

Notes from the Woods

Maps have always been an object of interest for me. Somehow knowing where I am, where I came from, where I am going, and where I might go have always fascinated me. I grew up with maps on paper, in atlases, in geography books, in car glove boxes (have you ever seen a glove in there?). Now those paper versions are relegated to nostalgic use, or as backups in case your computer or cell phone fail.

In the past few decades as map information was computerized, the field of Geographic Information Systems formed, allowing the creation of customized maps showing features other than land boundaries, roads, etc. The first major project of the East Amwell Environmental Commission, in the 1970's, was to create a set of transparent overlays highlighting the significant environmental features of the Township. These aided the Township rezoning process to be more consistent with physical constraints, private wells and septic systems, and residents' aspirations for the future.

In parallel with the GIS development, road maps were computerized, and satellites provided a means of approximate location -- the GPS system built into cars and phones now, and a means for remote sensing and imaging, used in all kinds of mapping, Google Earth for example. Starting in 1930, the state of NJ created a comprehensive aerial survey of the entire state, b/w photography, modest resolution, enough to see houses and most outbuildings. The latest is the March 2012 survey, in color, with sufficient resolution to easily see cars. They have been doing this periodically, with the 1930, 2007, and 2012 versions available on-line at NJGeoWeb, an outgrowth of the DEP Landscape project. One can create a custom map of a region by including various overlays such as roads, streams, watershed boundaries, topographic info, parcel data, and ecological information.

A more recent custom mapping tool is under development at Rowan University working in conjunction with the Nature Conservancy, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and D&R Greenway, which recently hosted a workshop on the subject. Their tool, called njmap2, is in the Beta test phase, ready to be experimented with. Go to njmap2.com and give it a whirl. It is fairly intuitive. It has overlays indicating various ecological rankings, streams, roads, and parcels. It is generally faster responding than NJGeoWeb. Both tools may not work with some browsers, though both work with Safari and Mozilla Firefox. The Environmental Commission will have a table at the Plant Swap on May 20 where you can discuss interactive mapping with me.

An odd map example is the illegal dumping map <http://www.stopdumping.nj.gov/>. It shows sites where illegal dumping on NJ property has occurred, who did it, and amount of the fine. If you see an illegal dump, go to the site and report it.

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