

Computerized Land Records Are Developed

By Gunther H. Greulich

It seems that everywhere there is concern for more effective land information. Blunders in the recent census have been given wide publicity by the national press. Almost daily we read about environmental problems and lack of resources. The Federal government is going to spend billions for cleanup of hazardous waste pollution, we are told.

Few people realize that all these self-inflicted wounds have one common denominator: Insufficient information on the land. It is no accident that the U.S. Census Bureau is currently mailing copies of a recent NRC study to 3,500 county recorders. The report was published by the National Academy Press on behalf of the National Research Council and is entitled "Need for A Multi-purpose Cadastre." It gives an outline of technical and organizational requirements for a better land information system at the county level.

Utility companies and highway departments are frustrated by rising acquisition costs, increased lead times and growing demands for voluminous environmental impact studies. Right-of-way agents all know how difficult it often is to determine minimal information on land ownership, location or boundaries. There is no justifiable reason why utility companies or transportation departments should continue to spend millions to straighten out neglected land records for the single purpose of a right-of-way across a very small portion of the real estate in question. Even the most thoroughly executed record research and field survey cannot hope to resolve all discrepancies and conflicts that exist between right-of-way and abutting parcels. As a result, much of the required effort is single purpose, redundant and wasteful.

At its 25th anniversary meeting of Chapter 16, representatives of the New England Power Service Company made a timely presentation. They explained how the pressure for up-to-date information on their right-of-way fee holdings had caused

them to initiate a computerized land inventory. The system is based on a graphic plot of land parcels on available U.S. Geological Survey quadrangle sheets. Each parcel owned by New England Power Company is identified by a number derived from centroid positions based on the state plane coordinate system. Relevant information of about 30 attributes for each unit of land is then stored in a remote computer. Retrieval is made possible by the parcel identifier and/or other cross-index data elements. According to William Rickard, it works like a charm and an expansion of the system is in the works.

It is unfortunate, and perhaps a sign of the times, that each private or public agency must fend for itself in developing an independent land information system of its own. It again means duplication of effort, for land does rarely move and is of interest to more than one person.

A multipurpose cadastre established and managed by the county in cooperation with utility companies and other users (the Pennsylvania RMLR project is an example) could be of tremendous benefit to all, and it would save money in the long run.

The National Academy of Sciences has recognized this need in its NRC study. Among the recommendations made in the executive summary are:

"We recommend that each state authorize an Office of Land Information Systems, through legislation where necessary, to implement the multipurpose cadastre."

"We recommend that each county government (or municipality where appropriate) create an Office of Land Information Systems in coordination with such offices as the recorder of deeds, county surveyor, assessor, planner, and county abstractor, if any."

A county cadastral office may be envisioned as a land information center inter-

facing the files of county engineers with those of the county register of deeds, local assessors, utility companies, resource planners and other parcel-oriented data elements. The information will have a common data base and be stored in a central computer. Controlled data entry and retrieval will be possible at a number of relevant public offices. Because the system is based on the ownership parcel, right-of-way agents would be contributors as well as beneficiaries of the cadastre. There would be no need to "start from scratch" everytime a right-of-way is planned.

Houston, Memphis, Calgary, and other cities have implemented such a system. The Bureau of Land Management has pilot projects underway in Colorado and Alaska. Trial and error will eventually produce a Land Information System that many of us have been waiting for.

A free copy of the NRC report can be obtained from: Leader, Cadastral Survey and Mapping Staff, Bureau of Land Management, Denver Service Center (D-411), Building #50, Denver Federal Center, Lakewood, Colorado 80225

Car Rental Discount Increases

The National Car Rental Discount offered to members of the International Right of Way Association has again been increased to 35 percent for regular time and mileage use and the "National Attention Rates" have been increased to 5 percent. The "National Attention Rates" at most locations include 100 free miles per day, if the car is returned to the renting location. If the 35 percent discount is better, then it will be used instead to calculate the cost of the rental car.