

Census Data and Boundary File Sources for Mapping - A Comparison								
UW Libraries - June 2012								
Source	Extent of Coverage	Years Available	Data Available	Boundary Files Available	Media	Digital File Format	Use Restrictions	Comments
WAGDA Census Geodatabases	Puget Sound Counties and WA State	2010, 2000, 1990	All data in SF1 and SF3 (2000), STF1A and STF1B (1990)	Tracts, block groups and blocks for the county geodbs, counties, tracts, urban areas, places, and zip codes for the state geodb	Online	Access geodatabase	None - Public domain	Most convenient and easy to use resource for local area mapping for the 1990,2000 and 2010 Census.
State of Washington OFM Geospatial Data Files*	WA State	2000, 1990	Select data in pdf format - not suitable for mapping	Most boundaries below the state level, including tracts, blockgroups, and blocks	Online	shapefiles	None - Public domain	Good source for WA boundaries not included in the WAGDA geodbs.
Census Bureau's American Factfinder	Entire US	2000, 1990	All data in all summary files	None - boundary files must be downloaded from separate source	Online, CD~, Paper^	text, dbf, and Excel files	None - Public domain	The most comprehensive and primary source for the data. Easy to use, but requires some data table preparation for mapping. See notes below for additional info.
Census Bureau's Generalized Cartographic Boundary Files	Entire US	2000, 1990	None - data must be downloaded from separate source	All boundaries except blocks and block groups, boundaries are generalized	Online	shapefiles, coverages, and interchange files	None - Public domain	Convenient for using with Factfinder data above the block group level. Be aware that boundaries are generalized (i.e. simplified).
ESRI Census Watch	Entire US	2000	Select variables only	Most boundaries below the state level	Online, DVD	dbf files for data, shapefiles for boundaries	Restricted to non-commercial use	Convenient source for making a quick map, but data is limited and there are use restrictions.
Geolytics	Entire US	1970 to 2000	All data in all summary files	None - boundary files must be downloaded from separate source	CD	text and dbf files	Restricted to licensed users for non-commercial use	Disks do not work on Windows 7 machines, CDs extract information using a 16-bit application.
NHGIS	Entire US	1790 to 2010	Varies by year	Varies by year - at least state and county level for all years, tracts for 20th century, metro areas for recent years	Online	text files for data, shapefiles for boundaries	None - Public domain, registration required	Good source for historical data and only comprehensive source for historic boundaries. Site is under constant development.
* Various state, county, and municipal government agencies across the US provide census data and boundaries for their area, in most cases for 1990 and 2000 only. These sources may actually be best for block group and block boundaries, which are unavailable directly from the Census Bureau and are use-restricted by ESRI Census Watch.								
~ The UW CSSCR and the UW libraries have extracts from 1980 to 2000 on CD. These are good sources for large, intensive projects that require many of the census variables.								
^ The UW Library has paper copies of the census for Washington State back to the 19th century.								