

Dr Roger Tomlinson: Data for Decision, Then and Now

In this excerpt from the 1967 film "Data for Decision," Dr. Roger Tomlinson explains how computers were being used to solve geographic problems in Canada. In a second clip from the 2010 Esri Senior Executive Seminar, Dr. Tomlinson looks back at 40-plus years of geospatial innovation.

http://video.esri.com/watch/102/dr-roger-tomlinson-data-for-decision_comma_-then-and-now

Video Transcription

00:04 At the moment, the government is rather like a farmer who has just inherited his farm.

00:10 He doesn't really know how big the farm is, perhaps doesn't know much about the soil.

00:15 He hasn't got too much idea about the climate, and he's not really sure whether there's usable water.

00:22 And yet, he has to make decisions that will let him plant the right seed and grow enough food to support his family.

00:31 And if you think that would be a problem on an ordinary size farm, think what it would be like with a million square miles.

00:39 The Canada Land Inventory is trying to tackle this problem in two ways.

00:44 Firstly, it's trying to gather together the basic information that we need to know about the country.

00:51 Secondly, it's trying to find out some way of handling this information.

00:57 We'd like to think that we've got a system that can accept the information, can store it...

01:03 ...can analyze it, and present the results in a usable form.

01:08 A system that can do this not in years, but in hours.

01:19 Thank you very much.

01:21 It's rather frightening to see yourself 40 or 50 years ago.

01:28 They were wonderful years.

01:31 Mr. Kennedy was in the White House.

01:34 And Sputnik was in the air.

01:40 Mr. Kennedy gave us a feeling that if you could think it, you could do it.

01:46 The good people in the government of Canada had a need to come to grips with their farming situation and put their money behind it.

01:57 I just happened to be alive in the middle of all of that.

02:01 And it was...we could still call them the champagne years.

02:07 And now we are 50 years on.

02:12 The movie was made in '67, I started in 1960 playing around with maps and computers.

02:25 I got the thing started off, but many people, particularly Jack Dangermond from 1969 on, was the guy who really put the organizational strength behind the development of the field.