GIS
Tips & Tricks

By Al Karlin, Ph.D. CMS-L, GISP

Some Old Habits Die Hard

As with so many of my recent columns, this month's tips originated with questions from my GIS class. This semester (Fall 2023) at the University of Tampa, we updated the Esri software from ArcGIS Desktop and moved right into ArcGIS Pro 3.1. So, for some GIS students this was the first ArcGIS version that they experienced, while for others, not so. For those continuing students, some of the most perplexing issues (and there are many when switching from Desktop to Pro) are the bracketed red ellipses […] that they found frequently in their map legends, as well as, how to select/unselect the items for the map legend. So, this month's Tips focus on changes between how the map legends are constructed in ArcGIS Desktop and ArcGIS Pro.

TIP #1 — THE RED BRACKETED ELLIPSES […]

In ArcGIS Desktop, when the layer (feature class) titles in the legend contain numerous characters and there is insufficient space in the map legend, depending on your selection for the map legend format, ArcGIS Pro just word wraps to fill the available space as in Figure 1. Notice that I included the citation (from the Florida Geographic Data Library) in the title of each feature class and the word wrapped entries in the map "legend" (a pet peeve that I'll address later.)

When I change the symbology to include the name of each county, the dreaded red bracketed ellipses […] appear as in Figure 2.

The red bracketed ellipses are indicating that there is hidden text (or features) that are not being displayed in the map legend. The fix is really pretty easy, in most cases, all you need to do is click and drag a corner of the map legend box, expanding it to accommodate the hidden text (or features) as in Figure 3.
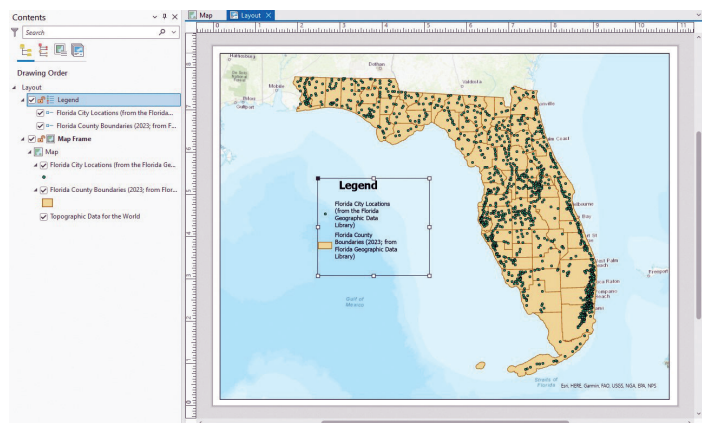

Figure 1. Default ArcGIS Pro map legend showing word wrapping for layers with multiple word titles.
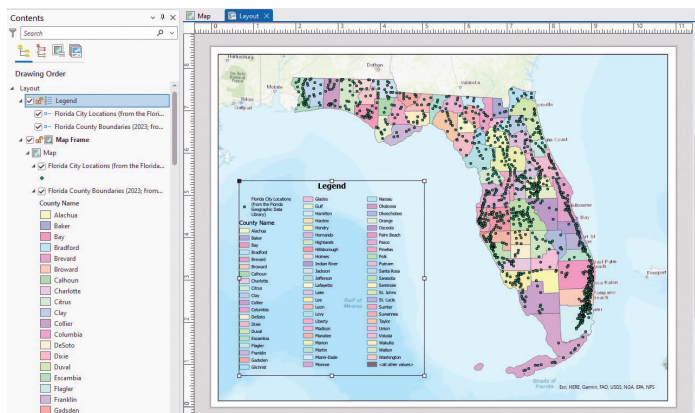

Figure 2. Red bracketed ellipses […] appear when there are hidden elements in the map legend.

Figure 3. Expanding the map legend box to reveal the hidden text.

You may see multiple red bracketed ellipses (Figure 4) while you adjust the size of the map legend, so just keep adjusting the size of the map legend until the entire text (or features) are displayed in the map legend and the red bracketed ellipses are removed.
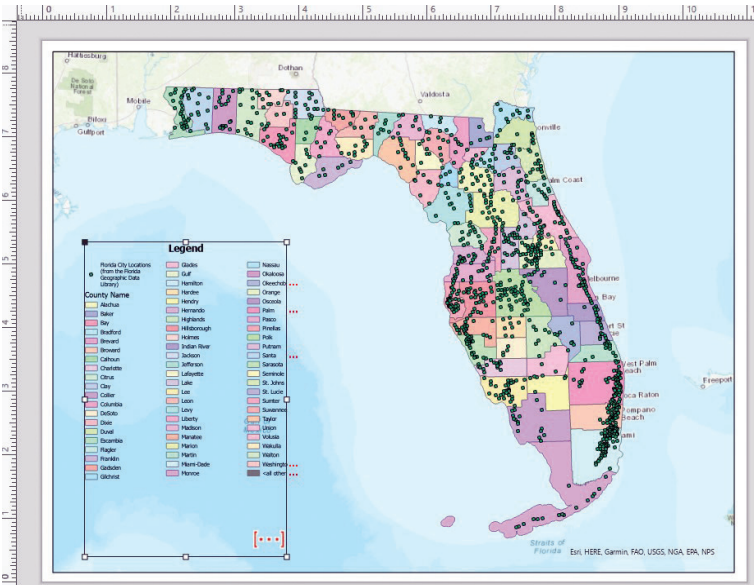
Figure 4. Multiple red bracketed ellipses [...] may appear while expanding the map legend box.
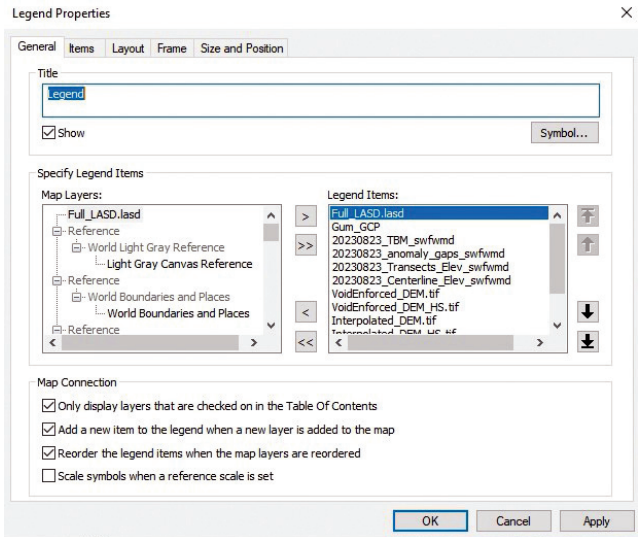

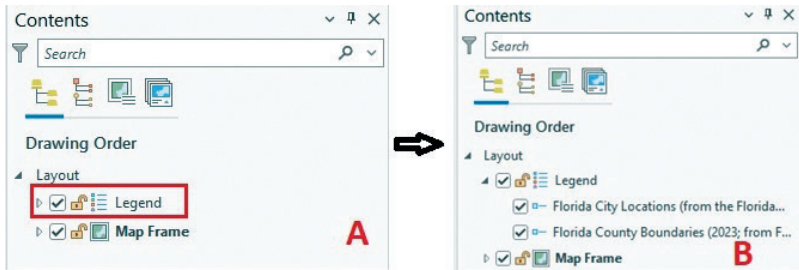Figure 5. The ArcGIS Desktop Legend Properties window used to select items for the map legend.

Figure 6. Clicking on the arrow next to the Legend object (6A) expands the legend to show the layers (6B) which can be turned off by clearing the checkbox.

TIP #2 — REMOVING LAYER NAMES FROM THE MAP LEGEND

In the Esri software, the feature classes checked "on" in the Contents panel are displayed on the layout, but previous Esri software from ArcView (for those oldies) to ArcGIS Desktop used a selection panel in the Legend Properties (Figure 5) to select which feature classes would be displayed in the map legend.

In ArcGIS Pro, this functionality has been moved to the Contents panel on the Layout. When the Layout is constructed, the Legend object is collapsed (Figure 6a). Simply click on the arrow to the left of the Legend (Figure 6b) to expand this object and check on (or off) layers for display in the legend.
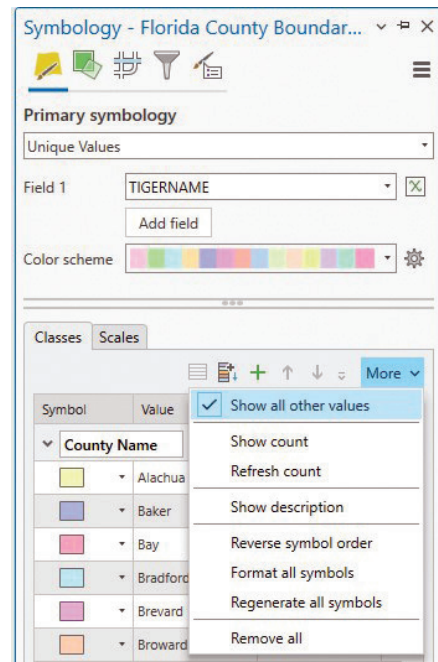

Figure 7. To remove the <all other values> text from the map legend, clear the check box from the More dropdown.

TIP #3 — REMOVE THE <ALL OTHER VALUES> FROM THE MAP LEGEND

When you choose the Primary Symbology as Unique Values, ArcGIS Pro defaults to including the <all other values> item in the legend. Of course, in most cases, when you use the Unique Values symbology, you are showing all of the possible classes and the <all other values> should be turned off. To remove the <all other values> text from the legend, open the Symbology pane for the layer, and on either the Classes or Scales tab, expand the "More" button and uncheck the "Show all other values" item (Figure 7.)

Tip #4 — Remove "Legend" from the Map Legend

A personal pet peeve of mine is when a student (or any cartographer for that matter) leaves the default word "Legend" as the title for the map legend. For me, either simply remove it, i.e. no title, or replace the default with something meaningful. At first glance, it is a little confusing because on the Element | Legend pane, there appear to be two places where the word "Legend" appears; first in the Options | General space and again in the Legend | Title space. To customize the legend title, replace the Legend | Title with something meaningful (Figure 8) or uncheck the Title | Show box to produce a title-less legend.
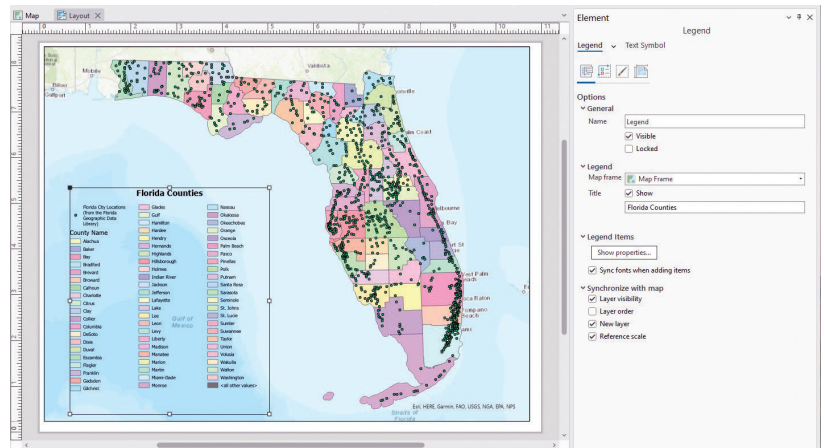

Figure 8. Use the Legend | Title, not the General | Name to customize the legend. You can also clear the Title | Show checkbox to remove the map legend title text.

Send your questions, comments, and tips to GISTT@ASPRS.org.

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