

Sharing Land Management Practices

Report on the 2005 FIG Commission 7 Annual Meeting, Madison (WI), USA, June 19-23, 2005

The International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) is composed of ten commissions, each with a specific focus in the surveying community. FIG Commission 7, whose focus is on cadastre and land management, recently held its annual meeting in Madison, Wis., June 18-23, 2005. This was the first time in the 128-year history of FIG that a commission convened its annual meeting in the United States. Thirty FIG delegates from 24 countries attended. For many of them, it was their first visit to America.



The theme of the FIG Commission 7 Annual Meeting centered on international land management and development issues. In most countries of the world, these issues are handled on a national basis. However, the United States is unique because most of its surveying and land management issues (zoning, sale, transfer, assessment, taxation, etc.) are administered and regulated at the local level. This difference became a primary focal point of the annual meeting, and the U.S. representatives focused on giving the international delegates a better idea of how things work in the states.

Presentations and Excursions

Key components in educating the delegates on surveying in the USA included presentations by Steve Kopach, chief land surveyor for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, on surveying at the federal level and wildlife refuges/endangered species activities; Reginald Jaquish, president of the Madison Area Surveyors Council, on the work of a private surveyor in Wisconsin and the U.S.; Fred Halfen, vice president of Ayres Associates (and president-elect of the Wisconsin Land Information Association), on land information in Wisconsin and the USA; Joe Hanousek, vice president of Extract Systems, on title companies and the title industry in the USA; Don Buhler, chief of cadastral survey for the Bureau of Land Management, on the history of surveying in the U.S. The historical presentation included a description of metes and bounds and the Public Land Survey System (PLSS). The delegates were particularly interested in the rectangular survey system of the PLSS and how it is used in a large country.



Rob Nurre shows some of the surveyor tools used in Wisconsin in the 1830s.

Two days of the conference were devoted to technical excursions. The first field trip was a local excursion to the State of Wisconsin Board of Commissioners of the Public Lands office to see many of the original field notes and plat books used in the original surveys of Wisconsin. Rob Nurre, land records manager, hosted the group at this office, and also entertained them with his presentation of “The Surly Surveyor: A look at a surveyor during the time of the original government surveys in the Wisconsin territory in the 1830s.”

Next was a visit to the Dane County Register of Deeds, Planning Department and Land Information Department offices. Jane Licht, Dane County's register of deeds, gave the delegates an overview of how land is sold, bought, and transferred through her office. She showed them the historical progression from the original paper plat maps to the digital technology of today where residents can look up detailed information on computers- some of which is accessible through the internet. Troy Everson, GIS planning specialist with the planning department, showed the delegates how planning and zoning was coordinated throughout the county. Diann Danielsen, Dane County's land information manager, explained how land information is handled and distributed at the county level. She explained how AccessDane, a single portal access to the county's geographic and land information, including parcel mapping and zoning information, is used by more than 5000 people per day.



The Wisconsin State Capitol building is the largest survey monument in the world. It is located on a PLSS section corner (sections 13, 14, 23, and 24 of T7N, R9E).

The West statue is located on the second floor west entrance to Wisconsin's capitol.



As a fitting end to the day's technical excursion, the commission took a tour of the Wisconsin State Capitol building, the world's largest survey monument and also a section corner (the common corner of sections 13,14, 23, and 24 of T7N, R9E is at the center of the Capitol rotunda). One of the highlights, in addition to discovering the unique nature of the building being a survey monument of sorts was a visit to the second floor west entrance where the statue *The West* is located. Representing the exploration and movement west from the original thirteen colonies, it is a fine marble statue in the traditional Greco style. The figure is shown holding a surveyor's chain in her right hand and a compass in the crook of her left arm. At her feet on the left is a shaft of wheat, while on the right is a broken bow and arrow.



The Oneida Nation Land Management Department logo.

Tribal Land Management

After learning about the PLSS system used in Wisconsin, the delegates discovered another "wrinkle" in U.S. land management—Native American land holdings. On June 23, the delegates made a technical excursion to the Oneida Nation Department of Land Management. Located near Green Bay, the Oneida Nation is a tribal reservation that was originally established in 1838. Although the adjoining lands of the Oneida Nation follow the PLSS structure, the Oneida lands do not. The land management department staff explained that they are in the process of reestablishing tribal jurisdiction over the land within the reservation's original boundaries. Historically, many of the Oneidas, without knowing the value of land, traded or sold the land for little compensation—sometimes just a bottle of liquor or a gun. One

important aspect of the reacquisition of the land by the Oneida Nation is that it compensates the local tax authority (city, village, town) for the value of the taxes lost when property is removed from their tax rolls.

The Oneidas use a GIS-based system to set coordinates for their land and hire local surveyors for contract work. Currently, the Oneida Nation owns approximately 18,000 acres of its original 65,607 reservation acres. In addition, individual Oneida tribal members own approximately 730 acres of trust land and about 1,000 acres of fee land within the reservation.



Delegates at the FIG Commission 7 Annual Meeting held in Madison, WI

Sharing and Learning for the Future

Delegates to the annual meeting conducted their commission's business and were updated on land management developments in various countries including Denmark, Finland, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland. In addition,

they reviewed recent and future conferences, including upcoming conferences in Jordan, Thailand and Ghana. By the meeting's end, the international delegates were looking forward to communicating with the American contacts they had made—and were also looking forward to their next visit to the United States.

John Hohol (U.S. delegate to FIG Commission 7 and the local coordinator for the 2005 FIG Commission 7 Annual Meeting)