

The 3D Elevation Program—Summary for Minnesota

Introduction

Elevation data are essential to a broad range of applications, including forest resources management, wildlife and habitat management, national security, recreation, and many others. For the State of Minnesota, elevation data are critical for agriculture and precision farming, natural resources conservation, flood risk management, infrastructure and construction management, water supply and quality, coastal zone management, and other business uses. Today, high-quality light detection and ranging (lidar) data are the sources for creating elevation models and other elevation datasets. Federal, State, and local agencies work in partnership to (1) replace data, on a national basis, that are (on average) 30 years old and of lower quality and (2) provide coverage where publicly accessible data do not exist. A joint goal of State and Federal partners is to acquire consistent, statewide coverage to support existing and emerging applications enabled by lidar data. The new 3D Elevation Program (3DEP) initiative (Snyder, 2012a,b), managed by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), responds to the growing need for high-quality topographic data and a wide range of other three-dimensional representations of the Nation’s natural and constructed features.

3D Elevation Program Benefits for Minnesota

The top 10 Minnesota business uses for 3D elevation data, which are based on the estimated annual benefits of the 3DEP initiative, are shown in table 1. National Enhanced Elevation Assessment (NEEA; Dewberry, 2011) survey respondents in the State of Minnesota estimated that

3DEP in Minnesota by the Numbers

Expected annual benefits	\$13.64 million
Estimated total cost	\$28.15 million
Payback	2.1 years
Quality level 1 buy-up estimate	\$17.91 million



Figure 1. Map of Minnesota showing the areal extent and quality levels of planned and existing publicly available light detection and ranging (lidar) data in November 2012. No lidar data that meet 3DEP requirements for quality level 2 or better are publicly available for Minnesota. See table 2 for quality levels.

the national 3DEP initiative would result in at least \$13 million in new benefits annually to the State. The cost for such a program in Minnesota is approximately \$28 million, resulting in a payback period of 2.1 years and a benefit-to-cost ratio of 3.9 to 1 over an 8-year period. Because monetary estimates were not provided for all reported benefits, the total benefits of the 3DEP to Minnesota are likely much higher. On the basis of the NEEA survey results, all levels of government and many organizations in Minnesota could benefit from access to statewide high-resolution elevation data.

The NEEA evaluated multiple data-collection programs to determine the optimal data quality and data replacement cycle relative to cost to meet the stated needs. For Minnesota, approximately 76 percent of the total benefits are realized in agriculture and precision farming and natural resources conservation uses alone, as shown in table 1. The status of publicly available lidar data in Minnesota is shown in figure 1. By enhancing coordination between the 3DEP and the various government and private organizations in Minnesota, it may be possible to meet a higher percentage of the needs.

3D Elevation Program

3DEP is a national program managed by the USGS to acquire high-resolution elevation data. The initiative is backed by a comprehensive assessment of requirements (Dewberry, 2011) and is in the early stages of implementation. 3DEP will improve data accuracy and provide more current data than is available in the National Elevation Dataset (NED). The goal of this high-priority cooperative program is to be operational by January 2015 and to have complete coverage of the United States by 2022, depending on funding and partnerships. The new program has the potential to generate \$13 billion/year in new benefits through improved government services, reductions in crop and homeowner losses resulting from floods, more efficient routing of vehicles, and a host of other government, corporate, and citizen activities (Dewberry, 2011).

Benefits of a Funded National Program

- Economy of scale—Acquisition of data covering larger areas reduces costs by 25 percent.
- A systematic plan—Acquisition of data at a higher quality level reduces the cost of “buying up” to the highest levels needed by State and local governments.
- Higher quality data and national coverage—Ensure consistency for applications that span State and watershed boundaries and meet more needs, which results in increased benefits to citizens.
- Increase in Federal agency contributions—Reduces State and local partner contributions.
- Acquisition assistance—Provided through readily available contracts and published acquisition specifications.

Several organizations and agencies in Minnesota have supported the acquisition of high-accuracy digital elevation data for a variety of resource management needs, with particular emphasis on water-related activities. The following examples highlight how 3DEP data can support business needs in Minnesota: (1) Enhanced elevation data are being used to improve water quality by modeling soil erosion and runoff into streams to decrease the amount of sediment and nutrients delivered to the lakes and rivers (fig. 2). (2) High-resolution terrain data have been used to more effectively implement natural resources conservation practices, provide detailed watershed delineation and analysis in efforts to preserve and restore wetlands, and improve water-quality assessments. These practices provide cost savings to the public that will support additional natural resources conservation projects.

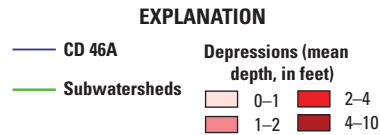
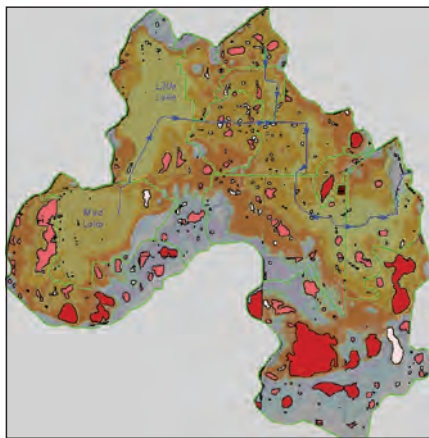


Figure 2. The graphic shows depressional areas, based on enhanced elevation data, where water could be stored in the area drained by Nicollet County Ditch 46A (CD 46A), within the Sevenmile Creek watershed, which drains directly into the Minnesota River. Using the depression information, hydrologic modeling can identify specific locations within the watershed that can temporarily store runoff to decrease peak flows and the amount of sediment and nutrient runoff. Courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Table 1. Conservative benefits for the top 10 business uses of the proposed 3DEP data identified in the National Enhanced Elevation Assessment for Minnesota (Dewberry, 2011).

Rank	Business use	Annual benefits (millions)
1	Agriculture and precision farming	\$6.90
2	Natural resources conservation	3.38
3	Flood risk management	1.10
4	Infrastructure and construction management	0.64
5	Water supply and quality	0.47
6	Coastal zone management	0.41
7	Forest resources management	0.33
8	Geologic resource assessment and hazard mitigation	0.15
9	Aviation navigation and safety	0.14
10	Renewable energy resources	0.07
	Other	0.03
	Total	13.62

References Cited

Dewberry, 2011, Final report of the National Enhanced Elevation Assessment (revised 2012): Fairfax, Va., Dewberry, 84 p. plus appendixes, <http://www.dewberry.com/Consultants/GeospatialMapping/FinalReport-NationalEnhancedElevationAssessment>.

Snyder, G.I., 2012a, National Enhanced Elevation Assessment at a glance: U.S. Geological Survey Fact Sheet 2012-3088, 2 p., <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2012/3088/>.

Snyder, G.I., 2012b, The 3D Elevation Program—Summary of program direction: U.S. Geological Survey Fact Sheet 2012-3089, 2 p., <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2012/3089/>.

3D Elevation Program—Continued

The USGS and its partners will acquire quality level 2 or better (table 2) three-dimensional lidar data over the conterminous United States, Hawaii, and the U.S. territories. Interferometric synthetic aperture radar (ifsar) data are being collected at quality level 5 (table 2) in Alaska. The data will be acquired over an 8-year period and will be made available to the public. A number of high-quality elevation-data products will be created to serve a wide range of business needs in government and the private sector.

Table 2. Data quality levels used in the National Enhanced Elevation Assessment (Dewberry, 2011).

[≤, less than or equal to]

Quality level	Nominal pulse spacing (meters)	Vertical accuracy (centimeters)
1	0.35	9.25
2	0.7	9.25
3	1–2	≤18.5
4	5	46–139
5	5	93–185

Next Steps for Implementing 3DEP

Accomplishing the 3DEP initiative's goal of national coverage in 8 years depends on the following factors:

- Increased partnerships among Federal, State, and local governments.
- Partnerships that acquire elevation data to the program's specifications across larger project areas.
- Increased communication about and awareness of the program's benefits and goals.
- Support for the program from government and other stakeholders.

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