



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP WITH A UNIVERSITY GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT TO BUILD MAPPING CAPACITY

Rock County, Wisconsin

THE PROBLEM

To better understand and visualize nitrate impacts to groundwater, Rock County Public Health Department planned to map a significant number of groundwater-related factors such as land use, irrigation systems, soil types, and wastewater systems. Because there was so much to map, the planning team was concerned they wouldn't be able to devote as many resources as they'd like to the project.

WHAT ROCK COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT DID

Public health department staff contacted the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Geography Department to see if they had any budding Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-proficient students who would be willing to intern with the health department on this project. The Geography Department was as excited about the potential partnership as staff at the health department were. Two advanced students were up for the task. During their internship, they were able to map four complex, groundwater-related layers and participate in refining and adjusting a tool to help communities assess groundwater nitrate risks.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

The public health department benefited from the time and expertise of the students, and the students gained valuable real world experience. This new partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's Geography Department will continue to be fruitful in years to come: they have already started conversations about future projects at the intersection of public health and GIS.



We are pleased we had the opportunity to send interns to work with the Rock County Public Health Department on a county-wide nitrate risk assessment tool. The department is hopeful that an ongoing relationship can be developed to allow our students to gain practical experience in applying GIS and other skills to the public health needs of Rock County.

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