

## *A Coordinated Geospatial Data Program to Enhance the Farm Bill*

America's agriculture program – production, conservation, compliance, rural development, and environmental management – can be greatly enhanced through the utilization of current, accurate, high quality geospatial information. Geospatial data can be the backbone for properly managing land resources throughout the United States. Improved capabilities for gathering and analyzing this information can also be leveraged to save money and time while increasing the many benefits and applications of its use.

The Senate made a good start when it included Section 1719 in its version of H.R. 2419, the Food and Energy Security Act (commonly known as the Farm Bill). Section 1719 on “Geospatial Systems” provides for the consolidation of geospatial systems of the agencies into a single enterprise system that ensures that geospatial data is shareable, portable, and standardized. MAPPS believes this provision is far too narrow for substantial integration and reform. MAPPS recommends renaming, expanding and broadening Section 1719 to cover USDA's more comprehensive geospatial needs.

Recent studies have recommended organized purchasing programs, such as Imagery For The Nation (IFTN) and Elevation For The Nation (EFTN). These programs propose to reduce redundant data capture and save US taxpayers more than \$100 million annually. In addition, the use of current high resolution imagery and elevation data, as well as current geospatial land cover information, will provide a reduction in the cost and time to implement conservation programs.

Geospatial data driven forestry and environmental monitoring can provide the foundation for an early warning system regarding threats to our natural resources allowing researchers to assess these potential threats and to mitigate the negative effects of issues such as invasive species, soil erosion, watershed protection, water conservation, insect infestations and others before they become costly widespread, irreversible epidemics such as the Northern Pine Beetle. Precision farming, even in its infancy, is reaping tangible results using actionable geospatial data inputs to high-tech enabled hardware to the benefit of both farmers and the environment. Precision farming will continue to develop rapidly across all high value crops to meet the needs of primary and secondary use markets such as biofuels.

Because this high-tech approach to farming is so tied to geospatial data input, MAPPS recommends that the 2008 Farm Bill provide support in supplying key data layers, such as imagery and elevation models. This will permit the precision agriculture applications technology to continue to grow throughout the life of the bill.

MAPPS advocates renaming this section to “Geospatial Data Coordination.” The revised Section 1719 would include the formation of a geospatial management office in USDA. Such an office, enacted in the Department of Homeland Security, has proven to be an asset to the department, the geospatial profession, other government agencies, and the taxpayers and as such, this program office should be emulated in USDA. Another major revision to Section 1719 would be to establish a baseline program that would blend IFTN with the National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP). This national dataset program would include current, accurate orthorectified image maps on a sustained and updated basis; elevation data utilizing modern geospatial technologies as are available from commercial data and service providers; parcel information including farm boundaries, common land units, and primary sample units, as well as a system for indexing and identifying each cadastral parcel and a series of land data files, each including the parcel identifier, which can be used to retrieve information and cross reference between and among other data files, which contains information about the use, value, infrastructure, resources and characteristics of each parcel; and a reference frame consisting of a geodetic network.

### **ACTION REQUESTED:**

**MAPPS respectfully urges Members of Congress, including Farm Bill Conferees, to expand Section 1719 (of H.R. 2419) to cover a broader degree of comprehensive geospatial terminology, data integration and program coordination. For more information, contact John Byrd, MAPPS Government Affairs Manager, at [jbyrd@mapps.org](mailto:jbyrd@mapps.org) or (703) 787-6996.**