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**Jim Sparks to retire as Polis Center Director of Geoinformatics; Marianne Cardwell appointed successor**

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (June 18, 2021) – The Polis Center at IUPUI today announced that Director of Geoinformatics Jim Sparks will retire at the end of June. Marianne Cardwell has been named to the position, effective July 1, 2021.

A highly skilled geospatial information professional, Sparks has spent most of his career working with geographic information systems (GIS). His experience includes work in the private sector, county and state government, and the university environment. Sparks worked closely with the Center in the early 2000s developing and managing a new department, Geoinformatics, focusing on geospatial projects with both practical and applied emphasis—the same model used by Polis today. He returned to the Center in 2018 after 11 years as Indiana’s first Geographic Information Officer during which time he developed, maintained, and distributed comprehensive statewide geographic data. He led Indiana’s efforts to become a spatially enabled state, for which he has received national recognition.

Polis Center Executive Director David Bodenhamer says, “Jim Sparks has been masterful in helping The Polis Center develop effective university-government-community partnerships to use spatial information to improve and enhance the quality of life for Hoosiers. His vision, drive, and commitment to Polis and its partners leave the center well-placed to continue collaborating with community experts to understand the complex problems of today’s world and finding potential solutions. His contributions to our work have been invaluable and will continue to pay dividends to Indiana for many years to come.

“After a competitive search, we are pleased to appoint Marianne Cardwell to the position. She brings significant experience and expertise to her new leadership role. Earlier in her career, she quickly moved into management positions in some of the nation’s leading GIS firms, and she has continued this record of success at The Polis Center. She recently assumed the presidency of the Indiana Geographic Information Council (IGIC), the state’s largest association of GIS professionals, and works with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and many of Indiana’s counties on issues related to natural disasters and crisis informatics. We are fortunate to benefit from her experience and skills as we continue to help the state respond to the demands of a changing environment,” said Bodenhamer.

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Sparks says: “I congratulate Marianne on her appointment. She is the perfect candidate to take over the responsibilities of Geoinformatics Director. Her broad and deep technology skills, organizational prowess, strong project management skills, and outstanding interpersonal skills will work well on behalf of her partners and the Indiana GIS community.

“It has been a pleasure and an honor to work alongside my colleagues at The Polis Center to support our partners across Indiana and around the country. The Polis mission to ‘define, measure, and improve community health, well-being, and resiliency’ has tracked very well with my personal career goals. I am very proud of the long and rich history of the work of the Indiana GIS community to address the challenges of a wide range of constituents. Indiana is a better place as a result. I look forward to reading and seeing and hearing about the great accomplishments of the next generation of GIS practitioners in Indiana.”

Cardwell says: “It will be a huge privilege to lead the talented Geoinformatics team and continue the great work we’ve done the past few years. I have seen how our work positively impacts people’s lives. Our focus remains supporting disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery activities for more resilient communities. To do so, we will continue working with current partners at the IDNR, the Indiana Geographic Information Office, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, local emergency managers, FEMA, and the Indiana Silver Jackets as well as expanding opportunities with the IU School of Informatics and Computing—IUPUI. I also extend my gratitude to Jim for his remarkable leadership at Polis.”

Sparks will retire as Geoinformatics Director on June 30, 2021. He will support the transition process by completing a strategic plan for the Indiana Geographic Information Office (GIO) before leaving Polis in December 2021.

**More About Jim Sparks**

In addition to achievements noted above, Sparks was integral to the development of the Indianapolis Mapping and Geographic Infrastructure System (IMAGIS), serving as project manager for the data conversion component. This substantial effort converted paper and digital data into GIS layers to create a geographic information system for Marion County, Indiana. Upon completion, IMAGIS was recognized as noteworthy for its size, complexity, and the level of benefit that it delivered.

As Indiana Geographic Information Officer, Sparks received national recognition for leading Indiana’s efforts in statewide collaboration, data sharing, and its outstanding geospatial data portal. Under Sparks’ leadership, the state’s data holding was improved by two updates of orthoimagery and LiDAR, as well as an improved National Hydrography Dataset (NHD) using local resolution data, and data sharing cooperation from all 92 Indiana counties.

He is a founding member of the Indiana GIS Initiative (INGISI) and served as co-chair of its Data Standards and Data Sharing committees. Sparks has been a frequent and popular presenter of topics such as "GIS for Librarians," "An Introduction to GIS," "GIS Legal Issues," "Implementing a County GIS," "For Fee or Free? Access to Government Spatial Data," and “GIS Resources in Indiana.”

Jim’s professional affiliations include serving as state representative of the National States Geographic Information Council and as a founding member of the Indiana Geographic Information Council (IGIC), for which he is former board president.

Sparks has a BA degree in Business Administration and a MS in Management, both from Indiana Wesleyan University. He is certified in geographic information systems by the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing.

**More About Marianne Cardwell**

Cardwell joined The Polis Center in 2018 as a GIS Project Coordinator supporting a variety of projects using geospatial data and technologies on behalf of Polis’ partner communities and helping Polis expand its use into new areas. She was integral in the development of the SAVI Coronavirus Data & Information Hub, which was nominated for the 2021 TechPoint Mira Community Impact Award. Cardwell recently worked closely with the Indiana GIO updating its Data Harvest program. She led Polis’ effort to process, standardize, augment, and integrate updated information from county datasets into updated statewide datasets, develop a new statewide geocoder, and make the data available to the public for download. The Data Harvest project received the Special Achievement Award at the 2021 IGIC conference.

Cardwell is the current board president of IGIC. Previously, she served as an aviation geospatial project manager for Woolpert. She earned her BS degree in geography from Michigan State University, MS degree in geographic and cartographic sciences from George Mason University, and a graduate certificate in data science from Indiana University.

**More about The Polis Center**

The Polis Center is a unit in the IU School of Informatics and Computing-IUPUI. It collaborates with community partners in Indiana and beyond to develop innovative place-based policies and practices for healthier and more resilient communities. It supports disaster mitigation, population health management, community development, and quality-of-life efforts. Polis Center experts use geospatial technologies to integrate, manage, and visualize the rapidly growing information on the places where we live and work. The Center tackles big problems that impact daily lives and influence actions and developments in each other.

The Geoinformatics team specifically works with communities to prevent or reduce losses from natural disasters. The center’s crisis informatics initiatives support disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery activities. It works on practical, technology-enabled solutions to problems faced by communities in Indiana and elsewhere and conducts research on the physical, social, and economic impact of changing environments and natural hazards. The center collaborates with the Indiana Department of Homeland Security on improving state and county hazard mitigation plans. It works closely with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, with which it is a federally recognized Cooperating Technical Partner (CTP), addressing ways to understand and mitigate the risk of flooding in the state.

The Polis Center is nationally recognized as a dynamic urban-centered, learning environment with highly professional staff who excel in partnerships, real-world application, and winning solutions for communities. Visit <https://polis.iupui.edu/> and <https://www.savi.org/>.

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