

**Borderless Boundary File: Initiation of a Thematic
Mapping Resource**

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Today's world of multinational free-trade zones, sensitivity to the international ramifications of environmental conservation (and abuse), and increased social and cultural interaction between residents of adjacent countries is vastly different from the geographically introspective view of the past. This new symbiotic internationalism requires that the analyst and decision makers of today have available to them the means to study and plan across borders. For cartographers producing maps by automation, several issues become vital.

Automated cartographic production requires that both statistical (thematic) data sets and digital geographic base files represent the same areas. When making maps that depict data distribution in two or more nations, base files for similar levels of geography must be available. Also, the statistical (thematic) data to be mapped must have similar meaning between the nations. Finally, the geographic and statistical data files must be freely exchanged for the good of the nations without the encumbrances of copyrights and confidentiality. These issues affect cartographers and should have their attention and support.

In order to provide a truly hemispheric capability to the map-makers, analysts, planners, and policy makers of North America, three organizations are working together to create a unified geographic file. The North American Statistical Areas Boundary File (NASABF) is an attempt to combine selected administrative and statistical areas of Canada, the United States, and Mexico into a single geographic file for the purpose of generating thematic maps of any data that corresponds to the geography. Such an effort requires close collaboration between the three government organizations.

The impetus for the project extends beyond serving the needs of the three nations. Rather, issues related to the economy, the environment, and social conditions traverse the borders. The macro-thematic map of North America is viewed differently than the micro-thematic map of the small community.

This paper discusses the purpose, components, production processes, potential uses and future plans of this joint effort. Coordination of planning, resource allocation, staffing, data transfer, and communication between multiple sites are examples of issues that require special attention. Efforts to evaluate, classify and specify similar geographic areas for use with statistical data between each nation are presented.