Dodge Foundation Funds Innovative Mapping Technology

The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation has supported the Rowan University Department of Geography, Planning and Sustainability's New Jersey Municipal Asset Profiler (NJ MAP) web-mapping tool for visualizing the state's environmental landscape with a $65,000 grant.

The private foundation, based in Morristown, New Jersey and established in 1974, focuses on issues critical to New Jersey and partners specifically with organizations whose work has a direct and meaningful impact on our home state.

"New Jersey is our place," said Margaret Waldock, Environment Program Director for the Foundation. "We support projects in many areas including the arts and education, but we are solidly committed to advancing New Jersey's environmental initiatives. We work with organizations who are striving to conserve land as our small state experiences serious development pressure."

With $3 million worth of funding a year dedicated to environmental protection in New Jersey, the Foundation recognizes conservation efforts are overwhelmingly supported by the public but are heavily limited by funds.

"The sky is the limit with this mapping tool," said Waldock. "New Jersey's conservation efforts are only limited by the amount of funds they receive. For anyone who cares about local land use, conserving land and the decision making process that goes into it all, this tool is invaluable in helping make the right environmental decisions in regard to individual communities and making Rowan's expertise tangible."

The Dodge funding allows NJ MAP to be made freely available for anyone interested in visualizing information about New Jersey's environment.

Initially developed by Rowan's Geospatial Research Lab (GeoLab) in 2011, NJ MAP is a set of internet-based geospatial tools designed to assist local New Jersey municipalities in making sound land use and environmental management decisions that can help achieve sustainability goals and objectives.

The project is designed so that volunteer citizen users can access the vast amounts of geospatial data available for New Jersey that are typically only usable to trained GIS professionals.

Project Director, Dr. John Hasse, Professor of Geography and Director of the GeoLab in the School of Earth & Environment, has worked with Rowan's geography department to develop and enhance NJ MAP and expand its reach throughout the state.

"We saw a great need to provide information at the local level," said Dr. Hasse. "This project can really help communicate, educate and inform New Jersey residents about land and environmental management."

In 2016, the GeoLab collaborated with the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the NJ Chapter of the Nature Conservancy to expand NJ MAP's capabilities for supporting land conservation, resulting in "The New Jersey Lands Conservation Blueprint," a set of map themes that facilitate the work of over two dozen conservation organizations and agencies.

NJ MAP is also being used as an educational tool for Rowan geography students, whose work is integral to the tool's success.

"Our student interns are centrally involved in the work of NJ MAP and we are also using it in a number of our courses," explained Megan Bucknum, a 3/4 faculty researcher in the department and NJ MAP Project Coordinator. "NJ MAP is a huge public service and it's been great having this project from our lab that integrates education and implementation with faculty resources, student interns and research funding."

With continued support from the Dodge Foundation, NJ MAP will be expanding its functionality to begin mapping New Jersey's watersheds in order to help protect water quality, minimize flooding and foster water-shed based stewardship.

"This project is vital in protecting New Jersey's ecology, farmland, clean water and overall community," concluded Dr. Hasse. "We are grateful to the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for their continued investment in our work and its impact." RA