PRESS RELEASE

On August 10th the Region 9 Planning & Development Council held the fourth annual Eastern Panhandle West Virginia GIS Users Group Meeting at the Country Inn in Berkeley Springs, with a crowd of 60 in attendance. Attendees heard presentations on mass evacuation planning, linking digital photographs to GPS data, parcel mapping projects, referencing historic maps, determining rooftop slopes for potential solar panels, and various state initiatives.

Using geography to plan and make decisions is not new, but the effort has been enhanced by Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. GIS integrates computer hardware, software and data for capturing, managing, analyzing and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information. If you have used Google Earth to view a satellite image of your neighborhood or tracked your location on a smartphone, you have experienced GIS technology.

Attendees came from West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and the Washington DC area, some driving over five hours. Representatives from local government were present, as well as private and non-profit organizations. Federal representatives from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration were in attendance. State agencies present included the WV Division of Forestry, WV Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, WV Department of Transportation and the WV Department of Environmental Protection. Academic attendees came from West Virginia University and Shepherd University.

Morgan County Commissioner Brenda Hutchinson welcomed the group "As someone with a real estate background, I find enormous value in GIS," explained Hutchinson. Matthew Pennington, Berkeley County Planner presented on his work with a local school board to predict future student populations and commented "If you've used a map, GIS is for you. Groups like this stimulate interaction, which leads to connection and collaboration beyond agency walls."

"It really is a great meeting, I've been to conferences with 10 times the number of people with less overall interest in GIS and how to use the latest technology for their benefit than what I've found here today," said first-time attendee Jim Owecke.

For more information on this annual event, contact the Region 9 Planning and Development Council at (304) 263-1743 or email bkidwell@region9wv.com.