

Geospatial Data Partnership Statement

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High Resolution Elevation Data Partnership

In 2005, I contacted Obi Sium, DNR Flood Plain Management Supervisor, in an effort to get support for a LiDAR project in McLeod County. I was told that, at that time, the State's focus for LiDAR data collection was the Red River Area but that McLeod County would be kept in mind.

In 2006, I received a phone call from Peter Jenkins (MnDOT) offering \$25,000 and staff support towards LiDAR data collection in my county. I met with the McLeod County commissioners who didn't say "no" but who wanted to think about it. It appeared to me that they might say "no" though, so I arranged for Peter Jenkins, Ron Wencil (USGS), and Chris Cialek (MnGeo) to come to a county board meeting to explain the value of this opportunity for McLeod County.

I met a short time later with the commissioners and explained that I had other interested partners as well: two cities, a watershed, a soil and water conservation district, along with MnDOT and USGS. One commissioner finally said, "You can have \$250,000 but you have to find the rest in partners." I met with those that were interested and was able to collect enough funds to not only obtain LiDAR, but LiDAR data accurate enough to be capable of producing 1-foot contours. There was also enough money for 6-inch resolution orthophotos. When I went back to the commissioners with all the letters of support and funding, they were able to approve the project.

The reason I mention this is because I don't think our commissioners ever wanted to say "no", but they needed the support from multiple agencies to justify saying "yes". If our commissioners spent a quarter-million dollars on pretty photographs and contour lines, they could be severely criticized as wasting taxpayer money by the average county citizen who might not understand the purposes for such an investment. Unfortunately, this criticism could spread quickly, so commissioners need to be supported before they feel comfortable to say "yes". This may be even more true in more rural Minnesota counties.

The local newspapers need to be on board as well. Negativity coming from the local paper could bring any project to its knees. Fortunately, I took time with the editor of the Hutchinson newspaper to discuss the importance of LiDAR and orthophoto programs in the county, along with the efficiencies that would be gained for staff, realtors, and the general public.

There is a ton of work to be done to promote partnerships. By itself, having a regional meeting for anyone to attend most likely won't produce the necessary level of commitment. If we went back to 2006 and there was a regional meeting, our county commissioners would not have attended and we would never have received their approval for a 2007 partnership. Having Pete, Ron, and Chris meet directly with our county commissioners was very important to our success. I remember one of our

commissioners saying, “They came to our county board meeting, so it must be important.” Another commissioner said, “I remember hearing about this LiDAR thing and that it is coming, we might as well do it now rather than later.” Pete, Ron, and Chris opened the door for me to go get those other partners.

Digital Aerial Orthoimagery Partnership

Jumping ahead to 2010, Chris Cialek called me to see if I might be interested in another partnership for a 2011 aerial photo buy up. Instead of 0.5-meter resolution imagery, we could get 12-inch for approximately \$25,000. I was very interested and I took the offer to our GIS committee. Our committee said “YES!” without reservation but we needed to figure out the funding. Each department discussed pitching in to show the multi-departmental support. With a commissioner present at the meeting, we agreed that all departments were in favor of the buy up and that instead of each having to pay a separate invoice to MnGeo, the simpler way to conduct the transaction would be for one department to make the payment. No one department, however, had an uncommitted \$25,000 in its budget. Then we looked to the Land Records Modernization (LRM) funds. In the past, we have used LRM funds primarily to collect accurate GPS values on all of our section corners. But, since we now have 100% of our monuments accurately located, the LRM funds could be used for other projects. With COGO parcels being a priority in McLeod County, high resolution aerial photos have become a very important component of the modernization of our land records. So, we agreed that the LRM funds would be used to partner in obtaining these new images.

As part of the McLeod County/MnGeo partnership, quality assurance and testing is an important component. McLeod does not have the expertise to test deliverables, and it was very important that MnDOT contributed testing in our 2007 LiDAR partnership. As part of the 2011 orthophoto partnership, MnGeo is testing the McLeod County deliverables, which is invaluable in ensuring that we receive a quality product.

In McLeod County these aerial photos are used in many ways:

- **Law Enforcement** – When our Chief Deputy saw the difference between the 1-meter FSA flights and the 6-inch photos taken in 2007, he said, “We can’t use the 1-meter photos because they don’t give us enough information about the buildings and property. We can use the 6-inch with confidence. We can’t be guessing when we enter a property.”
- **Assessor** – I have already received six phone calls from our assessor’s staff asking when we will be receiving our 2011 photos. They have been using 2007 photos, but since they are doing assessments now, they would like to be using the most current photos to see any changes.
- **Environmental Services and Zoning** – Use aerial photos daily. Having the most current is important in their reviews.
- **Highway** – Preliminary road design and right-of-way (ROW) issues. When we acquire ROW from statutory to 60 feet, we expect the crops to stay outside of the 60 feet. Current aerial photos allow us to see the areas that are plowed and planted. New road alignments also are important to complement the roads and parcel layers we have available on our website through our GeoMoose application.
- **GIS** – Parcel mapping and just about everything else.
- **Other Departments** – Every department at McLeod County has used our aerial photos at some point.

- **Realtors** – Real estate agencies print maps to share with prospective buyers. In this economy, they have said they need every tool available to make the property as attractive as possible. Imagery on those maps provides valuable information for home buyers.
- **General Public** – Recreation and a return for their tax dollars. I have presented at Rotary meetings and have gone to banks to demonstrate how our Internet mapping service, GeoMoose, can be used in conjunction with high quality aerial imagery. Some examples that I have demonstrated include: measuring an area for a new driveway, a garden plot, the route a person walks every morning, or how far it is from the base of a tree to the house. These types of measure tools really get people thinking. Having the most current aerial photos with good resolution really keeps their attention. When we can show our parcels, plats, and other layers along with these quality aerial photos, the public sees a worthwhile return on their tax investment.
- **Website Statistics** – McLeod County has a public website that serves all departments. From January 1, 2011 through December 1, 2011, McLeod County GIS has logged 291,504 clicks, and leads all departments at 23%; the Sheriff's Department is second at 10.4%. McLeod County also has an interactive GIS mapping website which has 453,909 page views or 11,529,204 total hits for almost the same time period. All McLeod County departments contribute to the GIS portion of the websites which makes it so successful. The interactive mapping site uses aerial photos which tie all of other layers together. These statistics clearly show the need for up-to-date high resolution aerial photography.

In a nutshell, counties need the support of other agencies to be successful. Sometimes it seems like you can talk till you're blue in the face, but when someone from another agency walks in and says, "Folks, this is the right thing to do", that helps so much more.

Sibley County has been watching McLeod County's GIS development for a few years now. Their County Engineer has been working to get GIS going and just this month advertised for their first GIS staff position. My point with this is, when MnGeo makes an investment in a county like McLeod County and neighboring counties see that that involvement leads to success, MnGeo's job gets a little easier when trying to develop a partnership with the next county.

As MnGeo looks for partnerships in the central region of the state for 2013, the Minnesota Counties GIS Association (MCGISA) will be an important ally in their effort. Gloria Stevenson (Todd), Mark Sloan (Clay), Brian Armstrong (Otter Tail), and Jim Dahl (Douglas) will be good to have in the loop.

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