

GIS training: 'More than making a map'



The training 40-plus conservation workers from northern Minnesota's Technical Service Areas 3 and 8 received this winter will help them to focus on locations most likely to improve water quality.

The February session centered on using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data for watershed and project analysis. It moved participants beyond using GIS data solely for reports, and showed them how to share it with people.

Crow Wing Soil & Water Conservation District Manager Melissa Barrick of TSA 8 hosted and coordinated the training with Board Conservationist Erin Loeffler. Mitch Brinks, the GIS analyst for TSA 8, delivered the training with Clint Little of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Lake Superior Coastal Program.

Trainers reviewed commonly available GIS data, such as land use and land cover, LiDAR,

demographics, water quality and soils/groundwater. They explained how to use maps to tell a story and ask better questions.

With basic GIS, it's possible to map projects and show where work has been done on the scale of a field or watershed. Combining geospatial datasets with water quality data results can help organizations target areas where public investments will have the most benefit. The resulting information can be presented in ways that are easy for citizens and policymakers to grasp quickly.

Merging many layers of watershed information can show where multiple environmental benefits can be achieved. It can identify watersheds where conservation services can be proactively presented to landowners, and where watershed-scale changes can be measured.

"The response of local staff

looking for more effective ways to target conservation installation and present complex information in an understandable way shows that they recognize that Geographic Information Systems is about much more than just making a map," said Jeff Hrubec. A Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) clean water specialist, he also attended the training.

Building GIS skills in local offices to include proactive watershed analysis can help organizations to coordinate water plans and maximize the efficient delivery of conservation resources.

The combination of a GIS analyst from TSA 8 plus local staff members who understand the availability and significance of GIS data has proven effective in advancing watershed planning in north-central Minnesota.

Advanced GIS training sessions are being contemplated.

More than 40 people learned how to get the most out of GIS data during a February training hosted by Crow Wing Soil & Water Conservation District. Trainers were Mitch Brinks, the GIS analyst for Technical Service Area 8, and Clint Little of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Lake Superior Coastal Program. Courtesy Photo

