

GEM NEWS

For the Idaho
GeoSpatial
Community

Fall 2010



2011 Intermountain GIS Conference

March 21-25, 2011

It's never too early to plan ahead when it comes to your professional development. The Intermountain GIS Users' Conference has been a consistent source of quality training and information for GIS professionals in the Intermountain West for over a decade. The 2011 'Geospatial Rendezvous' in Pocatello, Idaho, will continue that tradition with workshops, presentations, and information relevant to the ever progressing field of GIS.

Registration is now open for this conference, as well as the call for papers and posters.

Highlights include discussions on cloud computing, the development of regional resource centers, and the sharing of GIS collaborations and ideas. Start planning to attend this event and share with us your GIS success stories and milestones. For registration, abstract submissions, and general conference information, visits our website at <http://www.intermountaingis.org/conferences.html>.

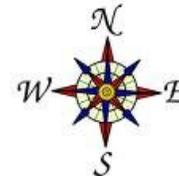
Don't forget to put in your nomination for the "Excellence in the Field of GIS Award". Nominations need to be received by Feb. 11, 2011. Visit http://www.intermountaingis.org/gis_award.html for details!

Census Bureau is Seeking Comment on Proposed Urban Area Criteria

The Census Bureau announces publication of the "Proposed Urban Area Criteria for the 2010 Census" in the Federal Register of August 24, 2010, available on the Federal Register's website at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>. Comments are due November 22, 2010. The proposed urban area criteria for the 2010 Census as well as summaries of the proposed changes, and more information about the Census Bureau's urban-rural classification is available on the Census Bureau's website at: <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/ua/urbanruralclass.html>.

Check out the Penn State Geospatial Revolution Project

The mission of the Geospatial Revolution Project is to expand public knowledge about the history, applications, related privacy and legal issues, and the potential future of location-based technologies. Check out the 14 minute video at: <http://www.geospatialrevolution.psu.edu/>



UPCOMING EVENTS:

GIS Day
November 17, 2010

Registration Is Now Open!
2011 Intermountain GIS Conference
March 21-25, 2011

NWGIS Users Conference
October 2011 Boise, ID

GEM NEWS

Summary of GIS Week Oct. 19-21, 2010

Gail Ewart, Idaho GIO

GIS Week has come and gone, and most people came away with renewed energy after seeing the progress and growth of our GIS community and the impact we are making in every corner of our state. Thanks to everyone who participated; you made it worthwhile. Thanks also to Northern Rockies URISA for its sponsorship and to ESRI and SWIG for their contributions.

The “meet” of the matter was The Idaho Map. Here are some highlights:

- The Parcels Workgroup presented the Parcel Data Exchange Standard. Please provide your input during the comment period ending December 15. The document is available at: http://gis.idaho.gov/portal/framework/cadastral/ParcelDataExchangeStandard_2010October6.pdf
- The Vertical Integration session shed some light on little-considered issues that generated good discussion. Check out the presentation at <http://gis.idaho.gov/portal/framework/VerticalIntegrationPresentationGISWeek2010.pdf>. If asked, Danielle Favreau and I might be persuaded to do this again.
- We got the latest skinny about cloud computing and GIS from ESRI. Check out the presentation at: http://gis.idaho.gov/portal/igo/CloudComputing_GIS_ID2010.pdf
- The Structures Data Exchange Standard received some vital input, and a final comment period will open soon. Watch for it at gis.idaho.gov.
- The Real Time Network brought in another significant partner, Western States Equipment. This initiative is reaching critical mass. Contact Keith Weber for details.
- There were many constructive suggestions made during the open discussion and wrap up, and SWIG’s Dan Narsavage moderated a discussion about how to contribute to TIM without feeling stressed out. Bottom line, choose just one or two topics and stick with them. Trust that others are doing a good job on the others. To help everyone keep current, we are improving our hard-working website based on your suggestions.

Other Highlights:

- Developers met off-site and after hours for a well-attended series of ignite sessions, food and libation. A good time was had by all.
- The two proposed regions in eastern Idaho have agreed to come together under one regional resource center. The business plan template is now being customized for the East Idaho RRC.
- The Idaho Geospatial Council Executive Committee meeting advanced the governance transition. Sign up to be a part of the Council so you will be able to vote on people to serve on the Executive Committee. Register at: <http://www.gis.idaho.gov/portal/IGC/>.

Here’s the run down on what worked well and what to rethink. Nearly everyone liked meeting at the Capitol. Even though the Garden Level is in the basement, natural light poured through many skylights. Everything we needed was close. Facility support was excellent, and the technology was a big advance over previous years. Using a wireless microphone, we were able to communicate with those participating through GoToMeeting. On the downside, having to transport the microphone to different parts of the room made for less than spontaneous exchanges. Maybe that’s not altogether a bad thing. Nearly every session had remote participation offered, but usage was low except in the opening session. What else can be done to encourage you to join in?

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For more information on GIS happenings in Idaho, Technical Working Groups, or other Framework Committees, please visit <http://gis.idaho.gov>

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ESRI Forums Have Moved

As of June 1st, 2010, ESRI has closed the older discussion forums at <http://forums.esri.com/>. The threads will remain available as read-only until 2014.

The new forum is located at <http://forums.arcgis.com/>. On this new site, you can create new threads and post replies.

Don't forget to check both the old and the new forum when looking for answers to your ESRI products and GIS related questions.



Summary of GIS Week Oct. 19-21, 2010

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Planning for next year is already underway. People volunteered to develop a map to make the downtown parking search easier. Restaurants will probably be on it, too. We will also make next year's sessions fit into a shorter time period. We are discussing how best to make the most of your investment of time and money by potentially holding the GIS sessions concurrently or in tandem with the NW GIS Users Conference in Boise October 2011.

If you have suggestions about this or feedback about GIS Week 2010, share them by emailing me at gail.ewart@cio.idaho.gov.



H-E-L-P!

Donna Phillips, NRURISA

I want to create a downloadable file in a specific format and the software wizard doesn't recognize my geo-database! Have you ever been in the situation where you just can't figure out what the heck is going on, why it won't work? Where do you look for help?

The first place that I like to start is in the "Help" of the program which I am currently working within. You have two choices: "Desktop Help" and "Desktop Resource Center". Then under "Desktop Help", there are four choices: 1) Contents, 2) Index, 3) Favorites, and 4) Search. The "Desktop Resource Center" takes you to the resources section of ESRI online. The software has done a great job of giving you a plethora of information.

Add into this variable, the fact that you may be using multiple pieces of software to accomplish a single task. For example, Server, Editor, ArcPad Studio, ArcPad...so now you have compounded your "Help" choices by a factor of four (4).

So when you are completely overwhelmed and still can't solve your problem, what are your choices? The Support Center is the place to go. It has several areas to choose from: New Support Request, My Support, Contact Tech Support, Chat with an Analyst, Knowledge Base, User Forums, Downloads, and Software. All great choices! All with a different take on supporting customers!

Still overwhelmed. Sometimes the best "Helpers" are those found within our own professional circles and organizations. Don't hesitate to give someone a call or put your question out on a list serv. The good and the bad of the "Help" resources can be seen by many, just realize that there **ARE** resources available for your use.

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Opinion: A Nod To The GIS Generalist

Danielle Favreau

Have you ever looked at the part of your job description that says "Other Duties As Required" and wondered what that means? Not me.

When it became clear to me that I wanted to make a career of GIS, I knew I was going to have to have a broader understanding of a few things. As I was looking at training courses and University programs, I began to look at certain areas that I felt I needed to know in order to advance my career.

Some things jumped out at me right away:

Adult Education for training staff, Cartography (one can always make better maps), Database Programming and Design, Software and Hardware Support (the printer too), Technical Consulting, and Website Development and Design.

As I thought a little harder about it, there are a lot of things that I have had to do while working as a GIS Specialist. I have been a:

Project Manager, Newsletter and Document Editor, Conference Organizer, Water Agent, Certified Pesticide Applicator, Program Liaison, Administrative Assistant, Mediator, Grant Administrator, Accountant, Lobbyist, Buyer, Desktop Publishing Specialist, and Graphic Designer just to name a few.

And that is a Specialist? I think Generalist is a better term. According to the Webster's Online Dictionary, a generalist is "a modern scholar who is in a position to acquire more than superficial knowledge about many different interests".¹ That definition applies to the GIS Specialist at all levels. It is not enough that a GIS Specialist understands the concepts behind spatial data and databases. It often requires an understanding of the type of data most used by the Specialist's employer may that be biology, criminology, or land records.

Does being a GIS Generalist make someone less of a GIS professional?

Absolutely not. In fact, it makes a GIS Generalist more of a professional. It takes dedication and talent to be able to adapt and adjust to just get the job done, whatever that may be at the time. I know of some who complain about moving from paper and pencil to GPS and PDA technology. Oh, yeah, I forgot, the GIS Generalist is proficient in GPS and PDA technology too. And what about them smart phones?

1 <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definitions/generalist?cx=partner-pub-0939450753529744%3Av0qd01-tldq&cof=FORID%3A9&ie=UTF-8&q=generalist&sa=Search#922>

What A Difference A Letter Makes

Kindra Serr, ISU

Working in a university setting means I field a lot of basic GIS inquiries. One of my favorite experiences happened with a phone call one afternoon. A woman on the other end of the line explained that she was just starting to get into GIS and had some questions. This is pretty typical, so I felt confident I could help.

She explained that she had all the software to start doing GIS, but wanted some information on what her computer needed. Also very typical, I explained some general system requirements needed to run GIS software. She said she knew that, but wanted to know more about the "thing you hooked up to your computer." Very puzzled, I asked her if she meant a mouse, monitor, or keyboard. No, she wanted to know about the thing that you used to get GIS information.

What a difference a letter makes.

Now back on track, I was able to help direct her to information about GPS units and talk to her about what might be best for her project.

After I hung up the phone, I couldn't help but worry. I really hope that she will take advantage of the workshops and information I told her about so she could appropriately use her GIS software and her "thing you hook up to your computer".



Alignment and Expectation

Dale Lindeman

How many times have you had to help out another GIS user because the geospatial data they are using doesn't line up or had the problem yourself with data you received from someone else. How long did it take you to find out that they had used 'Define Projection' instead of 'Project' to change the data spatial reference?

Sometimes it is not a matter of bad spatial reference but is error inherent to the data. Like when boundaries overlaid on – let's say an aerial photo – reveal discrepancies. You of course get asked about it by someone whose totally confused – they are dumbfounded and question "Well it is digital, isn't it?" As if being digital automatically makes everything right.

And actually, the data may be right. The data from one overlay may be from a standard recreational GPS unit with a published accuracy of ± 30 feet, the image it is being placed on is 2 meter, and the hydrography dataset is 166 feet (1:100,000). When you zoom in to 1:5000, it is not surprising that the line representing the river doesn't exactly lie where the image shows the riverbed and the GPS point is off to the left of both the river and the image riverbed.

Trying to explain these digital truths is often a difficult and trying part of every GIS professional's duties. If we are lucky, there may be some policies in place for addressing these issues of accuracy and precision. If not, we find that we just have to muddle through and keep a lot of metadata as we do our best to "just make the map right".

According to The Geographer's Craft, Accuracy is the degree to which information on a map or in a digital database matches true or accepted values and Precision refers to the level of measurement and exactness of description in a GIS database. If you would like to learn more about Error, Accuracy, and Precision as well as how to manage error, please visit http://www.colorado.edu/geography/gcraft/notes/error/error_f.html.

Sketching the Cadastral Map

Jennifer Bowles, Kootenai Co.

In the Kootenai County Assessor's mapping department we are phasing out our CAD maps now that our Arc GIS conversion is complete. Since we are still in transition, we must first update our CAD maps and then create a sketch for our cartographers to insert into the ArcGIS Geodatabase. This work needs to be completed in a timely and professional manner.

As a cadastral mapper, my challenge is learning to use the ArcGIS sketch environment to depict legal description changes for our assessment maps in the Arc View program. Effectively utilizing the sketch tools is key in achieving this goal. Entering the COGO and creating the sketch record for metes & bounds legal descriptions is the smoothest part of the process for me. Working with the sketch in ArcGIS can be frustrating. At times the sketch may be completed in a timely manner and everything will snap into place as designed. However, there are moments of sheer frustration trying to cut polygons for simple parcel splits when the lines seem to take on a life of their own.

In one instance, I turned off my sketch legal area display to see if my tracing tool would cut cleanly without any interference from the underlying legal area. Guess what! It worked. I turned the display back on and I actually had two separate polygons. Hooray! Another problem I've encountered is getting the vertices highlighted so that I can insert or delete them as needed to modify a polygon. I had to remember to go up and select "Modify Feature" each time I made a selection for editing. It immediately defaults back to "Create Feature" each time you select a polygon. Ugh!

As I familiarize myself with the tools available, the frustration level will moderate. I am learning various methods to reach the ultimate goal, however simple they may seem. Accomplishing the goal of producing accurate and workable sketches which will snap into place in our Kootenai County GeoDatabase is important so that our parcel coverage is accurate and that we have the best information available for our GIS department and the public we serve.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

"The Price (\$0.00) is Right" was the title to an article in the July 2009 issue of Reader's Digest. This article had great insight into our current GIS IT situation. In today's digital economy, the answer that many of our managers, leaders, and the public like to hear is that information is free. There are no publication costs, no delivery costs, and it can be delivered to mass numbers of people literally "free". The catch 22 for those of us who produce this information is the following: 1) There are costs associated with information production and 2) Revenue needs to be generated to continue to offer those services.

The Wall Street Journal answered this question by creating two tiers of subscribers: those who view only free articles and those who view articles only available to paid subscribers. Each of us has a business which generates what we consider to be public or "free" information. What services can we charge for (if any) to generate the revenue to continue to offer those services? The real concern with this kind of answer can be found in the following quote from the Reader's Digest article:

"I get the sense that – when it comes to news, anyway – we'll soon have two classes of Internet users: 1) people who have money and will pay for quality reporting and analysis, and 2) people who are less well-off or care less about quality and will accept any information that's free. So the elite will be better informed and others may get trashier media. True?"

What do you think? Please let us know your opinion of this article and how you view our direction in the state and the nation, by submitting articles to our newsletter editor, Danielle.Favreau@idwr.idaho.gov.

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NORTHERN ROCKIES URISA:
www.intermountaingis.org

Penn State GeoRevolution Project
<http://www.geospatialrevolution.psu.edu/>

Office of the Idaho GIO:
<http://gis.idaho.gov>

U.S. Census Bureau:
<http://www.census.gov>

The Geographer's Craft:
http://www.colorado.edu/geography/gcraft/notes/intro/intro_f.html

ESRI Forums:
<http://forums.arcgis.com/>

Inside Idaho:
<http://cloud.insideidaho.org>



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