



Congressional Research Service

Assisting the Congress with its deliberations and legislative decisions

Informing Congress with Geospatial Resources

Paul Schirle

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CRS in Brief

- Legislative branch agency founded in 1914
- Provides comprehensive legislative research and analysis
 - Authoritative
 - Confidential
 - Objective
 - Nonpartisan
 - Timely



Relationship with Congress

- Serves as shared staff to committees and Members
- Expert assistance at every stage
 - Early considerations
 - Committee hearings
 - Floor debates
 - Oversight of enacted laws



Authoritative

- Services and products are authoritative and accurate
 - Rigorous research methodologies
 - Nonpartisan
 - Critical assumptions explained and justified
 - Primary resources used whenever available
 - Document and vet all sources
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- If authoritative GIS data are not available, CRS will consider alternative analytical approaches



How Geospatial Analysis Can be Helpful

- Conveys complex and scientifically significant issues
- Reveal consequences, impacts otherwise concealed
- Members of Congress represent a population within a geography
 - Policy issues relate spatially to the Member's political geography: either a state or a district
 - Geography can identify shared public policy interests
 - Legislation with a geographic impact does not always precisely reference that geography
- Examples



GIS Analysis for Congress: Challenges

- Hundreds of analyses per year
- Tight deadlines
- Unfamiliar datasets
- Data & survey privacy issues
- Unique questions, unique solutions
- Appropriate secondary use of data
- Data from all levels of government, commercial sources, and non-governmental organizations overlaid
- Domestic and international data compared



GIS Analysis for Congress: Potential Solutions

1. Ability to collaborate with data creators & maintainers who

- know more about their data than can be included in the metadata
- can identify the data with the greatest resolution and the fewest transformations
- know the best data available for the use intended
- understand data collection methodology (which is essential for determining appropriate secondary data uses)



GIS Analysis for Congress: Potential Solutions

2. Clearinghouses as data sources

- Standardized metadata
- A single place to discover data
- Points to trusted repositories
- Data authenticity: accurately documented
- Citations to data sources provide a compact mechanism for independent parties to audit, add to, or reproduce analysis for the legislative context



Summary

- Good national public policy requires granular, accurate, and authoritative data
 - May conflict with survey privacy
- Clearinghouses
 - speed discovery and analysis of authoritative data
 - data owners may know of more appropriate sources of spatial data: consultation
- Relying on data connections for public policy analysis requires trusted repositories

