that a critical weakness in the existing governance structure is responsible for this lack of maturity. We strongly believe the NSDI should incorporate a governance structure that provides an equitable seat at the decision-making table for all appropriate stakeholders. The governance study proposed in the amendment concept will provide an opportunity for the stakeholder community as a whole to work together to find the right solution. We believe the time has come to fix the fundamental structural governance issues.

In addition, the inclusion of studies related to federal expenditures on geospatial data and the impact of the geospatial economy is desperately needed to indicate the necessity of coordination and to support coordinated investment across all sectors with a stake in our geospatial data infrastructure. Congress needs to understand the true magnitude of the investment federal agencies are making to acquire, develop, manage, maintain and use geospatial data to fulfill their missions. Beyond the federal level, understanding the geospatial investment made at all levels of government (state, local, and regional) would provide an even better understanding of the need for significantly enhanced coordination. Furthermore, it is essential for decision makers to understand the true impact of the geospatial infrastructure on the nation's economy. It's not possible to efficiently and effectively manage geospatial resources without an understanding of the money and effort currently being invested, or how that investment translates into sustainable data for all stakeholders. We believe the Bureau of Economic Analysis is the appropriate body to lead a study to determine the size of the geospatial economy and its impact on the national economy. Both studies will inform and strengthen the decisions to be made around an improved NSDI governance structure.

The FGDC has an extremely important role to play going forward in terms of coordinating geospatial activities at the federal government level. Despite this key responsibility, the FGDC budget has steadily eroded for over ten years, diminishing to the point where they are incapable of coordinating those activities and carrying out their duties in the most effective manner possible. In fact, the Geospatial Data Act of 2018 increased their role and responsibilities without providing any additional dedicated funding. The FGDC requires a significant increase to restore funding needed to support staff and activities consistent with the coordination role they currently have across all of the federal government, and additional funding appropriate for their participation in an improved NSDI governance structure.

We strongly encourage the geospatial community to formally support the bipartisan GDA amendment concept and help get it enacted as soon as possible in the 118th Congress.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Duran, President

John Jordan, Executive Director

