

THE NATIONAL LAND COVER DATABASE PROJECT: THE STORY OF ITS IMPACT

Carol A. Deering

ERT, Inc. at USGS EROS, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 57198, USA – cdeering@usgs.gov

KEY WORDS: impact analysis, land cover data, NLCD, research assessment

ABSTRACT:

The National Land Cover Database (NLCD) comprises Landsat-based, 30-meter resolution products that provide land surface spatial and descriptive data, including thematic class, percent impervious surface, and percent tree canopy cover. Since the publication of the first data products in 2000, NLCD has supported thousands of applications that seek to understand and assess ecosystems, biodiversity, and biological carbon sequestration; monitor water-quality and wildfire; predict and mitigate the effects of climate change; and develop land management policy. We have a bird's-eye view of the impact of the NLCD project, but we don't know the details around that impact. We don't understand the richness of that impact. In short, we don't yet know the story of NLCD project impact. A comprehensive assessment strategy is thus needed to gauge the reach and influence of the Nation's land cover database project and tell the story of its importance. Traditional measures of impact such as citation counts should of course be part of that strategy. But how else might we assess the impact of the NLCD? We could ask questions about the breadth and depth of the research activities that comprise the project structure. Indicators of the reach and impact of these activities would include multidisciplinary collaborations, conference presentations, peer-reviewed publications, research and development assets, software and scripting developments, and Web support and promotion. We could ask questions about the role NLCD has played in the advancement of knowledge. Indicators of this kind of reach and impact would include paradigm shifts, continued and increasing data use, first and second generation citations, and user comments and surveys. An initial assessment of these non-traditional measures of research begins to flesh out the multi-chaptered story of the NLCD project and bring into focus its wide-ranging impact.