

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
Between
GAP Analysis Program and LANDFIRE Program

USGS Core Science Systems
And
USGS Climate and Land Use Change
And
US DOI Office of Wildland Fire

A. Statement of Purpose:

The need exists for fully coordinated and integrated nationally consistent data sets that can be accessed by multiple parties operating at multiple scales to support a wide variety of business needs. Data that are correlated and integrated provide a solid foundation for applications and models for use in decision making.

The Department of the Interior has two programs that map vegetation data of the US at a scale and resolution that is complementary to one another. These programs are the GAP Analysis Program and the LANDFIRE Program. Oversight, leadership, and funding for these programs reside in the following:

- Associate Director of Core Science Systems - Oversees funding and mapping activities of the Gap Analysis Program (GAP).
- DOI Office of Wildland Fire - Provides oversight, funding and business direction for the LANDFIRE Program (coordinating with related partner efforts at USDA); and
- Associate Director of USGS Climate and Land Use Change that oversees the USGS Earth Resources Observations and Science (EROS) Center which manages LANDFIRE activities.

The intent of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to clearly state the roles and responsibilities of each of these three entities, with the explicit purpose of defining a unified process that results in a unified product through the formal partnership of the GAP and LANDFIRE programs. By agreeing to this MOU, each party accepts that working together, in unison, towards a common product, and eliminating any duplicative processes, is in the best interest of each program as well as the American taxpayer. This partnership also provides an end product that leverages the strengths of each program and results in less confusion to the user community as to which product to use and provides for broader ecological applications. As this MOU is implemented, the intent is to evaluate and use this partnership as an example to work on an expanded MOU that more fully provides for a coordinated and integrated National Landscape Conservation Information Framework across the USGS program areas of Climate and Land Use Change, Core Science Systems, Ecosystems, and Natural Hazards and from this to potentially a interdepartmental approach across the federal government where DOI/USGS is a leader of excellence.

B. Background:

While the missions and constituencies of the programs have some distinct differences, GAP and LANDFIRE share many similarities, with common or complementary uses for many applications. Given past collaboration efforts between the two programs such as; assessing technical mapping approaches and challenges; mapping scale and scope; ecologically based mapping themes; and fundamental scientific methods and product development, both GAP and LANDFIRE programs recognize the benefits

of a formal coordinated and unified process of development and production of mapped data products of vegetation characteristics.

In addition to technical and scientific grounds for collaboration; contemporary circumstances are conducive to it such as Secretarial priorities and the current fiscal environment. There are direct influences such as the emergence of the National Vegetation Classification Standard (NVCS) which has been approved with portions of the descriptions nearing completion. There are also general trends such as the continuing data needs of geospatial technology and the emergence of terrestrial monitoring initiatives related to (e.g.) climate change and carbon cycling; and the continuing commoditization of moderate resolution remote sensing data. All of these contribute to both the opportunity and the motivation—not only for collaboration between programs, but also for innovation and assertion of scientific leadership for this partnership.

The interests of stakeholders and the general public are better served by: common, consistent, distinct base ecological maps; by improved discrimination from and between specialized maps and data; and by clarity and utility for intended applications.

C. Authorities:

The Organic Act of March 3, 1879, as amended, 43 U.S.C. 31 et seq., and 43 U.S.C. 36c.

Departmental Manual.

- Series 02-Organization, Part 112-Policy, Management, and Budget, Chapter 7 Office of Wildland Fire.
- Series 34-Public Lands, Part 620-Wildland Fire Management.

D. Principles and Responsibilities:

1. The principals agree to a unified approach to vegetation mapping. The USGS GAP Analysis Program and LANDFIRE Programs will work together with a common annual work plan to create unified products. *With regard to the "unified approach" to creating a database and map of the current vegetation of the U.S., we agree that major decisions must be made with the mutual consent of the signatories of this agreement.* Major decisions will include, at a minimum, annual program plans, annual budget resources, and specifications for final products.
2. The principals agree that staff and budget resources available for vegetation mapping will be contributed to the combined effort on an annual basis.
3. The emphasis of this coordinated effort is to improve the quality of products, make products as ecologically meaningful as possible, increase the coordination of scientific and technical expertise across USGS and program components, and work in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

E. Administrative Provisions:

1. This MOU is in effect for a ten-year period from the date of signature. The partnership will be reviewed every three-four years from the time of signature to evaluate consistency with the annual program plans, continued relevancy of direction, funding, resources, and accomplishments. The parties may modify this MOU at any time by a written amendment executed by all parties. Additionally, if the parties wish to extend the partnership/MOU, this MOU may be amended or revised to reflect future direction.
2. Any of the parties may terminate its participation in and agreement to this MOU, in whole or in part, at any time by written notice to the parties.
3. This MOU in no way restricts the parties from participating in similar activities with other federal, public, or private agencies, organizations, and individuals.
4. This MOU is neither a fiscal nor a funds obligation document for the parties listed to any current or future expenditure of resources either in advance of the availability of appropriations from Congress or when funds are available. Nothing in this MOU authorizes or is intended to obligate the parties to expend, exchange, or reimburse funds, services, or supplies, or transfer or receive anything of value. If it is necessary to expend, exchange, or reimburse funds for any supplies or services, it will be accomplished under a separate approved process being subject to the availability of appropriations.
5. This MOU is strictly for internal management purposes for the Federal Government. It is not legally enforceable and shall not be construed to create any legal obligation on the part of the signatory Directors or their respective organizations. This MOU shall not be construed to provide a private right or cause for action by any person or entity.

The parties hereto in concurrence to the provisions have executed this MOU:

Signed by: Kevin Gallagher, Associate Director
USGS Core Science Systems
(Program contact: Kevin Gergely) _____ Date

Signed by: James Douglas, Director
DOI Office of Wildland Fire
(Program contact: Henry Bastian) _____ Date

Signed by: Dr. Matt Larsen, Associate Director
Climate and Land Use Change
(Program contact: Frank Kelly) _____ Date