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High-Resolution Maps Debut Online

*By Joseph Askins
The Morning News*

BENTONVILLE -- After more than a year of development, a new high-resolution photographic map of Northwest Arkansas is finally available on the Internet.

The Northwest Arkansas Imagery Project, a collaborative project of Benton and Washington counties, the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, the Arkansas Geographic Information Office and the University of Arkansas' Center for Spatial Technologies, opened its new ortho-photographic maps and digital elevation models to public access last week.

The maps, on AGIO's GeoStor digital map database, are more detailed and accurate than the images previously used by local governments, said Elizabeth Bowen of Benton County's Information System Department.

The new maps were photographed in true color, as compared to previous maps supplied by the Arkansas Geographic Information Office, which often appeared reddish because of the use of an infrared camera.

The photographs also have a resolution of 1 foot per pixel, resulting in sharper lines and detail than seen in the older maps, which had a resolution of 1 meter per pixel.

Not only does the new aerial photography provide a realistic overhead view of the entire 1,823 square miles of Benton and Washington counties, but users also are able to overlay data, such as road names, property and jurisdictional boundaries, zoning designations, planning areas and elevation with the click of a mouse.

Bowen said the juxtaposition of such data with the new maps will aid numerous local government departments, such as the assessor's office and 911 administration, and can also provide helpful information for local developers, Realtors and educators.

For example, overlaying GPS road data onto the photographic maps will help 911 dispatchers identify landmarks and locate buildings in the area of an emergency call, said Mary Kay Sullivan, director of operations for the Benton County 911 Administration.

The creation of the maps was proposed by the regional planning commission in November 2003. The commission formed an Imagery Task Force the following month to secure financial commitments, write contracts and make the final maps available for public use.

Participants included the Benton and Washington county governments, 27 local municipalities, federal government organizations such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, local utility companies, regional state parks, the University of Arkansas and the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport.

The participating communities divided the \$168,000 cost of photography and LIDAR mapping, with each municipality paying \$92 for every square mile within its city limits and planning area.

The photographs were taken by the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department at an elevation of 10,000 feet. The images were then altered to correct photographic distortion and pieced together into one large map.

According to Bowen, the data overlays are accurate to within 5.76 feet horizontally and 1.34 feet vertically.

Imagery Project

The new county maps and viewing programs can be downloaded at <http://www.cast.uark.edu/cast/geostor/>