

Innovative Web Based Communications and the Chesapeake Bay

Michael Land¹ and Guy Stephens²

¹National Park Service, Chesapeake Bay Program, Annapolis, MD, USA

²University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, Chesapeake Bay Program, Annapolis, MD, USA

The Chesapeake Bay Program is a unique regional partnership that has led and directed the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since 1983. The Chesapeake Bay Program partners include the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia; the District of Columbia; the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body; the Environmental Protection Agency, representing the federal government; and participating citizen advisory groups.

The Chesapeake Bay Program has maintained a web presence for well over a decade. In that time we have evolved the site both to keep up with the changing landscape of technology and too in an effort to find innovative ways to communicate our diverse scientific messages to broad and ever expanding audiences. The Chesapeake Bay Program website communicates scientific, educational, interpretive and technical information to an incredibly diverse audience ranging from the concerned citizen, to teachers and students, to research scientists, to government agencies to watershed organizations. Communicating effectively to such a diverse range of audiences requires a unique blend of well crafted content, interpretive charts and infographics, up to the minute news, interactive tools and resources and increasingly, the integration of social media and other avenues that encourage active engagement.

The next iteration of the Chesapeake Bay Program web site (launching summer 2011) leverages the latest technologies, both from a backend perspective and in terms of innovative communications methodologies. In redeveloping the site we engaged in a comprehensive discovery process to better understand the needs of our diverse audiences and to develop innovative approaches to communicate the complex science behind the restoration efforts. This led to a redevelopment of the web site information architecture which focused on clearly defining the issues affecting the Chesapeake Bay watershed and explaining how the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership was leading the way to protect and restore this national treasure. With www.chesapeakebay.net we've been able to successfully communicate complex scientific information, such as the importance of underwater grasses or how stormwater impacts rivers and streams and in an easily digested, effective manner online.

In this session, we'll talk about successes, failures and lessons learned in our attempts to communicate Chesapeake science, restoration and to facilitate engagement among stakeholders in the Chesapeake region. We will discuss our discovery process and how that helped us to redevelop the information architecture. Additionally we will talk about the technical approach we choose to developing the site and how that approach will allow us to more efficiently communicate the Chesapeake stories and messages.

Contact Information: Michael F Land, National Park Service, Chesapeake Bay Program, 410 Severn Avenue, Suite 112, Annapolis, MD 21012 USA, Phone: 410-267-9832, Fax: 410-267-5777, Email: miland@chesapeakebay.net