

**Opening Statement
Chairman Jim Costa
House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources Oversight Hearing on
“Federal Geospatial Data Management”
July 23, 2009**

Good morning, and welcome to the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee hearing on geospatial information. Officially this is the first hearing of a doubleheader that we will be holding this morning, so those of you in the audience and watching online will be getting your money's worth. The second hearing will be a legislative hearing on a bill sponsored by my good friend and fellow Blue Dog, Congresswoman Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin, and I will have more to say about that bill a little later.

This is the first time that I have had the opportunity to chair a hearing on this important topic, and, to the best of my knowledge, the first Congressional hearing directly on geospatial issues since 2004. While five years might not seem like a huge gap, when it comes to technology it is a lifetime. Five years ago, GoogleMaps and GoogleEarth did not exist, nor did iPhones. Today, Americans take it as a given that they should be able to get instantaneous driving directions across a city, state, or the entire country, or, if they have a GPS-enabled device, they should be able to find out the location of the nearest restaurant or gas station. Most people probably could not explain what “geospatial” means, but they know what it does, and it has become an increasing part of our everyday lives.

Also, most people probably have no idea what goes in to collecting that data and making it available in a useful form. I think we take for granted that every road will be there when we search for directions, or that the U.S. Geological Survey topographical maps will be there when we want to go on a hike in the forest, or that there will be a map showing what areas are being affected by severe drought. But a tremendous amount of time and money is required to make sure these maps exist, that they are accurate, and that they match up properly. Often times, such as when emergency responders need to know where to go, and where hazardous utility lines may be buried, this can be a matter of life and death.

Historically, the federal government has been the primary collector, manager, and integrator of geospatial data. Over 200 years ago, Thomas Jefferson signed the bill creating the United States Coast Survey, and the need to understand the shapes of our coastlines and the boundaries of our frontiers made mapping a truly federal affair. But recently the situation has changed, and the federal government has fallen from its preeminent position. This is not necessarily a problem in and of itself. In many cases, state and local governments need a much higher level of detail than the federal government, so it is fitting that they now create some of the highest resolution geospatial data sets. And often times the private sector is better equipped to efficiently collect or process the data. I believe the variety of geospatial information on the web provides excellent examples of that.

But the federal government has a number of other significant problems in this field. Government Accountability Office reports from five years ago point out that data duplication and a lack of coordination are a serious problem for the federal government. Earlier this decade, the Department of the Interior estimated that about 50 percent of the federal government's spending on geospatial data is redundant. Numerous examples exist where one agency spends considerable money collecting data that, with a little extra coordination between different parts of the federal government, could have been useful for a number of different agencies. But the

federal government has failed to manage this coordination effectively, and the American people pay the price, either through wasted money or inadequate data.

In theory, the federal government has been working towards resolving these issues, and establishing something called the National Spatial Data Infrastructure, since the early 1990s. But progress has been extremely slow, and some people have doubts that we even know what the National Spatial Data Infrastructure really is, or if we would know when it is completed. The dramatic advances in technology over the past several years raise questions about whether we need to reevaluate how the federal government manages geospatial data and activities.

I look forward to hearing from all our witnesses about how they believe the federal government can make improvements in the years ahead, and I now yield to the ranking member, Mr. Lamborn, for his opening statement.