

14.5 Distributed GIS. You have just been hired as a field forester by a timber company in the southeastern United States. You are eager to use the GIS skills you have learned in college to help yourself and others make informed forest management decisions. The timber company has a centralized GIS department and five remote field offices. The timber company is in the midst of developing a system whereby personnel (foresters, biologists, hydrologists, etc.) in field offices, where you are located, can use desktop GIS software to make their own maps and perform their own analyses. What can you do to ensure that the distribution of responsibilities, such as map development and analysis, to your field office will be successful?

The goal of a distributed GIS delivery system is to improve the capabilities of field office personnel in daily work activities that involve GIS. This typically involves making GIS software and spatial databases available to field offices. With local availability of GIS software and spatial data, field office personnel should no longer be dependent on a remote, centralized office for their basic GIS needs. The most significant challenge to successful distribution will be to ensure that field personnel are capable of completing the basic GIS operations necessary to support their daily activities. This would involve creating guidelines or providing assistance to distributed users so that they are able to properly access, process, and analyze spatial data. Supportive activities for a successful distributed GIS implementation might include protecting databases from being edited, establishing protocols for managing and creating data, and providing access to technical assistance or training.