

**Note:** The following column is reprinted from the May/June 2004 issue of *Networks*, the member newsletter of the Geospatial Information & Technology Association (GITA). For more information on GITA, visit [www.gita.org](http://www.gita.org).

# Federal Relationships Emerging

By Bob Samborski, GITA Executive Director

In the last issue of *Networks*, I reported on GITA's involvement in a "Future Directions Forum" hosted by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) in Washington, D.C.

In that session, representatives from the Mapping Science Committee of the National Academy of Science and leaders from various associations, along with FGDC staffers, discussed the



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present status of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI). In that article, I described the general sense of frustration that this admittedly hugely ambitious effort was not further along. A very positive observation was that the FGDC has opened up the discussion to include in a meaningful way the various communities it sees as vital to achieving the NSDI's promise.

I also outlined the general framework of GITA's National Geospatial Initiative for Critical Infrastructure Protection (NGI-4-CIP). I believe that this initiative is of utmost importance for the future of our association. A subsequent return to Washington in early June provided ample support for this view.

There were two primary reasons for the June trip. First, GITA was invited to attend a regular meeting of the FGDC Steering Committee, which includes official representatives from the 17 federal agencies that comprise the FGDC, as well as a selected group of stakeholder organizations. I had responded to an invitation by FGDC to apply on behalf of GITA for status as one of those

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stakeholder organizations. J. Steven Griles, the Deputy Secretary of the Interior, has since approved the application. Griles chairs the FGDC Steering Committee in that capacity.

GITA President-Elect Pete Gomez from Xcel Energy, Past President Dave DiSera from EMA, Inc., and I represented GITA. There were well over 60 people in the boardroom that morning, and we were among the very few, if not the only, "private sector" representatives in the audience (keeping in mind that the federal government considers "utilities" to be in the private sector). An interesting exchange between Pete Gomez and Deputy Secretary Griles ensued when Gomez summarized various geospatial data security concerns of electric and gas utilities. As he adjourned what he termed a very fruitful meeting, Griles acknowledged to President-Elect Gomez that the FGDC Steering Committee needed to hear more such comments from the utility perspective.

Because of our interaction with representatives of the Mapping Sciences Committee of the National Academy of Science at the FGDC Future Directions Forum in April, GITA was invited to make several presentations at their conference the same week. Thus the second reason for the June trip. Paul Cutler, NAS Mapping Sciences Committee staff executive, and David Cowen,

professor of geography and department head at the University of South Carolina, issued the invitation. Cowen, an old friend who represented the Association of American Geographers during the GIS/LIS days, serves as chair of that prestigious NAS committee. After Pete Gomez's presentation, "The Role of the Utilities in the NSDI," I summarized our ROADIC Study Mission to Japan. Past President DiSera concluded GITA's presentations with an overview of a planned pilot project on critical infrastructure protection. There will be more about this development later.

Why all the attention?

Simple: GITA represents a constituency—or group of constituencies from the federal government's perspective—that has been missing from the NSDI dialogue. Moreover, it is now obvious that GITA is in the best position to organize that constituency into a valuable contributor to the ongoing national dialogue on critical infrastructure protection and homeland security. Our increased involvement and partnership with the FGDC and other federal agencies represents a very important step for us—and an excellent opportunity.

As Yogi Berra once said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." Although the continued evolution of the NSDI and the myriad related national developments are complex, far from clear, and focused on the long term, it is time for GITA to take bold action. Here's what we're doing:

- The National Geospatial Initiative for Critical Infrastructure Protection will be a major issue during GITA's upcoming Strategic Planning Session in July. There are various activities being discussed for inclusion under the NGI-4-CIP banner, and a well-coordinated program of activity is imperative for GITA as we prepare for a leadership role in this critical area.
- We are continuing to develop a charter for FLAG (the Federal Liaison Advisory Group). The Board of Directors will consider a plan of action for FLAG, for which we will seek official approval at the board's July meeting in Denver. In general, FLAG would serve as the internal GITA committee responsible for coordinating and developing recommendations for pursuing a broad program of activity to position the association as a major

partner to the federal government in its efforts to complete the NSDI.

- We will continue to refine the proposal developed by our CIP Working Group in January 2004, which was subsequently presented on several occasions to senior managers at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The proposal is to develop and conduct one or more pilot projects involving a broad group of stakeholders in a specific region or urban community. A special workshop to better define the scope and agenda for an operational pilot was held in cooperation with the City and County of Honolulu in late June. The workshop, with the support of DHS, included representatives of local, state, and federal government agencies; utility organizations; the military; and other interested related first-responder and

emergency response organizations in Hawaii. The results of this workshop will be presented to DHS officials for their consideration of potential funding for a more involved pilot project. The objective of the pilot project series—to be known as Geospatially Enabling Community Collaboration (GECCo)—is to develop a replicable model for stakeholders in other communities to use in constructing data sharing agreements for critical infrastructure protection, among other things.

In the next edition of *Networks*, I'll relate how the workshop went and how it came to be. In the meantime, if you are interested in more information about FLAG and how you can contribute to its activities, please contact me at [bsamborski@gita.org](mailto:bsamborski@gita.org).