

Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform (FLAIR) Act: Improving Federal Land Stewardship

In December 2006, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported the Federal government failed its audit for FY 2006. GAO has repeatedly (108th, 109th, 110th Congresses) designated Federal Real Property Asset Management one of the high-risk areas within the Federal government most prone to waste, fraud and abuse. One of the reasons cited by GAO is the fact that the government does not have a current, accurate inventory of the land it owns. The General Services Administration (GSA) collects data from at least 30 Federal agencies, but its system has been criticized by GAO for being “unreliable and of limited usefulness” and “not current or reliable.” On the other hand, the government inefficiently maintains a plethora of land inventories that are inaccurate, out-of-date, single purpose and non-interoperable. This inefficiency should not be the case when a single, uniform, reliable, regularly-maintained database currently available through state of the art geographic information systems (GIS) technology can be used.

The inefficient and wasteful nature of the government’s current way of doing business was demonstrated by then-Interior Secretary Gale Norton in her 2005 testimony before the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee when she said, *“The Department currently uses 26 different financial management systems and over 100 different property systems. Employees must enter procurement transactions multiple times in different systems so that the data are captured in real property inventories, financial systems, and acquisition systems. This fractured approach is both costly and burdensome to manage.”*

To improve government efficiency and management, MAPPS, the association of private geospatial firms, and NSGIC, the National States Geographic Information Council, strongly support the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform (FLAIR) Act, H.R. 5532, introduced by Representatives Ron Kind (D-WI) and Chris Cannon (R-UT). In the Senate, Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) will introduce a companion version of the FLAIR Act. This bill creates a single, Federal multipurpose cadastre (a uniform Federal computer database), in accordance with standards recommended by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). The bill also calls for an “inventory of inventories,” so that duplication can be identified and eliminated. The FLAIR Act will provide all agencies owning Federal real property an improved accounting for their land assets. Such an inventory will assist in improved Federal land management, resource conservation, environmental protection and utilization of real property.

Since 1993, the Mapping Science Committee of the NAS recommended the benefits of “National Land Parcel Data.” In 2007, NAS endorsed the idea of the FLAIR Act. Western Governors’ Association (WGA) resolutions have also called for a more coordinated approach to a national cadastre. Other benefits derived from the bill include integration with existing state and local cadastral data which enables efficient coordination in responding to catastrophic disasters, energy development, urban renewal, open space preservation, affordable housing, and accounting for all assets and liabilities.

The Federal government can only be a good steward of land when it can first identify what it owns, where it is, and what its status is, and secondly, manage the land in a more efficient manner based on reliable data. The FLAIR Act will provide government that tool. Sound decisions will be made from one central GIS database, instead of the confusion resulting from deciphering numerous non-interoperable databases with different standards, data, and interpretations.

ACTION REQUESTED:

MAPPS respectfully urges Representatives to cosponsor with Representatives Kind and Cannon. To become a cosponsor, contact David DeGennaro in Representative Kind’s Office at 5-5506. Or, contact Emy Lesofski in Representative Cannon’s Office at 5-7751. MAPPS respectfully urges Senators to cosponsor this proposed legislation with Senator McCaskill. To become a cosponsor, contact Peg Gustafson in Senator McCaskill’s Office at 4-6154. For more information, contact John Byrd, MAPPS Government Affairs Manager, at jbyrd@mapps.org or (703) 787-6996.