

2012 Wisconsin Land Information Program Report

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November 2012



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF
ADMINISTRATION

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Executive Summary

The Wisconsin Land Information Program (WLIP) provides funding to counties for the modernization of land records. In some counties, land records modernization literally means updating from 19th Century technology, such as paper maps based on original land surveying conducted in the pre-settlement era, into the 21st Century dominated by Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Private and public landowners rely on land records and maps created by local governments to manage their property. Precise, accurate, and modern land information systems enable local and state governments to operate more efficiently and provide better service to constituents.

Most of the WLIP funding is through register of deeds fees retained by counties for land information, which totaled \$9.1 mil statewide in FY 2012. The county retained fee revenue depends on the amount of real estate transactions, which not only varies from year to year but also much more from county to county. In order to ensure a minimum of \$50k in funding for land records modernization in every county, the Department of Administration awarded a total of \$718,713 in WLIP need-based grants to 33 counties. According to the grant applications, the funds will be used for expenses central to land information offices: parcel mapping, acquisition of GIS hardware and software, and the provision of land information on the Internet.

In recent years, program revenue funding for WLIP grants has been diverted to fill state budget deficits. Grants did not ensure a \$50k minimum level of funding for land records modernization for half of the state's counties in the previous four out of five years.

All 72 counties participated in the 2012 WLIP annual survey, which inquired about the current state of each county's parcel mapping. According to the survey responses, 57 counties have a complete and fully digitized parcel map. Counties with incomplete digital parcel maps estimated it would take a total of \$18 mil to complete and fully digitize parcel mapping statewide. Respondents from 67 counties said their county would share its digitized parcel data with the state, but of those, only 17 counties indicated that they would be willing to share their data with no restrictions or charges. However, a more thorough analysis is needed to more accurately estimate costs and to better assess accessibility to county data.

Introduction to the Wisconsin Land Information Program (WLIP)

The WLIP is a voluntary program administered by the Department of Administration for the modernization of land records in which all 72 counties participate. Through the WLIP, county land information offices retain real estate deed recording fees and receive grants. In order to be eligible for WLIP funding, a county must have established a land information office, have a plan for the modernization of land records, have established a county land information council, and report on their expenditure activities each year.

The WLIP funds the development and maintenance of modern land information systems necessary to protect and grow Wisconsin's \$460 billion in real estate assets. Modern land information systems include GIS tools used for economic development and real estate commerce. For example, online digitized parcel maps enable decision-makers, investors, and developers to quickly assess information vital to policy and business decisions. However, in some Wisconsin counties, the parcel maps and other key land information are still paper-based and inaccurate, costing businesses time and money.

WLIP investments in county GIS data systems are typically working behind the scenes to provide modern governmental services. For example, when the location of a person calling 911 on a cell phone can quickly be identified, it was on account of government investment in local GIS infrastructure. When local officials want to know the potential effects of a flood, such as what homes and businesses are in need of evacuation and what transportation routes will remain open, they turn to the county's land information officer. This is why modernized land information systems are essential.

From the beginning, participation in the WLIP has required counties to develop certain county map data layers, referred to as the program's "foundational elements." A goal of the WLIP is to aggregate these into statewide map data layers, updated on a regular enough basis to be reliable and useful. Incomplete map layers in various counties, data-sharing restrictions, and lack of coordination at the state level have inhibited the completion of sustainable statewide GIS map layers. These "living" statewide layers yet to be completed include:

Parcels	Existing Land Use
Public hunting grounds	Electoral boundaries
Elevation	Utility districts
Road Centerlines	School districts
Address Points	Municipal boundaries
Floodplains	911 call center service areas
Non-metallic mining	Parks and Recreational Trails

WLIP Funding of County Land Records Modernization

Through the WLIP, counties are enabled to retain real estate deed document recording fees and receive grants for land information. Since 1990, the 72 Wisconsin counties have retained a total of \$124 mil in register of deeds fees for land information development and received \$32 mil in state grants. The WLIP has also provided an additional \$19 mil for the provision of land information on the Internet.

1. Retained fees

Statute 59.72(5) enables counties to retain \$8 of each real estate deed document recording fee for land information purposes. Six of the eight dollars must be spent modernizing or maintaining land records and two of the eight is designated for the provision of land information on the Internet. For all counties combined, this amounted to a total of \$6.8 mil in fees retained for modernizing and maintaining land records in FY 2012. However, retained fee totals depend on the number of real estate transactions and vary much by county. Nearly half of the 72 counties do not retain at least \$50k. In contrast, six counties each retained more than \$200k in FY 2012.

2. State Grants (s. 16.967)

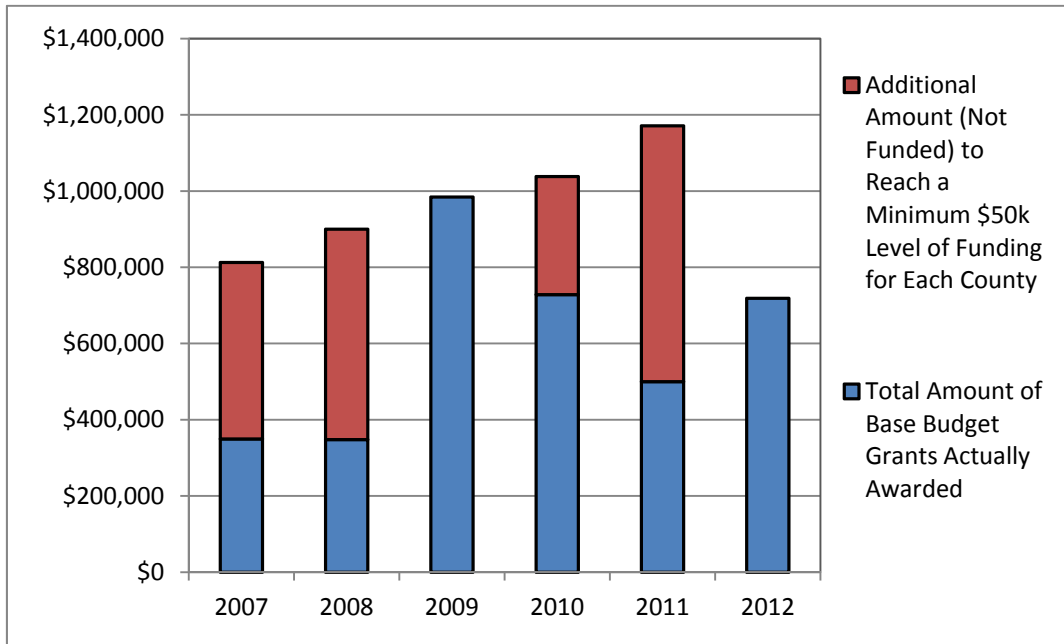
The WLIP can award four types of grants according to Administrative Rule 47. However, base budget grants are the only category to receive a significant amount of funding in the past decade. Training and education grants are limited to \$300 per county. Strategic initiative grants and contribution-based grants have not been funded since 2003.

WLIP “base budget” grants are intended to provide a minimal level of funding for land records modernization to make progress towards completion of foundational element map layers in every county. Counties are eligible for grants if they retain less than \$50k in register of deed document recording fees for land records modernization purposes. For example, if a county retains \$10k in the previous year, the county would be eligible for a \$40k grant. In 2012, thirty-three counties received base budget grants, totaling \$718,713.

While base budget grants do reduce funding disparities among individual counties, funding totals by county (both retained fees and grants received) vary widely. Historical totals range from \$0.7 mil for Menominee County to \$17.5 mil for Milwaukee County since 1990, with a median of \$1.2 mil. Yet, county land areas and land records modernization requirements are not as uneven. Counties that have received less funding tend to have fewer map layers completed, such as a digitized parcel map.

In recent years, counties have not been able to rely on WLIP base budget grants to ensure a minimum of \$50k in annual funding for the county land information office. As shown in the graph below, base budget grants have been funded to the \$50k level in only two of the last six years. This is due to funds being diverted to other purposes, such as comprehensive planning grants up through 2010. More consequentially in recent years, this fund has been subject to several lapses into the general fund on account of state budget deficits. These lapses into the general fund included \$1.92 mil in FY 2012, \$1.65 mil in FY 2011, \$1.8 mil in FY 2010, and \$420k in FY 2007.

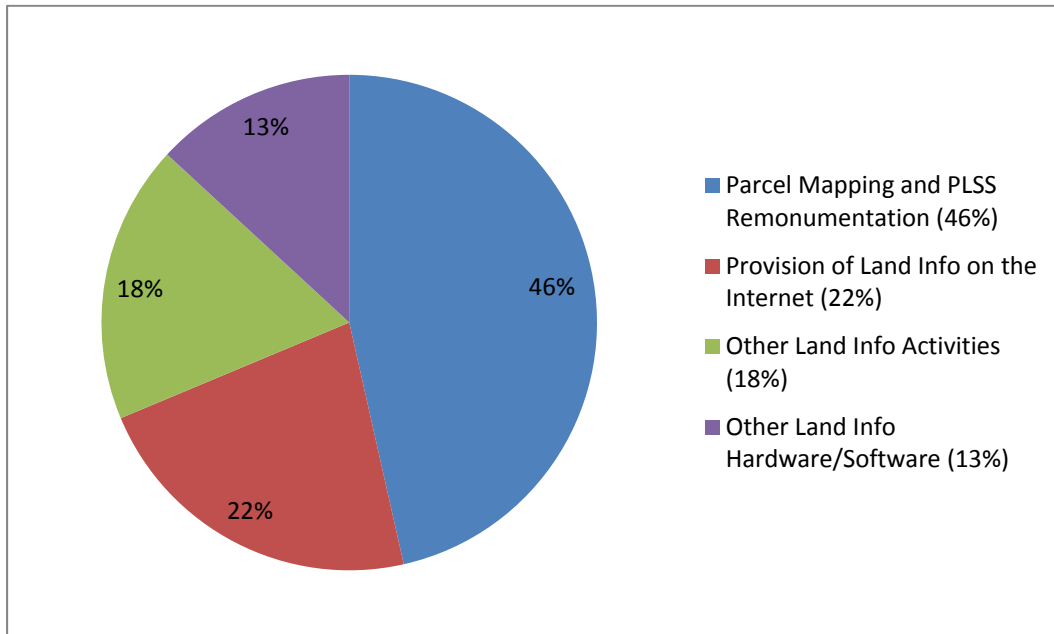
Total Base Budget Grant Funding 2007-2012



The inconsistency of WLIP base budget funding and timing of the grant announcements in the middle of the county fiscal year (calendar year), makes it difficult for counties who depend on base budget grants to plan ahead for more expensive land information projects, such as aerial imagery and LIDAR.

2012 Base Budget Projects

DOA distributed a total of \$718,713 in county base budget grants in 2012. The below graph displays expenditure areas based on base budget grant applications.



Retained Fees and Grants Reports

Since 2011, counties have been required to report on how WLIP retained fees and grants were utilized in the previous year, according to s. 59.72(2)(b). The reports cover expenditure activities from the previous calendar year. Each county's reporting form is posted online at www.doa.state.wi.us/WLIP.

Counties are required to categorize their expenditure activities and document how expenses are consistent with their land information plan. The activity area descriptions and land information plans are similar, but vary enough to make quantification and statistical analysis difficult.

According to the retained fees and grants reports, counties carry over an average of about \$140k from one year into the next. This is likely because several types of expensive land information projects, such as for flight projects including aerial imagery or LIDAR (elevation maps) acquisition, require counties to accrue money in advance.

County Land Information Plans

Per s. 59.72(5)(3), counties must spend their WLIP funding for land records modernization consistent with their county land information plan, referred to in statute as a "county-wide plan for land records modernization." These county land information plans must be approved by the Department of Administration per s.59.72(3)(b).

Per WLIP policy, counties are required to update their plans at least every five years and submit them for re-approval to the DOA. DOA facilitates a peer review process in which each county's plan is reviewed by two other county land information officers.

The county land information plan instructions, last updated in 2009, lay out a detailed plan template that lists the minimum plan elements to be included, but leave flexibility as to how counties may choose to address them. The plan instructions define the "framework data elements," historically and more commonly referred to as the foundational elements, the key map layers counties have been developing and maintaining since the WLIP's inception in 1989.

County Land Information Councils

In 2010, as part of the state's "flat fee legislation," a requirement was enacted (s.59.72(3m)) to require county boards to establish a land information council of not less than 8 members. The council shall consist of the following:

1. Register of deeds
2. Treasurer
3. Real property lister or designee
4. Member of the board
5. Representative of the land information office
6. A realtor or member of the Realtors Association employed within the county
7. A public safety or emergency communications representative employed within the county
8. County surveyor or a registered professional land surveyor employed within the county
9. Any other members of the board or public that the board designates

The land information council shall review the priorities, needs, policies, and expenditures of a land information office established by the board and advise the county on matters affecting the land information office. County budgets are drafted on an annual basis and priorities, needs, and policies are general written into the county land information plan that is required to be updated every five years.

There is no frequency of meeting for land information councils required in the statutes. It is unknown what the frequency of meeting is among land information councils. In some counties, the council has been established but has not met.

Some counties have reported difficulties finding people willing to serve on the councils. S. 59.72(3m)(am) allows for the councils to exist even if they cannot find a realtor, public safety or emergency communications representative, or county surveyor to serve.

WLIP Survey

The WLIP has an annual survey requirement. Based on survey information entered into the online GIS Inventory, the 2009 Report on County GIS Data Systems was completed by the State Cartographer's Office and DOA, available at www.doa.state.wi.us/WLIP.

While counties are encouraged to keep their information current in the online GIS Inventory, in 2012 the WLIP survey requirement was limited to a set of questions on digital parcel mapping included in 2012 grant applications. All 72 counties completed the survey.

2012 WLIP Survey Results

Fifty-seven of the of 72 Wisconsin counties reported complete parcel mapping. This is up from fifty-two as reported in the 2009 Report on County GIS Data Systems. The cost to complete and fully digitized parcel map totaled \$18 mil for all of the 15 counties reported they had yet to achieve one. Much of these costs would be incurred in PLSS remonumentation. However, the level of completeness in the "completed" counties and cost estimates to completion should be examined in more detail, such as in a more thorough survey and a business planning process for a statewide parcel map.

The following summary details the results of the 2012 WLIP survey:

1. Other than a parcel identifier, what other parcel attributes are associated with your digitized parcel layer, such as address, zoning, etc.?

This question received a variety of lists of attributes, some in the form of a list attached to the grant application. Others simply responded that all fields associated with the tax assessment database were attached to the parcel layer.

2. Are right-of-ways included in the digitized parcel layer?

Include: 35

Do not include: 16

Include in some cases: 21

3. Do you have a complete and fully digitized parcel map?

Yes: 57

No: 15

Note: For counties that answered yes, but gave an estimated cost to achieve a complete digital parcel map, their answer was changed to “no.” This applies to cases where they may have established a digital parcel map, but have yet to make its accuracy reliable.

4. If yes, how many parcels does your county have? And how much money does it take per year to maintain the complete digital parcel map?

Average number of parcels reported by counties with complete digital parcel maps: 52,689

Average cost to maintain the complete digital parcel map: \$65,670

Average maintenance cost per parcel: \$1.43

5. If no, when do you anticipate achieving one?

Median answer: 5 years

Longest: 35 years

6. What barriers does your county have to achieving a fully digitized parcel map?

Funding and staffing resources were cited by almost all respondents. In particular, funding for PLSS remonumentation was cited.

7. What is the estimated cost to achieve a complete digital parcel map (including steps for PLSS remonumentation or other activities if needed)?

Total cost: \$18 mil

Median: \$500k

Largest: \$2,802,000

8. For the purposes of a state-wide parcel layer, would your county freely share its digitized parcel data with the state?

Yes: 67

No: 5

9. Under what terms would your county share digitized parcel data with the state?

17 counties indicated in responses to Question 9 that they would be willing to share parcel data with the state with no restrictions or charges. Common terms for a county to share digitized parcel data with the state, included the following:

- Restrictions on sharing with third parties
- Costs, such as for reproduction, to be charged
- Restrictions on selling
- Requirements for disclaimer, waiver, indemnification
- Data sharing or licensing agreement required

Statewide Land Information Groups

County land information professionals are active in several Wisconsin land information groups that provide a forum for communication and coordinate statewide efforts related to the WLIP. The Land Information Officers Network (LION) most directly represents county land information office interests. The Wisconsin Land Information Association (WLIA) is open to a larger group, including GIS users in the private sector, and has actively supported the WLIP. The Wisconsin Geographic Information Coordinating Council (WIGICC) includes some land information officers as members and is a platform for many WLIP issues.

Land Information Officers Network (LION)

LION is made of a land information officer or designee from each county. LION has meetings scheduled about quarterly at WLIA conferences. The WLIP program manager and grant administrator typically attend such meetings.

In 2012, LION put forth a legislative agenda that requested base budget grant eligibility be raised from \$50k to the \$100k level and codified in statute and that training and education grants be increased from \$300 to \$1,000.

In an Aug. 8, 2012 letter, LION requested that 2013 base budget grants be funded to the full eligibility level and that the remaining balance of FY 2013 program revenue in Appropriation 116 be used to fund LiDAR acquisition, Public Land Survey System (PLSS) remonumentation, and parcel mapping through contribution based grants. LION would like that the grant amounts be announced earlier, so that counties will know what they are to receive in the upcoming calendar year.

Wisconsin Land Information Association (WLIA)

WLIA membership includes many land information officers, but the organization also represents the broader land information community. As described by the organization's mission statement, the purpose of the WLIA is to foster the understanding, development, and use of integrated land information systems. This includes supporting the WLIP in the following ways:

- Educating and lobbying on behalf of the WLIP in state government.
- Supporting statewide initiatives to create statewide land information systems on the basis of county data created through the WLIP.
- Providing a forum in which the concepts of the WLIP are discussed and enhanced. This includes providing meeting space for LION at WLIA conferences.

"Just Do It" Parcel Team

In 2012, the WLIA Board identified a task to gather as much parcel data as possible and assemble it into a seamless parcel dataset for the purpose of demonstrating the value of statewide data layers. The project was dubbed "Just Do It" to emphasize that counties wanted to achieve something tangible to demonstrate the value of statewide layers, rather than wait to work out all of the theoretical long-term issues. Justin Conner (Wood), Jeff DuMez (Brown), Ian Grasshoff (Waupaca) and Bill Cozzens (Waukesha) collaborated to establish a statewide map with parcels displayed in the majority of counties.

This pilot project is a proof of concept and not intended to be a maintained statewide parcel map with a standard set of parcel attributes to be shared.

Wisconsin Geographic Information Coordinating Council (WIGICC)

WIGICC is comprised of 21 members, including four county representatives and the WLIP program manager, Mike Friis. According to WIGICC's website, the overarching objective for the Council is to give all stakeholder groups within the geographic information community a voice in the decision making process regarding statewide initiatives. In July 2012, the Council requested that the Governor formally establish the council by executive order to give the council a more formal role in state decisions such as for the funding of land information activities.

DOA Land Information Listserv

The DOA manages a land information listserv with 317 email addresses currently included. All county land information officers are required to participate in the listserv in order to be eligible for grants. Others on the listserv are active in the land information/GIS field and are employees of other units of government or companies providing GIS services. Listserv activity varies depending on current issues, but usually has one question posted every week or so.