Informing Congress with Geospatial Resources
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CRS in Brief

- Legislative branch agency founded in 1914
- Provides comprehensive legislative research and analysis
  - Authoritative
  - Confidential
  - Objective
  - Nonpartisan
  - Timely
Relationship with Congress

• Serves as shared staff to committees and Members

• Expert assistance at every stage
  • Early considerations
  • Committee hearings
  • Floor debates
  • Oversight of enacted laws
Authoritative

- Services and products are authoritative and accurate
- Rigorous research methodologies
- Nonpartisan
- Critical assumptions explained and justified
- Primary resources used whenever available
- Document and vet all sources

- If authoritative GIS data are not available, CRS will consider alternative analytical approaches
How Geospatial Analysis Can be Helpful

- Conveys complex and scientifically significant issues
- Reveal consequences, impacts otherwise concealed
- Members of Congress represent a population within a geography
  - Policy issues relate spatially to the Member’s political geography: either a state or a district
  - Geography can identify shared public policy interests
  - Legislation with a geographic impact does not always precisely reference that geography
- Examples
GIS Analysis for Congress: Challenges

- Hundreds of analyses per year
- Tight deadlines
- Unfamiliar datasets
- Data & survey privacy issues
- Unique questions, unique solutions
- Appropriate secondary use of data
- Data from all levels of government, commercial sources, and non-governmental organizations overlaid
- Domestic and international data compared
GIS Analysis for Congress: Potential Solutions

1. Ability to collaborate with data creators & maintainers who

   • know more about their data than can be included in the metadata
   • can identify the data with the greatest resolution and the fewest transformations
   • know the best data available for the use intended
   • understand data collection methodology (which is essential for determining appropriate secondary data uses)
2. Clearinghouses as data sources

- Standardized metadata
- A single place to discover data
- Points to trusted repositories
- Data authenticity: accurately documented
- Citations to data sources provide a compact mechanism for independent parties to audit, add to, or reproduce analysis for the legislative context
Summary

• Good national public policy requires granular, accurate, and authoritative data
  • May conflict with survey privacy
• Clearinghouses
  • speed discovery and analysis of authoritative data
  • data owners may know of more appropriate sources of spatial data: consultation
• Relying on data connections for public policy analysis requires trusted repositories