

A Brief Note on Geography Awareness Week (GAW) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Day.

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Origins of GAW and GIS Day

Geography Awareness Week was launched in 1987 in the United States, and over the years organizations in a number of countries, including Canada, joined in a movement to achieve a common objective: to promote geographic education in K-12 schools and among the public. Geographic Information Systems Day or GIS Day is part of the Week, and it is a forum for users of geographic information systems (GIS) technology to demonstrate how they use this technology in real-world applications in government, business, education, research, community service and other situations.

Involvement of the Canadian Association of Geographers in GAW and GIS Day

In 2006 the Canadian Association of Geographers, which represents professional geographers in universities, colleges and schools, as well as in governments and business, established a program to become actively involved in Geography Awareness Week and Geographic Information Systems Day. Two reasons in particular called for this initiative.

First, Many Canadians are aware that the early settlement and development of this country was directly affected by its geography. The presence and location of mountains, rivers, forests, fertile lands, fish, sources of minerals and so on, as well as frequently harsh climatic conditions, directly affected the location of farms, villages, towns and cities, as well as the ways that we traveled, how goods were shipped, where we worked, and what we did to earn a living,

It is the perception of the Canadian Association of Geographers, however, that too many Canadians are not as aware as they should be about how geography continues to affect all aspects of Canadian society, and that a concerted effort is needed to establish with governments, businesses and citizens that geography may be even more important now than ever. The following questions illustrate this point by using day-to-day issues to demonstrate that having due regard for geographic factors is critical to the economic, social and environmental well-being of current and future Canadians:

- Where are we to put our garbage?
- Where do we grow food?
- Where do we obtain clean water?
- Where do immigrants locate in Canada?
- Where do we intensify in order not to sprawl?

- Where do we locate the mass transit lines?
- Where are the most dangerous intersections?
- Where have the glaciers gone?
- Where are the sources of airborne pollutants?
- Where are residents to shop if the area loses its food store?
- Where should the new bridge be located?
- Where does the wildlife go if the wetland is drained?

The fact that most of these questions have been asked repeatedly for many years, often with only limited resolution, is suggested as being due in part to the lack of attention paid to the role that geographic factors play in the problems arising, and in their prevention, solution, or mitigation.

Second, Canadian geographers have assembled an impressive record of publications in learned journals, conference proceedings, and research reports. However, it cannot be claimed that we have been equally successful in communicating our achievements in teaching, research, and consulting to Canadian governments, businesses, and citizens of all ages. Fortunately, courtesy of the Internet, geographers can make up for lost time to a degree by posting presentations at websites that can be viewed by people living hundreds of miles away, and these same individuals can view multiple sites without having to leave home, the library, the office, a community centre, or a café.

In combination, Geography Awareness Week and Geographic Information System Day represent an opportunity and a challenge for the Canadian geographic community to connect with the Canadian public on matters and issues of mutual interest and concern. The Canadian Association of Geographers invites widespread participation in what we believe is going to be a very stimulating and instructive exchange of ideas with Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Web Sites of Note

There are two web sites that provide directions on accessing dozens of university, government, and business presentations on geographic and GIS teaching, research, and applications activities:

- <http://www.cag-acg.ca/en/>
- www.gisday.com

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