

NEWS RELEASE

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UAlbany's Center for Technology in Government Releases Report on Knowledge Sharing Innovations in the Natural Resource Community

ALBANY, N.Y. (September 13, 2007) – The Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany has released its latest report, Knowledge Sharing Innovations in the Natural Resources Community. The report documents the experiences of eight project teams that participated in a collaborative program, The Electronic Commons, funded by the USDA Forest Service Wood Education and Resource Center, in partnership with the USDA Forest Service Region 9 National Forests and Northern Initiatives, a nongovernmental organization based in Marquette, MI. Northern Initiatives and the USDA Forest Service engaged the services of CTG to assist the grantees as they developed and implemented their projects and to capture lessons learned.

According to Peter Cambier, vice president of Northern Initiatives, "The program was designed to increase understanding of the potential benefits of and challenges to using information technology for communication and knowledge sharing among natural-resource professionals and volunteer organizations, schools, and communities neighboring national forests, as well as individuals interested in learning about natural-resource management."

Eight project teams were funded to explore technology-based strategies such as Web sites and Webinars as tools for sharing knowledge on natural-resource topics of concern to their communities and to build communities of practice. "Our task was to counsel the participants during the process, as well as to capture the lessons learned," said Donna Canestraro, CTG program manager. "The report is an excellent toolkit for anyone who is trying to deal with the challenges of geographically dispersed teams and constituents."

The report concludes that each team achieved their overall objective and successfully created and used technology-based innovations to share knowledge about natural resources management. Along the way they found that many of the obstacles they faced had to do as much with the challenges of multi-organizational, collaborative efforts as it did with limited understanding of the technologies under consideration. They found their success relied as much on their ability to adapt known project management and communication skills to this new environment as it did on their efforts to build understanding about how technology could be leveraged to support the goals of their various partnerships.

In addition, the project sponsors found evidence that their small investments in community-based efforts to employ technologies in new and innovative ways in support of knowledge sharing did make a difference in how information is shared with and used by geographically dispersed and disparate communities.

"We were very pleased with the results of the project and learned a number of things we hope to apply with others," noted Al Steele, liaison for USDA Forest Service Wood Education and Resource Center. "In these days of tight budgets, we can't do it all ourselves and must be more effective in developing mutually beneficial partnerships. Our partners leveraged the modest funding we provided by taking full advantage of the amazing expertise available to them at CTG. We think we've established the viability of these collaborative networks and hope we've created a group of colleagues who can now be the first generation resource for grantees of the future."

The eight project teams are:

- Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University – Department of Forestry
- University of Minnesota, Natural Resource Research Institute
- The Nature Conservancy of Michigan and The Stewardship Network
- The Nature Conservancy of Indiana
- Northeast Minnesota Forestry Industry
- Shelburne Farms and Green Mountain National Forest, Vermont
- Nicolet Distance Education Network
- University of Georgia Cooperative Extension

While the toolkit is specifically directed toward natural resources practitioners in government, academic, and

not-for-profit settings, it also provides valuable lessons for any organization involved in community-based collaborative knowledge sharing activities. Advice for use by funding organizations was also captured from the project teams and is shared in the report as well.

The full report can be downloaded from CTG Web site at:
http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/reports/knowledge_sharing.

The Center for Technology in Government is an applied research center devoted to improving government and public services through policy, management, and technology innovation. The Center, located at the University at Albany, works with government to develop well-informed information strategies that foster innovation and enhances the quality and coordination of public services. For more information visit www.ctg.albany.edu.

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