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### *GeoConnections Project to Enhance Local Public Safety*

At the regular meeting of Lanark County Council last night, local MP Scott Reid, representing the Honourable Gary Lunn, Minister of Natural Resources, along with project leaders, announced to council the exciting partnership between the federal government and local stakeholders, including the county, that aims to enhance the accessibility and quality of online location-based (geospatial) information to benefit all citizens and visitors to the area.

The county's proposal to develop its Geospatial Emergency Management System was accepted by GeoConnections, and an agreement was signed in May. The project will make existing geospatial information, such as maps and satellite images, available at a moment's notice to decision makers during an emergency, including provincial and federal organizations, local authorities, the community (in terms of critical infrastructure involved) and the general public. Tools to create and enhance the data will also be designed.

The project is made possible with financial support from GeoConnections, a national program initiative led by Natural Resources Canada. GeoConnections and its program participants are working to enhance the Canadian Geospatial Data Infrastructure, an online resource that enables decision makers to access, combine and apply geographic information to gain new insights into social, environmental and economic issues.

"With this state-of-the-art information technology, public safety and security agencies across all levels of government will be better equipped to predict, prepare for and respond to emergencies," said Mr. Reid. "This partnership with Lanark County and all stakeholders is another example of Canada's New Government's commitment to building a stronger, safer, Canada."

The federal contribution to the project amounts to \$89,600, and the county's commitment is in kind through staff time and resources. The partnership also includes the Almonte General Hospital, local municipalities, the county's GIS supplier, emergency-service organizations and the County of Renfrew Emergency Management Coordinator.

In developing the Geospatial Emergency Management System, mitigation/prevention, preparedness, response and recovery are all taken into account in order to provide decision makers with the best information.

County Warden Al Lunney notes the project is far-reaching. "Various local, provincial and federal agencies will have pertinent, timely information at their fingertips in the event of an emergency," he said. "This enhances communication, which helps decision makers to further protect our citizens and visitors to Lanark County."

"This is an excellent opportunity for the county and our partners to develop our Geospatial Emergency Management System, which will be used to collect, share and maintain information we need during an emergency," added Peter Wagland, the county's chief administrative officer.

A project team consisting of representatives from local municipalities, the county, emergency services and Natural Resources Canada has been assembled and has outlined key tasks and a timeline in order to complete the project by March 31, 2008.

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