

CECW-EP

Technical Letter
No. 1110-1-152

1 January 1994

Engineering and Design CONVERSION TO THE NORTH AMERICAN VERTICAL DATUM OF 1988

1. Purpose

This technical letter provides technical guidance and implementation procedures for the conversion from the National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD29) to the North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD88).

2. Applicability

This letter is applicable to all HQUSACE elements, major subordinate commands, districts, laboratories, and field operating activities having responsibility for civil works, military construction, or environmental restoration projects.

3. References

a. Water Resources Development Act of 1992 (WRDA 92), Section 224, Channel Depths and Dimensions.

b. EM 1110-2-1003, Hydrographic Surveying.

c. Converting the National Flood Insurance Program to the North American Vertical Datum of 1988: Guidelines for Community Officials, Engineers, and Surveyors, FEMA Report No. FIA-20, June 1992.

d. Results of the General Adjustment of the North American Datum of 1988, American Congress on Surveying and Mapping Journal of Surveying and Land Information Systems, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1992, pp. 133-149.

e. American Congress on Surveying and Mapping Ad Hoc Committee Report on NAVD88, Special ACSM Report, 1990.

4. Discussion

a. NGVD29 has been replaced by NAVD88, an international datum adopted for use in Canada, the United States and Mexico. NAVD88 was established to resolve problems and discrepancies in NGVD29. The adjustment

of NAVD88 was completed in June 1991 by the National Geodetic Survey (NGS), an agency of the Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NAVD88 was constrained by holding fixed the height of a single primary tidal benchmark (BM) at Father's Point/Rimouski, Québec, Canada, and performing a minimally constrained general adjustment of U.S.-Canadian-Mexican leveling observations. The result of this adjustment is newly published NAVD88 elevation values for benchmarks (BMs) in the NGS inventory. Most Third-Order BMs, including those of other Federal, state and local government agencies, were not included in the NAVD88 adjustment. Appendix A contains further background information on the development and adjustment of NAVD88.

b. The Federal Geodetic Control Subcommittee (FGCS) of the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) has affirmed that NAVD88 shall be the official vertical reference datum for the U.S. The FGDC has prescribed that all surveying and mapping activities performed or financed by the Federal Government make every effort to begin an orderly transition to NAVD88, where practicable and feasible.

c. Both tidal and non-tidal low water reference planes and datums are affected by the change to NAVD88. The datum for the Great Lakes is now the International Great Lakes Datum of 1985 (IGLD85). Unlike the prior datum (IGLD55), IGLD85 has been directly referenced to NAVD88 and originates at the same point as NAVD88. Elevations of reference points/datums along the various inland waterway systems will also be impacted by the change in datums.

d. The transition to NAVD88 may have considerable impact on Corps projects, including maps, drawings, and other spatial data products representing those projects. However, once completed, the transition will result in a more accurate vertical reference datum that has removed leveling errors, accounts for subsidence, and other changes in elevation.

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e. A computer program entitled "VERTCON 1.0" can be used to make approximate conversions between NGVD29 and NAVD88. This program was developed by NGS and during the later part of FY94 will be incorporated into the USACE program CORPSCON. VERTCON conversions are intended for general small-scale mapping uses -- VERTCON should not be used for converting benchmark elevations used for site plan design or construction applications. Further details on VERTCON are at Appendix A.

5. Action

a. USACE commands should begin the orderly transition to NAVD88. Procedural guidance for performing this conversion is given in Appendix A.

b. The conversion to NAVD88 should be accomplished on a project by project basis. The relationship of all project datums to both NGVD29 and NAVD88 will be clearly noted on all drawings, charts, maps, and elevation data files.

c. In accordance with Section 24 of WRDA 92, when elevations are referred to a tidal reference plane in coastal waters of the U.S., Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW) shall be used as the vertical datum. Tidal BMs should be tied to NAVD88 instead of NGVD29 where NAVD88 data is available. Tidal datums shall be established in accordance with the procedures outlined in EM 1110-2-1003.

FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CIVIL WORKS:

1 Appendix
APP A - Development and Implementation of
NAVD88

d. Other hydraulic-based reference planes established by USACE for the various inland waterways, reservoirs, and pools between control structures should continue to be used for consistency; however, they should also be connected with the NAVD88 where practicable and feasible.

e. In project areas where local municipal or sanitary jurisdictions have established their own vertical reference planes, every attempt should be made to obtain the relationship between that local datum and NGVD29 and/or NAVD88; and clearly note this relationship on all drawings, charts, maps, and elevation data files.

5. Technical Assistance

The U.S. Army Topographic Engineering Center (USATEC) may be consulted if technical assistance is required in the conversion effort. Contact Commander and Director, USATEC, ATTN: CETEC-TL-SP, Building 2592, Fort Belvoir, VA 22060-5546. The HQUSACE proponent for this action is the Engineering Division, Directorate of Civil Works, ATTN: CECW-EP-S.

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APPENDIX A DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NAVD88

SECTION I Background

1. General

a. The NAVD88 is a new vertical datum for North America which effectively covers Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. The new adjustment of the U.S. National Vertical Control Network (NVCN) was authorized in 1978, and in 1982 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Canada signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the adoption of a common, international vertical control network called the NAVD88.

b. The Federal Geodetic Control Subcommittee (FGCS) of the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) has adopted the new NAVD88 datum. In addition, NAVD88 was established in conjunction with the International Coordinating Committee on Great Lakes Basic Hydraulic and Hydrologic Data. This committee defined the IGLD85 which was published for use in January 1992. IGLD85 replaced IGLD55.

2. The National Vertical Control Network (NVCN): NGVD29 and NAVD88

a. The NVCN consists of a hierarchy of interrelated nets which span the United States. Before the adoption of NAVD88, benchmark (BM) elevations of the NVCN were published as orthometric heights referenced to NGVD29. NGVD29 was established by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey's (USC&GS's) 1929 General Adjustment. NGVD29 was established by constraining the combined U.S. and Canadian first order leveling nets to conform to Mean Sea Level (MSL) as determined at 26 long term tidal gage stations that were spaced along the east and west coast of North American and along the Gulf of Mexico, with 21 stations in the U.S. and 5 stations in Canada.

b. Local MSL is a vertical datum of reference that is based upon the observations from one or more tidal gaging stations. NGVD29 was based upon the assumption that local MSL at those 21 tidal stations in the U.S. and 5 tidal stations in Canada equalled 0.0000 foot on NGVD29. The value of MSL as measured over the Metonic cycle of 19 years shows that this assumption is

not entirely valid and that MSL varies from station to station.

c. The NGVD29 was originally named the Mean Sea Level Datum of 1929. It was known at the time that because of the variation of ocean currents, prevailing winds, barometric pressures and other physical causes, the MSL determinations at the tide gages would not define a single equipotential surface. The name of the datum was changed from the Mean Sea Level Datum to the NGVD29 in 1973 to eliminate the reference to sea level in the title. This was a change in name only; the definition of the datum established in 1929 was not changed. Since NGVD29 was established, it has become obvious that the geoid based upon local mean tidal observations would change with each measurement cycle. Estimating the geoid based upon the constantly changing tides does not provide the most stable estimate of the shape of the geoid, or the basic shape of the Earth.

d. The datum for NAVD88 is based upon the mass or density of the Earth instead of the varying heights of the seas. Measurements in the acceleration of gravity are made at observation points in the network and only one datum point, at Pointe-au-Pere/Rimouski, Québec, Canada, is used. The vertical reference surface is therefore defined by the surface on which the gravity values are equal to the control point value. Although the international cooperation between the United States and Canada greatly strengthened the 1929 network, Canada did not adopt the 1929 vertical datum. The NGVD29 was strictly a national datum. NAVD88 is an international vertical datum for the US, Canada, and Mexico.

3. Distinction Between Orthometric and Dynamic Heights

a. There are several different reference elevation systems used by the surveying and mapping community. Two of these height systems are relevant to IGLD85: orthometric heights and dynamic heights. Geopotential numbers relate these two systems to each other. The geopotential number (C) of a BM is the difference in potential measured from the reference geopotential surface to the equipotential surface passing through the

survey mark. In other words, it is the amount of work required to raise a unit mass of 1 kg against gravity through the orthometric height to the mark. Geopotential differences are differences in potential which indicate hydraulic head. The orthometric height of a mark is the distance from the reference surface to the mark, measured along the line perpendicular to every equipotential surface in between. A series of equipotential surfaces can be used to represent the gravity field. One of these surfaces is specified as the reference system from which orthometric heights are measured. These surfaces defined by the gravity field are not parallel surfaces because of the rotation of the earth and gravity anomalies in the gravity field. Two points, therefore, could have the same potential but may have two different orthometric heights. The value of orthometric height at a point depends on all the equipotential surfaces beneath that point.

b. The orthometric height (H) and the geopotential number (C) are related through the following equation:

$$C = G * H$$

where G is the gravity value estimated for a particular system. Height systems are called different names depending on the gravity value (G) selected. When G is computed using the Helmert height reduction formula that is used for NAVD88, the heights are called Helmert Orthometric Heights. When G is computed using the International Formula for Normal Gravity, the heights are called Normal Orthometric Heights. When G is equal to normal gravity at 45° latitude, the heights are called Normal Dynamic Heights. It should be noted that dynamic heights are just geopotential numbers scaled by a constant, using normal gravity at 45° latitude equal to 980.6199 gals. Therefore, dynamic heights are also an estimate of hydraulic head. In other words, two points that have the same geopotential number will have the same dynamic height.

c. IGLD55 is a normal dynamic height system which used a computed value of gravity based on the International Formula for Normal Gravity. Today, there is sufficient observed gravity data available to estimate "true" geopotential differences instead of "normal" geopotential differences. The "true" geopotential differences, which were used in developing IGLD85 and NAVD88, will more accurately estimate hydraulic head.

4. Problems with NGVD29 and Why a New Datum Needed to be Established

a. Approximately 625,000 km of leveling have been added to the National Geodetic Reference System (NGRS) since the 1929 adjustment. Each new line has been adjusted to the network. The new leveling data uncovered some problems in NGVD29. Through the years, the agreement between the new leveling and the network BM elevations slowly grew worse. An investigation of NGVD29 general adjustment results indicates that large residuals were distributed in some areas of the country during that adjustment. For example, the accumulated 1929 adjustment correction along a 3000 km east-west leveling route from Crookston, Minnesota, to Seattle, Washington is a delta of 89 centimeters (cm).

b. Inconsistencies in NGVD29 have increased over the years. This increase is a function of factors such as:

(1) Many BMs were affected by unknown vertical movement due to earthquake activity, postglacial rebound, and ground subsidence.

(2) Numerous BMs were disturbed or destroyed by highway maintenance, building, and other construction.

(3) New leveling became more accurate because of better instruments, procedures, and improved computations. It was decided in 1977 that the high accuracy achieved by the new leveling was being lost when forced to fit the 1929 network, and plans were made to begin developing a new national vertical network.

c. These inconsistencies have not always been apparent to the user since NGS has periodically readjusted large portions of the NVCN and spread these large residuals over large areas. Eventually, however, there would be a large number of areas in which surveyors would not be able to check their work using NGVD29. NAVD88 is specifically designed to remove the inconsistencies and distortions such as those found in the NGVD29. NGS has held off incorporating approximately 40,000 km of newer leveling data for these reasons. These data were incorporated into the NAVD88.

5. Selection of the Adjustment Method for NAVD88

a. The FGCS created a Vertical Subcommittee in 1989 to study the impact of the NAVD88 on the programs of member agencies and to recommend a datum definition. Several different datum definitions for

NAVD88 were studied by the subcommittee and the three options below were selected for final consideration:

(1) Fix the elevation or mean sea level at a single point.

(2) Fix mean sea level at four tide gages located at the network corners.

(3) Fix the NGVD29 elevations at 18 existing, well scattered BMs.

b. Two options were considered for the establishment of the vertical datum: (1) tidal epoch or (2) a minimally constrained adjustment. The tidal epoch option required that the adjustment hold MSL fixed at all appropriate primary tide stations and use the latest available tidal epoch. This definition is actually the same as NGVD29, but used the latest data available. The other option used a minimally constrained adjustment holding local MSL fixed at one primary tide station and adjusting all leveling data to it. This second option would maintain the integrity of the leveling data but would also create the greatest deviation from the presently published data.

c. Research was done by NGS to determine which option would be the best choice. To assist in the NAVD88 datum definition decision, several adjustments were performed using different constraints. The results obtained from several trial adjustments indicate that no matter which datum definition scenario is chosen for NAVD88, including a minimally constrained adjustment, that changes in absolute heights of as much as 75 to 100 cm would exist between NGVD29 and NAVD88.

d. In addition to the NGS research, agencies and appropriate bodies were queried to determine which option would be their preference and to ask for recommendations. The FGCS and the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping (ACSM) established committees to investigate the impact of NAVD88 on their members' activities and the activities of others in the community. Members of these committees were requested to provide documentation on the affects that the readjustment would have on their user populations and to include specific examples describing the real impact of a new vertical datum on their products. USACE was included in the questionnaire survey. The ACSM report is included as a reference to this document.

e. As a preliminary measure, both committees drafted recommendations for NAVD88 and specified that NGS should:

(1) Perform minimally-constrained least squares adjustment of the data for NAVD88.

(2) Shift the datum vertically to minimize recompilation of National Mapping Products.

(3) Develop computer transformation software to convert between NGVD29 and NAVD88. ("VERTCON").

(4) Develop national and/or regional geoid models to ensure GPS height differences meet at least 2nd Order, Class II FGCS precise geodetic leveling standards for accuracy.

f. Results indicated that the tidal epoch option would minimize the magnitude of the changes from NGVD29 to NAVD88 and thus possibly allow direct comparison of present hydrographic survey elevations with the proposed new NAVD88 elevations. The smaller change between elevations would cause less confusion and concern over flow heights, and the like. Regardless of the datum definition selected, large differences would exist between the NAVD88 and the NGVD29 heights. It should be noted that the NAVD88 heights are better estimates of orthometric heights than the NGVD29 heights. Better estimates of orthometric heights will become more critical in the future as surveying techniques continues to become more sophisticated and more accurate. The improved accuracy of geoid height determinations using GPS data requires the best estimate of true orthometric heights. Many cartographers want heights on their maps based on the best estimate of true orthometric heights.

6. The NAVD88 Adjustment

a. The NAVD88 adjustment is the culmination of over ten years of work. This effort has included: establishing about 100,000 km of trunk line leveling to reinforce weak areas in the network; modernizing the vast amount of leveling observation and description data that has been collected for over a century; performing adjustments of sections of the network to verify the quality of the observation data; informing the public users of the network of the pending change and determining the impact on the nation's engineering activities. After the datum definition was selected to be a minimally

constrained adjustment, the final task of this effort was to perform the least squares adjustment of the whole network.

b. The general adjustment of NAVD88 was completed in June 1991. The primary network consists of 200 loops containing 909 junction BMs. The network connects to 57 primary tidal stations which are part of the National Primary Tidal Network and 55 international water-level stations along the Great Lakes. In addition, 28 border connections were made to the Canadian vertical control network and 13 to the Mexican vertical control network. Third order BMs of other agencies (e.g., USACE) were not included in this adjustment. The 500,000 BMs established by the USGS were also not placed in computer readable form and therefore will not have NAVD88 heights. In addition, USACE commands have established thousands of BMs which will not have NAVD88 heights.

c. A particular concern for the developers of the NAVD88 was how to resolve the many issues associated with the National Mapping Program (NMP) of USGS and the National Map Accuracy Standard (NMAS). The NMP includes more than 83,000 different map products of which over 7 million copies are distributed annually. Almost all of these products contain elevation information as contours and spot elevations on maps or as elevation arrays in Digital Elevation Models. Changing these products, both graphical and digital, to the NAVD88 will be a massive and costly undertaking and will require a decade or more to complete.

d. The new leveling data have additional corrections applied for refraction and rod correction and are adjusted in geopotential units rather than the orthometric system used in the past. The datum definition is the most scientifically acceptable of all the definitions considered and is the most natural because it is based on an undisturbed representation of the Earth's gravity field. It is the most suitable for the geoid height computations needed for the reduction of GPS ellipsoidal heights. The main disadvantage is the differences with MSL on the west coast. At Seattle, a person standing on the zero elevation contour (NAVD88) will barely have their head above water at midtide.

e. Preliminary analysis indicates that the overall differences between orthometric heights referred to NAVD88 and to the NGVD29 range from approximately -40cm to +150cm. Most surveying applications should

not be significantly affected because the changes in relative height between adjacent BMs in most geotechnically stable areas should be less than 1 cm. In many geotechnically stable areas, a single bias factor describing the difference between NGVD29 and NAVD88 can be estimated and used for most mapping applications. This was a significant consideration for assessing the impact on the National Mapping Products. The absolute height values will change much more, but this should not be the surveyor's biggest concern, since he/she should be concerned with ensuring that all height values of BMs are referenced to the same vertical datum. The overall differences between dynamic heights referred to the IGLD85 and to IGLD55 will range from approximately 1 to 40 cm.

7. Maintenance of Parallel Datums by NGS: NAVD88 and NGVD29

For a period of time, NGS will support both the NAVD88 and the NGVD29. Beyond the next 5-7 years, continued maintenance of NGVD29 will depend on user demands and budget constraints.

SECTION II

Impact of NAVD88 Conversion on Other Hydraulic Reference Datums

8. International Great Lakes Datum of 1955 (IGLD55)

a. IGLD55 is a datum common to the United States and Canada and is defined by international agreement. Before the establishment and adoption of the IGLD55, the differences in elevation between the lakes had been determined but had not been connected to sea level and lake level data published from the United States and Canada did not match for the same lakes and rivers. The IGLD55 was an international cooperative effort between the those two countries, the result of which was that the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system was then covered by a single uniform vertical control network. The IGLD55 is different and separate from the NGVD29.

b. IGLD55 is by definition a hydraulic (i.e., dynamic) datum. The reference zero for IGLD55 is based on mean water level surface at Father's Point (Pointe-au-Pere), Québec, Canada. Holding this point fixed determined the IGLD55 datum. A procedure termed a "water level transfer" has been used to establish a local vertical datum on each of the Great Lakes. Research has concluded that the water level transfer technique was concluded to be at least as accurate as First-Order, Class I geodetic leveling. The remaining lakes were incorporated using a combination of level lines and water level transfers. Adjusted elevations on the IGLD55 are referenced using the dynamic number system. The dynamic value of a benchmark (BM) is not a true linear elevation, but a serial number given to the level surface on which the mark lies. Dynamic elevations were adopted for the IGLD55 primarily because they provide a means by which the geopotential hydraulic head can be measured more accurately between two points.

c. The earth's crust experiences movements around the entire Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River area. Therefore, the vertical reference datum for this area must be vertically readjusted every 25 to 30 years. This crustal movement is called "isostatic rebound," which is the gradual rising of the earth rebounding from the weight of the glaciers during the last glacial age. When IGLD55 was created, it was known that readjustment would be necessary due to the effects of isostatic rebound. Crustal movement is not uniform across the Great Lakes basin and causes bench marks to shift not only with respect to each other, but also with respect to the initial reference

point. Subsidence and other local effects can cause bench marks to shift as well.

9. International Great Lakes Datum of 1985 (IGLD85)

a. The Coordinating Committee on Great Lakes Basic Hydraulic and Hydrologic Data revised the IGLD55 datum and established IGLD85. This committee has input to the international management of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system. Representatives from the U.S. and Canada are members on this committee. The efforts of the Coordinating Committee to revise IGLD55 and establish IGLD85 were coordinated with the efforts to establish the new common international vertical datum for the US, Canada and Mexico, NAVD88.

b. The IGLD85 is the current vertical control reference system in the Great Lakes Basin. The IGLD55 was the vertical control reference system for this area until the publication of the IGLD85 in January, 1992. Originally, an IGLD 80 had been planned, but the project was extended. The epoch that was actually used to determine the mean water level for the new datum was from 1983-1988 of which the mean year is 1985. The reference zero point for IGLD85 is located at benchmark #1250G, located at Rimouski, Québec. This benchmark has an IGLD85 elevation of 6.723 meters and IGLD55 elevation of 6.263 meters. IGLD85 increases the number and accuracy of benchmarks in the Great Lakes area. Corps districts were targeted to have converted over to IGLD85 by January of 1993. This cannot be practically done until NOAA publishes complete IGLD85 BM data for the area. IGLD85 data is available for the gages, but the spacing of the gages is not dense enough to support conversion of local project control.

c. Agencies in the U.S. and Canada will use IGLD85. The National Oceanic Service (NOS) and the Canadian Hydrographic Service (CHS) began reporting water levels referenced to IGLD85 upon its implementation in January, 1992. For a period of time, conversion factors for both IGLD55 and IGLD85 water level data will be provided by NOAA/NOS Great Lakes Section and CHS. The monthly water level bulletins published by USACE and CHS will reflect this information.

d. IGLD85 will not change water levels established for federal flood insurance programs in the US. These levels will be referred to NAVD88. Elevations common to both NAVD88 and IGLD85 are available from NOAA. Lake-level outflows also will not be affected by the datum change to IGLD85. As benchmark information becomes available, navigation, construction, and other improvement work on the Great Lakes should be referred to IGLD85. Either datum is acceptable until the benchmark data is available for the respective USACE District or project area. Drawings shall include a note for the vertical IGLD datum in use to avoid blunders. USACE permit applications will still be referenced to the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) as defined under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. As benchmark information becomes available, new applications should reference IGLD85.

10. NAVD88 and IGLD85

a. The specific needs of the Great Lakes system were taken into account while the decision were being made about how NAVD88 was to be established. Analyses of data in the Great Lakes Basin was used to determine the effects of the datum constraint, magnitudes of height changes from the IGLD55, deficiencies in the network design, selection of water-level station pairs to be used to generate zero geopotential difference observations, and additional releveling requirements. This coordination provided a check on the accuracy of the work and established a conversion between the IGLD85 and NAVD88.

b. Elevations referenced to NGVD29 are unacceptable for use in resolving the involved problems of the Great Lakes System. The reference zero for NGVD29 is not located within the Great Lakes system and orthometric elevations are not sufficient for use with large bodies of water such as the Great Lakes. The dynamics of large bodies of water are not modelled well by considering them as single equipotential surfaces. Other forces such as gravity must be considered. For example, water level measurements obtained at both ends of the Lake and connected to the NGVD29 would show some magnitude of a permanently northerly slope.

c. The general adjustment of the NAVD88 and IGLD85 is one and the same. A minimum constraint adjustment of Canadian-Mexican-U.S. leveling observations was performed holding fixed the height of the primary tidal BM, referred to the new IGLD85 local

mean sea level height value, at Father's Point/Rimouski, Québec, Canada. This constraint satisfies the requirements of shifting the datum vertically to minimize the impact of NAVD88 on USGS mapping products, as well as provides the datum point desired by the IGLD Coordinating Committee for IGLD85. The only difference between IGLD85 and NAVD88 is that IGLD85 BM values are given in dynamic height units and NAVD88 values are given in Helmert orthometric height units. The geopotential numbers of BMs are the same in both systems.

d. Geopotential numbers from the general adjustment of NAVD88 were used to compute IGLD85 dynamic heights. They will provide the best estimate of hydraulic head. If secondary gage data are placed in computer readable form, they will also be incorporated into NAVD88 and IGLD85. NGS will publish NAVD88 heights and provide, upon special request, geopotential numbers for all BMs included in NAVD88.

e. The use of GPS data and a high-resolution geoid model to estimate accurate GPS-derived orthometric heights will be a continuing part of the implementation of NAVD88 and IGLD85. It is important that users initiate a project to convert their products to NAVD88 and IGLD85. The conversion process is not a difficult task, but will require time and resources. Other local reference planes have been established by local jurisdictions and these can be referenced to either IGLD85 or NAVD88.

11. 1974 Low Water Reference Plane (LWRP)

a. On the Mississippi River between the mouths of the Missouri and the Ohio Rivers (the Middle Mississippi River), depths and improvements are referenced to a LWRP. No specific LWRP year is used for the Middle Mississippi north of Cairo, IL. Below Cairo, IL, depths and improvements along the Lower Mississippi River are referenced to the 1974 LWRP. This is also a hydraulic reference plane, established from long term observations of the river's stage, discharge rates, and flow duration periods. The low water profile was developed about the 97-percent flow duration line. The elevation of the 1974 LWRP drops gradually throughout the course of the Mississippi, however, some anomalies in the profile are present in places (particularly in areas containing rock bottoms or groins/weirs). The gradient is approximately 0.5 feet per river mile. The ever-changing river bottom will influence the 1974 LWRP. Changes in the stage-

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discharge relationship will influence the theoretical flow line for the 1974 LWRP.

b. Construction and improvements along the lower river are performed relative to the 1974 LWRP at a particular point. Differences in 1974 LWRP elevations between successive points along the river are determined from simultaneous staff readings and are referenced to benchmarks along the bank. The 1974 LWRP slope gradients between any two points must be corrected by linear interpolation of the profile. Thus, over a typical 1-mile section of river with a 0.5-foot gradient, each 1000-foot C/C river cross section will have a different 1974 LWRP correction, each dropping successively at approximately 0.1-foot increments.

c. Where practicable and feasible, NAVD88 should be used as the common reference plane from which 1974 LWRP elevations are measured. The relationship of all project datums to both NGVD29 and NAVD88 should be clearly noted on all drawings, charts, maps, and elevation data files. All initial surveys should be referenced to both NAVD88 and NGVD29. If this is not feasible, then NGVD29 should be used as the common reference plane from which 1974 LWRP elevations are measured until the move to NAVD88 can be accomplished. Differences between the 1974 LWRP and NGVD29 are published for the reference benchmarks used to control surveys and construction activities. In some districts, surveys are performed directly on NGVD29 without regard to the 1974 LWRP profile (i.e., elevations above NGVD29 are plotted rather than depths below 1974 LWRP). The 1974 LWRP depths are then contoured from the plotted NGVD29 elevations, with the 1974 LWRP profile gradients applied during the contouring process. If a survey is conducted over a given reach of the river, the 1974 LWRP-NAVD88 and/or the 1974 LWRP-NGVD29 conversion must be interpolated based on the slope profile over that reach.

d. Controlled portions of the Upper Mississippi are referred to pool levels between the controlling structures. Although a variety of reference datums are used on other controlled river systems or impoundment reservoirs, most are hydraulically based and relate to some statistical pool level (e.g., "normal pool level," "flat pool level," "minimum regulated pool level", etc.).

e. On the Mississippi River above Melvin Price Locks and Dam at Alton, IL, to Lock and Dam No. 22 at Saverton, MO, the reference used is related to the

minimum regulated pool elevation. These pools are regulated referenced to a "hinge point". The pools are drawn down when the river's flow will provide adequate navigation depths naturally. When the flows are reduced to low volumes, the pools are reestablished and are essentially level. The depths and improvements along this reach of the Mississippi River are referenced to the "minimum regulated pool" elevations.

f. On the Mississippi River above Lock and Dam No. 22 at Saverton, MO, to St. Paul, MN, a "flat pool level" reference is used, and soundings are shown as "depth below flat pool". The flat pool is the authorized elevation of the navigation project and can be referenced to any number of local datums. Most commonly, this level is referenced to the mean sea level (MSL) datum of 1912, the general adjustment which preceded 1929. Conversions between MSL 1912 and NGVD29 are available. The Illinois Waterway pool elevations are referred to NGVD29, however, relationships to numerous other datums are also made.

g. Vertical clearances (bridges, transmission lines, etc.) are usually measured relative to high and low waters of record, or relative to full pool elevations. Shore lines shown on river drawings and navigation maps may be referenced to a low water datum (i.e., 1974 LWRP). On the Mississippi River above Lock and Dam No. 22 at Saverton, MO, the plotted shore line is referenced to full pool stage at dams with discharges equaled or exceeded 90 percent of the time. Given the variety of reference levels, special care must be taken to properly identify the nature and source of all vertical reference datums used on a project. The datum notes should include and clearly depict the relationship to NAVD88.

SECTION III

Impact of NAVD88 Conversion on U.S. Geological Survey and Federal Emergency Management Agency Programs

12. NAVD88 and the National Mapping Program (NMP)

a. The NMP of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) includes more than 83,000 different map products. Some 55,000 of these are in the 7.5-minute, 1:24,000-scale, primary quadrangle map series (7.5-minute quads). These maps are widely used by Corps planners. Since the 7.5-minute quad series is the largest scale in the NMP and contains the greatest detail and elevation accuracy, it will be significantly affected by the vertical datum change.

b. The contour intervals of the 7.5-minute map series are selected to best express the topography of the area. With a few exceptions, the contour intervals range from 5 feet for very flat country to 80 feet for rugged mountainous terrain. In between these limits are 10-, 20-, and 40-foot contour intervals. A few maps in recent years have been compiled with metric value contours. The USGS production processes were designed to produce maps that meet the requirements of the National Map Accuracy Standards (NMAS). This standard requires that the error in 90% of the test points be less than one-half contour interval. Field survey methods are generally used to test the maps, and the elevation on the map is determined by interpolation between contours.

c. Other forms of vertical information shown on the USGS 7.5-minute maps are BMs and useful elevations, which are indicated by a cross symbol with the elevation given to the nearest foot. These elevations are established by geodetic leveling of third-order accuracy or better. Spot elevations are measured by field or photogrammetric methods and are readily identifiable features, eg: natural lakes, definite tops and saddles, fence corners, or road intersections. These elevations are usually placed at a density of about one-per-square mile and are considered to be accurate to within three-tenths of the contour interval.

d. Digital files of topographic information will also be affected by a change in the vertical datum. A Digital Elevation Model (DEM) consists of a sampled array of elevations for ground positions that are usually at regularly spaced intervals. For the 7.5-minute DEM, the horizontal framework is the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) system and the spacing is 30 meters.

The 1-degree DEM horizontal coordinate system is based on the latitude and longitude positions of the World Geodetic System of 1972 (WGS 72) datum and the spacing is 3 arc-seconds. Another form of the digital topographic data that will be affected by the datum conversion is the hypsography category Digital Line Graphs (DLG).

e. In support of the production of the USGS topographic maps, a 3rd order level network was established that resulted in few places being more than 5 miles from basic vertical control. These lines were usually established along farm roads, railroads, desert track roads, and mountain trails (less dense in mountain areas). USGS field surveyors have established nearly 500,000 BMs. Most of this work is on NGVD29.

f. Changing the above NMP products, both graphic and digital, to the NAVD88 will be a massive and costly undertaking and will require a decade or more to complete.

(1) In areas where the datum change is very small compared with the contour interval, advantage can be taken of the tolerance in the NMAS (i.e., 90% of the test point errors are less than 1/2 of the contour interval). If the datum change is only 1/10th of the contour interval, then the existing contours will still meet NMAS and will not require recompilation. The labeled elevations for BMs and spot elevations will need to be changed. This type of conversion is a low-cost approach but might be useful to extend the life of an otherwise sound map series. This is not a technically correct solution because a small bias is being introduced. Special care must be taken to insure that the contouring is in agreement with changed labeled elevations.

(2) Recompiling the contours and spot elevations on a 7.5-minute quad map is the most geometrically correct method of fitting the new vertical datum; however, this is an expensive approach. Therefore, total recompilation and recontouring due to an out-of-date datum is not considered to be cost-effective. However, some other factors may justify recompilation:

- Change to metric contours
- Terrain changes because of subsidence or other

causes

- Inaccurate existing contours or inappropriate contour interval

g. Adjusting the USGS 3rd-order leveling network to the NAVD88 is a different challenge, because high accuracy is needed to maintain its usefulness as geodetic data. This level of accuracy can only be provided by a least squares adjustment of the old observations to the new NAVD88 primary network elevations.

h. The selected NAVD88 datum definition best fits the needs of the NMP. The important characteristics are:

- Small elevation changes for the eastern half of the USA where the 7.5 map contour intervals are the smallest and large changes for the western half where contour intervals are the largest.
- The isograms representing these changes are smoother and show less irregularities.

Both of these are important if the map patching conversion techniques is to be used. The requirements are that the shift values be small compared with the contour interval and the gradient in the datum change be minimal so that a single change value can be applied over an entire 7.5-minute map with little noticeable error. A vertical shift (bias) in the defining elevation is desirable to expand the favorable interval/elevation change area over the entire U.S.

13. National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Transition to NAVD88

a. The NFIP is a federal program that provides identification of flood hazard areas on a community basis and includes availability of insurance against flood damages. When a community joins the NFIP, it agrees to adopt minimum Federal floodplain management criteria enforced by local regulations. The major product of the NFIP is the Flood Insurance Study (FIS) and accompanying Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM), which describes a community's floodplains and regulatory floodways, as well as computed flood profiles. FEMA prepares an FIS for severely flood prone communities, that identifies 100-year base flood elevations (BFEs) and flood hazard areas. Nearly all flood maps for these areas are referenced to the NGVD29. Conversion to NAVD88 will require the education of map users as well as map producers. New FISs will be based on NAVD88.

Existing studies and maps will be converted when substantive revisions occur to redefine flood hazards.

b. The dual mission of the NFIP through the Federal Insurance Administration (FIA) is to reduce future flood losses as well as provide insurance coverage to offset deficit producing disaster assistance payments. To provide the floodplain management information to the communities, FEMA provides flood hazard mapping of major flooding sources within a community, usually based on the 100 year BFEs.

c. FEMA will be converting its products the NAVD88 in a gradual process primarily as FEMA's FISs and FIRMs are republished. Currently, the vast majority of FEMA products for the NFIP are referred to NGVD29. All FEMA studies contracted for FY93 and beyond will require the use of NAVD88 as vertical control. Since October 1992, all requests for map change actions received required the inclusion of NAVD88 data. The NFIP will transition to NAVD88 on a project basis or as other reasons for revision indicate.

14. Effects of NAVD88 on FIRMs and Communities

a. The base 100-year BFEs and Elevation Reference Marks (ERMs) will be converted to NAVD88. Use of the current datum will be acceptable until the change is made of the FIRM. After that time, all flood insurance policy sales and renewals will be based on elevations referenced to NAVD88. Determination of locations of structures and proposed projects with respect to special flood hazard areas (SFHAs) will be based upon elevations referenced to NAVD88. The datum listed as the reference datum on the applicable FIRM panel should be used for Elevation Certificate completion. This is FEMA policy for all NFIP communities since the NAVD88 is defined over all these regions. For Hawaii, the Pacific Trust Territories, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, their datums will be adjusted based upon releveling work done in those areas and their 1960-78 tidal epoch. Their local datums will be designated as NAVD88 and will be defined by their current local MSL determinations.

b. The conversion of the vertical reference datum from NGVD29 to NAVD88 will take place over time and documentation should be carefully maintained to reflect which vertical reference datum was used. If a FIS is completed with ERMs referenced to NAVD88, the conversion method and results shall be part of the

deliverable items with that FIS. The FEMA Project Officer should be consulted to decide if NAVD88 must be used or not, prior to commencement of any work for that FIS.

c. No requirement is made by FEMA on local communities to relevel their local vertical control networks for NFIP purposes. If, however, the community's current vertical control system is referenced to an NGS bench mark(s) that is included in the new data available from NGS, then appropriate conversion can be made. Questions regarding the mechanics of shifting to NAVD88 may be addressed to the appropriate FEMA Regional Offices.

d. A very important potential problem is caused by mixing datums. If a consistent datum is used for determining Base 100-year BFEs and lowest floor elevation, actuarial rating and building requirements would be correctly determined. If mixed datums are used, significant problems arise. For example, if the 1-foot NAVD88 BFE is used mixed with the 2-foot NGVD29 lowest floor elevation, an error of 2 feet (not in the NFIP's favor) would occur. There are roughly 22 million people living in the nation's floodplains. Proposed elevations above the BFE are sometimes minimal for economic considerations, so up-to-date and properly referenced elevation data are a must. Correct referencing of those floodplains to the nation's vertical datum must be accomplished as soon as it is administratively and financially possible to do so.

15. Map Revision Requests to FEMA

a. As the NFIP moves further into the maintenance stage of the mapping program, the major action with respect to mapping of flood hazards will be the review and processing of requests for revisions to the currently effective FISs and FIRMs. The decision of whether to convert to NAVD88 as the reference datum for a revision action must be made on a case by case basis. All map revision requests should contain documentation of vertical control used and those requests to FEMA after 1 October 1992 must include vertical control data referenced to NAVD88. The decision regarding the published reference for the map revision will be made by the FEMA Project Officer for the applicable region.

b. Map revision requests shall include either NGS BM data or the method and computations used to tie to NGS BMs. If NGS BM data is unavailable, documenta-

tion to that effect must be submitted with the map revision request. If a computer program was used, the name of the program should be included along with where an exact copy of that program can be obtained. The leveling field notes should also be included. All surveying data must be certified by a licensed Land Surveyor or registered Professional Engineer. For all map revisions, the datum referenced on the current FIRM shall be used unless otherwise directed by the Project Officer. When the current map datum is used, a conversion factor to allow comparison to NAVD88 elevation should be included.

16. Impact of NAVD88 Change on Flooding Sources

a. *Riverine and Lacustrine Flooding.* For most areas affected by this type of flooding, the changes from NGVD29 to NAVD88 will be adequately addressed by a shift factor for areas of USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle series topographic maps. In larger areas than that, such as county wide studies involving significant stream or river reaches, additional considerations are necessary.

b. *Coastal Flooding.* In areas affected by coastal flooding, additional care must be taken to avoid confusion with local MSL data that are used in addition to NGVD29 data. In many areas, these are assumed to be the same, while in other areas differences may exist based upon the latest tidal observations. NGS has included in its published data the new reference elevations for tidal stations previously taken as 0.0000 foot on NGVD29. All vertical data must clearly reflect what basis of vertical control was used. For example, if mean low water datum was used, conversion to NAVD88, or at a minimum NGVD29, must be provided and sealed by a certified land surveyor.

c. *Other Influences.* Areas that have experienced crustal motion or land subsidence since the publication of the vertical control data for that area, must be referenced to at least one BM known to be stable. Documentation from a certified land surveyor or by the agency that recently relevelled the BM must be included with any data submitted to FEMA. NGS will be publishing special reports for these areas as part of its ongoing long term task.

(1) For areas that experience uniform change over a given range, and where datum difference can be expressed as a bias factor for specific geographic areas, little

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if any distortion will occur in the hydrologic and hydraulic parameters that influence the definition of a given floodplain. In these instances, FEMA will be concerned with assuring that the proper conversion of ground and hydraulic elevations takes place.

(2) In instances where non-uniform elevation differences are indicated, an investigation of the potential effect on hydraulic behavior will be required. Usually, unless the change in flood elevation or depth is greater than 0.5 foot or in some cases 1.0 foot, no republication of the flood elevations is dictated. Indications of potential changes of 1.0 foot or more will probably place the stream or community on the priority list for a contracted restudy to establish the exact effect of the changes.

17. FEMA Policy for Map Conversion: Affect on NFIP Products

FEMA datum conversion activities called for all FY93 FIS's to be referenced to NAVD88 and that this action be confirmed by the contractor with the Project Officer prior to the beginning of survey work. The study contractor is responsible for assuring that proper reference to NAVD88 is made.

18. NAVD88 Requirements for Flood Insurance Studies

a. Type 15 Studies. For initial studies, NAVD88 shall be required. Exceptions must be approved by the Project Officer prior to the start of survey work.

b. Type 19 Studies and Limited Map Maintenance Program Studies. Use of NAVD88 shall be the decision of the Project Officer. If NGVD29 is used, then a conversion factor to NAVD88 should be included with the study material.

c. The use of NAVD88 for these studies will be determined by the extent of the changes that will occur to the community's FIRM when revised. For communities whose FIRM is larger than 1 panel and revision of other panels is unlikely with the restudy, the use of NGVD29 may be continued, but a note explaining the conversion to NAVD88 should be included in the "NOTES" in the map border of the panel being revised.

SECTION IV Corps of Engineers Transition Plan to NAVD88

19. General

A change in vertical datum will affect most USACE engineering, construction, planning, and surveying activities. The cost of conversion could be substantial at the onset. There is a potential for errors in conversions inadvertently occurring. The effects of the vertical datum change can be minimized if the change is gradually applied over time; being applied to future projects and efforts, rather than concentrated on changing already published products. In order to insure an orderly and timely transition to NAVD88 is achieved for the appropriate products, the following general guidelines in this section should be followed.

a. Conversion Criteria. Maps, engineering site drawings, documents and associated spatial data products containing elevation data may require conversion to NAVD88. Specific requirements for conversion will, in large part, be based on local usage -- that of the local sponsor, installation, etc. Where applicable and appropriate, this conversion should be recommended to local interests.

b. Newly Authorized Construction Projects. Generally, initial surveys of newly authorized projects should be referenced to NAVD88. In addition to design/construction, this would include wide-area master plan mapping work. The project control should be referenced to NAVD88 using conventional or GPS surveying techniques. All planning and design activities should be based upon NAVD88. All maps and site drawings shall contain datum notes as described below. If the sponsor/installation requires the use of NGVD29 or some other local vertical reference datum for continuity, the relationship between NGVD29 and NAVD88 shall be clearly noted on all maps, engineering site drawings, documents and associated products.

c. Active Projects. On active projects where maps, site drawings, or elevation data are provided to non-USACE users, the conversion to NAVD88 should be performed. This conversion to NAVD88 may be performed the next time the project is surveyed or when the maps/site drawings are updated for other reasons. Civil works projects may be converted to NAVD88 during the next maintenance or repair cycle in the same manner as for newly initiated civil works projects.

However, if resources are not available for this level of effort, either re-draw the maps or drawings and add the necessary datum note. Plans should be made for the full conversion during a later maintenance or repair cycle when resources can be made available. MCA, OMA, AFH, OMAR, MCAF, OMAF and master planning projects should remain on NGVD29 or the local vertical datum until a thoroughly coordinated effort can be arranged with the MACOM DCSSENGR and installation DEH, or AFRCE and BCE. An entire installation's control network should be transformed simultaneously to avoid different datums on the same installation. MACOMs should be encouraged to convert to NAVD88. However, the respective MACOMs are responsible for this decision.

d. Inactive Projects. For inactive projects or active projects where maps, site drawings or elevation data are not normally provided to non-USACE users, conversion to NAVD88 is optional.

e. Work for Others. Projects for other agencies will remain on NGVD29 or the current local vertical datum until a thoroughly coordinated effort can be arranged with the sponsoring agency. Other agencies should be encouraged to convert their projects to NAVD88, although the decision to convert rests with the sponsoring agency. However, surveys, maps and drawings should have the datum note described below added before distribution to non-USACE users. If sponsoring agencies do not indicate a preference for new projects, NAVD88 should be used.

f. Miscellaneous Projects. Other projects referenced to strictly local datum, such as structural deformation, beach nourishment, submerged offshore disposal areas, historical preservation projects, etc., need not necessarily be converted to NAVD88. However, it is recommended that surveys, maps and drawings have a clear datum reference note added before distribution to non-USACE users.

20. Datum Reference Note

Whenever maps, site drawings or spatial elevation data are provided to non-USACE users, they should contain a datum note that provides, at minimum, the following information:

The elevations shown are referenced to the [NGVD29] [NAVD88] and are in [feet] [meters].

Differences between NGVD29 and NAVD88 at the center of the project sheet/data set are shown on the diagram below. Datum conversion was performed using the [program VERTCON] [direct leveling connections with published NGS benchmarks] [other]. Metric conversions are based on [US Survey Foot = 1200/3937 meters] [International Survey Foot = 30.48/100 meters].

21. Technical Advantages in Converting to NAVD88

There are several compelling reasons that make it advantageous for USACE commands to convert to NAVD88. These include:

- Differential leveling surveys between bench marks will often close better.
- NAVD88 will provide a better reference to estimate GPS-derived orthometric heights.
- IGLD85 will provide a better reference to estimate heights of water-level surfaces on the Great Lakes.
- Data and adjusted height values will be readily available and accessible in convenient form from NGS's Integrated Data Base.
- Federal surveying and mapping agencies will stop publishing on NGVD29 and IGLD55, and will publish only on NAVD88 and IGLD85.
- Surveys performed for the Federal government will require use of NAVD88.
- NAVD88 is recommended by ACSM and FGCS.

22. Levels of Effort

For map and site plan drawings, including digital variations thereof, the conversion process entails one of two levels of effort: (1) conversion of all elevations to NAVD88 and re-drawing the map, or (2) simply adding a datum note based on an approximate VERTCON conversion.

23. Real Estate Implications

a. Surveys, maps and plats prepared in support of civil works and military real estate activities should conform as much as possible with state requirements. Many states are expected to adopt NAVD88 (by statute) as an official vertical reference datum. This likewise will entail a transition to NAVD88 in those states. State and local authorities should therefore be contacted to ascertain their current policies.

b. Note that several states have adopted the International Foot for their standard conversion from meters to feet. However, recent action by the FGCS to affirm continued use of the U.S. Survey Foot for Federal surveying activities could lead to a reversal of some state policies.

c. In order to avoid dual elevations on USACE survey control points which have multiple uses, it is recommended that published elevations be based on the U.S. Survey Foot. In states where the International Foot is the only accepted standard for boundary and property surveys, conversion of these elevations to NAVD88 should be based on the International Foot while the control remains based on the U.S. Survey Foot.

SECTION V VERTCON 1.0

24. General Description of VERTCON

VERTCON is a program developed by the NGS that converts elevation data from NGVD29 to NAVD88. VERTCON uses a simplified transformation of benchmark (BM) heights using a modeled shift for a given area and is, in general, only sufficiently accurate to meet small-scale mapping requirements. VERTCON should not be used for converting benchmark elevations used for site plan design or construction applications. Users can simply input the latitude and longitude for a point and the vertical datum shift between NGVD29 and NAVD88 is output. Data may be input either point-to-point by hand or by batch file. Three batch file formats are supported:

- Free File Format Type 1
- Free File Format Type 2
- NGS Internal BM Format Type 3

A "help" menu in the program gives information and examples of the file formats. Example inputs and outputs for the first two batch file types and a hand input type are included in the following pages. In the existing release, survey points must be input in North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) horizontal coordinates. Future releases will convert inputs to NAD 83. This release works on IBM compatible PCs running DOS. VERTCON is command line driven and should be fairly easy to use for anyone with basic computer skills. Batch files are explained in the help menu within the program and can be created through the use of a standard text editor. The command line interface is very basic, but functional.

25. USACE Program CORPSCON

VERTCON was released by NGS in early 1993. During the later part of FY94, VERTCON will be incorporated into USACE program CORPSCON, which is currently used for horizontal datum conversions between the North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27) and NAD 83. CORPSCON can use either geographic, State Plane or UTM coordinates as input/output. Until the revised version of CORPSCON is available, the current version can be used in combination with VERTCON to perform vertical datum conversions with State Plane or UTM inputs.

26. VERTCON Installation and Operation Details

Program VERTCON consists of the following files:

VERTCON.EXE - Executable program file
VERTCON.DIR -Directory of VERTCON data base
(non-readable, i.e., binary, file)
VERTCON.COF -Coefficients of VERTCON data base
(non-readable, i.e., binary, file)
README.TXT -User's instruction file

a. VERTCON Installation.

(1) Make sure the original floppy disk is write-protected.

(2) Make a subdirectory on hard disk; for example: "mkdir NGVDCONV" (VERTCON will also run from the floppy disk)

(3) Go into a subdirectory; for example: "cd NGVDCONV"

(4) Copy the floppy disk into the subdirectory; for example: "copy A:*. *.* /v"

(5) Put the original floppy in a safe place.

b. VERTCON Execution. Type "VERTCON" and follow the prompts.

c. VERTCON Termination. VERTCON computations can be stopped at any time by the Control-C (i.e., <ctrl-c>) key combination, but interactive processing can be terminated by entering 0. (i.e., zero WITH DECIMAL POINT)

27. VERTCON Modeling Procedure

The modeled conversion of NGVD29 normal orthometric heights to NAVD88 Helmert orthometric heights can be accomplished by using the VERTCON software. This conversion is sufficiently accurate for many small-scale mapping purposes. The software and two files of modeling coefficients (data base) for the conterminous United States (CONUS) are provided on the disk.

VERTCON returns the orthometric height difference between NAVD88 and NGVD29 at the geodetic position specified by the user. The root-mean-square (RMS) error of the actual NGVD29/NAVD88 height differences versus the computed height differences from the model for the data points used to create the model is ± 1 cm; the estimated maximum error is ± 2.5 cm. Depending on network design and terrain relief, larger differences (e.g., 5 to 50 cm) may occur the further a bench mark is located from the control points used to establish the model coefficients. For this reason, VERTCON should only be used for approximate conversions where these potential errors are not critical. If feasible, future versions of VERTCON will contain estimates of uncertainty on a region-by-region basis.

28. VERTCON Data Input Procedures

The user can key in latitude and longitude on a point-by-point basis or can create an input file using a text editor. Several file formats are provided, including the internal bench mark file record format of the Vertical Network Branch, NGS. These formats are detailed in a "Help" menu option which appears when the input filename is specified. Most horizontal positions of the bench marks used to generate VERTCON were scaled from USGS topographic maps. The estimated uncertainty of the scaled positions is far greater than the differences between NAD 27 and NAD 83. Therefore, the horizontal geodetic datum to which the latitude and longitude are referenced (either NAD 27 or NAD 83) should not adversely affect the computed height difference since the height differences change very little with slight changes in horizontal position, i.e., less than 100 meters.

29. VERTCON Data Output

VERTCON Results are collected into an output file. The default name of this file is "VERTCON.OUT", but the user can choose any other legal filename. (Do not use misleading extensions such as *.EXE, *.DIR, *.COF, or *.BAT). The format of the output file is linked to the format of the input file to maintain consistency.

30. Derived NAVD88 Heights from NGVD29 Heights

The modeled NAVD88 - NGVD29 height differences convert from NGVD29 normal orthometric heights to NAVD88 Helmert orthometric heights. This value is ADDED ALGEBRAICALLY to NGVD29 normal orthometric heights to obtain NAVD88 Helmert

orthometric heights. If a NGVD29 height is desired when a NAVD88 height is given, SUBTRACT the value ALGEBRAICALLY from the NAVD88 height.

31. VERTCON Models for CONUS

a. Interconnected local VERTCON models were computed in October 1992 using more than 300,500 NAVD88 - NGVD29 orthometric height differences. The aggregate of these local models, defined for 144 Helmert blocks, comprise the total VERTCON model for CONUS. The benefit of developing this mosaic of local models is that any error found locally, such as gross errors and/or an inconsistent leveling network, can be corrected promptly and the data base "repaired" swiftly without affecting any other area.

b. The method of computation is based on Professor Rolland L. Hardy's multiquadric method for data modeling and prediction. Accordingly, a set of coefficients of radial basis functions are determined at "optimally" selected data points in a two-dimensional space. These coefficients define an irregular surface which matches the selected data exactly, in this case the NAVD88 - NGVD29 height differences, and approximate the data at varying error levels at other points.

c. It is desirable for datum conversion efficiency purposes to model the data field with a minimal set of surface coefficients, while keeping the deviation of the surface at non-selected data points within predefined bounds. This was achieved by an iterative process in which, after a small initial set of data points was modeled, additional data points were gradually added to the model at the locations of largest deviations between model surface and data. This approach provided a minimal set of model coefficients, while maintaining predefined error bounds.

d. The data base and VERTCON software are operational on standard disc operating system (DOS) controlled (IBM-compatible) personal computers (PC). However, the executable code and (binary) data base may not be transferable to other systems. In the near future two additional modules will be provided:

(1) CONVASCI -- will extract and store the local models in an ASCII file for transfer to other systems

(2) CONVBIN -- will restore the ASCII file into a two-file binary data base on the new system. The

recompiled VERTCON software can then operate on this data base.

32. Future VERTCON Modifications

A continuing development effort is underway to improve VERTCON results. NGVD29 normal orthometric heights are being analyzed for localized monument and/or crustal motion effects, for inconsistent adjustments, and other effects. Computed height differences which are significantly influenced by such effects will be flagged and rated for reliability on the output.