



# Report in Brief

September 19, 2024

## Background

Geospatial data affects the daily lives of the American public and supports federal government policy decisions. The Department's geospatial data takes many forms such as census data; weather, climate, and environmental data; satellite imagery; and maps. The Department provides almost 75 percent of the geospatial data listed on the Data.gov website, the government's open data site.

The Geospatial Data Act of 2018 (GDA), 43 U.S.C. §§ 2801-2811, mandates how the federal government manages geospatial data through 13 responsibilities. These responsibilities include geospatial strategy, data sharing, integration, records retention, management, standards, partnerships, application, and privacy.

The GDA requires inspectors general of the covered agencies to audit the agencies' collection, production, acquisition, maintenance, distribution, use, and preservation of geospatial data not less than once every 2 years.

This is our third audit in fulfillment of this requirement. In accordance with an approach developed through the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, we again limited our audit to focus on the 13 covered agency responsibilities.

## Why We Did This Review

Our objective was to assess the Department's compliance with the 13 covered agency responsibilities in 43 U.S.C. § 2808(a).

## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

### Biennial Audit of the Department's Compliance with Geospatial Data Act Requirements

OIG-24-035-A

#### WHAT WE FOUND

To meet our objective, we reviewed our audit results from 2020 and 2022 and obtained updated information from the Department for each of the 13 requirements. In addition, we independently tested the Department's geospatial metadata published on Data.gov.

We found that the Department was complying with 12 of the 13 GDA requirements. In response to our 2022 report, the Department implemented corrective actions for all five of our recommendations. Only one recommendation from our 2020 report remains open, but it cannot be fully addressed until the Office of Management and Budget issues guidance. In addition, since 2022, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Census Bureau (Census) initiated new partnerships and enhanced existing ones in fulfilling GDA-mandated responsibilities.

However, our testing revealed that the Department's geospatial metadata is not always complete. We found that the Department completed 15 of 19 fields consistently but did not complete 4 fields at least half the time. The four fields commonly missing were the reference system identifier, data set download link, web service, and data set last update (revision) date. A subset of records we tested were National Geospatial Data Asset metadata records. For this subset, we found the Department had improved completion of the metadata fields that our 2022 testing had determined were missing, which indicates the Department's actions in response to our recommendations were effective. The single metadata field for which there was no improvement was the data set download link content field.

Without ensuring a consistent approach to completing geospatial metadata, the Department's geospatial data stakeholders could face challenges in making the most efficient and effective use of the Department's geospatial data portfolio.

#### WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Department's Senior Agency Official for Geospatial Information coordinate with NOAA and Census to:

1. Review our test results, determine which missing metadata content is most significant for current users of geospatial data, and develop a plan (with goals and timeframes) to ensure more consistent completion of those fields.