

Friday, November 16, 2007

Minister Deveaux praises GIS Day initiative

NASSAU, The Bahamas --- Minister of Works the Hon. Earl Deveaux Wednesday applauded members of the Caribbean/URISA Chapter for hosting a “successful” GIS Day seminar, adding that GIS technology is truly the wave of the future.

Held each year on the Wednesday of National Geographic Society’s Geography Awareness Week (November 11–17 in 2007), GIS Day is a global event that celebrates Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, the innovative technology that uses geography to bring countless benefits to the world. GIS Day was celebrated here in New Providence at the Police Conference Centre, East Street.

The Caribbean/URISA GIS Day Seminar provided an opportunity for those curious about GIS to see its applications in action. A GIS is a computer-based mapping tool that takes information from a database about a location, such as streets, buildings, water features and terrain, and turns it into visual layers. The ability to see geographic features on a map gives Users a better understanding of a particular location, enabling planners, analysts and others to make more informed decisions about their communities.

Mr. Deveaux said his ministry will continue to use GIS and Global Positioning System Technology in its planning and mitigation efforts as a result of its successful application following Tropical Storm Noel.

He said the continued use of GIS Technology will, among other things, lead to the establishment of planning tools that “will help Bahamians construct their homes and commercial structures away from flood plains”, in addition to establishing elevations for known flood plains.

“We know now that as a result of a 1-in-60-year event that Cat Island, Long Island, San Salvador, Exuma and Acklins are among the islands likely to flood,” Mr. Deveaux said. “We have very accurate information on the levels of the flooding and so we can design planning tools to say to individuals and/or business, or to just build regulations to indicate how high a foundation needs to be if someone insists on living downtown Salina Point, or downtown Georgetown, or anywhere in New Providence.”

Minister Deveaux said the technology played a key role in ministry officials being able to “map” the damages caused by Tropical Storm Noel in some of the hardest-hit areas of the storm in “Real Time.”

He said the ministry’s First Responders were provided with some “basic training” in hand-held GPS Technology before going into the affected areas where they were able to map not only the areas that were flooded, but also those where there was damage to buildings, docks and seawalls.

“As a result of the technology, we were able to make a presentation to Cabinet who were all able to view a visual presentation of where the damages occurred,” Mr. Deveaux said. “More significantly, it was capable of providing Cabinet with accurate information to assess the actual damage.”

The Minister of Works congratulated members of the Caribbean/URISA Chapter for organizing the seminar, calling it a “timely event.” The Caribbean/URISA Chapter, is a non-profit organization of GIS professionals that was established in August, 2007 and uses GIS technology to help government agencies and businesses across the region in their day-to-day planning.

“People may not be aware of it, but GIS touches our lives daily as it is used throughout the world to solve problems related to the environment, healthcare, land use, business efficiency, education and public safety,” said Mrs. Valrie Grant-Harry, Interim President, Caribbean/URISA Chapter.

“The power supply directed to homes, the patrol cars and fire trucks that keep neighborhoods safe and the delivery trucks on the road can all function more efficiently because of GIS. This technology can also help businesses place ATMs and restaurants at more convenient locations, allow people to pull maps off the Internet and help farmers grow more crops with less chemicals.

“GIS Technology is uniquely shaping the Health sector and there are presently many health GIS applications around the world. It has been used to monitor the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). It has been used in the Caribbean to map the spread of malaria. GIS is also playing a critical role in crime analysis and other areas of law enforcement. From border patrol agents to doctors, and from federal agency employees to local city planners, people in nearly every profession all over the world are reaping the benefits of this extraordinary technology,” she added.

Mrs. Grant-Harry said GIS Day serves to make people aware of GIS technology and the important contributions it is making in the fields of science, technology, information, and the humanities.