GIS Data Sharing & Public Access to Data in Clay County, MN

Information is often perceived as proprietary. I gathered the data. I wrote it down. It is mine. I control it, and if someone wants it, they can come and ask me for it. That view of information does not work in the digital age.

Today we have the capability to rapidly exchange data between desks, offices, buildings, communities, and the world. As a county, we are faced with challenges more complex than ever before. We are meeting the demands for more services by utilizing GIS technology to increase productivity, reduce costs, and provide better customer service.

At Clay County, our goal is to create and maintain the most accurate data possible for use by our direct end users. Information is generated for a specific purpose. Any use of that data by other agencies, organizations or the public is simply a benefit to the initial investment. We readily share all data and encourage others to utilize it. One of the primary reasons for our investment in GIS technology is to reduce or eliminate duplication. Data sharing activities allow that to happen. No more of the letter-jacket mentality where information is ours for us alone to use; now it is a part of the public domain and accessible to all.

In September 1998, and again in February 2010, the Clay County Board of Commissioners approved a policy that allows all public GIS data to be freely distributed via electronic means in an effort to get the greatest benefit from our GIS data. In 2014, the Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution declaring free and open access to GIS data.

All Clay County GIS data is available, free-of-charge via our ftp site and our on-line services. Through the use of data sharing, we are achieving our goals of reducing duplication while providing additional services. Free exchange of information is the key to making efficient use of the investment in GIS development.