



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, D.C. 20240

NOV 12 2009

The Honorable Mark Begich
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Begich:

Thank you for your letter dated September 9, 2009, regarding an opportunity to partner on the Alaska Statewide Digital Mapping Initiative (SDMI). The Department of the Interior, our science and land management bureaus, and the Federal Geographic Data Committee, are keenly aware of the critical importance of geospatial data in the State of Alaska. We share your concern about the need to improve Alaska's geospatial data and maps to meet National Map Accuracy Standards and the demands of today's applications. In addition to the State's significant needs for aviation safety and other concerns, accurate elevation data are essential to Department of the Interior priorities such as climate change impact assessment, ecosystem analyses, natural hazard forecasting, and energy and minerals assessment. Several of our bureaus participated in SDMI's 2008 digital elevation model study, and we support its findings and recognize the magnitude of the effort and costs for developing an adequate elevation dataset for the State.

To help address the critical needs of Alaska, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has recently increased its focus on mapping issues in the State, and is planning to apply approximately \$1 million of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funding toward statewide elevation data acquisition plans. The USGS Geospatial Liaison for Alaska has been coordinating with other Federal agencies and the broader community in the State to raise awareness and seek additional partners for the elevation initiative. With Federal contributions committed thus far, it is anticipated that a first phase of data acquisition will begin during this fiscal year. Additionally, at local and regional levels, USGS is supporting numerous partnerships for higher resolution elevation and imagery data, and this is expected to continue to grow as more partnerships are fostered.

At the national level, the Federal Geographic Data Committee, through its Executive Committee, has been working to increase awareness and develop joint strategies across multiple Federal agencies to address Alaska's geospatial data issues. It is clear that the magnitude of funding required to improve Alaska's geospatial data is greater than any one agency or entity can contribute, and will require significant strategic partnerships at this level to fully realize this goal.

The Department of the Interior applauds the efforts of SDMI to develop a sound plan for mapping Alaska that begins with a foundation of elevation data, and we intend to continue our partnership in the effort.

Senator Mark Begich

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If you have any questions or would like to discuss this issue, please contact Mr. Mark DeMulder, Program Coordinator for the National Geospatial Program, at (703) 648-4250, or mdemulder@usgs.gov.

Sincerely,



Anne J. Castle
Assistant Secretary for
Water and Science

Identical Letter Sent To:

Senator Lisa Murkowski
Representative Don Young