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Student B
GEOG 806
Dr. Terry Slocum
Ethics Response

Nice discussion, but I think you could have put more emphasis on all of the potentially affected parties.

The Weight of the Caribou

This situation involves a GIS analyst working for an environmental firm hired by a natural gas utility to create a map for a proposed pipeline. This map is to be created in preparation for a public hearing. The analyst has gathered the necessary variety of data to display features of the physical landscape along with other variables such as boundaries, laws, and regulations. Along with this data the analyst includes caribou migration routes that intersect the proposed pipeline at several locations. The analyst brings the attention of caribou migration routes to her supervisor, who instructs her to remove this data from the maps that will appear at the hearing. The firm, utility, and especially the analyst are faced with difficult ethical questions and decisions that require critical analysis. The consequences of these decisions will have significant impacts on their reputations, careers, and the environment.

The analyst has the option to create the map with the migration routes if she feels inclined to do so. This option however could be potentially unethical if she doesn't ^{not clear why it is unethical} follow the instructions of her supervisor and accepts payment from her employer. If the analyst does in fact decide to follow her supervisor's instruction she is creating a misrepresentation by leaving out the migration routes. This misrepresentation and omission of relevant facts is unethical for her assignment, which sought to assess the physical and human landscape, despite the request from her supervisor. If she follows through with the omission of migration routes, the environmental firm's reputation and credibility could be jeopardized under public scrutiny by various special interest groups.

The analyst doesn't yet have enough information to make a decision. She needs to understand why her supervisor instructed her to remove the migration routes first, then act accordingly. The only logical step would be to speak with the supervisor and find ~~these~~ ^{the supervisor's} reasons behind instruction. It is probable that this decision was made solely by the firm or in conjunction with the utility. Regardless, she is faced ^{with} a decision to work on the project or refuse to work for the project. If she continues with the project, it can be presumed that she could theoretically chose anonymity for her work. Choosing this option would preserve her credibility from possible public scrutiny leaving the firm to take the blame. She must then decide if this is appropriate and fair option to her employer. If she decides to work on the project she has to question the ethical obligation of environmental degradation and livelihood of the caribou in the ecosystem.

If she felt so inclined, she could refuse to continue with the project on the grounds that omitting caribou migration routes is unethical. She could further this by refusing to work for the company based on similar grounds. The outcome of this decision could seriously affect her career and income. Yet, regardless of whether or not she takes credit for the maps, we can assume she would be in relatively good standing with her superiors if she omitted the migration routes. Her good standing could possibly lead to opportunities and rewards for the company in the future.

Let us assume, due to its high probability, that the utility and firm decided collectively to leave out any data that would call into question the interests of the proposed pipeline, such as caribou migration routes. This assumption calls into question the ethics of the analyst. She must weigh whether the omission is unethical or not and whether she is obligated to inform the public. It is reasonable to assume that the Alaskan

public has a right to know about potential environmental degradation and wildlife endangerment and to have a voice and vote in the matter. She must weigh the well being of the caribou with that of her career. Here we must again acknowledge that she is required by the firm to make the maps as long as she is an employee.

Her employment requires the creation of maps, but doesn't require caribou migration routes. However we must take into account that humanity is inextricably tied to the environment in which we live and are responsible for. In this situation I believe since she is the source for the dissemination of information she is required on moral and ethical grounds to represent all the pertinent information. She can choose to do this in a variety of ways. She can include them in the maps for the public hearing, or choose another method of dissemination to ensure the public is informed. This is another ethical decision she must weigh. Should she risk her career for the caribou or find a way to distribute information about the migration routes anonymously and betray her allegiance to the firm?

Naturally it should be recommended that she further discuss with her supervisor and others in the firm the reasoning behind the decision. If in fact, the decision was made collectively between the firm and the utility, then it would reasonably ^{be} necessary to discuss this issue with the utility as well. When she meets with the utility, she should communicate and demonstrate the moral and ethical obligations of the company for the transparency of the migration routes. This will not only avoid public scrutiny for the company if the routes are displayed, but will ensure an honest policy and public respect for the firm and utility.

good point

The analyst clearly is obligated to make some decisions based on her beliefs,
values, morals, and personal interests that will have significant consequences for all
parties involved.

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