Governance of the NHD and WBD
DRAFT 1.2

By design, and in practice, the National Hydrography Dataset and Watershed Boundary Dataset are governed in a collaborative process consisting of representatives from federal, state, and local government, industry, academia, and non-government organizations. The NHD was conceived in 1993 when the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency jointly designed a hydrography feature dataset for nationwide use by all agencies in an effort to consolidate surface water hydrography mapping in the U.S. The design process sought feedback from a large number of stakeholders to ensure a "best fit" dataset that would meet as many needs as possible.

The collaboration became more extensively established in 2000 with the development of the high-resolution version of the NHD. At this time a weekly teleconference of stakeholders was put in place that has operated continuously since then. By 2004 the consortium grew to 56 partners involved in the development and production of the NHD. Today there are 74 partnering agencies involved in governing the NHD.

The governance process works in multiple ways. The weekly teleconference started in 2000 has evolved in the NHD Advisory Team, which now meets twice a month, but still maintains its function as a forum for ideas and changes to be vetted in roundtable discussion. Through this discussion and debate a consensus view is achieved whereby decisions are made. Strategic direction is provided by the NHD Management Team, which is an executive committee of the NHD Advisory Team. The Management Team consists of eight members, including an expert on the WBD, that meet every two weeks. They jointly develop a vision for the NHD, identify problems affecting the program, and conduct root cause analysis in an attempt to resolve problems.

A standardized system for organizing and collecting hydrologic units for the nation began in the 1970's by the USGS. To improve the sharing of national data, and minimize this duplication of effort, by the mid-1990's the USGS and member agencies of the Federal Geographic Data Committee, agreed upon approach for creation of the Watershed Boundary Dataset (WBD). During the late 1990's the Natural Resources Conservation Service and USGS co-partnered to provide management oversight and national technical support. By 2006 a multi-agency federal WBD Steering Committee was formed. This committee meets quarterly. By spring of 2010 the WBD was "certified" as complete for the nation after over a decade of collaboration by hundreds of federal, state and local partners across the nation.

The WBD is a dynamic dataset, with significant ongoing partner investment. Improvements and enhancements are continually being incorporated. To manage this work the WBD National Technical Coordinators has regular weekly and often daily meetings. Since 2007, the WBD State Stewardship Work Group has been functioning at the "grass-roots" level of governance through bi-monthly meetings to provide direction.

In 2012, NGP established several Communities of Use (COUs), in an effort to focus NGP's efforts to meet user needs. The initial COUs include Water Resources, Geologic Mapping, and Geologic Hazards. The COUs do not have a formal role in governance, nor are they primarily data stewards and contributors as is the case with the governance bodies. Although there is a clear linkage between the Water Resources COU and the NHD, the interests of the Water COU may include other NGP products and services. Similarly, other COUs may have requests for improvements to the NHD. COU technical committees, a subset of the general COU membership (analogous to the NHD Management Team) meet monthly, and provide feedback on proposed changes to NGP products and services as well as requests for

improvements or modifications to the products and services. This input then informs the planning process for the National Geospatial Program, including the NHD and WBD programs.

Additionally, an important part of the NHD and WBD programs are the data stewardship processes that are in place for each of the datasets. These stewards are focused on the maintenance of the NHD/WBD and form a community of users beneficial to the governance of the NHD/WBD. This community of data experts meets regularly to resolve largely technical issues around the NHD and WBD. This ensures that the NHD and WBD function properly from a technical standpoint based on experiences and feedback from a range of data maintainers.