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Revenue's GIS application wins international award

OLYMPIA – Sept. 22, 2014 – A creative use of geographic information systems (GIS) to assess property earned the Washington State Department of Revenue (Revenue) top honors from the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO).

Revenue received the [2014 Distinguished Assessment Jurisdiction Award](#) for its property tax GIS application. The IAAO gives the award to an agency that has implemented a new approach to assessment that increases fairness.

The application simplifies the cumbersome process of locating, valuing and divvying up the value of certain property assets in the state.

Revenue is responsible for assessing utility company assets in the state and apportioning the value among the appropriate taxing districts. Assets include airlines, gas and oil pipelines, electricity generation and distribution, landline and wireless telephones, and railroads. In 2013, these assets were valued at \$18.6 billion and generated more than \$230 million in property tax for local government and state schools.

With nearly 1.5 million centrally-assessed assets located in nearly 3,200 different tax code areas, correctly apportioning property tax values was no small feat, according to Revenue Director Carol K. Nelson.



Kim Lauffer, president of the International Association of Assessing Officers, left, presents David Saavedra and Pete Levine of the Washington State Department of Revenue with an award for the agency's property tax GIS application.

“The old process relied on marked-up maps each utility would send our office annually,” Nelson said. “Our staff had to transpose those assets onto maps Revenue staff updated by hand each year as the tax code areas changed. It was an outdated, tedious process that needed a 21st century solution.”

The GIS application benefits utility companies and the state alike.

Utility assets have a location code in the GIS database, and utilities only need to let Revenue know when their assets have changed in use or value. The process of creating updated tax code area maps is simplified with GIS, too. Boundaries can be adjusted in the application rather than on a paper map.

Revenue estimates the GIS application saves hundreds of hours for utilities and the state, shaving months off the process of providing accurate property tax information to the county assessors. Revenue’s GIS application also received special recognition from the Federation of Tax Administrators this year.

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About Revenue

The Department of Revenue is Washington state’s primary tax administration agency, nationally recognized for innovation and service quality. Revenue collected more than \$19.6 billion in tax revenues in Fiscal Year 2014. These funds go to support public schools, social services, health care, corrections, public safety and natural resources conservation.