

Notes on RCP Roundtables

Session 1: Coordinating Conservation in the CT River Blueway – What’s Possible?

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Notes prepared by Jeb Stevens

Introduction:

The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge was established in 1997 and since then has conserved over 35,000 acres. The refuge owns land in two areas of Massachusetts, including former agricultural lands managed for the benefit of wildlife. The Refuge is very active in acquiring land in New Hampshire, while the Vermont portion focuses heavily on protecting forestland.

- Legislated Purposes: Conserve, protect, and enhance the CT River watershed populations of Atlantic salmon, American Shad, river herring, shortnose sturgeon, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, osprey, black ducks, etc.
- Access is a big focus in the Pondicherry Division.
- Public access has been a priority in Nulhegan Basin sub-division; compatible pre-existing uses sustained.

The Refuge has partnerships with various federal agencies and NGOs, as well as with educational centers/nature centers. This exemplifies conservation through partnerships.

- Entire Connecticut River watershed has been designated a “Blueway” – the first in the nation. Since this time, over \$6 million has been invested in land protection within the watershed, protecting over 598 acres. This is a result of a mainly grassroots approach.

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Discussion: [Correlated with Bill Labich’s notes on flipchart paper]

What are people/groups doing in the watershed area?

- Kestrel Land Trust: 19 towns, 32 acres - \$1.25 million. Conservation fund provided loan until federal funding acquired (acquired from LWCF). Conte “stamp of approval” perhaps benefited other grant applications (e.g., Forest Legacy Program). Grants for \$8.8 million total.
- Lower CT River Valley/Land Trust Exchange: Coordinating on projects with various local, regional, and federal organizations; Landowner outreach → Regional Greenway
 - Working with town of Old Saybrook on community forest on edge of watershed. Funding has been every limited.
 - GIS modeling, conservation plan
- Mass-Vermont partnership.
- North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative:
 - NALCC, DOI
 - Help develop large scale science; maintain partnership and deliver science on ground; data sets- will be available for the whole watershed. RFPs in early December. TA to partners – train how to use science. Demonstration projects.
- Urban Refuge Partnership: improving nature and wildlife habitat in urban settings.
 - Landscape scale science; aggregate of land; known values based on science; a better conservation outcome & \$

- Landowner outreach: Why is your land important and for what, @ different scales.
- CT River Invasive Species Partnership: On the ground invasive plant work in subwatershed in northern realm, Upper White River, Westfield River, wild and scenic stretch of Farmington River, 8 Mile river watershed. Groups need staffing help to get things off the ground.
 - Early rotation and early response; each smaller subgroup needs a word.
- VT Chapter of Nature Conservancy: 3 dam-related projects (hydro-relicensing). Aquatic connectivity, impaired from dams and culverts. Land protection within watershed, including 1000 acre farm in Canaan, VT. Attention shifting to Northern part of VT
 - Flow management; aquatic connectivity, dams and culverts; land protection; stewardship and restoration in watershed → partnership with Conte and outreach to landowners (NRCS) plus land deals in Pondicherry watershed
 - 1000-acre farm, new state wildlife management area, 250 acres plus flood plain forests protection with local longer districts and elm restoration. Dams for removal, north and south
 - TNC: Whole systems, big priority in all states
- Stewardship Network New England: Goal of more on-the-ground stewardship. Funding from Forest Service
 - Engage more volunteers; increase number of well designed projects; increase in number of well-trained volunteers; want to support existing group; NH-centric; invasives
 - RCP: working stewardship network
 - Share field crew – divided up
 - FOC – share data within the Conte
- Landscape Partnership (MA State)
 - Large contiguous parcels (500 acres +)
 - Due diligence with landowner outreach target areas
 - Holyoke tree planting

