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# BUSINESS REVIEW

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## RPI team will study development impacts on Hudson River ecosystem

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In the debate over economic development in the Hudson Valley, one hears a lot of anecdotal claims about the effect development will have on the economy, jobs, the natural environment, and on less measurable things like the quality of life and the social health of communities.

The hard part, says Jon Erickson, an assistant professor of economics at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, is coming up with a way to gauge how economic activity and changes in land use affect the ecosystem.

Hoping to answer that question, Erickson and John Gowdy, an RPI economics professor, will use a \$300,000 foundation grant to study the economic, environmental and social changes in three communities, and the effect on the Hudson River's aquatic health. The grant for the three-year study is from the Hudson River Foundation of New York City.

The goal of the study, Erickson said, is to develop a model "to concretely evaluate the tradeoffs of land use," one that can be used by municipalities along the Hudson when reviewing proposed developments. He hopes people will go beyond simply evaluating projects for their economic growth potential and make

decisions based on multiple criteria.

By sharing the information with towns, villages and cities, he said, the researchers also could strengthen the connection between RPI and its community. "One of the things we can do is help provide information for the planning processes so [the affected parties] don't get so polarized," he said.

In addition to Gowdy and Erickson, the study will involve researchers Karin Limburg, an assistant professor at SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, Glenn-Marie Lange, an associate professor at New York University's Institute for Economic Analysis, and Audra Nowosielski, a Ph.D. candidate in Economics at RPI.

Erickson and his colleagues have yet to identify the three communities they will use in the study, which has a start date of July 15. They will start by contacting interest groups, such as the Hudson River Greenway Communities Council and Scenic Hudson Inc., that have mobilized around issues relating to the health of the Hudson River.

After selecting the individual communities to be studied, the case studies will be designed to identify the driving forces of economic and land use change, then to develop scenarios that link economic activities to ecosystem change.