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Fostering Open-Source Research Via a World Wide Web System

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In recent years we have witnessed the incredibly productive power of "open-source" programming where independent software developers freely share their source code and collaborate globally over the Internet. While components of the Internet (e.g., email, FTP, etc.) have long been used as mechanisms for research collaboration, it has only been recently – since the development of the web – that the Internet as a system for research collaboration has been available to non-technical users. Even so, the free exchange of research data and products, similar to the open-source sharing of programs is still quite limited. This paper explores the question of how a web system might enhance and encourage open source modeling of land cover change and, in general, "open-source research." We discuss the concept of open-source and the creative and productive potential of open-source collaboration. We describe the foundations of open-source programming, largely in the context of Linux, and summarize lessons learned from these open-source efforts. Finally, we examine how these lessons might be applied in an open-source research setting by describing our initial efforts to establish a web system to encourage and foster open-source research and modeling of complex human-environment systems.

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