A revised version of the Federal Geospatial Data Act of 2017 (GDA) was introduced in both Chambers of Congress on November 15, 2017. The new version changes some wording and eliminates the two sections to which URISA and many other geospatial organizations objected. **URISA members and all GIS professionals should be interested in the GDA for two reasons.** One, the federal government is being directed by Congress to share geospatial data among federal agencies and with non-federal agencies, acquire data from non-federal sources if possible, adopt standards, and make their data easy to access for the public. Two, there is still a chance the GDA will be amended with the type of language that impacts GIS professionals unrestricted ability to perform work for the federal government and potentially other environments. It was this language that prompted URISA’s opposition and URISA will be following this legislation closely. Below are frequently asked questions (FAQ) about the GDA and where you can read the text of the bill and the Congressional committees that will be reviewing it.

**What is the Geospatial Data Act?**

Members of Congress believe that the current approach of using Executive Orders (EO 12906 & 13286), Office of Management and Budget directives (OMB Circular A-16), and other executive documents was not achieving the effectiveness hoped for in reducing the duplication and waste in the procurement, use, and availability of Federal geospatial data. The GDA is intended to codify the previous executive actions and give Congress an oversight role for federal geospatial data expenditures.

**QUICK FACTS**

- The current version of the GDA was introduced November 15, 2017
- Senate Bill: S.2128 - Sen. Hatch (R-UT), Sen. Warner (D-VA)
What are the key elements in the Geospatial Data Act?

Much of the language in the GDA reflects the current directives of OMB Circular A-16 and Executive Orders 12906 & 13286. Below is a brief summary of the key elements.

It establishes in statute the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) “for the development, implementation, and review of policies, practices, and standards relating to geospatial data.” It makes the Chair the OMB Director and Vice Chair the Secretary of the Interior, which is the reverse of how it is structured today. It says the FGDC shall “lead the development and management of and operational decision making for the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) strategic plan and geospatial policy ...” and “designate NGDA [National Geospatial Data Asset] themes and oversee the coordinated management of the NGDA data themes ....” The FGDC will “not less than every 2 years, submit to Congress a report ...” on the progress and status of each NGDA data theme (including the NSDI) and an evaluation of each lead covered agency.

The GDA formally establishes the National Geospatial Advisory Committee (NGAC) and its duties and composition. As indicated above, the GDA formalizes the NSDI and NGDA data themes. Continuing its current practice, the GDA directs the FGDC to establish standards for each NGDA data theme. Finally, the GDA directs the FGDC to “operate an electronic service that provides access to geospatial data and metadata for geospatial data, to be known as the GeoPlatform.

URISA members should be encouraged by the GDA’s direction in Sec.9 Covered Agency Responsibilities to “coordinate and work in partnership with other Federal agencies, agencies of State, tribal, and local governments, institutions of higher education, and the private sector to efficiently and cost-effectively collect, integrate, maintain, disseminate, and preserve geospatial data, building upon existing non-Federal geospatial data to the extent possible....”

Where can I find the new version of the Geospatial Data Act?


Why a new version of the Geospatial Data Act?

The GDA was first introduced in Congress in 2015. That version did not contain anything about how geospatial data and services were to be procured. URISA, and many other geospatial organizations supported the bill, but the Management Association for Private Photogrammetric Surveyors (MAPPS) objected to the lack of procurement language and lobbied for its inclusion, especially that some procurement should follow the Brooks Act, which requires the Qualifications-Based Selection process. The legislation wasn’t acted on during the term and died.

On May 25, 2017, a revised version of the Geospatial Data Act was introduced in the Senate as S.1253. A companion bill, H.R.3522, was introduced in the House on July 27, 2017. This version had an expanded definition of geospatial and two new sections. Section 11 Use of the Private Sector directed that Federal agencies use private entities “to the maximum extent practical” for providing or continuing geospatial activities and to place geospatial under “surveying and mapping” which was expanded to require all procurement to follow the Brooks Act, although that was not the author’s original intent. Section 12 Relationship to State Law required any geospatial work for the Federal government to follow state licensing laws which in some states would impact GIS firms.

URISA objected to this new version which had potentially onerous impacts on the GIS community and could limit who can perform and bid on GIS projects.

What happened when the Geospatial Data Act of 2017 was introduced?

Many geospatial organizations became concerned with the wording in the bill. The first organization to publically raise concerns was the American Association of Geographers (AAG). This was followed by an analysis done by URISA’s Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) which indicated the possible impact of the new language could be problematic. Several geospatial blogs also commented on the bill’s potential impact. Based on the PAC’s recommendation, the URISA Board issued a letter stating its withdrawal of support for the GDA until the language was revised to its satisfaction.

The Coalition of Geospatial Organization (COGO), of which URISA is a founding member, met at the 2017 Esri User Conference to review the GDA. It was there that URISA, AAG, and other
What happened when the Geospatial Data Act of 2017 was introduced? (con’t)

organizations voiced their opposition to the GDA as it was currently worded. COGO formed a subcommittee, which included URISA, to look into revising the language but, after meeting several times, could not come to an agreement.

URISA and other organizations met with the staffs of Senators Hatch and Warner, who were the sponsors of the bill, to voice our objections to the current language in the bill and to work towards a possible solution. Knowing that MAPPS would object, but that most of the other geospatial organizations and many geospatial firms would support the revised language, they went ahead and agreed to removing sections 11 and 12. A new version of the GDA was introduced instead of amending the original.

What is the new version of the Geospatial Data Act?

The new version of the Senate bill is S.2128. It was introduced on November 15 by Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Mark Warner (D-VA). The Senate bill has four cosponsors: Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV), Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sen. John Boozman (R-AR), and Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). The bill will likely be referred to the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee in December or January.

Also on November 15, a companion bill was introduced in the House of Representatives as H.R.4395, sponsored by Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-AR4) and Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA6). The bill will likely be referred to the House Science, Space and Technology Committee and the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

What committees will be hearing the new version of the Geospatial Data Act?

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About URISA

URISA is an multi-disciplinary geospatial organization that provides professional education and training, a vibrant and connected community, advocacy for geospatial challenges and issues, and essential resources. URISA fosters excellence in GIS and engages geospatial professionals throughout their careers. For more information, visit [www.urisa.org](http://www.urisa.org).