

September 22, 2025, LeeCARES Net Training: Good Maps (Revised)

Presented by Jason Korb, KI5ABB

In the past, I have talked about the need for good maps as part of our necessary equipment. I discussed the need for having alternate routes to avoid accidents or the ever-present traffic through town on a weekend...and heaven forbid, a train comes through...or having to navigate during a mass evacuation as happened in 2005 with the coming of Hurricane Rita.

During a short-term emergency event, having knowledge of surface streets and back roads can be invaluable. With the heavy burden on local businesses, knowing how to avoid traffic and getting to small towns off major evacuation routes can allow you to acquire the supplies you may need. It is also important for us to navigate to locations we may need to deploy to during an activation.

Since 2005, we have become more reliant on our mobile phones for mapping and navigation than ever before. The technology we have in the palm of our hand is amazing, but it is limited by how much traffic the surrounding cell towers can handle. Now, we are learning that our GPS satellites are vulnerable to hacking, jamming, and spoofing. This makes having a good map and the ability to navigate with it imperative.

Today, we have access to lots of map sources, but most of these are online. Bookmark as many sources as you can find and download them as well. It is also a good idea to get paper maps too. Atlases are a great way to get lots of maps in one place. There is a great Mapsco Atlas of the Roads of Texas, which is an excellent resource for backroads, however, I believe this is out of print and getting harder to find (I have included a link to a used version on Amazon). The Delorme Atlas & Gazetteer: Texas is also a good alternative.

Maps can also be downloaded to your mobile device and the GPS on board will still guide you even while in airplane mode. Google Maps allows this for free. You can also purchase GPS apps such as onX or Gaia GPS. I have used Gaia GPS in airplane mode in remote Utah and New Mexico with excellent results. I also had a good experience with onX in the Grand Tetons last year.

Consider buying or downloading (and printing) topographical maps of your primary area. If possible, also do this for areas you may deploy to (such as the Guadalupe River in Kerr Co.). Topo maps allow you to read the terrain and navigate around areas that may be problematic.

Along with good maps, you will need to have a quality compass on hand. Again, we have this technology on our phones, but it can fail. I keep compass along with me as part of my everyday carry. Being able to orient yourself and your map is the start of good navigation.

I have included links to a few excellent sources for maps and road conditions below. I am sure others are available out there. Keep these on hand and use the opportunity of traffic situations to practice your map skills to navigate around trouble spots. You never know when it will be needed.

Sources for Maps:

Lee County Map <https://www.co.lee.tx.us/upload/page/5440/Commissioners%202022%20Large.pdf>

TX DOT Travel Maps <https://www.txdot.gov/data-maps/official-travel-maps.html>

DeLorme Atlas & Gazetteer: Texas <https://a.co/d/h1g27PQ>

The Roads of Texas <https://a.co/d/gieKUGd>

Topo Maps <https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer/#10/30.2751/-96.8980>

Apps

GaiaGPS <https://www.gaiagps.com/>

onX <https://www.onxmaps.com/>

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Other Sources for Road Conditions:

Bluebonnet Electric Outage Map <http://outage.bluebonnetelectric.coop:82/>

Drive Texas <https://drivetexas.org/>

ATX Floods <https://www.atxfloods.com/>