

Dealing with crises via surveying and mapping

—by Michael Rubner

Surveying as a solution? Most of my fellow professionals seem to have an astute ability to spot and define problems. I believe ACSM is in a unique position to help ultimately solve the unfolding national crisis.

The current real estate crisis showcases how financial institutions have profited from the sale and development of land. But, even though the current discussion centers on the financial end, let's be clear about the fact that this crisis is really about land.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is our area of expertise. After a solution is devised concerning the financial crisis, the real solution is in the land. The dust will settle as it always does. The land which comprises our country has always been the solution. It is our strength and it is, in no small part, integral to what makes the United States great. Land ownership and the right to designate its best use will continue to create real financial gains. Whether the U.S. government becomes a larger stakeholder or not, is still to be decided. But regardless, this country will need our help in restoring financial stability through the use of land.

Many questions will arise, much discussion will be heard, but the bottom line is how to utilize America's resources more effectively. We are in a position to help define what resource we have, how accessible they are, and at what cost can they be exploited, while minimizing impact on recreation and preserving and renewing these natural gifts. The questions are: What is land really worth? How is it's worth determined? Who makes the determination? How broken is the process? How can the process be improved?

Our ability to map title and boundary lines and define natural resources (trees, minerals, water sheds, soil types, etc) will become incumbent on resolving crises involving land. Utilizing GPS, GIS, and hydrographic and land surveying will be paramount in defining the real value of the land comprising our country.

By assisting in defining land configurations, we will help establish our profession as the light at the end of the tunnel. By providing our services, we will reap goodwill from those affected by the crisis. We will be better received by legislatures and the public in general.

When we help provide answers to questions concerning land and the depictions of boundaries created by topography, geology, and title, we provide solutions. The tools that we use—GPS, GIS, and, let's not forget the tried and tested land surveying practices—will shine.

The needs addressed by this Congress, through its member organizations, involve a multitude of issues ranging from federal land maps in a GIS format, to height modernization, to more emphasis on education, and the way we address them will provide future generations with the tools they need to deal with other crises, be they natural or man made. Ultimately, once we show our capabilities, bringing elected officials to our perspective will follow. [Editor's note: Michael Rubner is the 2008 chair of the ACSM Council of Sections; Michael.Rubner@lacity.org]

