

***CoreCast: A USGS Podcast***  
**Office of Communications**  
**U.S. Geological Survey**  
**Reston, Virginia, U.S.**

**NEED/OPPORTUNITY** / The USGS is highly respected and well known in the scientific and academic communities. However, when it comes to the general public, the USGS has not done a lot of push marketing or used social media to put its information and messages in front of people who might not otherwise understand how USGS science applies to their lives. The information the USGS does make available publicly, though very valuable, is often presented in a way that a nontechnical audience might find difficult to digest or find personally relevant.

This presented an excellent opportunity to communicate how the USGS is involved in climate change, natural hazards, water quality, wildlife disease, satellite imagery, and much more in a way that just about anyone can appreciate. USGS science is relevant to most people's lives, and it's being used to serve those people and to solve major societal problems—this podcast is a way to tell them that and to expose them to a much deeper and broader look at USGS research.

**INTENDED AUDIENCE** / *CoreCast's* intended audience was somewhat tech-savvy people who are mildly to extremely interested in science. There are two secondary audiences:

- The USGS's more than 9,000 employees, who can use *CoreCast* as a way to understand and connect with the wide variety of work done throughout the USGS and its 400+ locations
- The news media, who can use *CoreCast* as a background source and can serve the USGS by directing their audiences to USGS's information and research

Research was done on popular podcasts produced by several federal, private, and publicly owned science entities, publications, and more to get an idea of the technicality, production quality, length, tone, and other qualities that the audiences *CoreCast* was trying to reach were looking for in a podcast.

Podcasts are likely to reach people who aren't inclined to give hours of their time but will give a little while to learn something interesting, whether they're at work, in the car, working out, etc.

*CoreCast* was launched as an internal-only product about five months before the public launch. Surveys and focus groups were conducted with USGS employees to see how they felt about *CoreCast*.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES** / The mission of the USGS office of communications and outreach is to help make USGS science widely known, sought out, and relied upon by the public and decision makers at all levels.

The vision of the USGS as a whole is to become a world leader in the natural sciences thanks to the organization's scientific excellence and responsiveness to society's needs.

Based on that guidance, *CoreCast* had two goals:

- Expose nontechnical audiences to USGS science and its societal relevance.
- Get them to visit the *CoreCast* site and download and/or subscribe to *CoreCast*.

**SOLUTION OVERVIEW** / This medium was chosen because of its personal nature—it's much easier to understand complex scientific topics when listening to a conversation directed toward

nontechnical audiences than it is by reading a jargon-heavy web site or fact sheet. The podcasts are designed to be like a discussion between a layperson and his or her scientist acquaintance. The medium also offers a chance to have fun and present information in radically different ways than the USGS has in the past, as heard in the parody advertisements at the beginning of some episodes.

Podcasts are also very flexible—they can be rerecorded and changed as often as necessary. They can also include video and images and can be distributed via web subscriptions and embedded in e-mails, pages other than the page of origin, electronic press releases, and more.

Finally, podcasts offer the opportunity to re-package information that has been in less dynamic print and web formats (reports, fact sheets and other publications) or isn't easily distributed (speeches or lectures, training procedures, etc.) saving time, effort and money.

The title, *CoreCast*, and the tag line, "It's natural science from the inside out," were created to reflect several things:

- The medium itself ("cast")
- The fact that it's about the science the USGS conducts ("natural science")
- The fact that this science is about the entire Earth and beyond (from the "core" out)
- That hard core science from within the USGS is being presented for a lay audience ("core," again, and "from the inside out")

This project was discussed with and approved by USGS communication leadership from the beginning, and every episode was discussed with the scientists and programs in question beforehand.

The podcast was distributed cost-free via RSS feeds through iTunes (which featured *CoreCast* as a "New and Notable" podcast for several weeks), Feedburner (a podcast distribution and tracking service), e-mail and any other RSS subscription vehicle. Publicity included press releases and event handouts (including the 2,000+ bookmarks taken by visitors to the USGS open house).

**IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES** / *CoreCast* was not given an explicit budget—office leadership didn't know about it until it was proposed, and the organization had very little money to contribute to new, unproven efforts.

The budget was pretty slim:

- *CoreCast* was launched and produced for several months on about US\$500 (for recording equipment—*CoreCast* was edited with free, open-source audio software, and no work was contracted out).
- As the ambition and interest in the project grew, that budget went up to about US\$1,700, which included two more of the US\$500 setups mentioned above and some promotional bookmarks, posters, and business cards for public events and conferences.

Resources and time were also limited:

- The three principle members of the team, who do most of the work, have many other responsibilities, several of which supersede podcasting (one is a scientist, one a web developer and one a writer/editor). Each member could devote about 25 percent or less of their time, and a typical episode takes two to four hours to produce.
- None of these principles had any previous experience with podcasting or audio editing.
- All production (script writing, audio editing, voiceovers, interviewing, web site creation and maintenance, etc.) was done in house.

**MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION** / Results have been measured with web statistics about page visits, subscriptions, downloads, and the geographic origin of visits, and they've been measured by investigating mentions in the news media/social media community. Below are the results as they relate to goals (all results are for August to December of 2007).

**Goal:** Expose nontechnical audiences to USGS science and its societal relevance.

**Results:**

- The *CoreCast* site was visited almost 130,000 times.
- Visitors were from about 25 countries.
- *CoreCast* was syndicated by OmniSound Radio, an Internet radio syndication site that receives about 1.3 million hits per month.
- The National Science Foundation is making *CoreCast* part of an all-science channel being prepared for XM Satellite Radio, which has more than eight million subscribers.
- *CoreCast* was mentioned and plugged in more than 10 independent blogs and podcast consolidation sites, and was used as a primary source for information and quotes in several news media stories.

**Goal:** Get people to visit the CoreCast site and download and/or subscribe to *CoreCast*.

**Results:**

- The CoreCast site was visited almost 130,000 times.
- *CoreCast* episodes were downloaded more than 20,000 times.
- More than 400 people subscribed to *CoreCast*, saying, in effect, "I like *CoreCast* enough that I want it automatically pushed to my computer every time a new episode comes out."
- On several occasions, *CoreCasts* were released in conjunction with press releases and new web sites, and on three such occasions, the CoreCast site saw its highest traffic ever, proving the value of and interest in these podcasts.

In two different instances of these peak occasions—both relating to the California wildfires of October 2007—the USGS newsroom (where the associated press releases originated) and the USGS's overall wildfire hazards web site each saw their highest numbers in months.

