

Title:

Data Sharing at the Channel Islands Regional GIS Collaborative (CIRGIS)

Author:

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Abstract:

The Channel Islands Regional GIS collaborative (CIRGIS) was organized by agencies using GIS in Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo Counties in California. These state, federal, and local agencies, along with a number of companies, saw a need for a formal data-sharing agreement to facilitate the use of GIS in the region. Recently, CIRGIS has focused on emergency response and disaster preparedness, and has received an FGDC grant to improve the metadata of its members and other GIS users in the area. This paper will discuss how CIRGIS has met the needs of regional users, and what challenges remain for us to improve community readiness with GIS. CIRGIS has also become a focus for local GIS users, and serves the GIS community through its website, <http://www.CIRGIS.org>.

Body:

CIRGIS was organized in response to a growing recognition of the common value of GIS data in our region of California. As more companies and government agencies in our region have come to use a common set of spatial data, they recognized that sharing data was essential for productivity, accuracy, and public safety. Today, the [Channel Islands Regional Geographic Information Systems Collaborative \(CIRGIS\)](#) is an established regional consortium [dedicated to sharing spatial data](#) and creating a common set of standards for interoperability for members.

We have been recognized by the [California GIS Council](#) as a [Regional Council](#), and have over 30 [active member and participants](#) (see attached list). In the past year, with the funds from the [Federal Geographic Data Committee](#) (FGDC), we have created over 500 metadata records at the [California Environmental Information Catalog](#) FGDC node, making it by far the largest collaborative catalog in that system.

While CIRGIS has been successful in attracting a broad range of members who use and share spatial, from Federal agencies to private consultants, we now wish to focus our efforts on supporting disaster response and emergency preparedness in our region. CIRGIS members recognize that spatial data is vital to our safety, and we intend to pool our efforts to insure we can support homeland security most efficiently.

This year CIRGIS has three goals:

1. Inventory data holdings that are important for homeland security. In the past year, CIRGIS has met to determine what data is important for disaster response and emergency preparedness, created metadata for members, and done a preliminary survey of current holdings. That determination came about through cooperation with other agencies, including the California Governor's office of Emergency Services (OES), and the USGS through its National Map program. We now wish to do a "gap analysis" to determine what data is missing from our member's holdings that are most important for security. With that knowledge, we can help our members develop important data in the most efficient way, and enable secondary disaster responders such as FEMA and OES to quickly determine what is available to them in an emergency.
2. Increase membership to insure more complete representation of regional GIS users. Priority targets include the US Forest Service Los Padres National Forest, which administers nearly half the land in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.
3. Structure our organization so that it can best assist members in their sharing and creation of data and metadata. CIRGIS has voted to incorporate as a California nonprofit public benefit corporation and is filing for tax-exempt status under IRC 501(c)(4). This will enable CIRGIS to take a more active role in assisting members by providing a platform for funding and services.

In addition to cooperation among our members, CIRGIS works closely with the California Environmental Information Catalog, the FGDC node where our metadata is stored. We also work with the USGS, OES, the California Geographic Information Association (CGIA), the Central Coast Joint Data Committee (CCJDC, a regional collaborative on which CIRGIS was modeled) and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to coordinate policy and share knowledge.

CIRGIS members provide a broad and deep pool of talent for organizing our efforts. In addition to a large contingent of GIS managers, we have current and retired senior managers from local agencies who make a significant contribution to guiding the organization. The result is that CIRGIS has been on a steady course since its inception over five years ago, and stands ready to make a significant contribution to local safety and security.

In the past year, our members have created over 500 metadata records that are now posted on our FGDC node. Along the way, our members have created presentations on the importance of metadata, rewritten the bylaws of the organization, passed control from one set of officers to another, successfully encouraged several new organizations to sign our Memorandum of Agreement, and taken the initiative to incorporate.

This year we will present our efforts and our goals at three important meetings—the California Geographic Information Association annual meeting, the CalGIS conference, and the ESRI User's Conference. We intend to sponsor a GIS policy discussion at CalGIS, and we are actively involved with other organizations that engage in data policy initiatives, such as the Open Data Consortium.

We also have the technical capability and organization resources to back up future efforts, such as the collection and dissemination of datasets important to homeland security efforts via ftp sites, map servers and WMS compliant web services that our members currently maintain.

Compared with regional organizations in other states, CIRGIS operates in a unique environment in California. Since the State disbanded its previous effort to create a GIS council in 2002 and deleted the position of State Geographic Information Officer, cities, counties and regional organizations such as CIRGIS have had little guidance from the State. Instead, regional organizations have taken the lead in setting policy and providing resources for member organizations in California.

For CIRGIS, this is both a burden and an opportunity. Instead of simply filling the gaps between the state and local agencies, we must chart our own course, and work with other regional organizations across the state to maintain consistent standards and goals. As we have described above, we intend to do that partly by attending statewide meetings, as well as maintaining cross-memberships with other regional organizations such as the CCJDC and SCAG.

The opportunity is that we control our agenda, and we have chosen to focus on homeland security and disaster preparedness for our members. This has proven to be a compelling mission for our members, and a catalyst for other larger organizations we work with such as SCAG, which is now organizing a homeland security and data conference. We also believe that it will help attract other new members by providing a focus that meets the needs of organizations that are struggling with new requirements for homeland security.

In the past year CIRGIS learned that regional GIS consortia were vital in the response to the Fall Firestorms in southern California, since many jurisdictions needed rapid access to common data for mapping. Ventura County and City of Oxnard fire departments have directly participated in our planning, and that is part of why we wish to attract agencies such as the Forest Service to our organization.

We have a clear path established to meet the needs of emergency responders in our region. That path began with the discovery of who the major users of geospatial data were in our region, and was followed by outreach and metadata creation. Now, with many participating members and their metadata in hand, we intend to discover what the gaps in both our membership and data are.

With the knowledge gained from that gap analysis, we can first inform our membership and other emergency responders as to the state of relevant data in our region. Our primary tool for that task is the California Environmental Information metadata Catalog, but we also intend to build other tools that directly enable users to visualize the coverage and gaps in vital datasets with an interactive map. A tool for that purpose has already been prototyped at: http://www.anacapagis.org/website/CIRGIS_Domains

Beyond this project, we intend to collect the data identified as most important for disaster response and emergency preparedness and distribute it to our members and the public as appropriate. We know from experience and training that in a real emergency, there is an instant need to share information. Our goal is to satisfy that need in a way that no single government entity in our region currently can. That is why we have also chosen to restructure our collaborative as a nonprofit public benefit corporation. In the future, we hope to coordinate and participate in the creation of regional data and metadata that fills the gaps and fulfills the security needs of the citizens of the Channel Islands region.

Author Information:

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