High Tech Communication Spans Geographic Distance for Rural Communities

Collaboration Creates Ways to Share Information and Solutions
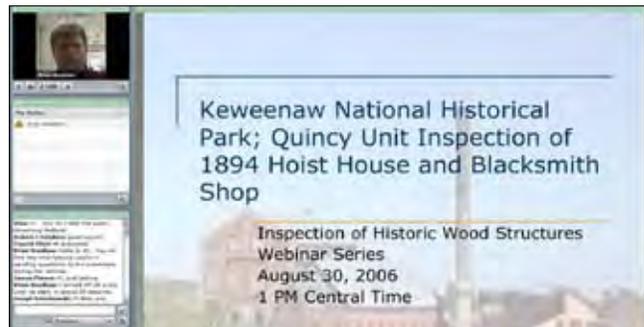
The Challenge

While the communities that border the Nation's national forests are diverse, they share similar economic, social, and environmental challenges. Geographic distance has limited the ability of these communities to share natural resources information and solutions among themselves. Many are unaware of natural resource-related technical assistance, training, and community-building assistance that may be available from government, nonprofit, or private sources. Better communication would benefit communities, but also natural resource professionals, volunteer organizations, schools, and others interested in national forests and neighboring communities.

The Solution

The Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany, New York; the Northern Economic Initiatives Corporation; and the U.S. Forest Service Eastern Region are collaborating with the U.S. Forest Service Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry Wood Education and Resource Center (WERC) to share information and solutions on topics of concern to national forests and nearby communities.

The project's goal is to conquer the challenges and reap the benefits of using advanced communication technologies to enhance community environmental, economic, and social health. Eight training, technical assistance, and natural resource-related projects were funded. Projects include a University of Minnesota Natural Resource Research Institute "Webinar" series for owners and inspectors on preserving historic wooden structures, and a series of Nature Conservancy-sponsored on-line training sessions on invasive plant management. A reference guide for groups interested in launching a similar effort captures "lessons learned" from the project teams, lists available resources, and offers advice to funding organizations.

Technology for sharing natural resources information and building communities: making it work for you.

Webinar on the condition assessment of the 1894 Hoist House and Blacksmith Shop of the Keweenaw National Historic Park, Quincy Mine Unit.

Resulting Benefits

- Developed web-based information technologies to sustain economic development in the wood products industry.
- Demonstrated communication technologies to improve the economy in national forest communities
- Shared collaborative community-based innovations and information among diverse, geographically dispersed stakeholders
- Developed a network of organizations that have access to information or can provide expertise about issues such as invasive species, weed management or other natural resource-related topics impacting national forests and state and private forestry issues

Sharing Success

- A toolkit, Knowledge Sharing Innovations in the Natural Resources Community, was developed and is available at: http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/reports/knowledge_sharing
- Participation by communities from across the Eastern United States.
- Shared information through interactive Web sites, Webinars and electronic presentations.
- Developed information and training materials for use in remote training workshops.
- Facilitated an on-going exchange of ideas and information among agencies.

More information about the projects is available at: http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/reports/knowledge_sharing?chapter=8>