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USING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS AS A COMMON GROUND FOR DIALOGUE ABOUT WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP

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ABSTRACT: To help prepare professionals for leadership positions in watershed stewardship, the Center for Watershed Stewardship (CWS) at Penn State University has adapted GIS for use in its curriculum. The GIS is used as a common ground for communication between graduate students representing several departments or programs in an interdisciplinary, yearlong Keystone Project. The Keystone Project group works with a community organization to produce a watershed stewardship plan. Currently, Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) ArcView 3.2a and 8.1 and several extensions are used routinely. Arc/Info 8.1 is also available for more complicated analyses and data management. This software is available in a dedicated computer laboratory with a 100-megabit network connecting 8 desktop and 2 laptop computers, with a dedicated geo-database and print server. CWS has committed funding for a teaching assistantship to support the computer operations and provide technical support. Students in the program come with varied GIS experience. Students have the option to take several GIS courses around the university and via CWS-sponsored short courses offered to professionals in business, government, and the nonprofit sectors. The students help each other to learn how to work with the data to develop a story of the watershed of interest, reinforcing a collaborative learning environment.