6-17-2010

UNH Computing Center Develops State-Of-The-Art Oil Spill Response Tool

Erika Mantz
UNH Media Relations

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/news

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.unh.edu/news/3358

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Administrative Offices at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Media Relations by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.
UNH Computing Center Develops State-Of-The-Art Oil Spill Response Tool

June 17, 2010

DURHAM, N.H. -- The Research Computing Center (RCC) at the University of New Hampshire, in partnership with UNH’s Coastal Response Research Center and NOAA, developed the web-based tool that is recognized as the one-stop shop for detailed near-real-time information about the response to the Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill.

“This spill response is being conducted from a number of different sites and it is vital to have a tool that allows everyone to have access to the same information and operate from a common picture,” said Nancy Kinner, co-director of the Coastal Response Research Center. “This tool – the Environmental Response Management Application (ERMA®) – was born at UNH and it is crucial to getting resources allocated to the areas we need to protect. Before two years ago everything was on paper and this hampered the response and coordination.”

The web-based GIS platform incorporates data from the various agencies that are working together to tackle the spill. Originally designed for responders, who make operational decisions, to the oil spill disaster, http://www.GeoPlatform.gov/gulfresponse integrates the latest data on the oil spill’s trajectory, fishery closure areas, wildlife and place-based Gulf Coast resources -- such as pinpointed locations of oiled shoreline and daily position of research and response vessels -- into one customizable interactive map.

The launch of the public site on June 14, 2010, was designed to facilitate communication and coordination among a variety of users -- from federal, state and local responders to local community leaders and the public. Beyond NOAA data, it includes data from Homeland Security, the Coast Guard, the Fish and Wildlife Service, EPA, NASA, U.S. Geological Survey and the Gulf states. It is designed to be fast, user-friendly and constantly updated.

The people doing that updating around the clock are programmers in RCC; primarily Philip Collins and Robert St. Lawrence. ERMA was first developed three years ago as a tool for responders and it was operational in one hour for the Gulf of Mexico spill. The programmers then worked for approximately four weeks to develop the public version, which had 3.4 million hits on the first day of its release.

“This has been an incredible project for us to work on,” said Patrick Messer, director of UNH’s Research Computing Center. “They came to us with a problem and we all worked together on how to solve it. It allowed my staff to actively participate in the design of the software, which was very rewarding. We may not be down on the coast, but it feels good to know we’re helping to make a difference.”

Jane Lubchenco, undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator, praised the site saying it “provides users with an expansive, yet detailed geographic picture of what’s going on with the spill; Gulf Coast fisherman, recreational boaters, beach users and birders will be able to become more informed. It’s a common operational picture that allows the American people to see how their government is responding to the crisis.”

“UNH is conducting cutting-edge research every day and the partnership that led to the development of this critical tool is a perfect example of how we take innovation and partner it with the needs of the people out there doing the work,” said Jan Nisbet, senior vice provost for research at UNH. “This tool is used in White House briefings and by leaders in the response effort. That’s an incredible impact.”

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state’s flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

-30-
