

Notes on Engaging Landowners and New Partners in Large Landscapes

Session 1: Getting More Landowners to Conserve & Steward their Land: Lessons from the Field

Lisa Hayden, New England Forestry Foundation; Karen P. Bennett, UNH Cooperative Extension
Moderated by Christopher Riely, Providence Water

Notes prepared by Heather Siart

Christopher Riely:

Working with landowners is an important part of Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W). W&W is working toward conserving 70% of the land in New England. Most of New England's land is owned by private landowners. We want to get more families involved in taking important steps toward pursuing legal action to conserve their land.

Lisa Hayden:

We all understand the importance of outreach and talking to landowners to expand and quicken conservation efforts. We have been trying to connect with landowners for decades and we find that it is not working, there seems to be a disconnect. Therefore, we need to crack the code that will help us connect with landowners. New research is helping us micro-target and find people that are ready and want to take this next step.

- NEFF has adopted the Heart of New England program, which is testing and finding ways to help reach landowners.
 - Focusing on 10 towns within 38-town Mass-Conn region that includes the Narcross Wildlife Sanctuary, Yale Myers Forest, and Goodwin Forest. Targets 3,000 woodland owners.
 - Working with local and national partners, like American Forest Foundation (AFF), provides the opportunity to test out the NEFF process in other areas using micro targeting.
 - Uses marketing data to find prime landowners and establish a comprehensive approach.

Strategies & Lessons Learned

1. Identify Goals and Audience: Take a step back and ask what your goal is, what change you are trying to effect, who you need to reach to get to that goal, what town you want to work with, and how you will go about that. Each landowner has a different history. How long they have lived on the land? Do they have an emotional connection to the land? Are they looking to make money off the land?
 - Break people into homogenous groups based on the type of landowner and tailor programs and messages to each group. (Ex: If they haven't found a trusted forester, send messages on good foresters or send out information that highlights people's success with a great local forester.)
 - Steps to take with land owners:
 - Walk land with expert
 - Write forest management plan
 - Talk with family and attorney
 - Conserve and manage land
2. Establish a Baseline: Set up maps and data because "what gets measured gets done." How do we know what has changed if we don't know where we have started?
 - Measure landowner attitudes using conservation awareness index, barriers and benefits survey.
 - Map resources and see if landowners are interested in working with that land and conserving it.
3. Barriers and Benefits: Breaking down barriers helps you talk to landowners and helps them see the benefit of their land, how to use it, and the importance.
 - Landowners highly trust family members and other landowners.
 - They trust and feel better after reading books that talk about conserving land and management.
4. Message Testing and Audience Segmentation: Letting people tell us what is important to them.

- Wildlife vs. Conservation/Management: Wildlife messaging tended to perform better.

5. Summary

- Take inventory of your capacity: landowner outreach is a long term thing and it's something that lasts years, not months. Make sure you think about the time commitment.
- Choose geography: There are small watersheds, so pay attention to smaller features in area.
- Learning about barriers: It's really important to get a baseline and understand the area and people you are working with.

Karen P. Bennett:

- Case study project came from the Northern Forest Land Council and Keeping Forests as Forests Initiative. The State Forests Association then put in a request for a grant and they got it.
- Goal of the project was to try different outreach methods to engage landowners and forge new partnerships.
 - Asked over 100 people, 22 from non-governmental organizations in NY, New England (excluding ME): "What's on your mind?"

Executive Summary

What works best in engaging individuals and family landowners in managing and conserving their woodlands to sustain large, highly prized, forested landscape?

- Regional conservation partnerships of foresters and conservationists collaborating with woodland ambassadors to creatively bring small group of landowners together.

16 steps, that's all it takes!

1. Share local and regional knowledge about the forest and the people.
2. Get trained: TELE
3. Identify the target landowner.
4. Build a landowner database.
5. Develop evaluation protocol.
6. Develop work plan.
7. Using TELE, develop outreach messages for each target landowner category.
8. Invite Woodland Ambassadors to help promote/lead peer landowner education classes/trips.
9. Develop media (posters and fliers).
10. Engage and train private consulting foresters.
11. Implement the strategies and programs.
12. Use the evaluation tools.
13. Track landowner participation.
14. Meet regularly as an RCP and with surrounding RCPs.
15. Communicate methods, lessons, and outcomes to greater RCP network.
16. Continue to engage partners in coordinated activities to help landowners reach their goals.

Best Approaches to Landowner Outreach

- Determine desired outcomes.
- Learn conservation area and culture of community.
- Know which landowners are interested.
- Develop a communication plan.
- Invite peer landowners to help outreach.
- Use good design crafting outreach media.
- Have food at the meetings.

Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE)

- Develop a good message.
- Give a compelling reason why they should take action. Give them a reason to care.
- Use words like woodland, woods, woodlot, and avoid using the word "forests."

Lessons Learned from Southern New England Heritage Forest Landscape Partnership

- The basic research from TELE was used to separate landowners into different categories.
- Focused on woodland retreat owners because they are emotionally bound to the land.
 - Messages about keeping their forests healthy and keeping it around.
 - Used terms like “Love the land.”
 - Land owners of all types most likely to respond to a postcard that matches their values.
 - Their connection to the land is hands-on. You might say, “Cut your own firewood to heat your house” as a way to get them interested.
- Engaging retreat landowners: “You love your woods, what’s their future?”
- They recruited and trained woodland ambassadors on how to give woods walks.
 - Trained 31 people and on how to have an effective meeting- not on the content, but on how to engage them in the right way and have it be effective.
 - “You love your woods, share your passion.”
- Direct mailing, posted fliers most effective for getting the word out and landowners interested.
- With more partners involved it took more time to make a plan.
- We found that people were busy and it was harder than we thought to manage our time. We found that the woodland ambassador has worked and that it’s working in a positive way.

Summary

I think conservationists and state service forestries need each other. They know the landowner, they work with the landowner, they can provide you with help, and you can help them. Peer to peer works better than professional to professional works, but peer to peer isn't enough. You need professionals that know what they are doing and can help move things forward.

Not all messages work with everyone every time. We are too focused on having people act and do what we want them to do and when we want them to do it, but we need to let them know that we are there and ready for when they are ready to take action. You have to be there ready to act when they are ready to act.

Q&A:

I noticed the focus on being responsive to land owners, but if you are doing a Woods Walk and you have people engaged, do you keep running that walk over and over or do you move onto other topics and other activities?

Karen: One of the important parts of good outreach is having a next step. You should suggest some activities that will push them in the right direction. For example, take a walk on your own property with a forester and see what you have on your land. Try to engage them in a next step and point them in the right direction.

We have found that the Woods Walks work well, but that we need more of a topical next step.

Karen: I would say that land owners are busy and they might step out of eye sight for a while, but as long as they were engaged they will come back when they are ready

Audience member response: NEFA got another grant to produce a model app that’s called “About my Woods”. It will be out in two weeks and will be compatible with Androids, iPhones and tablets. It will get new landowners excited about their land and help them find a forester to help manage their land.

Could you talk more about the ambassadors that were a couple?

Karen: Working with couples was easier for them and it resulted in better engagement. They tend to bounce off each other and to push each other to do more. It’s great working with ambassador couples.