# The Geographic Approach for the Nation

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"GIS is changing things; it is changing—actually—everything," asserted ESRI president Jack Dangermond in his address to the more than 3,000 attendees of the ESRI Federal User Conference (FedUC), held February 17–19, 2010 in Washington, D.C.

The first FedUC was held 15 years ago. FedUC attendees represent a diverse group that forms one community drawn from civilian GIS users across many disciplines and interests as well as users in the military and intelligence communities.

The conference theme this year, The Geographic Approach for the Nation, underlined the message that a national GIS is emerging. This distributed network of systems and services supports national policies and priorities. A geography-based approach enables transparency and accountability in government processes, allows better performance mea-

surement and place-based approaches to governance; and encourages citizen engagement.

"The first step in open government is showing where you're putting money," Dangermond said. "The second way GIS can help is overlaying maps of where there are problems. That's where you start to get into an information-driven government."

In a new era of open government, GIS is enabling transparency and accountability by making projects' status and expenditures more easily known. During the Plenary Session, ESRI staff demonstrated GIS applications that are making government more accessible and decisions more information driven. Recovery. com has been a tremendously popular site that uses maps linked to charts that allow visitors to drill into information to discover which funds are being spent where. Another example shown was the U.S. Department of Transpor-

tation stimulus spending site which addresses accountability by answering why money was spent on particular projects. ESRI has developed Web templates that streamline the process of building Web sites for tracking stimulus spending and projects. These templates are being used by many federal and state agencies.

ChesapeakeStat was cited as an example of how GIS is aiding performance management. This site provides far greater access to program information and interactive capabilities that complement existing paper processes.

GIS is quite naturally supporting the development of place-based policies so government can more easily target priority places, coordinate projects and programs, and support integrated decision making.

The enhanced mobile capabilities of GIS are also leading to increased citizen engagement with government. Through the use of Web and mobile technologies, volunteered geographic information (VGI) is emerging. VGI makes it possible for every citizen to be a "sensor." GIS could be used not only for gathering the observations of millions of people but also integrating them. Now citizens can help build a national GIS.

Another conference theme was Gov 2.0—an approach that views government as a platform for getting things done by bringing the advantages of Web 2.0 to government. GIS helps government make its data and information available to other organizations so they can more effectively do their jobs. The conference keynote speaker, Dr. John Holdren, noted that good decisions can't be made without good data. "That's why the Obama administration has placed such a priority on putting high-quality data in the center of the executive branch." Not just good data but the ability to visualize that data is crucial for decision makers in the government and the public. Data visualization is one of the strengths of GIS. Holdren is President Obama's science and technology advisor and the director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

As Dangermond noted during the Plenary Session, GIS professionals are building authoritative data, high-quality maps, performing analysis, and developing models and applications that make information available in a much more timely manner. He contrasted the

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our MS GIS Program is designed for an audience of professionals seeking to improve their knowledge of the analysis and management of geographic information. We offer both a full-time and a part-time residential program. Within the University's interdisciplinary learning environment, students have an unparalleled opportunity to interact personally not only with University faculty, staff, and students from other programs, but also with the many talented professionals at the world's leading GIS company, ESRI, located in close proximity to the University.

The University of Redlands, founded in 1907, is a fully-accredited, liberal arts and sciences university. This intensive, international learning environment ensures a global context of relevance to students from around the world. Graduates of this program can become GIS practitioners prepared for positions such as project managers, applications specialists, and applications software development team members.



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months it took to integrate and analyze data associated with the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 with the minutes it took to acquire the same kind of common operational picture (COP) for the Los Angeles fires in 2009.

Many presentations at FedUC provided more information on the impending release of ArcGIS 10. This release focuses on GIS development on the Web.With ArcGIS 10, GIS is easier, accessible, and collaborative and uses cloud architecture, Web services, information integration, crowd sourcing, and open data

sharing.

ESRI also announced during the conference that it is collaborating with Amazon Web Services (AWS) and has joined the growing community of AWS Independent Software Vendors (ISVs) building services and solutions in the cloud computing environment.

Developments in organizational cooperation coupled with increased GIS software capabilities and pervasive data collection is building a body of knowledge that is quite extraordinary and will further enable the use of

geography and GIS as an organizing principle for governance and society.

In accepting the Making a Difference award, Tim Trainor, chief of the Geography Division of the United States Census Bureau, noted, "We are at a very good time. It's at a convergence of lots of technology, lots of very rich software, rich datasets, and a highly skilled professional body that can actually use that data. This is our time."

# **Transforming GIS**

### 2009 ESRI Middle East and North Africa User Conference

More than 450 professionals from executives and managers to GIS and IT end users gathered in Manama, Bahrain, for the 2009 ESRI Middle East and North Africa User Conference (MEAUC).

This event for ESRI users in the Middle East and North Africa was held November 10–12 at the Diplomat Radisson Blu Hotel. MEAUC is a forum for learning about the newest developments in GIS and building relationships with other members of the international ESRI user community.

The conference was held under the patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister for the Government of Bahrain. Khalifa deputized His Excellency Sheikh Ahmed Ateyatalla Al Khalifa, Minister of Cabinet Affairs for the Kingdom of Bahrain, to attend the conference in his stead.

"GIS is slowly transforming into a pervasive technology," said Dr. Ghulum Bakiri from MicroCenter, the ESRI distributor in Bahrain. "And many countries in the region are embarking on a national NSDI [National Spatial Data Infrastructure] initiative to act as the platform of choice for integrating diverse islands of information that exist in various departments and government organizations. This conference gave GIS professionals and decision makers an outstanding opportunity to share their experiences and gain valuable insight into essential best practices in this challenging undertaking."

Attendees heard from ESRI president Jack Dangermond during the Plenary Session. He discussed his vision for GIS, its impact on the world, and explained that now GIS is not only about providing maps and information but is also an indispensable tool for analysis and decision making for developing environmental policies and urban plans.

At conference sessions, users had questions answered and learned how to obtain results in their organizations and communities through using GIS. They saw the latest GIS tools and applications, heard about time-saving tips and tricks, and met with ESRI staff and business partners. Technical workshops, led by ESRI product managers and paper sessions on successful GIS applications showed attendees new ways to get solutions to technical issues and cost-saving ideas for specific markets.

For the region's next gathering, users in the Middle East and North Africa are invited to attend a combination European User Conference (EUC) October 26–28, 2010, in Rome, Italy. See the annoucement in the accompanying article, "Upcoming Conferences" on this page.



## **Upcoming Conferences**

### **2010 EMEA Conference**

The 2010 ESRI Europe, Middle East, and North Africa User Conference (EMEA) will take place October 26–28 in Rome, Italy, at the Ergife Palace Hotel. The EMEA is being hosted by ESRI Italia, the ESRI distributor in Italy. This union of the European User Conference (EUC) and Middle East and North Africa User Conference (MEAUC) gives users throughout these regions the chance to connect with an even larger ESRI community. More information is available at www.esri.com/meauc.

#### **ESRI Latin America User Conference**

The ESRI Latin America User Conference (LAUC), in its 17th year, will be held September 22-24, 2010, in Mexico City, Mexico. The event, hosted by the ESRI distributor in Mexico, SIGSA, will be held at the Sheraton Maria Isabel Hotel & Towers on the Paseo de la Reforma. The LAUC is the premier event for GIS users throughout Latin America and between 800 and 1,000 attendees are expected. Participants can form valuable relationships with peers and meet with key contacts-from ESRI staff and business partners to the region's industry leaders. Attendess can find out how to launch and grow successful GIS projects and share geographic knowledge. Learn more, register, and see how to participate at www. sigsa.info/lauc2010.

For a complete listing of ESRI events worldwide, visit www.esri.com/events.