



Updating the Software on Handheld GPS Units

15 August, 2006

By John Nowatzki, Geospatial Specialist
NDSU Extension Service

Consider updating the software in your handheld GPS unit. Handheld GPS units have software and operating systems that can be updated to ensure they are using the most current features available from the manufacturer. Normally GPS units continue to function fine without updates however installing the latest updates adds the manufacturers' features that have been added to later versions of your model. Even though installing these free updates normally will not update the base maps that come installed on handheld GPS units they will likely make your unit operate better because the updates have incorporated corrections to issues or operating bugs reported by users.

All Garmin handheld GPS units can be updated as needed by downloading and installing their updating program called WebUpdater. The download is available on the Internet at: <http://www.garmin.com/products/webupdater>. The updating program is designed to be downloaded and installed on a desktop or laptop computer. Any Garmin GPS unit can be updated using this program as long as the computer is connected to the Internet. Once the program is installed on your computer updating is a simple process. Connect the GPS unit to your computer using manufacturers' serial or USB connection cables that normally come with the unit. If you don't have a connection cable they will be available for purchase from the same businesses that sell the GPS units. After installing the Garmin WebUpdater run the program from Start | Programs on your computer. The program will indicate the model of GPS unit connected to the computer and then provide a step-by-step wizard to follow to complete the update. Detailed instructions on how to use the Garmin WebUpdater program are available on the NDSU Geospatial Education web page at <http://134.129.78.3/geospatial/gpsedmat.htm>

Other brands of GPS units can be updated directly from their website. Magellan's website is <http://www.magellangps.com/>. The Lowrance website is <http://www.lowrance.com/>.

Updating the software in a GPS unit does not update the background maps that are loaded into some handheld GPS units. Updating the background maps generally requires a specific request to the manufacturer. Most manufacturers have map updates that they will send to you on a CD or DVD. Generally the map updates are not available without additional costs.

More information on GIS software is available from the NDSU Geospatial Education Web Page at <http://134.129.78.3/geospatial/>.