

## **National Mapping: National Benefits**

**USGS 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Topographic Mapping  
December 3, 2009**

**DOI Assistant Secretary Anne Castle  
Opening Remarks (target 8 min.)**

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Good afternoon.

I am delighted to be here with you today, and I'm very proud to represent the Department of the Interior and our Secretary Ken Salazar.

And I am proud that our team now includes a wonderfully knowledgeable and respected new Director, Marcia McNutt. I know that USGS will be more dynamic than ever under her guidance.

Serving as the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science has provided me with an opportunity to help the Secretary and the Obama Administration lead the way on the path to the science-based decisions and the sustainable water policy that America urgently needs.

I am especially pleased and honored to be in presence of so many experts on topographic mapping. I understand we also have many retirees here today who have devoted their entire careers to providing maps for our Nation. I salute your service; I thank you for it. And I wish to convey Secretary Salazar's appreciation as well.

I also owe you a personal thanks because I have used your topo maps for everything from backpacking in the Rocky Mountains, to my work as a water lawyer in Colorado. The decorating scheme in my law office was using USGS quadrangle maps instead of pictures, and the first thing I always did when I opened a new case file was to get the quad map that gave me the lay of the land. Over the time I've been using them, topo maps are better, more up to date, and more accessible than ever before.

In the past quarter-century, digital technologies have transformed topographic mapping science, enabling USGS to construct the electronic *National Map* we have today.

**To celebrate our legacy of 125 years of topographic mapping, the USGS and the Department of the Interior today announce a new type of digital topographic map that can be printed by users, and also a new online viewer for *The National Map*.**

In the program for this event, we'll learn a lot more about the 125-year legacy of topographic mapping here at USGS and we'll see firsthand the new products representing great strides in mapping.

As the first speaker, I have the opportunity to frame today's celebration, and expand the dialogue a bit. So I'd like to talk for a few minutes about the benefits that a vibrant program of national mapping brings to the Nation.

We often hear, and we'll hear today, that a comprehensive mapping program is vitally important.

And, of course, that's right. But maps aren't just important for their own sake.

Geographic information and maps are tools that enable us to do other tasks: to build highways, carry out a census, search for minerals, protect lands with cultural or environmental significance, or simply hike to a hidden fishing lake, and, in my case, hike back out again.

As the Nation's lead mapping organization, a fundamental duty for the U.S. Geological Survey has been, and continues to be, ensuring the availability of complete, consistent, and current base geographic information.

This basic information, whether in the form of paper maps or electronic data, provides a common starting point of geographic knowledge for government, industry, and the public.

Sound geographic knowledge has always been a basic requirement for effective government. The Continental Congress recognized this in 1781 by appointing a "Geographer of the United States," even before the Revolutionary War was over.

President Thomas Jefferson recognized this, too, in the early days of our Nation, when in 1803 he instructed Lewis and Clark to find, and carefully map, a river route to the Pacific Ocean. The Lewis and Clark Expedition's accomplishments eventually resulted in Clark's *Map of the Track of the Expedition*, which was published in Philadelphia in 1814 – and, in a sense, was the National Map of its day.

The need for a national map has been and is a continuing, critical need for the Nation. John Wesley Powell, the second Director of the USGS, recognized this when he asked Congress to support a

comprehensive national mapping program on December 5, 1884. That's the occasion we're celebrating here today, 125 years later.

Following in step with modern advances in cartographic and computer technologies, the evolution of Powell's vision, today's *National Map*, is an electronic compilation of multiple layers of geographic data provided by many different partners.

A nationally standardized geographic framework makes it possible for scientists to discover relationships between phenomena and processes that would otherwise appear completely independent.

When USGS geographic information is enhanced through private enterprise, it forms the basis for a huge number of commercial products. Geographic data from *The National Map* contributes to many of the electronic mapping and navigation services found on the Internet and in personal navigation devices.

Emergency management and response across the Nation are strengthened through widely available, nationally consistent geographic information and technologies. Having that information at our fingertips facilitates quick decisions and improves communication in times of crisis – like hurricanes, earthquakes, or even acts of terrorism.

There is one further national benefit to a national mapping program that can't be said to be scientific. But John Wesley Powell was not only man of science, a geographer and geologist, but also an ethnographer and linguist, a humanist who valued native languages and cultures.

And he would have appreciated the fact that the detailed picture of the nation that a comprehensive national map provides

enables every American to have a shared perspective of our land, and a common geographic vocabulary.

Again, I am extremely pleased to be with you here today for this wonderful celebration. I honored to work with all of you who have made this national program of topographic maps possible.