

# Access to Public/public Data in the U.S.

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# Public vs. public

- **Public**
  - **Generated by governments**
    - Federal, State, Local
- **public**
  - **Generated by the public**
    - professional researchers (“Small Science”)
    - others for their purposes (“Besides Science”)

# Public: Federal

- In U.S., Federal government cannot hold copyright
- In some cases, data produced by private parties under contract can be copyrighted

# Public: Federal

- **Many Federal agencies making good progress toward making data available digitally**
  - **Geospatial OneStop portal**
- **Laggards are usually politically motivated**
  - **Environmental Protection Agency**
    - **library closings, “weeding”**

# Public: Federal

- **Some Federal agencies using funding to promote access**
  - **National Institutes of Health**
    - mandate for articles
    - discussion about underlying data underway
  - **National Science Foundation**
    - data preservation/access now part of most funding applications

# Public: Federal

- **Impediments: National Security**
  - 20.5 million classification actions in 2006, up every year since 2000
  - retroactive: 55,000 previously public documents in National Archives reclassified secret
  - spatial data hard hit: after 9/11, repositories told to remove geodata, e.g. reservoir locations

# Public: Federal

- **Impediments: Physical Access**
  - Some items purchase only
  - Responses: FOIA requests or “purchase and post”
    - <http://public.resource.org>
      - SEC filings/findings
      - videos from NTIS
      - case law decisions
      - Army documents
    - Libre Map project: 56,000 USGS maps
      - \$1600 raised in 24 hours to “free the data”

# Public: State and Local

- **Mixed bag**
  - Most states doing well at making data available digitally
  - State laws vary regarding holding copyright
  - State laws vary regarding Freedom of Information laws and public documents definitions

# Public: State and Local

- **Impediments: Usually based on revenue**
  - **West Virginia case**
    - Private company filed Freedom of Information request for digital copy of tax maps but had to go to court to get it
      - \$167,000 (paper) vs. \$20 (digital)
  - **Brick Township, NJ**
    - Utilities district got digital copies of maps declared essential for Homeland Security

# public: Small Science

- **Spatially related academic data**
  - underlying theses and dissertations
  - generated by individual or small team research
    - least likely to be preserved and catalogued
  - generated by established groups with a research agenda
    - e.g., large environmental groups

# public: “Besides Science”

- **Spatially related data produced by local organizations, e.g.,**
  - lakefront owners association
  - school class projects
  - local businesses
  - individuals

# public: Of Use IF

- **rights are simply affixed and clear**
- **data is stored and findable using standards-based metadata**
- **provenance is clear and trackable**
- **evaluation of suitability for purpose is available**

# public: Of Use IF

- All this is easy for both contributors and users

# Here's the Commercial

- Commons of Geographic Data project aspires to produce software that will make all this possible for contributed spatially related “small science” and “besides science” data

# Here's the Advert

- Preliminary model and short papers:  
[www.geodatacommons.umaine.edu](http://www.geodatacommons.umaine.edu)
- Background vision discussed in  
Onsrud and Campbell, “Big  
Opportunities in Access to ‘Small  
Science’ Data” at  
[http://dsj.codataweb.org/special-  
open-data.html](http://dsj.codataweb.org/special-open-data.html)

**Thanks!**