

May 27, 2018

Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council
658 Cedar St., Room 300
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Council Members,

I am pleased to nominate the Minnesota Geospatial Commons for a Governor's Geospatial Commendation. I believe this is an exemplary project worthy of recognition by the Council and the Governor.

Prior to the [Minnesota Geospatial Commons](https://gisdata.mn.gov) (the Commons, <https://gisdata.mn.gov>), several Minnesota organizations had their own, discrete portals for publishing and distributing geospatial data. Most data producing organizations had no portal at all. To acquire data, one had to first know what organization had it, and then search their portal, or browse their web site, or find a contact person and contact them. This was cumbersome and time consuming for governments, businesses, non-profits, academic organizations and anyone else that needed to consume geospatial resources. A great opportunity existed to make all of these organizations more efficient and effective.

The Commons is a collaborative public website where geospatial technologists interested in Minnesota can access hundreds of geospatial resources including data, metadata, maps, services, and applications. The Commons serves as Minnesota's focal point for this data, providing users a single place to search for resources provided by a variety of publishers, including state, regional, county, academic, and nonprofit organizations.

The Commons is also a product envisioned and defined in concept by a collaborative, multi-sector group representing the Minnesota geospatial community. It was implemented by a multi-agency group at the state level and is operated by the Minnesota Geospatial Information Office (MnGeo).

A Short History of the Commons

The idea for the Commons started with a 2005 [Minnesota State GIS Enterprise Conceptual Architecture Design](#) vision created by the Governor's Council on Geographic Information (GCGI). In 2009, a joint workgroup of the GCGI and MetroGIS began developing a more concrete vision for "**A single place we all go to find and share geospatial resources**". Federal, state, regional, county and city government and non-profit representatives contributed to defining and prioritizing the functionality needed in the Commons. A geospatial data user/producer survey was conducted with over 500 responses, further clarifying the priorities for the purpose and functionality of the Commons. A prototype site was developed to help understand and hone the needs for the final product.

In 2012, state government took over the work of actually building and implementing the Commons using a collaborative team composed of MN.IT staff supporting several state agencies. The team used the CKAN platform and incorporated the "Geospatial Data Resource Site" (GDRS) technology developed at the MN Department of Natural Resources to build the Commons.

It officially launched in March of 2015. Shortly after, three major geospatial data publishing sites were decommissioned, eliminating redundancy and focusing the state’s geospatial efforts into “*a single place we all go to find and share geospatial resources*”

Since then, the Commons team has transitioned into operations, focusing on adding publishers and content along with operational enhancements, including streamlined metadata publishing, improving documentation, adding new data types, and improving size limitations on data. As part of a communications plan, the team also releases news articles on the site, for example tackling topics such as the DNR’s buffer map and data, Next Generation 911 data, and the policies behind free and open data.

Governance of the Commons

Importantly, governance for the Commons is established and maintained by the geospatial community, as represented by the [Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council](#) (GAC). Governing principles emphasize quality and clarity over quantity, holding publishers to important metadata standards and expectations for the benefit of the broader geospatial community:

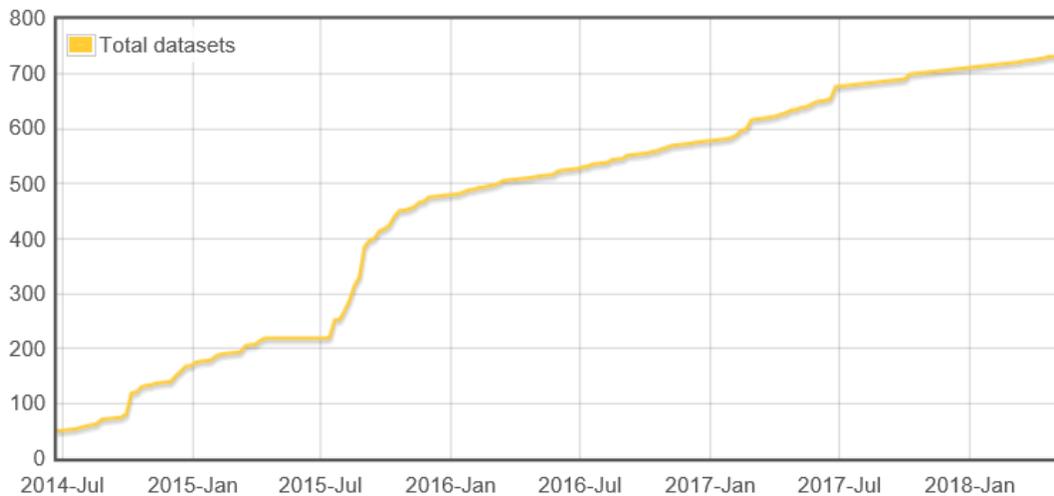
- Data must be free and open.
- Data must cover at least part of Minnesota.
- Data must be published in a geospatial format or a tabular format that can be spatially enabled.
- Each resource must have sufficient documentation to determine if it is fit for a particular use.
- Publishers must be organizations, not individuals.

This level of governance not only makes the site a very efficient and effective tool for users, but also leads to time savings for publishers who will spend less time answering questions about their data.

Success of the Commons

The success of the Commons is evident in its growth. Starting with just nine publishers and less than 200 data resources when it launched in March of 2015, adoption and use has grown steadily to over 700 resources from 28 publishers within three years.

Total number of Datasets



Publishing Organizations

Publishing Organization	Published Resources
Dakota County	64
Hennepin County	22
Itasca County	4
Lake County	4
Legislative Coordinating Commission	19
MetroGIS Collaborative	25
Metropolitan Council	157
Metropolitan Mosquito Control District	1
Minnesota Geological Survey	26
Minnesota Valley Transit Authority	1
MN Agriculture Department	33
MN Board of Animal Health	1
MN Board of Water and Soil Resources	8
MN Education Department	14
MN Geospatial Information Office	97
MN Health Department	6
MN Natural Resources Department	174
MN Pollution Control Agency	30
MN Revenue Department	2
MN Secretary of State	2
MN Transportation Department	13
Natural Resources Research Institute	2
Ramsey County	8
Rice County	6
Saint Louis County	1
Steele County	2
University of Minnesota	12
Waseca County	5
Total Resources Published	739

Site traffic now averages approximately 50,000 page views per month. In 2017, users made 86,000 successful downloads.

Also, since the Commons launched in 2015, eleven Minnesota Counties have either passed a “free and open data policy” or implemented open data rules by practice. Currently, eight counties are leveraging the Commons for their data distribution mechanism, meaning they do not have to invest in their own technological solution to meet their goals of distributing data freely to users. This capability has been a critical incentive to county commissioners when considering the adoption of an open data resolution.

Very quickly the Commons has become the focal point for all things geospatial in the state, which has improved communication and created efficiencies regarding GIS data, services, applications, information and news related to geospatial activities and events in Minnesota. The Commons and those who manage and use it have been

able to connect publishers and users of geospatial data like never before. This is a transformational development for Minnesota: GIS professionals throughout the geospatial community are spending significantly less time acquiring data, and more time on value-added analyses that benefit our citizens.

In Summary

The true value of data is derived from its use. Making authoritative, well documented data easily discoverable in a single place for Minnesota ensures that data usage is maximized, providing an exponential return on investment for data creators, data consumers, and ultimately for the citizens of Minnesota.

Thank you for considering this nomination of an exemplary project for a Governor's Geospatial Commendation. Six testimonials in support of this nomination are attached.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Kotz".

Mark Kotz, GIS Manager
Metropolitan Council
mark.kotz@metc.state.mn.us, 651-602-1644



Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

Using law, science, and research to protect Minnesota's environment, its natural resources, and the health of its people.

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Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council
658 Cedar St., Room 300
St. Paul, MN 55155

May 22, 2018

Dear Council Members and Governor's Geospatial Commendation Award Committee:

Please accept this testimonial letter in support of the nomination by Mark Kotz, GIS Manager of the Metropolitan Council, for the Minnesota Geospatial Commons to be selected for the 2018 Governor's Geospatial Commendation Award recognition as a collaborative and authoritative public geospatial resource that enables the effectiveness of the GIS industry in our state.

At the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, we use geospatial science to address and resolve environmental justice and natural resource conservation issues from neighborhood to statewide scales. The usefulness of the spatial analyses that we perform to inform decision makers is tied directly to the availability and quality of data that we can obtain for their implementation. The Geospatial Commons hosts the widest selection of current digital data in Minnesota, spanning subject matters from roads and parcels to biota and sensitive habitats. Having these scalable, open source, and reliably-documented public GIS data readily available is imperative to our mission of advocating for the sustainability of Minnesota's natural resources.

Furthermore, the Geospatial Commons is a point of collaboration for the GIS industry in Minnesota. The online resource features over 700 datasets in 24 data formats, contributed by almost 30 organizations. This includes seamless metro-wide datasets, as well as rural regional data compiled under the governance of MetroGIS, which facilitates access to data from 22 counties statewide. The Minnesota Geospatial Commons is a reputable resource for providing access to these, and a diversity of public geospatial resources, with users and publishers benefiting from the convenience of its services. The role of the Commons expands into all GIS sectors in Minnesota, from non-profit to academic, to government and commercial projects – with stakeholder impacts that reach countless communities.

The importance of the Minnesota Geospatial Commons cannot be understated. It serves as a digital library of irreplaceable information and services that enables us to make best use of our states geospatial resources. As such, I encourage your consideration for its recognition by selecting the Minnesota Geospatial Commons for this year's Governor's Geospatial Commendation Award.

Sincerely,

Andra Bontrager, GISP
GIS Specialist, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy



MNIT @ Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Rd
St. Paul, MN 55155

May 25, 2018

Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council
658 Cedar St., Room 300
St. Paul, MN 55155

Greetings Council Members,

Please consider this testimony in support of the Minnesota Geospatial Commons nomination for a Governor's Council Geospatial commendation. I believe this project is significant and deserves recognition by the Council and the Governor.

For several years my role at the Department of Natural Resources was to manage content on the DNR's Data Deli. While the Deli was very successful, I and my colleagues always realized the limitations of a single state agency data delivery site. Of course we did include data on the Deli from partners when possible, but given our agency imperatives it was necessarily a secondary priority which often went neglected.

The Geospatial Commons Project was born out of this frustration and a vision to create a broader and more inclusive arena for GIS data sharing, one that would leverage the skills and talents of many agencies and partner organizations. As I read the nomination it was a bit embarrassing to realize how long it took to bring the "Commons" to full fruition. But as I thought about it I really couldn't help but be amazed that it happened at all. Across agency lines a group of excited GIS practitioners and their willing supervisors got together to slowly but surely persist in making the Commons a reality. With no budget. With no overarching departmental mandates. They just did it because it was the right thing to do. There were a lot of issues to work through, but they didn't give up. If that isn't the Minnesota GIS way, I don't know what is.

The Minnesota Geospatial Commons speaks to the best values of the Minnesota GIS community: free and open data, sharing of technology and expertise, collaboration across different sectors of society, and governmental transparency. One of the key decisions made at the outset of this project was to explicitly value quality over quantity as a way to respect end users and create a resource of true value. This decision was critical to the eventual success of the project.

For DNR staff, the Minnesota Geospatial Commons has made the process of sharing data with the public as simple as sharing data with their colleagues. At the same time, DNR staff now have organized access to even more data than ever before, much of it from counties and other partners who we did not regularly share data with in the past. As a departmental GIS Manager, I believe it represents an outstanding value to both our agency and the citizens of Minnesota, and is worth every penny the DNR now contributes to its ongoing operations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hal Watson', is written over a horizontal line.

Hal Watson
GIS Section Supervisor
MNIT @ Department of Natural Resources



May 22, 2018

390 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101

Mark Kotz, Chair, Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council
658 Cedar Street, Room 300
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Letter of Support for the nomination of the Minnesota Geospatial Commons for the Governor's Geospatial Commendation

Greetings Mark,

I am submitting this letter of support the nomination of the Minnesota Geospatial Commons for the Governor's Geospatial Commendation. As the Coordinator of the MetroGIS collaborative, I have the on-going opportunity to work with, and interact directly, with many geospatial professionals from city, county, regional, state and federal governments as well as with professionals in the non-profit, academic and non-profit sectors. Without exception, geospatial professionals in Minnesota and beyond have lauded the Geospatial Commons as a remarkable resource for discovering data, metadata and services. The design, ease of use and architecture of the Commons indicate tremendous care and attention has been taken to create a premier user experience that is elegant, useful and responsive.

So effective has the presence of the Geospatial Commons become that the MetroGIS collaborative decided to fold all the geodata holdings of its own portal—the DataFinder—into the Commons in December 2015 and retire the DataFinder. While the DataFinder was a much-used and much-loved data clearinghouse from its inception in 1998, MetroGIS is now proud to offer its twenty-five regionally standardized datasets and other resources to the data consuming public via the Geospatial Commons and participate in the ever-growing and ever-sophisticated pool of statewide geospatial community resources.

The presence of the Commons itself is symbolic of the strong collaborative spirit of the Minnesota geospatial professional community and our collective belief in this technology to enhance the work of our agencies and the lives of our citizens. I am proud to support its nomination for the Governor's Geospatial Commendation.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey Maas, GISP
MetroGIS Coordinator, Metropolitan Council
Lecturer, GIS and Data Visualization, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota
Chair, Standards Committee, Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council
763.772.4287 - geoffrey.maas@metc.state.mn.us - maas0021@umn.edu

From: David Brandt <David.Brandt@co.washington.mn.us>

Sent: Wednesday, May 23, 2018 2:39 PM

To: Kotz, Mark <mark.kotz@metc.state.mn.us>

Subject: RE: Governor's Commendation Award Testimonials - MN Geospatial Commons

The geospatial community within and beyond the state has greatly benefitted from the Minnesota Geospatial Commons. Not only has it made it easier than ever to discover geospatial data in Minnesota, it makes it easier for data producers to share their data. The Geospatial Commons is a successful example of collaboration and sharing of geographic data, expertise and technology. This project also promotes geographic data standards by requiring a certain level of metadata for each data set published to the Geocommons. Public and private institutions across the state have collaborated on, and benefited from the geospatial resources made available through the Geocommons.

David Brandt
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May 23, 2018

Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council
C/O MnGeo
658 Cedar Street, Room 300
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Members of the Governor's Geospatial Commendation Award Committee:

I strongly believe that the Minnesota Geospatial Commons should receive the Governor's Geospatial Commendation Award this year. With 62,000 students and 25,000 faculty and staff, the University of Minnesota is a huge consumer of geospatial data. The Commons makes it easy to discover and access a wide variety of data. For example, instructors often use the MPCA's "*What's in My Neighborhood*" application to teach about pollution, urban planning, equity, and more. On the research side, parcel data and detailed hydrography layers are critical in mapping and analysis for many projects. These are just a couple examples; the use of the Commons is pervasive throughout all campus locations.

The University is also a large producer of geospatial data. Data from the Minnesota Geologic Survey, Natural Resources Research Institute, and several other colleges are regularly published to the Commons. The Commons provides an effective portal to share resources with the geospatial community, policy makers, and public.

I applaud the use of the open source CKAN platform to build the MN Geospatial Commons. This allows for a cost-effective implementation and sustainable long-term support. The Commons also provides interoperability with other platforms for data discovery and access through a variety of formats (i.e. shape files, web services, etc.)

It's hard to believe that the Mn Geospatial Commons has only been available since June 30, 2014. It has seen amazing growth in four short years and has become a valuable resource across the University for teaching, research and outreach. Please feel free to contact me if further information is needed via e-mail at lenkne@umn.edu or phone at my direct office number, 612-624-7591.

Sincerely,



Len Kne

Associate Director, U-Spatial
MGIS Faculty, Department of Geography, Environment and Society
University of Minnesota

Minnesota Geospatial Advisory Council
658 Cedar St., Room 300
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Council Members,

On behalf of the GIS users at the Metropolitan Council, this letter is being written in support of the Minnesota Geospatial Commons for the Governor's Geospatial Commendation award. The Geospatial Commons has provided immeasurable benefits not only to GIS practitioners but also to data managers, ultimately providing value and cost saving to taxpayers.

Having a single authoritative data portal for GIS users is the primary and most recognized benefit, but additional value can be seen from a GIS data workflow and Information Technology (IT) infrastructure perspective. The Council's retirement of its own public geospatial data portal, DataFinder is one example. Prior to the Commons, the Council maintained servers and other IT resources required to publish GIS data to DataFinder. Now, the Council utilizes the Commons infrastructure to support public data sharing which provides significant savings to the Council long term. This same benefit has been multiplied many times over as other organizations have retired their individual data portals and switched to the Commons.

The second significant data management benefit that the Commons provides is to smaller organizations or organizations who many not have maintained data portals in the past. Now these organizations can take advantage of the Commons cost effective resources to publicly share their information. Having IT infrastructure and workflows available to agencies can provide significant cost saving, thereby encouraging data sharing and making a wider array of GIS information available to the public.

A third benefit from an IT management perspective is the standardized framework that the Commons provides for downloading all participating agencies GIS data. GIS users in all divisions at the Council utilize external agency map layers to support their business processes. Before the Commons existed, GIS data managers were required to manually search multiple data portals for current information that could be downloaded and incorporated internally. Now, the Commons infrastructure allows automated processes to be established saving significant amounts of time maintaining map layers and keeping those layers up-to-date. Again, this benefit can be multiplied many times over as other agencies utilize similar workflows.

In summary, the Commons provides many user and data management benefits and because of the cost saving and public value this service provides, it is felt that the Commons deserves recognition for its excellence.

Sincerely,



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