

Definition

Meta Data, or "data about data," describe the content, quality, condition, and other characteristics of data.

Standards

The FGDC Content Standard for Digital Geospatial Meta Data At its June 8, 1994, meeting, the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) approved the "Content Standards for Digital Geospatial Meta Data. The standard specifies the information content of meta data for a set of digital geospatial data. The purpose of the standard is to provide a common set of terminology and definitions for documentation related to these meta data. their geospatial data.

The standard specifies information that helps prospective users to determine what data exist, the fitness of these data for their applications, and the conditions for accessing these data. Meta Data also aid the transfer of data to other users' systems.

Other Related Standards

The FGDC Content Standard identifies and describes the fields to be included in the meta data record. It does not, however, provide guidelines for a standard vocabulary to be used when filling out the fields. Standard vocabulary has, however, been identified at the federal level for cadastral data and for the classification of wetlands. The FGDC Steering Committee, on December 17, 1996, formally adopted as FGDC Standards the 'Cadastral Data Content Standard' and the 'Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States.'

The "Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States," sponsored by the Wetlands Subcommittee, is a classification standard that provides specific ecological and hydrological information for the identification, classification, and mapping of wetlands in the United States and its territories. A limited number of written copies are available from the FGDC (see below). Additional copies of the Coward in Classification System (Coward in et al. 1979) are for sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Payment may be made by check, money order, or deposit account. The publication is available through the Library of Congress (QH76U5a79/31 [QH104] 574.5'0973s [574.5'2632] 79-607795.

The Cadastral Data Content Standard, sponsored by the Subcommittee on Cadastral Data, describes a logical data model containing the attributes or elements that are found in land ownership related documents.

Requests for written copies of the above standards should be sent by mail to: FGDC Secretariat (attn: Jennifer Fox), U.S. Geological Survey, 590 National Center, 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston, Virginia, 22092; telephone 703-648-5514; fax 703-648-5755; or Internet "gdc@usgs.gov". Information is also available from the FGDC Web site: <http://www.fgdc.gov>

Best Practices

The main reason to document data is to maintain an organization's investment in its geospatial data. Organizations that do not document their data often find that, over time or because of personnel changes, they no longer know the content or quality of their data. Organizations then cannot trust the results generated from the data in which they have invested their time and resources. In addition, the lack of information about other organizations' data often leads to a needless duplicating of effort.

The major uses of meta data are:

- To help organize and maintain an organization's internal investment in spatial data,
- To provide information about an organization's data holdings to data catalogues, clearinghouses, and brokerages, and
- To provide information to process and interpret data received through a transfer from an external source.

The prototype NYS GIS Spatial Data Clearinghouse (<http://www.ctg.albany.edu/gisny.html>) employed the FGDC Meta Data Content Standard as the foundation for discovering and exchanging GIS datasets in New York State. While the federal standard may be refined and/or further defined by New York State, it is anticipated that a NYS

standard will closely follow the structure of the federal standard.

Policies

On April 11, 1994, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12906, "Coordinating Geographic Data Acquisition and Access: The National Spatial Data Infrastructure." This executive order instructs Federal agencies to use the FGDC Content Standard for Digital Geospatial Meta Data to document new geospatial data beginning in 1995, and to provide these meta data to the public through the National Geospatial Data Clearinghouse.

On September 17, 1996, the Governor's Task Force on Information Resource Management issued 'Technology Policy 96-18 Geographic Information Systems,' which states: "A GIS Meta Data Clearinghouse will be established in the State Library. The clearinghouse will be set up to provide descriptions of the data available to users and easy access to data currently residing within State and local agencies. Other data coordination issues will be addressed through a work group (established by the NYS GIS Coordinating Body)."