

cartographic perspectives

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Letter from the Editor

Rediscovering Cartography
By James E. Meacham, NACIS
President, 2001-2002

I am pleased to report that our organization is growing and I sense a general feeling of optimism, opportunity and strong commitment in our ranks. We have seen a substantial growth in NACIS membership and meeting attendance over the last five years (see *figure 1*). At the 1997 Lexington meeting the attendance was 107 with a membership of 381. At last year's meeting in Portland the membership had grown to 485 and the meeting attendance had more than doubled to 231. The pre-conference event last year in Portland, "Practical Cartography Day," was also enormously successful, with 105 participants, including 65 more than was originally planned for. This is good news indeed. In a time when some have questioned the vitality of cartography, we are

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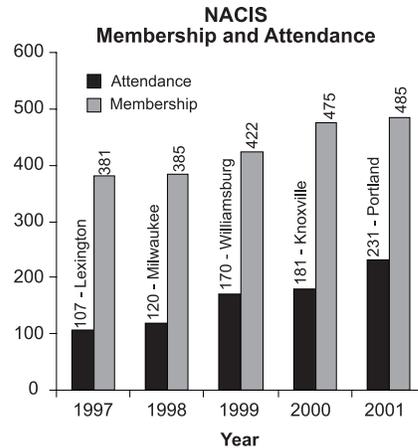
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seeing a substantial growth in our field.

I believe cartography is experiencing something of a rediscovery. From my point of view as a university cartography lab director and an active member of NACIS, I see substantial growth and renewed interest in cartography on several fronts in government, private industry, academia and the general public. In addition, the GIS community is turning out to a valuable partner rather than a threat to our profession. We need to move past the Cartography versus GIS debate (Tyner, 2001). I believe cartography is experiencing part of the increased awareness and growth that its parent discipline of geography and sister discipline of GIS are experiencing (National Research Council, 1997 and Goodchild, 2000).

The vitality of our field can especially be seen in the work of our membership. NACIS members are embracing opportunities on all mapping fronts, applying their cartographic craft and tools in very innovative and effective ways. They are making a difference in all disciplines that rely on spatial data from resource planning and environmental science to demographic studies and parks management. These efforts do not go unnoticed. Decision-makers and the public are rediscovering the importance of cartography through these efforts. These activities are defining us.

Through my work in the UO InfoGraphics Lab, I see first hand that government administrators and the rapidly expanding GIS community is rediscovering our profession and seeking us out for our knowledge and skills. We are the ones that can turn their rich databases and analyses - that are at the heart of their work - into well-



designed data-rich print products and digital delivery systems. These products greatly assist them to fulfill their missions. My lab is seeing a rapid increase in these types of projects. We have put our cartographic knowledge to work on projects ranging from communicating Oregon's salmon recovery effort through maps and graphs, to building a comprehensive planning database of rural lands in our state. Students gain invaluable experience through these projects.

In our department we have noted increased demand for graduating students with cartographic design skills, in addition to the traditional GIS concepts, from both the public and private sectors. This is another significant indicator of the health of our field and our future.

As cartographers, we are in a vital period, a period of rediscovery. We must continue to embrace opportunities to apply our knowledge and skill in exciting and innovative ways. NACIS is both at the heart and the forefront of cartography. The NACIS community is strong and has the energy and the obligation to set the tone and the path for the future of our profession.

References

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Acknowledgments

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