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REMOTE SENSING STUDIES PLANNED FOR LATIN AMERICA

Remote sensor data, to be obtained from aircraft and spacecraft, will be applied to natural resource and environmental studies in 16 Latin American countries, under a joint U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior, and Inter American Geodetic Survey (IAGS) program, it was announced today.

At a recent symposium in the Panama Canal Zone, scientists and engineers from various U.S. agencies met with Latin American delegates to discuss ways by which remote sensing studies could aid in accelerating mapping programs, determining the probable location and extent of natural resources, and in investigations of related problem areas.

Latin American countries represented at the symposium: Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela.

The plan to conduct remote sensing studies in Latin America was spurred by a conference held in April last year at which directors of the various Latin American cartographic agencies expressed interest in the technique, and asked IAGS to incorporate the new techniques into collaborative mapping programs.

For the past quarter century, IAGS has been assisting countries of Latin America to map the 8 million square miles of territory between the Mexican border and the southern tip of Chile -- such mapping is a fundamental need for economic development and resource development.

There was general agreement that the various Latin American mapping programs would be accelerated by the application of high-altitude aircraft and orbital photography.

To meet the requests from the Latin American countries, the IAGS turned to the Interior Department's EROS (Earth Resources Observation Systems) program, administered by the U.S. Geological Survey, which has a major responsibility of analyzing and using remote sensing data in the United States. A partnership was then formed between the USGS and IAGS for the purpose of assisting in the application of remote sensing technology in Latin American countries.

Some of the proposals advanced by Latin American governments for the application of remote sensing in their countries:

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- * One Nicaraguan proposal, presently being studied, is an investigation of earthquakes and geothermal potential. Nicaragua wants to explore the possibility of using steam from its many active volcanoes to generate electric power.
- * Nicaragua is also interested in using sensor data to determine the extent and pattern of erosion in the north-west section of the country. Not only does the erosion add to the impoverishment of the land, but the resultant silting of the port and rivers in the area is creating a serious navigational problem.
- * Columbia is looking for a way to detect salinity of an irrigation area; resolution of this problem would greatly improve crops. Another problem in Columbia is that of water contamination in Cartagena Bay. Pollution in the bay has resulted in fish kills, and the water is filled with algae. Remote sensing of this area may help find a solution, Colombian officials believe.

In a key address at the Canal Zone symposium, Brigadier General L. D. Faurer, U.S. Southern Command, said that "the cry 'economic development' has become almost a cliché over the past decade, but unlike many clichés, its repetition does not detract from its validity. Nobody here will deny that Latin America needs to develop its natural resources. If the claims made for remote sensing as a tool for development are even partly fulfilled, tremendous progress is possible in the near future."

IAGS Director Colonel Hans G. Ruthe emphasized the partnership between his organization and the USGS by noting that "in the early stages of our combined remote sensing program, IAGS will lean heavily upon USGS-EROS for technical expertise. However, training of IAGS cartographers and geographers has already begun, and has priority in the overall plan."

Ruthe said that one of the first major contributions made by USGS to the IAGS training program is the design of the first course in remote sensing for the IAGS Cartographic School. "The school will initiate this course in the 40th class, which starts in February, 1972," Ruthe reported.

Through its USGS-administered EROS program, the Interior Department represents the largest single recipient and user agency of data to be obtained from NASA aircraft and spacecraft designed to gather repetitive information related to such disciplines as geology, hydrology, cartography, marine geology, geophysics, volcanology, and seismology.

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