

Comments by Gary Smith about the beginning of GIS in Vermont

The following was written by Gary Smith in his cover notes to the documents *The Creation of the Vermont State Data Base -- A Program of Work* and *A Geographic Information System for Vermont*.

"The first GIS in VT was the ESRI installation installed in UVM's School of Natural Resources in the summer of 1981. The bulk of the funding came from a grant from the US Forest Service that was arranged by Senator Leahy. This funding effort started in 1978. Within SNR, we started using image processing software (ORSER) in 1979 to process early Landsat data. This was funded by NASA ... This was the source of our early land cover maps.

While we waited for the USFS funding, we interviewed and investigated a number of different computer mapping/GIS companies. We ultimately selected ESRI, largely because they really wanted to work with us. Any profit that might have come from the sale was consumed in the conversion of the ESRI software (PIOS & GRID) to run on a new DEC VAX 750 computer. Until our sale, all of ESRI's software ran on PRIME computers. It took an ESRI programmer about 6 weeks on site to complete this conversion.

The first GIS project used the Mad River Valley. With not a single piece of existing digital data (anywhere in VT) it was a very tedious task just to build the database. Despite all of the challenges, it was obvious to me that GIS had great potential. I found a supporter in Ray Godfrey at the USDA SCS (now the NRCS). With this help, I was ultimately able to secure funding in 1983 to start the database. The document "The Creation of the Vermont State Data Base -- A Program of Work" dated April 1983 outlines the initial effort to fund and start a GIS database for VT. I wrote this document.

I built the second document, the one with the GIS layers graphic on the front in 1983 to promote the idea of a statewide database. I printed several hundred copies. I had a roll of maps from various projects and I traveled around the state talking to groups to promote the concept. Slowly we grew the interest and it ultimately resulted in GIS being added to the content of ACT 200.

In summary, the VT GIS database development formally began in 1983 at the School of Natural Resources. The data were formally given to the State (Governor Kunin and Secretary of Administration, Tom Menson) in 1990. ... We gave it to the state at no cost. At that time, no state funding had been used to build any of the existing databases, which now covered Grand Isle, Franklin, Chittenden and Lamoille counties."

[comments written in September 2009]