

e-Volunteering in Unprecedented Times: New Synergies to Address Environmental Challenges

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SUMMARY

The Volunteer Community Surveyor Program (VCSP) is an innovative volunteer program that is working to be a powerful driver for both social impact and professional development. This multifaceted program includes an e-Volunteering Path, which provides opportunities for young surveyors to volunteer remotely for high-impact projects worldwide. e-Volunteering projects have varied applications, are low-cost, not limited by scale, and provide a safe way for the VCSP to organise and engage volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the first of many planned VCSP e-Volunteering projects, in October 2020 a partnership was developed with the Surveying and Spatial Sciences Institute (SSSI), the peak national body for the Australian geospatial industry. Over 400 e-Volunteers from 37 countries participated in the FireWater Mapathon over 24 hours, collecting spatial data on static water infrastructure to support bushfire preparedness efforts. In total, 515,000 hectares were mapped with over 37,000 new infrastructure features digitised. The VCSP team was key in providing 24-hour moderation to the SSSI Firewater Mapathon, and instrumental in bringing it to the global stage by utilising the 11,000-member strong FIG Young Surveyors Network.

The data produced during this Mapathon is a valuable resource for a number of stakeholders. Industry partners of the mapathon are able to use collected data as a training dataset for artificial intelligence applications. State and Federal partners will validate the data and use it to create important updates to the national foundation spatial data.

This type of initiative taps into young surveyor's eagerness to contribute to SDGs. The outputs of this project demonstrate that e-Volunteering is an achievable way to keep the VCSP relevant and active.

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The VCSP team has gained valuable experience from the FireWater Mapathon, preparing it well for deploying young surveyors remotely in future efforts. In a move to enhance networking and engagement for future e-Volunteering projects, the VCSP has formed a relationship with the newest Working Group of FIG Commission 3 - WG 3.6 Geospatial Next. Considering the common targets of connecting, promoting, and sharing knowledge, the VCSP and WG 3.6 Geospatial Next seek to collaborate together to create training resources and encourage e-volunteering projects in the future. Experiences gained from the FireWater Mapathon are presented as a platform for future projects to be organized in collaboration with WG3.6 Geospatial Next. The joint outcomes are expected to develop young surveyors' technological and organizational skills when it comes to using spatial data solutions to tackle global and regional environmental challenges.

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