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A MapQuest for data-minded decision makers

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PORTAGE I Think of the Green Infrastructure Mapping Project as a region-specific, muscled-up MapQuest for policy and decision makers, with 170 layers of valuable ecodata and a myriad high-tech whistles and bells.

Yet, critics and skeptics ask: What's the good of a super-fancy map if it has what some consider outdated images, incomplete information and alleged geopolitical leanings?

At Friday's meeting of the Indiana Technical Advisory Committee, two dozen local land-use officials and data-minded experts listened to a presentation on the controversial tri-state mapping project -- found at www.greenmapping.org.

They represented several entities, including Gary, Hammond, Chesterton, the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Indiana University Northwest and the Northwestern Indiana Planning Commission, where the meeting was held.

They offered suggestions on a prototype of the project's second phase, which includes an interactive Web server that will allow visitors to create specific customized maps for different geographic regions, including Northwest Indiana and the Chicago area.

"It's still in the development stages ... a work in progress," said Peter Haas, of the Center for Neighborhood Technology, which is co-creating the project.

The project's first phase collected layers of data on wetlands, flood plains, rivers, protected open space, threatened and endangered species, greenways, trails and soils from more than 60 providers in 14 counties in Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin.

"A project like this allows local decision-makers to look at the big picture to see how their decisions impact those of the surrounding areas," said Becky McKinley, of the Northwest Indiana Geographic Information Systems Forum.

But some of that geodata didn't come with metadata -- specific and needed details about data -- and at least two counties, Porter and LaPorte, were left out of the initial project, begun in 2000, causing a mild uproar by local officials.

Both counties since have been included in the project's second phase. Yet data is still needed from all region counties, and many cities and towns, to make it complete, Haas said.

"We're just a clearinghouse of data," Haas said. "We need as much as we can get."

[EXTRAS]

To provide data for the project

Local agencies, municipalities and other interested groups can provide mapping data and metadata to the Green Infrastructure Mapping Project, phase II, by contacting:

* Peter Haas, Center for Neighborhood Technology, at (773) 269-4034 or pnh@cnt.org

* Lenore Beyer-Clow, Openlands, at (312) 863-6264 or lbeyer-clow@openlands.org

* Cindy Copp, Center for Neighborhood Technology, at (773) 278-4800 or cindy@cnt.org

To view the project, visit www.greenmapping.org