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UNH To Host National Earth Science Group Commemorating Ten Years Of "Making Data Matter"

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Ten years ago, NASA founded the Federation of Earth Science Information Partners (ESIP) to manage and disseminate the ever-increasing load of data generated daily by Earth-orbiting satellites. Put simply, it was an effort to put to good use this cornucopia of high-tech information gathered from on high and contribute significantly to the creation of a healthy and sustainable planet.

By any measure that effort has been successful and today ESIP members provide several terabytes-worth of the Earth science data gathered every day by satellites to researchers, educators, policy makers and the general public.

That success will be noted at a three-day meeting beginning Tuesday, July 15, 2008 on the University of New Hampshire's Durham campus when federation partners, including researchers at UNH, will celebrate 10 years of "making data matter."

"The whole idea of the federation was to provide a network that would take NASA scientific data, a lot of which is satellite imagery, make it more understandable, and move it down the pipeline - from researchers to agencies to the general population and educators," says research scientist Annette Schloss of the UNH Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space (EOS).

Schloss, along with former EOS director Berrien Moore, were founding members of ESIP with the creation of UNH's EOS-WEBSTER Earth-science data portal in 1998. EOS-WEBSTER, which stands for "WEB-based System for Terrestrial Ecosystem Research," was developed through a $3.5 million grant from NASA.

Schloss calls the ESIP consortium a "unique collaboratory" that brings together a group of people who would not normally know about each other, let alone work together, in an effort to synthesize data sets that tend to be very large, poorly cataloged, widely distributed, and difficult to access. At the same time, these data have the potential for providing scientifically valid answers to many of the world's most pressing environmental problems.

Today, the ESIP consortium is comprised of more than 90 organizations that collect, interpret, and develop applications for remotely sensed Earth observation information. Included in the federation network are NASA, NOAA, and USGS data centers, research universities, government research laboratories, supercomputing facilities, education resource providers, information technology innovators, nonprofit organizations and commercial enterprises.

The federation has grown significantly over the last decade, and Schloss notes that a spurt of

growth in last couple of years "shows that a lot of institutions and government agencies and even for-profit organizations are seeing this as a very valuable organization to belong to." The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is one of the latest to join.

ESIP groups work in and disseminate information from topical "clusters" to manage the potentially unwieldy amount of satellite-derived data. For example, current clusters include those on air quality, water management, coastal management, public health, disaster management, and ecological forecasting - the latter involving the ability to predict how ecosystems will respond to human and natural influences. A carbon cluster, which will address needs for data integration and decision support in carbon cycle management, was formed in January 2008.

For more information on ESIP visit www.esipfed.org , and for more on EOS-WEBSTER go to eos-webster.sr.unh.edu .

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