



**By Laurence Socci**

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## A Tale of Two Map Programs

**C**ommercial geospatial technologies and spatial data are transforming government and private enterprise by enabling and improving more effective and efficient operations, communications and decision making. These geospatial technologies and data are used daily by the federal government, state agencies, local and public authorities and thousands of private citizens. When it comes to geospatial technologies, two of the most talked about programs in the federal government are The National Map and the Geospatial One-Stop (GOS). The National Map appears to be “private sector friendly,” that is, the private sector—including surveying and mapping professionals—have the opportunity to contribute to the program. The Geospatial-One-Stop, on the other hand seems to be a lot less “private sector friendly.”

The National Map is under the control of the United States Geological Survey (USGS). Its purpose is to provide seamless, continually maintained geographic base data to serve as a foundation to integrating, sharing and using data easily and consistently. Geospatial One-Stop is under the control of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of Interior (DOI). Its purpose is to “spatially enable e-government faster, easier and less expensive access to geospatial information.”

The National Map is a result of a partnership between the USGS and states, local, tribal, university and private/commercial partners. While all of the partners involved played an important role, the role of the private industry—including surveying volunteers—is significant because they provided tools and data, as well as conducted research, identified changes and provided updates to keep the project current. The project took off after September

11 when the federal government learned the importance of accurate up-to-date maps to enhance protection of the U.S. population from natural disasters and acts of terror.

The USGS did the brunt of the work in updating its existing maps with help from the private industry. This partnership worked toward the goal of The National Map to build a seamless, continually maintained nationally consistent set of base geographic data, containing several layers of geographic data. From the start, state and local governments, as

well as private industry, were needed to make the project a success. State and local governments provided the various data layers of the map, identified changes needed and provided updates. The private sector did the necessary research and provided the tools to facilitate access to the map. The final product is something that can be used by the public, but more important, was built with the help of the public.

GOS began as part of the e-government initiative of President Bush. Its goal is to organize, broaden and accelerate federal government plans to develop and provide improved access to geospatial data. The purpose of GOS is to support the business of government and to support decision making on all levels of government by creating a single source where federal, state, local and tribal

governments can gain access to geospatial data from around the country. Geospatial One-Stop was also intended to help provide the tools for governments to provide safe, effective and efficient services to their citizens through easier access to geographic information created by all levels of government and the private sector. At this time, however, it only provides access to geospatial databases created and maintained by the public sector. One of the main problems with this limited access is that many of the public sector databases are not current. The Department of

Interior has not yet developed a policy for the inclusion of data prepared by the private sector to be included in the GOS. There is an old saying, “garbage in, garbage out.” In the case of the Geospatial One-Stop, that saying holds true—at least until a policy is developed to bring the private sector in to help bring the databases up to date. A policy of this sort may or may not be hard to put together. Any policy developed must contain certain restrictions on who can provide data and what kind of data can be included. Additionally, restrictions must be in place so that federal, state and local security is not breached. Until the private sector, the surveying and mapping professionals who practice their trade every day, are given the opportunity to contribute to the Geospatial One-Stop, it will not live up to the potential that is intended to have. *A*

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