

Report of the Geospatial Data Access Committee for 2010/11

Geospatial Data Access Committee (GDA) members in June last year were Trudy Bodak, Larry Laliberté, Kathleen Matthews, Richard Pinnell, Ann Smith, and Maxine Tedesco. However, because of retirements and/or changing job responsibilities the membership of this committee changed during the year. Current members are: Larry Laliberté, Richard Pinnell, and Maxine Tedesco.

What follows is a summary of some of the datasets and data products that have attracted the interest of the GDA Committee during the past year. We bounced around a lot of ideas for data projects we might adopt but at this time we are still continuing to debate how best to proceed.

Canadian Hydrographic Service (CHS): chart data

This product was discussed extensively in 2009/10 and into the current year. We contacted ACMLA members at institutions on coastal waters (e.g., University of Victoria, Dalhousie) to discuss licensing issues but we stalled out because of the inflexible pricing policies of CHS and their even more inflexible license restrictions. For example, libraries are not allowed to broker access to the data, only researchers can order the data, and so on. We concluded that we would need to contact and negotiate with the Dominion Hydrographer in order to find common ground, but that communication has not yet taken place.

SimplyMap Canada

This is an expensively priced product and so the best way forward may be to try to arrange optimal consortial pricing. Geographic Research Inc (GRI) does offer discounts: the more institutions that sign up, the greater the discount per institution. For example, if ten institutions with more than 10,000 FTEs sign up, each is given a 25% discount. Requirements are not as onerous for institutions with fewer than 10,000 FTEs. But even if 10 institutions do subscribe, the discounted price is still too much for some. At the December 2010 meeting of the OCUL Map Group we agreed that one of our strategic goals would be to try to arrange deeper discounts from GRI in exchange for “pushing out” this product to institutions across Canada and not just within Ontario. There will be a demonstration of SimplyMap Canada 2.0 version at CARTO 2011 in Quebec City and this is expected to include new tutorials that are based on Canadian data.

LIDAR data

Many of us find that these data are much in demand but coverage seems to be patchwork across Canada both in terms of geographical extent and mapping or contracting agency. But what are the costs and how many of our members are interested in this data product? This remains to be explored. One committee member has observed that the Geode group (U Alberta, U Calgary, U Lethbridge, and SAIT) has a long-standing consortial arrangement with AltaLis for access to a

wide variety of data products but this arrangement will most likely not include the recently introduced LiDAR15 DEM.

RMSI data: <http://www.rmsi.com/>

We are hearing less these days, thankfully, from aggressive sales representatives employed by this geospatial technology company based in India with offices in California. However, RMSI (Global) does have an interesting suite of geospatial data products on offer including building elevations point data based on analysis of QuickBird imagery. These expensive datasets may be purchased for urban areas across Canada, the USA, India and elsewhere. RMSI does offer discounts to individual institutions based on the quantity of data purchased but for many of us the price remains too high.

SimpleGeo: <https://simplegeo.com/>

The committee is currently exploring whether we might be able to arrange reasonably priced access to data from companies such as SimpleGeo which collect information for developers to build geo based applications. This particular company will supply its customers with access to “a geographically aware, super-fast database in the cloud, tuned specifically for querying and storing location data.” They will provide an API key for 30 free days of unlimited use. Customers can query with an IP address; SimpleGeo will geocode this IP address and run the query all in one call.

Open Data in Canada

The committee continues to monitor the ongoing development of the Open Data in Canada Initiative. Briefly “Open Data in Canada” describes the capacity for the Canadian Federal Government and other levels of government in Canada to provide online access to internal data in a standards-compliant Web 2.0 way. The Ontario Ministry of the Environment now has a downloads page providing free access, for example, to well water records. It wasn’t long ago that the Ministry charged thousands of dollars to purchase under license the records for a single Ontario county. We are all aware of the open municipal data available for cities across Canada. And of course there is also the Government of Canada’s Open Data Pilot Project: <http://www.data.gc.ca>. Some may feel that this is a disappointing first start, but at least it is a start.

The irony of the data situation in Canada is that on one hand there is strong support by all levels of government for more open data (and open data licensing) and we have a robust Volunteered Geographic Information (VGI) movement providing access to open data provided voluntarily by individuals (e.g., OpenStreetMap), on the other hand many useful proprietary data products remain prohibitively expensive and beyond the reach of many in the academic sector. Good examples of such products are those discussed in this and earlier reports of the Geospatial Data Access Committee. Perhaps the best example of overly expensive proprietary data is the ATIC Consortium for Access to SPOT Imagery. While ATIC’s business plan called an ACMLA consortium to collect several hundreds of thousands of dollars for subscriber access to SPOT

data, the reality was that most institutions could not raise more than several thousand dollars, and certainly not each and every year. Thus ATIC and ACMLA were and remain poles apart. And there in a nutshell is the challenge for the Geospatial Data Access Committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Pinnell, Chair
ACMLA Geospatial Data Access Committee
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