

The Wetlandsbank Group mobilizes Google Earth Pro to promote sustainability and preserve wetlands



AT A GLANCE

What they wanted to do:

- Accurately pinpoint service areas
- Overlay environmental, economic, and geographical data
- Give developers the data they needed to purchase the right credits

What they did:

- Used Google Earth Pro to analyze and display complex data regarding mitigation sites
- Displayed the right data to enable developers to purchase credits

What they accomplished:

- Improved a cumbersome, time-consuming manual process by automating it with Google Earth Pro
 - Quickly achieved more accurate, reliable results
 - Presented location information in a way that made it easier for customers to make the right business decision
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The Wetlandsbank™ Group

Introduction

Wetlands halt flood waters, filter our drinking water, and support healthy animal and plant life. Preserving these important ecological zones is essential to environmental health. Yet only decades ago, hundreds of thousands of acres of wetlands were lost each year, primarily to development initiatives. In response, the federal government set a national goal for wetlands: “no net loss.” As part of the initiative, developers were required to offset their impact by creating or restoring wetlands in exchange for affecting other wetland sites. They could also purchase “credits” for wetlands offset from mitigation banks like The Wetlandsbank Group (TWG).

As a founder and leader in the field of mitigation banking, TWG restores and enhances thousands of acres of streams and wetlands throughout the Southeastern U.S., and in turn, sells credits to developers. TWG is involved in premier wetland restoration projects such as the Panther Island Mitigation Bank, a 2,778-acre site that has generated 934 mitigation credits and provided significant benefit to both freshwater wetland systems and habitat values.

TWG’s efforts are good for developers and also benefit the environment. Seth Platt, Marketing Manager for The Wetlandsbank Group, sums up the company’s mission, saying, “We provide a means for sustainable growth while preserving ecosystems and enhancing habitat corridors.”

Challenge

Capturing, visualizing, and analyzing large amounts of geographical and other data is a cornerstone of Platt’s role. Managing this location-based information can get complicated, especially since developers and others can only purchase wetland credits if they are in the right service areas and contained within a specific watershed. Platt spent large amounts of time matching up data “the hard way” – by looking up addresses of credit applicants and manually pinpointing them on maps to determine if the applicant fell within the watershed. “Manually matching an applicant to a service area was extremely time-consuming. If the address was close to a boundary line, there was no safe way of telling whether or not it was inside or outside the required service area,” he recalls.

“I probably would have had to start paying a consultant for geographical modeling and mapping, which would have cost many thousands of dollars. Google Earth Pro is my environmental consultant – I don’t know how I’d do my job without it.”

Assimilating data around new mitigation opportunities was also a manual process. Platt needed to download GIS information into his computer each time he needed to define a watershed – and, since much of the data was not fully up to date, the process could take many hours and still produce erroneous results. He also faced the challenge of consolidating disparate types of environmental and economic data to provide a complete assessment. “I needed to accurately tell our executives

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Seth Platt
Marketing Manager

ABOUT GOOGLE EARTH PRO

Google Earth Pro extends the power of Google Earth’s comprehensive global imagery database with additional capabilities designed specifically for business users. Print images in high resolution for use in your presentations, posters, and reports. Import and overlay geographic information system (GIS) data for boundary information. Film custom tours using Google Earth Pro’s Movie Maker feature, which allows you to show important location information to customers and co-workers with easily-viewed online displays.

For more information, visit earth.google.com/pro

whether a watershed was a ‘go or no go’ proposition,” says Platt. “It took weeks to do due diligence on properties when I had to manually factor in all of the geographical, economic, and environmental data.”

Platt knew that digital geographical modeling and mapping solutions would streamline TWG’s efforts and lead to faster, more informed decisions regarding wetlands restoration and credit sales. Yet, as a relatively small company with modest budgets, they weren’t sure that they could justify the expenditure. “We didn’t have the resources to purchase high-end GIS modeling and mapping solutions like larger mitigation bankers do,” remembers Platt.

Solution

With budgets in mind, Platt set out to find the most cost-effective ways to accomplish the company’s objectives. “I’m all about identifying free, inexpensive, or open source solutions,” says Platt. He started with the free version of Google Earth, but soon saw the potential to do more. He wanted to capture images and overlay maps with environmental, wildlife species, and other data from various environmental agencies to obtain a consolidated picture of specific wetlands areas. Exploring Google’s Earth and Maps offerings, he realized that Google Earth Pro provided the features he needed – at a price he could afford.

“Google Earth Pro fit in perfectly with our mission and cost structure,” he recalls. “I saw that I could import and visualize many different types of files – vector data, images, and more – into Google Earth Pro,” says Platt. “We found this invaluable in analyzing and obtaining an overall picture of the complex data required for wetlands mitigation projects.” Platt simply ordered Google Earth Pro online, downloaded it and installed the software, and was up and running. He was immediately, easily able to map and print the results that had previously required weeks of time and effort to pursue.

Today, Platt downloads and ingests GIS information into Google Earth Pro to delineate specific service areas. He can immediately see if an address falls within the watershed boundaries, which can lead to the sale of a mitigation credit. He embeds data about specific mitigation projects within Google Earth Pro and posts it to the web to help potential credit purchasers identify whether or not they fall into a specific service area, enabling them to purchase credits quickly and efficiently.

Results

Google Earth Pro has enabled TWG to make more intelligent business decisions through in-depth aggregated analysis of wetland and environmental data. Equipped with better, richer information, TWG can help protect the most valuable wetlands areas and build corridors for wildlife – all while promoting sustainable development – more easily and effectively than before. “Google Earth Pro has saved hours every day and has made it easier to interpret a richer set of data,” he says. “I probably would have had to start paying a consultant for geographical modeling and mapping, which would have cost many thousands of dollars. Google Earth Pro is my environmental consultant – I don’t know how I’d do my job without it.”

