State of Illinios
Department of Transportation

Coles County, IL

Vertical Accuracy Assessment Report

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AERO-METRIC Project No. 1-101107.01

Background

The National Standard for Spatial Data Accuracy (NSSDA)[1] defines guidelines for testing and reporting the accuracy of digital geospatial data. The NSSDA makes the assumption that all errors follow a normal error distribution where Root-Mean-Square-Error (RMSE) procedures apply. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)[2] guidelines implement the NSSDA standards and recommend the survey of a minimum of 20 checkpoints per ground cover category representative of the area being tested. A minimum of three categories (60 checkpoints) is required. The National Digital Elevation Program (NDEP)[3] and the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS)[4] provide an alternative method for reporting the vertical accuracy whereby errors in vegetation categories are not assumed to follow a normal error distribution. The ASPRS guidelines are directly referenced to the assessment of LiDAR digital data. A minimum of 60 checkpoints is again recommended, with up to 100 points preferred. For the Coles County project, five major ground cover categories were defined by Aero-Metric as representative of the project area (hard surface, short grass, tall grass, brush, and woods). A total of 533 checkpoints were collected over the entire project area including building and profile points.

Aero-Metric's vertical accuracy assessment for the Coles County project was carried out in accordance with the two methods mentioned above. The first method (defined by NSSDA and FEMA) assumes all errors follow a normal error distribution and the newer second method (defined by NDEP and ASPRS) assumes that errors in some land cover categories may not follow a normal error distribution. Comparing the two methods helps determine the amount of systematic errors that may exist in the five ground cover categories: hard surface, short grass, tall grass, brush, and woods. The following table summarizes the criteria used to evaluate the vertical data. Criteria highlighted in yellow refer to the NSSDA and FEMA guidelines and those highlighted in orange refer to the NDEP and ASPRS guidelines.

Table 1 -- DTM Acceptance Criteria

Criteria	*Acceptable Value*
$RMSE_z$= NSSDA vertical accuracy statistic at 68% confidence level (1.0 x $RMSE_z$)	0.60 ft for all ground cover categories combined
$Accuracy_z$= NSSDA vertical accuracy statistic at the 95% confidence level (1.96 x $RMSE_z$)	1.19 ft ($RMSE_z$ x 1.9600) for all ground cover categories combined
Fundamental Vertical Accuracy (FVA) in open terrain only = 95% confidence level	1.19 ft ($RMSE_z$ x 1.9600) for open terrain only
Supplemental Vertical Accuracy (SVA) in individual ground cover categories = 95% confidence level	1.19 ft (based on 95th percentile per category; this is a target value only, not mandatory)
Consolidated Vertical Accuracy (CVA) in all ground cover categories combined = 95% confidence level	1.19 ft (based on combined 95th percentile)

Aero-Metric tested the digital vertical data using the following steps:

1. American Survey ground survey personnel collected and processed GPS data for each of the ground cover checkpoints. These points were distributed throughout ground cover category areas within the project limits.
2. The checkpoints were compared to the digital vertical data using the TerraSolid, LTD program TerraScan. The program creates a TIN surface from the digital vertical data and computes vertical differences between the surface and the surveyed checkpoints. An output file records the vertical differences and associated statistics.
3. The results were analyzed by Aero-Metric to assess the quality of the data. Various accuracy parameters as defined by the NDEP and ASPRS guidelines were used in the review process. Also, the overall descriptive statistics of each dataset were computed to assess any tendencies or inconsistencies. The following tables, graphs, and figures illustrate the data quality.

Using the NDEP and ASPRS Guidelines for Vertical Accuracy Testing

The required Fundamental Vertical Accuracy (FVA) and the optional Supplemental Vertical Accuracy (SVA) and Consolidated Vertical Accuracy (CVA) are specified by the NDEP and ASPRS guidelines. FVA determines how well the digital data was collected in open terrain type ground cover where all errors are presumed to be random. The SVA determines how well the digital data represents the actual ground in each of the ground cover categories, tested separately. The CVA determines the overall accuracy of all the ground categories combined as one test.

FVA for this project is calculated using only the checkpoints in the *Hard Surface* ground cover category. The digital data in this category is most likely to represent the actual ground surface and the random errors will follow a normal error distribution. The FVA shows how well the Photogrammetric process used to produce the digital vertical data represents the actual ground. With a normal error distribution, the vertical accuracy at the 95% confidence level is computed as the vertical root mean square error ($RMSE_z$) of the checkpoints x 1.9600, as specified in Appendix 3-A of the NSSDA guidelines. As shown in Table 1, the FVA for this project (2 ft contours) is 1.19 ft.

CVA is calculated with all the checkpoints in all the ground cover categories combined. There is a possibility that the digital vertical data may yield errors that do not follow a normal distribution. CVA at the 95% confidence level equals the 95th percentile error for all checkpoints in all ground cover categories combined. The CVA produces a listing of the 5% outliers that are larger than the 95th percentile and that may not follow the normal error distribution.

SVA is computed for each ground cover category separately. There again is a possibility that the digital vertical data may yield errors that do not follow a normal error distribution. Systematic errors per ground cover category are identified. For each category, the SVA at the 95% confidence level equals the 95th percentile error for all checkpoints in each individual ground cover category. The individual SVA statistics are used to analyze the data based on each of the ground cover categories.

Table 2 summarizes the vertical accuracy by Fundamental, Consolidated, and Supplemental methods:

Table 2 – FVA, CVA, and SVA Vertical Accuracy at 95% Confidence Level

Ground Cover Category	***# of Points***	***FVA Fundamental Vertical accuracy Spec = 1.19 ft***	***CVA Consolidated Vertical accuracy Spec = 1.19 ft***	***SVA Supplemental Vertical accuracy Spec = 1.19 ft***
Total Combined	533		0.469	
Hard Surface	433	0.467		0.447
Short Grass	20			0.341
Tall Grass	40			0.711
Brush	20			0.604
Woods	20			0.493

The digital vertical data for the Coles County meets all mandatory and target specifications as per the following vertical accuracy tests:

Compared with the 1.19 ft FVA specification, FVA tested 0.467 ft at the 95% confidence level on the hard surfaces ground cover category, based on $RMSE_z$ x 1.9600. The NSSDA specifies that vertical accuracy at the 95% confidence level equals $RMSE_z$ x 1.9600; the NDEP and ASPRS stat that this method is valid only when random errors follow a normal error distribution, as in the hard surface category.

Compared with the 1.19 ft CVA specification, CVA tested 0.469 ft at the 95% confidence level on the hard surfaces, short grass, tall grass, brush, and woods ground cover categories combined, based on the 95th Percentile. NDEP and ASPRS guidelines specify that vertical accuracy at the 95% confidence level equals the 95th percentile when random errors may not follow a normal error distribution, as in vegetated or obstructed areas. Table 3 lists the 5% outliers larger than the 95th percentile (0.469ft).

Table 3 – 5% Outliers Larger than 95th Percentile

Ground Cover Category	*Elev. Diff (ft)*	
Tall Grass	0.476	Zero of the errors were larger than the CVA standard (1.19ft) which permits up to 5% of the checkpoints, 26 out of 533, to be larger than 1.19 ft.
Profile	0.476	
Profile	0.478	
Woods	0.486	
Profile	0.487	
Building	0.488	
Brush	0.492	
Profile	0.503	
Profile	0.506	
Profile	0.51	
Tall Grass	0.521	
Tall Grass	0.526	
Tall Grass	0.527	
Profile	0.577	
Profile	0.577	
Tall Grass	0.584	
Tall Grass	0.591	
Profile	0.593	
Brush	0.596	
Woods	0.633	
Tall Grass	0.7	
Brush	0.764	
Building	0.888	
Tall Grass	0.929	
Tall Grass	1.026	

Compared with the 1.19 ft SVA target values, SVA tested 0.447 ft at the 95% confidence level on hard surfaces; 0.341 ft in short grass; 0.711 ft in tall grass; 0.604 ft in brush; and 0.493 ft in woods ground cover categories, based on the 95th Percentile

Figure 1 illustrates the SVA by specific ground cover category. Figure 2 illustrates the magnitude of the differences between the checkpoints and the digital vertical data by specific ground cover category and sorted from lowest to highest. Zero of the checkpoints are beyond the 1.19 ft criteria shown in figure 2. This exceeds the 95% requirement, where up to 5% of the checkpoints could be outside the 1.19 ft criteria.

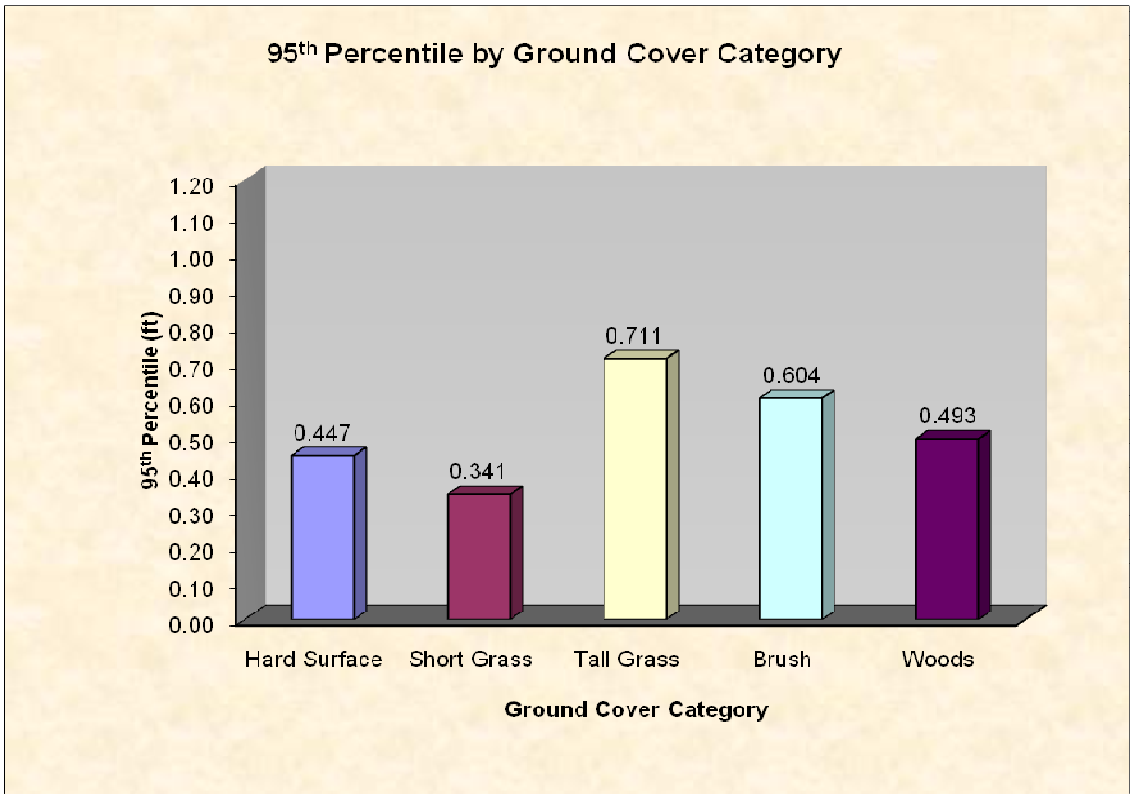

Figure 1 -- Graph of SVA Values by Ground Cover Category

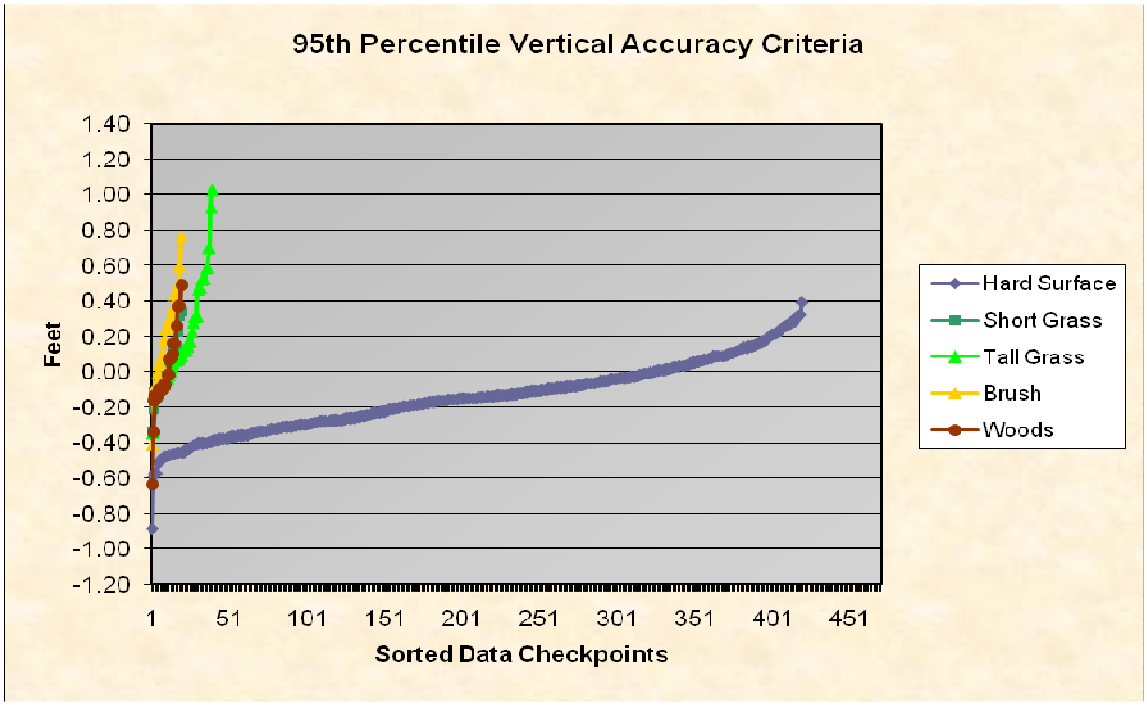

Figure 2 – Magnitude of Elevation Discrepancies, Sorted from Largest Negative to Largest Positive

Vertical Accuracy Testing in Accordance with NSSDA and FEMA Procedures

The NSSDA and FEMA guidelines were both published before it was recognized that digital data errors do not always follow a normal error distribution. Future changes to these guidelines are expected to follow those of the NDEP and ASPRS. In order to comply with FEMA's current requirements, $RMSE_z$ and other statistics were computed in all five ground cover categories, individually and combined. These statistics are shown in Figures 3 and 4 and Table 4 below.

Figure 3 shows the RMSEz values as calculated for each ground cover category separately.

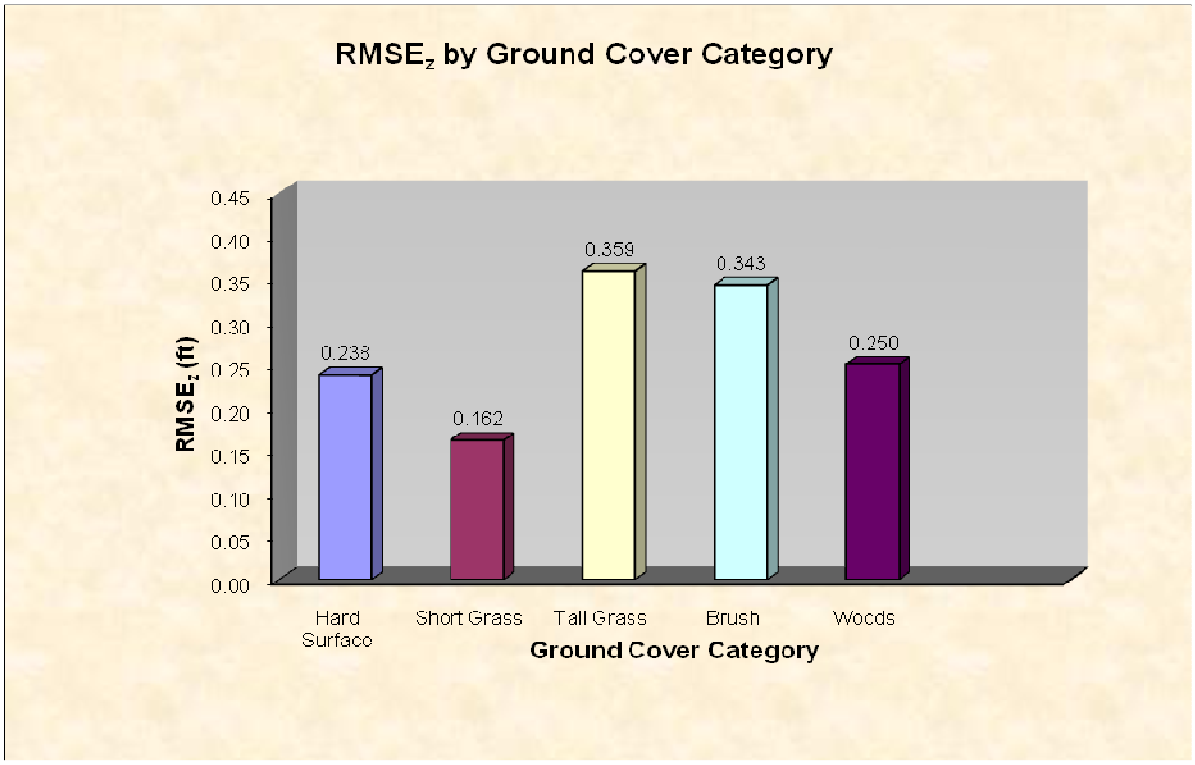

Figure 3 – $RMSE_z$ statistics by Ground Cover Category

Table 4 – Overall Descriptive Statistics by Ground Cover Category

Land Cover Category	*RMSEz (ft)*	*Mean (ft)*	*Median (ft)*	*Skew*	*Std Dev (ft)*	*# of Points*	*Min (ft)*	*Max (ft)*
Consolidated	0.252	-0.092	-0.106	0.733	0.235	533	-0.888	1.026
Hard Surface	0.238	-0.140	-0.145	0.065	0.193	433	-0.888	0.398
Short Grass	0.162	0.021	0.027	0.027	0.165	20	-0.343	0.341
Tall Grass	0.359	0.182	0.105	0.847	0.313	40	-0.347	1.026
Brush	0.343	0.207	0.244	-0.132	0.280	20	-0.409	0.764
Woods	0.250	0.000	-0.046	-0.231	0.257	20	-0.633	0.486

Figure 4 shows a histogram of the elevation differences between the field surveyed checkpoints and the TIN surface computed from the digital vertical data. The histogram shows the number of occurrences (frequency) along the vertical axis that fell within the 0.20 ft ranges shown along the horizontal axis.

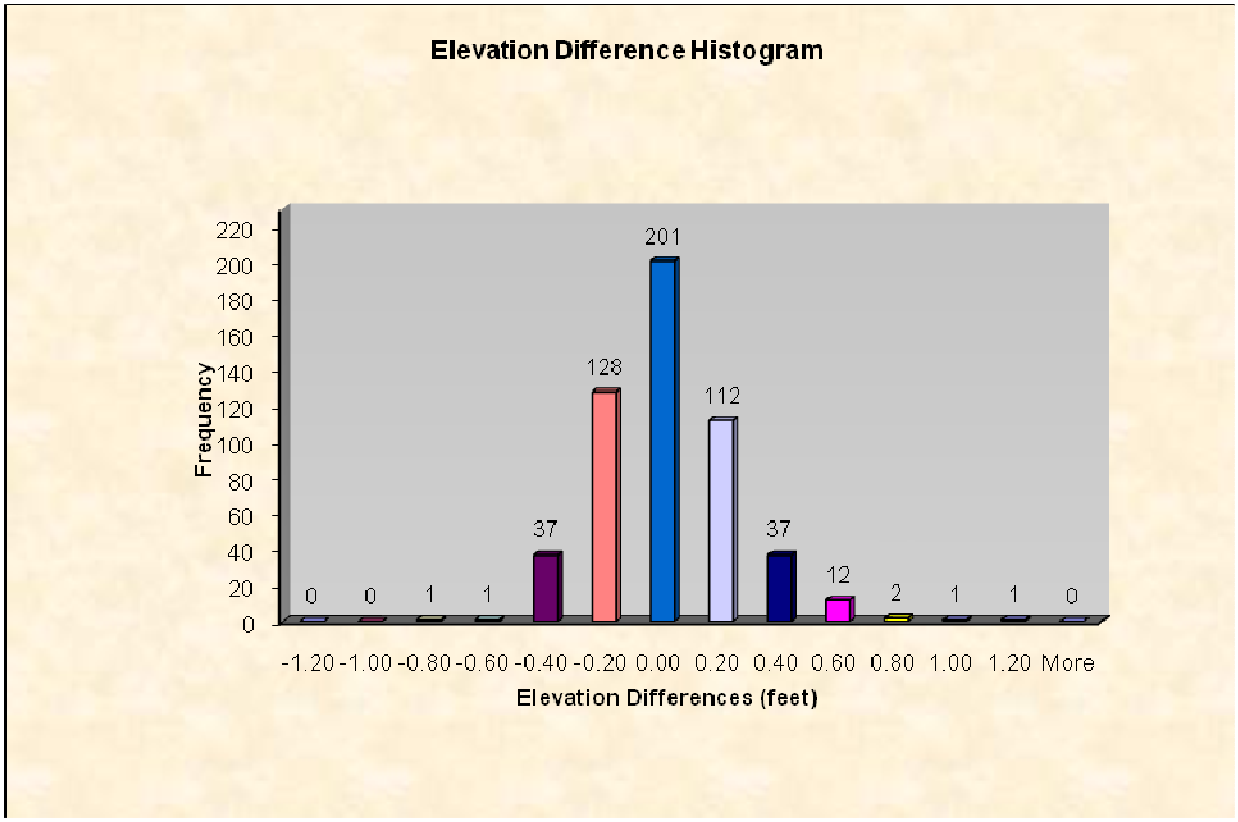

Figure 4 – Histogram of Elevation Discrepancies within 0.2 ft bands

Summary and Conclusions

The vertical accuracy testing methods derived from the NSSDA/FEMA and NDEP/ASPRS guidelines, when applied to the Coles County, verify that the digital vertical data provided by AERO-METRIC is well suited for the production of 2 ft contours.

Per NSSDA/FEMA guidelines: $RMSE_z$ x 1.9600 = 95% confidence level
0.238 x 1.9600 = 0.467 ft

Per NDEP/ASPRS guidelines: 95th percentile (CVA) = 95% confidence level
= 0.469 ft

Both of the 95% confidence level test results exceed the required 1.19 ft accuracy level to support the generation of 2 ft contours.

[1] Part 3: *National Standards for Spatial Data Accuracy (NSSDA)*, "Geospatial Positioning Accuracy Standards," published by the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC), 1998

[2] Appendix A, *Guidance for Aerial Mapping and Surveying*, "Guidelines and Specifications for Flood Hazard Mapping Partners," published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), April 2003

[3] *Guidelines for Digital Elevation Data*, Version 1.0, published by the National Digital Elevation Program (NDEP), May 2004

[4] *ASPRS Guidelines, Vertical Accuracy Reporting for Lidar Data*, published by the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS), May 2004