NORTH EAST *STATE* FORESTERS ASSOCIATION

NORTHEAST REGIONAL PILOT DEMONSTRATION PROJECT TO STRENGTHEN FOREST PRODUCT MARKETS, FOREST STEWARDSHIP, AND FOREST CONSERVATION
TASK 2: NEW YORK –NEW ENGLAND
FAMILY FOREST OWNER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

AUGUST 30, 2011 TO AUGUST 30, 2014

FINAL REPORT

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Question: What works best in engaging individual and family forest owners in managing and conserving their woodlands to sustain large, highly-prized, forested landscapes in eastern New York and New England?

Answer: Regional conservation partnerships (RCPs) of foresters and conservationists. RCPs can collaborate with Woodland Ambassadors (WAs) to creatively bring together small groups of landowners in priority conservation areas to learn from each other. RCPs work with WAs to help landowners take important steps towards stewarding and conserving their forestland.

1.1 Introduction

The NY/NE Family Forest Owner Engagement Initiative was a unique landscape conservation and stewardship project designed to answer that question. The Initiative also served to implement recommendations of the New England Governors' Conference Commission on Land Conservation (CLC). The Initiative was one of the three tasks associated with a winning proposal submitted to the US Forest Service's (USFS) Competitive Resource Allocation Program (now called Landscape Scale Restoration). The North East *State* Foresters Association as well as the state foresters of MA, CT and RI were the applicants. The proposal, "Northeast Regional Pilot Demonstration Project to Strengthen Forest Product Markets, Forest Stewardship, and Forest Conservation," also received support from Highstead Foundation and the Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network.

The four regional conservation partnerships (RCPs) that participated in this initiative are among the 40 RCPs in New England. RCPs are typically informal networks of people representing private and public organizations and agencies that collaborate over time to implement a shared conservation vision across town and sometimes state boundaries.

Between 2011 and 2014, over 100 leaders representing twenty-eight conservation and forestry organizations and agencies, and landowner networks, formed three new inter-state RCPs and strengthened another. With the help of the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative (SFFI), partners learned how to communicate with unengaged landowners and which programs and activities from around the region were most promising.

While this full report is dense with those learnings, the purpose of this executive summary is to present the main products, outcomes, and findings of the initiative. These lessons are based on partners' careful documentation of their activities. Each partner adopted our shared evaluation protocol. This protocol includes the tracking of impact indicators. At 1 year, 3 years, and 5 years, Highstead Foundation will review the identity of family forest owners listed in the rolls of new stewardship plans and practices and new conservation easements and projects and note which of these were participants in the Initiative. We will then compare the % of participation within the focal areas to the % of the larger landscape and the state as a whole. In this way, we intend to capture the longer-term impacts from our work together.

We would not have any results without the commendable efforts of the partnerships and individual partners. They sought to learn from first hand experience the relative value of different landowner engagement strategies. Some pursued strategies to their conclusions despite challenges and less than promising turnouts. New practices were tried out, some without fully understanding, or being able to commit, the amount of time or follow-up that was required. However, in each and every case, their activities and results have led to our greater understanding of what we need to do to encourage many more previously unengaged family forest owners to steward and conserve their land. This study is, therefore, dedicated to the forestry and land conservation partners and the partnerships that made it all possible.

1.2 Outcomes: Learnings

The primary function of this Initiative was to help us learn which strategies and activities would be most useful in advancing stewardship and conservation outcomes at the landscape-scale. Each partner and each partnership learned a great deal while trying new ways of connecting with landowners. Moreover, together the four RCPs learned even more. Together, they:

- Created a 16-step approach for engaging landowners in large landscape stewardship and conservation (pages 2 and 16),
- Developed a model evaluation protocol for tracking and measuring the short and long-term activities and impacts of landowner engagement work (page 18).
- Discovered how to use and improve eight landowner engagement strategies.
- Identified the attributes of a well-designed and implemented communication initiative and engagement strategy.
- Leveraged the communication capacity of the RCP Network. This was especially apparent at the RCP Network Gatherings in 2012 and 2013. Related sessions at each conveyed to hundreds of conservation and forestry professionals the benefits, lessons, and opportunities to be gained from increasing the social capital among landowners within the large landscape as a long-term strategy for getting more land managed and conserved.

Together, we have learned that the best strategies for reaching and engaging landowners are not of a particular kind, but in how they are advertised, organized, run, and most important—whether there is follow-through (see section 1.224 for more on follow-through).

1.21 Results by the Numbers

Between January 2013 and June 2014, RCP partners designed their strategies using the skills and landowner programs in which they were trained. Partners crafted their own messages to engage a particular landowner type (see the SFFI's website), and together communicated directly with over 18,000 family forest owners, owning forestland within ten key conservation focus areas in the four interstate landscapes. Partners and, in some cases, peer landowner leaders, invited these mostly "Woodland Retreat" owners to events. These events included Woods Forums and Woods Walks, Estate Planning Workshops, Silviculture for the Birds Workshops, and other landowner programs.

Over 1,000 landowners attended events (12% of those contacted), and the majority were of the target landowner type. Those landowners who attended their first event heard from their peers about why these other owners enjoyed and cared for their land. They learned they had options and opportunities. RCP members and peer leaders followed-up with attendees. They encouraged the landowners who were most interested to take the next step: speak with a forester, an attorney, a land trust professional, or go to bird workshop and get a free bird habitat assessment. Over 200 landowners did just that (28% of those attending their first event). By making these next steps easy, RCP partners moved these landowners further down the path towards accomplishing their own objectives. In most cases, the landowners' objectives often supported the mission and objectives of the RCP and its partners.

Of the 206 landowners who took action:

- 41 landowners met with a consulting or an extension forester; 10 have begun management plans, and 52 had Bird Habitat Assessments completed on 7,358 acres.
- Eight landowners met with an attorney to talk about their estates and their conservation options, 20 met

with a land trust professional, and 16 new land protection projects are in the process, representing 1,935 acres.

Based on a comparison of outcomes tracked by participants, we have learned how to help advance unengaged landowners down their paths towards land stewardship and conservation. We have learned which kinds of strategies and approaches work best.

Although plenty of detail awaits the reader in the following report, most will appreciate getting the gist of what we learned from our work together. The following sections of the Executive Summary provide our main takeaways.

1.22 Lessons Learned: Best Approaches to Landowner Outreach and Engagement Activities in Large Landscapes

We could only have accomplished our initiative through coordinated partnerships, each collaborating with partners to work at the scale of large interstate landscapes, often much larger than the territory of any one group. The following 16-step approach is designed to be pursued in partnership:

1. Share local and regional knowledge of the landscape about:
   a. the focal areas containing the most important and threatened forests in the region. Use geographic information systems (GIS) to map and analyze the forests in the larger landscape in order to identify priority focus areas.
   b. the most important forest threats and desired outcomes in these areas.
   c. the individual and family forest owners in the focus areas.
2. Get trained:
   a. in how to think like, and write to attract, your target audience (e.g. Sustaining Family Forest Initiative's Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE)).
   b. in how to help unengaged landowners do the next positive thing towards managing and conserving their land. Identify and collect winning strategies from within and from outside your region.
3. Identify the target landowner audience (by location, area (in acres), TELE attitudinal group).
4. Build a landowner database (in Excel or Access) for each focus area and fill the database with information from local assessors' offices (e.g. names, addresses, area). Use the database as a contact manager. Document and track which partner reaches out to and engages that landowners using which specific strategies.
5. Develop and agree on an evaluation protocol that includes process, outcome and impact indicators (or use NEFA's. See page 18).
6. Develop work plans designed for the whole partnership (to implement shared objectives) and then for each focus area group of partners.
7. Using TELE, develop outreach messages for each target landowner category in each focus area.
8. Reach out to "Woodland Ambassadors" (WAs) and invite them to help promote and or lead peer-landowner education events like Woods Walks and Woods Forums.
9. Develop media, like postcards, flyers, and press releases, using the outreach messages. Work with WAs and ensure that design standards or practices achieve media that works well with the target audience.
10. Engage and train private consulting foresters to assist in engaging and following-up with landowners.
11. Implement the strategies and programs.
12. Use the evaluation tools.
13. Track all landowner participation, outcomes, results, and partner investments using the landowner database.
14. Meet regularly and in-person as an RCP and with surrounding RCPs so that partners can learn from their own and others' mistakes, lessons, and successes.
15. Communicate these methods, lessons, and outcomes to the larger RCP, conservation, and forestry communities.
16. Continue to engage WAs, foresters, and partners in activities, coordinated via the RCP, that help individual landowners achieve their long-term stewardship and conservation objectives.

1.221 Best Approaches to Landowner Outreach

Messages used by partners to "speak" to targeted landowner types were often unique to the landowner category and landscape. However, we learned that there are key steps to follow in designing and using TELE-based messages (for more information on these steps, see page 54):

1. Determine your desired outcomes.
2. Get to know your conservation focus area and the culture of the communities involved.
3. Know which landowner category you want in attendance.
4. Reach out and invite Woodland Ambassadors (WA), or otherwise named peer landowners, to help you target your message and pick your channel and your strategy.
5. Depend on one message, but use multiple channels.
6. Use good design in crafting your media (e.g. postcards).
7. Choose to highlight the fact that you'll serve pie and coffee over explaining who's in your partnership.
8. Have flyers on follow-up activities to offer the attendees at these first events.

1.222 Attributes of Best Landowner Engagement Strategies

Based on the outcomes reported by the partnership groups (see Table 2), a "best" strategy is one having the following attributes:

- A collaboration of organizations and agencies, like an RCP, engage their partners each of whom contribute to and coordinate landowner outreach and engagement in their shared focus area(s).
- Involvement and leadership of land trust professionals for conservation-related outcomes and follow-through, and an extension forester or other natural resource professional for stewardship-related outcomes.
- Woodland Ambassadors or Peer Landowner Leaders cultivated, trained, and motivated to assist in all aspects of outreach and engagement, but <u>not</u> serving as event leaders, organizers, producers, or managing follow-through with attendees. Have conservation staff do this work.
- A well-thought through outreach strategy that includes direct mail within a month of the event and partner staff and peer leaders calling prospective attendees before events.
- Events that have tangible follow-up activities and opportunities like one-on-one meetings with foresters, attorneys, and land trust professionals or volunteers, or other workshops.
- Landowner follow-up within one to two months of these one-on-one next steps (e.g. meetings with an attorney) by the partners most invested in management and or land protection outcomes.
- Plans to capture momentum by continuing to communicate and engage landowners in the partners' focus areas.
- Connect landowners to various professionals that allow for new opportunities and pathways to conservation and stewardship like Audubon groups and their Silviculture for Birds program.
- Ample time to plan for those activities like Silviculture for the Birds. This program requires larger windows of time for inviting landowners, for doing fieldwork, and for following up with next steps. Follow-through activities need to link assessments to management plans, to active treatment, and to future Bird Habitat Walkovers.

1.223 How well did the Landowner Engagement Strategies and Activities Work?

Initiative partners used one or more of the following four basic strategies to engage landowners in conversations about their land that they then sought to lead to action.

1. Event (like a Woods Forum) and follow-up with a one-on-one meeting with a forester, attorney, or land trust professional.
2. Neighborhood event with follow-up invitation to participate in local, collaborative landscape-scale conservation project

3. Train Woodland Ambassadors (WAs) in how to organize and facilitate landowner engagement events and then have them host events on their land.
4. Train consulting foresters in Silviculture for Birds, provide WAs with free bird habitat assessments, host a bird workshop for landowners, and offer attendees free bird habitat assessments. Then modify bird habitat assessments so they comply with NRCS conservation plans or current use management plans. Then manage forests for birds. Land trust staff can follow-up with specific conservation opportunities.

By far, the simplest and most effective strategies were numbers one and two. The events in strategy one were typically Woods Forums and Estate Planning Workshops. A **Woods Forum** is a low-key introduction to conservation and stewardship whereby the audience leads the session themselves with experts ready to help with technical questions and next steps. Click here for more information about this model. Partners saw an average of 4 percent response rate to their media (e.g. postcard) and with follow-through to varying degrees, 27 percent of attendees took a next step. **Estate Planning Workshops** had a 7 percent response rate, and 24 percent of attendees took action (click here to learn more about estate planning workshops).

Number two in the above list, the Neighborhood meeting strategy was developed by partners in the Q2C Partnership to great effect. Those partners were a MA state forester and another RCP, one of the oldest in New England: the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership. Their **Landowner Neighborhood Gatherings** and **Forest Stewardship Program Landowner Network (Stew Club)** are relatively low cost, small-group gatherings of landowners with WAs involved from the beginning. Their purpose was to generate interest in a potential landscape-scale land conservation project and in forest management, respectively. Both strategies provided for a relatively high response rate (37% and 14%) and a very high percentage of attendees taking next steps (55% and 40%). What accounts for this success? As is mentioned earlier, the best strategies are not of a particular kind, but in the manner in which they are advertised, organized, run, and most important—whether there is follow-through. Based on the outcomes reported by the partnership groups (see Table 2), a "best" strategy is one having the attributes listed on the previous page, with the most important being follow-through.

Follow-through was one key factor that was missing from both the **Woodland Ambassador (WA) Program** and **Silviculture for the Birds**, as they were implemented. Evidence suggests that the WA program can be effective in harnessing the charisma of strong peer leaders who then go on to serve as recruiters and extension agents for dozens of landowners. Silviculture for the Birds is also very promising both as a hook to engage unengaged landowners, and as a means for bringing forestry and foresters into the mainstream. In the partners' defense, both of these programs were designed and carried out to test and learn about their effectiveness in engaging landowners to take new steps. They also had to work with a time frame that we learned only much later was too short. As both programs were implemented, much energy was spent on the first stages: recruit, train, and have WAs host Woods Forums and Woods Walk. This first stage for Silviculture for the Birds involved training foresters and informing landowners of this new way of managing woodlands (for birds), while lining up and completing bird habitat assessments. In each of these programs, and despite their considerable promise, we learned of the critical importance of the landowner shepherd, the organization, or individual, that would encourage the landowner towards stewardship and conservation. Without that role, no activity would succeed in achieving its full potential. To be fair, and as was previously mentioned, time did not adequately allow for that next step for both of these strategies, and that in itself is an important finding. Silviculture for the Birds organizers found that the workshop for training foresters and the bird workshop for landowners did not by themselves result in landowners signing-up for bird habitat assessments. To realize the full potential from a WA program and the Silviculture for the Birds Program, a great deal of time, planning, oversight, and follow-through would be required. This is reflected in recommendations (on pages 6, 7, 53, and 54).

1.224 The Critical Importance of Follow-Through

Follow through (intransitive verb): to press on in an activity or process especially to a conclusion. (MerriamWebster.com)

Follow-through, in the context of landowner engagement, is the act of staying in communication with a particular owner and helping them take steps towards managing or conserving their land. When applied to a landscape-scale approach by an RCP, follow-through also applies to the capacity of partnership members to coordinate various activities most efficiently so as to be mutually supportive and collectively helpful to landowners as they take steps towards stewardship and conservation.

The results of our initiative point to the effectiveness of following through with landowners, especially if an opportunity exists that they can take advantage of like funding for due diligence or management plans. However, even in the earliest stages of a forest owner's awakened interest in their land, there are concrete steps that they can take. This can be as simple as receiving a follow-up phone call from a land trust staffer to meet with them or an attorney. It could be their agreeing to drive to a Woodland Ambassador's home (at their invitation) to meet with a consulting forester. In both cases, someone needs to manage this follow-through and in a timely way in order to help the landowner get to their next step. Without follow-through, a landowner might very well lose interest.

It is common knowledge that it usually takes much time, effort, and money for landowners to move from awareness of their options to action. However, most RCP members including those involved in this initiative believe all three are in short supply. This is one of the main reason people form RCPs. They seek to coordinate their efforts and resources to keep forests from being further fragmented from development. Forested ecosystems with important habitats, timber, soils, and watersheds are more valuable when located in large undeveloped blocks. A large landscape stewardship and conservation approach can be effective in connecting, managing, and protecting unfragmented blocks of forest if partners follow-through with their activities at the landscape scale and over time.

Within this context, we can imagine a hypothetical RCP interested in reaching out to unengaged landowners. Perhaps there is funding for some activities, or they are interested in increasing landowners' general awareness of stewardship and conservation options. Within their landscape, they have identified the most important long-term conservation focus areas within which they plan to target all of their coordinated outreach activities. Even using a focus area approach with priorities, there could still be thousands of landowners to reach potentially and engage. This particular RCP includes partners with interests in wildlife, rivers, forest management, farms, and land protection. In order to be most effective, our study points to the need for the partners to share agendas, information, resources, and measures of success and to coordinate planning, scheduling, and implementation. By doing so, activities in the field can build off each other, enjoy synergy, and get the kind of results that people want. This level of coordination is challenging if there's a lot going on and impossible without regular partner interaction. Coordinated follow-through by an RCP's members is, however, paramount if common objectives are to be realized in a timely and cost effective manner.

1. 3 Recommendations

1.31 Recommendations for the 3 Emerging RCPs and Q2C

- Re-convene, decide whether to continue your partnership, and, if so, whether there are other organizations you could include as partners.
- Join the RCP Network and take advantage of the resources and knowledge of its member RCPs.
- In the near future, develop a strategic conservation plan with focus areas based on best available science and data sets.
- Continue to engage the state foresters in your outreach and engagement work.
- Revisit each of your strategies and consider where improvements are needed.
- Reach out to the other RCPs including Q2C to explore collaborating on future grants.
- Consider the following sequences of events as possible templates where the land trust owns the follow-up

in each case, bringing in the state forester or extension forester as needed:

- Woodland Ambassador (WA) recruitment, Woods Forum, sit-down meetings with land trust staff and or forester, land trust leads follow-up
- WA recruitment, Woods Forum, Estate planning event, meet with land trust and attorney
- WA recruitment, Neighborhood Landowner Meetings, meetings with land trust and attorney to discuss conservation opportunities.
- WA recruitment. Train foresters in Silviculture for the Birds. Produce Pioneer Bird Habitat Assessment on WAs' lands. Have a Bird Workshop with Tours of Assessed Lands by WA landowner. Develop additional Bird Habitat Assessments. Set up one-on-one meetings between landowners and foresters/NRCS state conservationists. Conservation and or Management Plan completed and Implemented. Continued follow-up by land trust staff and state forester. Land entered into current use, and or conserved with an easement.

1.32 Recommendations for the North East *State* Foresters Association and other State Foresters and their Agencies

- Support the continued involvement of your state foresters in the work of these four RCPs.
- Fund the development of peer-to-peer education and actively engage networks of family forest owners throughout your state.
- Encourage the RCPs to apply for Landscape Scale Restoration grants themselves or in partnership with other RCPs.
- Find ways of sharing the lessons and results of this initiative throughout the Northeast region, and beyond.
- Continue to look for ways to partner with the RCPs in your states to achieve shared objectives. Consider attending the RCP Network Gathering each fall to stay engaged with this important community.
- Work with RCPs as a means for engaging with other state and federal agencies to access resources or to have a positive impact in high priority areas.

1.33 Recommendations for the US Forest Service Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry

- Explore ways of working with RCPs and the RCP Network to advance the stewardship and conservation of large forested landscapes in high priority resource areas. Help RCPs access and use GIS data layers including: prime forest soils, current use parcels, areas threatened by development or pests and disease, areas of high forest productivity or "wood baskets," and distressed watersheds. The US Forest Service might be able to provide valuable input to RCPs' prioritizations by delivering accessible science and information similar to the North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (NALCC). The USFS might be able to provide experts and or educational programming and training in watershed protection, climate change adaptation, forest-based economic development, and on effectively partnering with the forest products industry.

- Continue to support the development of landscape-scale approaches to conservation and stewardship challenges. Promote approaches that take advantage of the immense capacities already in existence in the form of peer landowners, landowner networks, land trusts, and regional conservation partnerships (RCPs) that together cover over 55% of the forests of New England. United States Forest Service and states need to increase funding for peer-landowner leader training like Coverts and Keystone Programs while Congress needs to increase funding for the Forest Legacy Program for New England and New York.

2. INTRODUCTION

The NY/NE Family Forest Owner Engagement Initiative (Forest Owner Engagement Initiative) is a unique landscape conservation, stewardship, and economic development initiative. Its purpose was to further implementation of the recommendations of the New England Governors' Conference Commission on Land Conservation (CLC), consistent with US Forest Service efforts to promote landscape-scale stewardship. The Initiative was one of the three tasks associated with a winning proposal to the USFS Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry's Competitive Resource Allocation Program. The proposal, "Northeast Regional Pilot Demonstration Project to Strengthen Forest Product Markets, Forest Stewardship, and Forest Conservation," was submitted by the North East *State* Foresters Association as well as the state foresters of MA, CT and RI, with strong support from Highstead Foundation and the Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network.

The basis of our original application is the *Blue Ribbon Commission on Land Conservation, 2010 Report to the Governors*, New England Governors' Conference, Inc., July 2010. The *Governors' Resolution 200*, July 12, 2010, was also important (available at www.ct.gov/dep/lib/dep/forestry/2010__clc_rpt- final.pdf). In Resolution 200, the six governors call upon the Chief State Officers involved to continue development of these proposals as a collaborative regional approach and on a priority basis with partnering agencies, private organizations, and the Commision on Land Conservation (CLC). Furthermore, it called upon the Congressional delegations of the several states to support the development of these proposals; and upon the Obama Administration to apply related federal programs, staffing, and funding across departmental lines in new and creative ways to achieve the goals cited.

3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the Pilot Demonstration Project and of the Forest Owner Engagement Initiative were consistent with that of the New England Governors' Blue Ribbon CLC's Keeping Forests as Forest Initiative (CLC initiative). The three goals include: 1) strengthen markets for forest products, 2) strengthen forest stewardship, and 3) conserve the many values of the region's forest landscape for future generations.

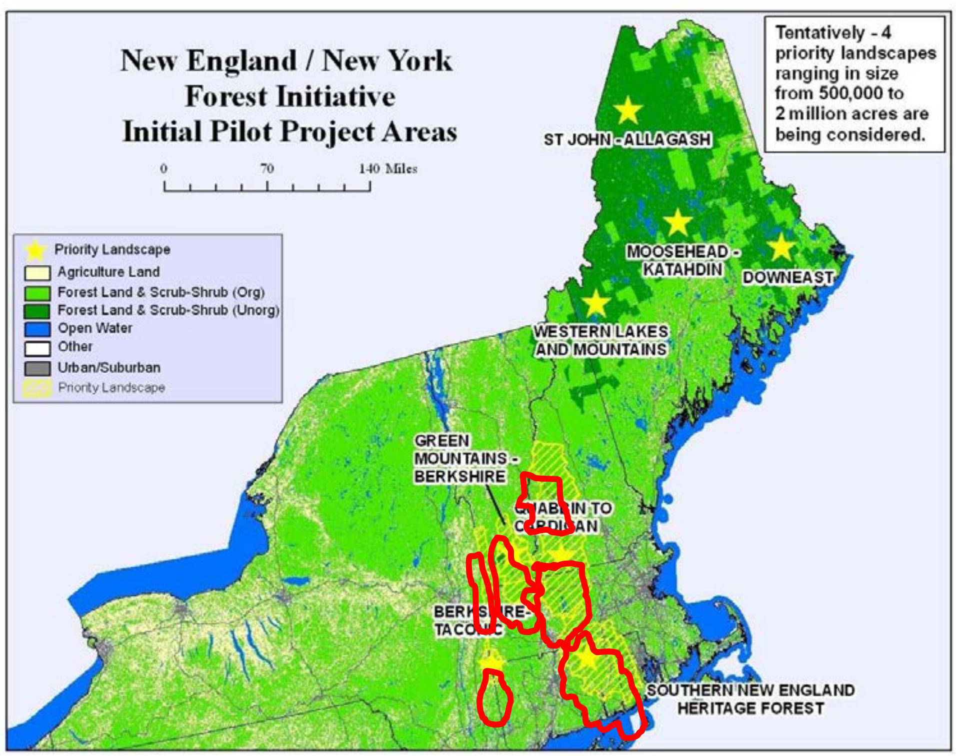

Figure 1: The Four Priority Interstate Landscapes

The purpose of the Forest Owner Engagement Initiative is to develop and implement pilot outreach initiatives on four Priority Landscapes in order to determine the best approaches for reaching these landowners and achieving specific management and conservation goals. The objectives include: (1) developing effective activities and messaging for the landowners in each of the four areas, and (2) identifying which pilot approaches work best so that these tools can be replicated in other parts of the region.

The Forest Owner Engagement Initiative sought to achieve these goals and objectives in the four high priority interstate landscapes (See Figure 1. Quabbin to Cardigan (NH and MA), the Southern New England Heritage Forest (RI, CT, and MA), the Green Mountain and Berkshire Hills (VT and MA) and the Taconics (CT, NY, VT and MA)) by:

- Creating a collaborative effort among federal, state, private, and philanthropic partners to implement pilot projects in four priority interstate landscapes that will use federal and state programs in new, creative, and more flexible ways.
- Engaging private landowners on a voluntary basis in addressing three questions: should I manage my land; should I enroll in current use; and should I plan for the conservation or the development of my land?
- Providing incentives to keep forests as forests, including but not limited to tax incentives, rewarding stewardship that provides public benefits, making management for forest products more profitable, and paying willing landowners fair market value for development options;
- Maintaining diverse and robust markets for primary forest products to enhance the returns landowners can achieve from forest management, and encourage nature-based tourism; and
- Creating new models for promoting exemplary stewardship among private landowners.

4. OUTLINE OF INITIATIVE AS INTENDED

In year one of the grant, pilot project area partners planned to participate in activities 1-5, and in years two-three, in activities 4-5:

1. Train in strategies used to engage different types of landowners,
2. Explore the information about existing landowners in each pilot project area,
3. Develop an action plan for implementing and evaluating up to three landowner engagement tools, techniques, or programs (“strategies”),
4. Implement the strategies, and
5. Report on implementation: results, issues, lessons.

1. Train in strategies used to engage different types of landowners. (October 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011) On December 7, 2011, at Harvard Forest in Petersham, Massachusetts, staff of conservation organizations, State Foresters, State Conservationists, and, in some cases, US Forest Service personnel participated in training. The training had two main parts: 1) Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE); and, in 2) specific tools, programs, and techniques for engaging family forest owners. The former was by Yale and the USFS’ Sustaining Family Forests Initiative. The latter was by state, federal or non-profit staff with the most expertise on that tool. In the Peer to Peer training, trainers included staff of both non-governmental and governmental agencies.

2. Explore Information about Landowners in the Pilot Project Areas (January 1, 2012 to February 28, 2012) – Once trained in the TELE and Peer to Peer trainings, each pilot project area’s partners would pull together known information about landowners in their region. Each group of partners would then pick the landowner group(s) they would like most to focus on as well as up to three strategies to implement and evaluate. The information collected would help the partners match the strategy to the landowner group(s) of interest.

3. Develop an Action Plan for Implementing and Evaluating Up to Three Landowner Engagement Tools, Techniques, or Programs (January 1, 2012 to March 31, 2012)—Equipped with available information on landowners in their region, each area’s group of organizations and agencies and staff would meet at least once to develop an action plan for the remainder of the grant period. The action plan would include descriptions of and roles and responsibilities for participating members of the partnership/area collaboration.

4. Implement the Strategies (March 1, 2012 to August 30, 2014)—Each area's partners would determine the non-governmental organization/partner(s) that would be working on each strategy and sub-task. The selected groups would develop sub-contracts with NEFA. Then they would work to implement the strategies. They would then apply the appropriate evaluation tool. During this time, each group would also receive together one, two-day training on TELE from Yale's SFFI that would help them create effective communication products to use in conjunction with their chosen strategies.

5. Reporting on Implementation: Results, Issues, and Lessons at Annual Regional Conservation Partnership Gatherings, etc. (August 30, 2011 to August 30, 2014)— Each area's partners would prepare periodic reports on the status of their work based on a template and schedule provided by Highstead. In addition, all area participants, including State Foresters (or their staff), State Conservationists (or their staff), USFS staff, local officials and conservation groups and agencies would participate in annual gatherings to share updates, lessons, results, and best practices with other partnerships including some that are not currently part of this grant initiative. These events were thought to be likely scheduled for the fall of 2012, the fall of 2013, and the spring of 2014.

5. KEY PARTICIPANTS AND ROLES

There were three people who served as Project Leads for the Regional Pilot Demonstration Project and who assisted with the NY/NE Family Forest Owner Engagement Initiative.

Charles A. Levesque, Executive Director, North East State Foresters Association. Charlie Levesque served as coordinator for the entire Regional Pilot Demonstration Project, fiscal administrator for Task 2, and guided early meetings of the members of the Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership.

William "Bill" Labich, Regional Conservationist, Highstead Foundation (Highstead). Bill Labich served as the coordinator for the NY-NE Family Forest Owner Engagement Initiative (Initiative). Working in close cooperation with NEFA, RCPs, and other partners, Bill designed the original proposal for this task as well as the program's activities. Bill organized trainings and all landscape meetings, served as the coordinator for the three new partnerships (through most of 2012) and facilitated the activities involved with the evaluation. Highstead launched the RCP Network in early 2012. Through the activities of the RCP Network, this initiative's activities, lessons, and successes have been shared with hundreds of conservationists in 35 other RCPs across New England and eastern New York.

Robert O'Connor, Director of Land and Forest Conservation, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Robert O'Connor served as one of the three primary coordinators for this Pilot Demonstration Project and assisted in the coordination of the three new partnerships, later serving as trusted advisor.

NEFA Board and other State Foresters served as trusted advisors. They included Robert Davies (NY), Steve Sinclair (VT), Brad Simpkins (NH), Peter Church (MA), Chris Martin (CT), and Bruce Payton (RI), as well as US Forest Service's Rob Clark and Terry Miller.

Yale University's Mary Tyrrell, US Forest Service's Brett Butler with Purnima Chawla served as the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative's (SFFI's) main trainers in their Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE).

Other key participants (organizations) are described below by priority area/partnership. The organizations marked in bold implemented elements of the action plan through a subcontract with NEFA. This report includes more information about individual participants' roles in subsequent sections.

5.1 The Taconics Partnership

<u>Landscape</u>
The Taconics landscape runs along and to either side of the mountain range of the same name. The landscape encompasses towns along the shared New York, VT, MA, and CT state boundaries from Danby and Pawlet, VT west to Hebron, NY and south to encompass the Rensselaer Plateau, NY and Pittsfield and Sheffield, MA and then running to Amenia, NY and Sharon, CT.

<u>Partners:</u>
The Taconics Partnership, coordinated by Rensselaer Plateau Alliance's Marybeth Pettit (and now being coordinated by the Columbia Land Conservancy), includes approximately 22 individuals/staff of the following agencies and groups:

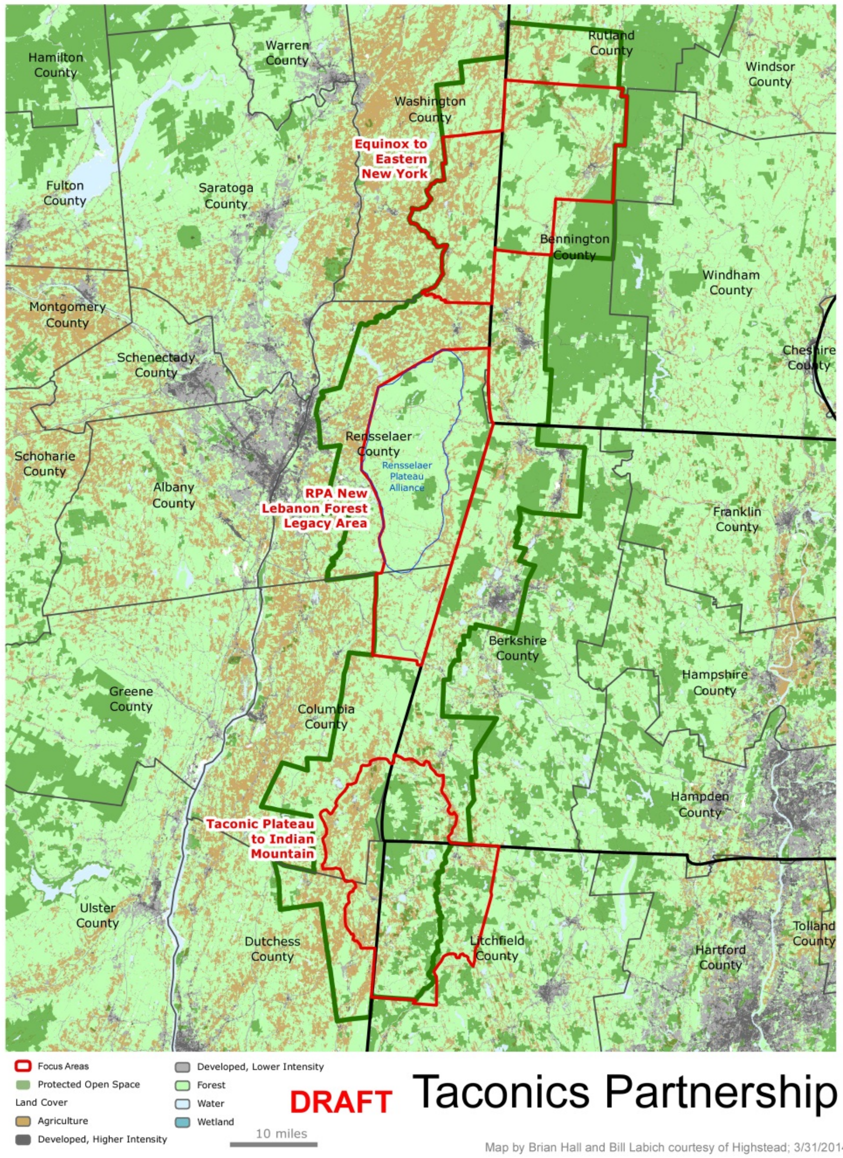

Figure 2: Boundaries of the Taconics Partnership and Focus Areas

Non-Governmental Organizational Members:

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Inc. (NY)
- Marybeth Pettit, Coordinator for the Taconics Partnership, and led activities in the RPA-New Lebanon Focus Area (Central).
- James Bonesteel, President
- Water Kersch, Board Member

Columbia Land Conservancy (NY)
- Nathan Davis implemented the action plan in southern and central focus areas in NY only.

Housatonic Valley Association (CT)
- Tim Abbott implemented the action plan

Governmental Agency Members:

VT Division of Forests, Parks, and Recreation
- Jay Maciejowski, Chris Stone

NY Department of Environmental Conservation
- Sloane Crawford, Barbara Lucas-Wilson, Jason Drobnak

CT Department of Environmental Protection
MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
- Robert O'Connor

in southern focus area in CT only.

Massachusetts Audubon (MA)

- Matthew Kamm, Stu Watson, and Margo Servison implemented an action plan in the southern focus area in MA only.

Audubon CT (CT)

- Scott Heth and Patrick Comins implemented an action plan in the southern focus area in CT only.

Vermont Land Trust (VT)

- Kate McQuerry and Donald Campbell implemented the action plan in the northern focus area.

Agricultural Sustainability Association (NY)
Audubon NY (NY)
Connecticut Audubon Society (CT)
New England Forestry Foundation

- Whit Beals

5.2 The MA-VT Woodlands Partnership

<u>Landscape</u>
This region is comprised of the Deerfield River and the West River watersheds located largely within Windham County, Vermont and in western Franklin County, Massachusetts (See Figure 3 on page 13).

<u>Partners:</u>
The MA-VT Woodlands Partnership, coordinated by Vermont Land Trust's Joan Weir, includes approximately 13 individuals/staff of the following agencies and groups:

Non-Governmental Organizational Members:

Vermont Land Trust (VT)

- Joan Weir, Coordinator of the MA-VT Woodlands Partnership, Pieter van Loon

Massachusetts Audubon (MA)

- Matthew Kamm, Stu Watson, and Margo Servison

VT Coverts (VT)

- Lisa Sausville

Franklin Land Trust (MA)

- Wendy Ferris and Alain Peteroy

Audubon VT

- Jim Shallow

Governmental Agency Members:

VT Division of Forests, Parks, and Recreation

- Jay Maciejowski and Sam Schneski

MA Department of Conservation and Recreation

- Allison Wright and Peter Grima

MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

- Robert O'Connor

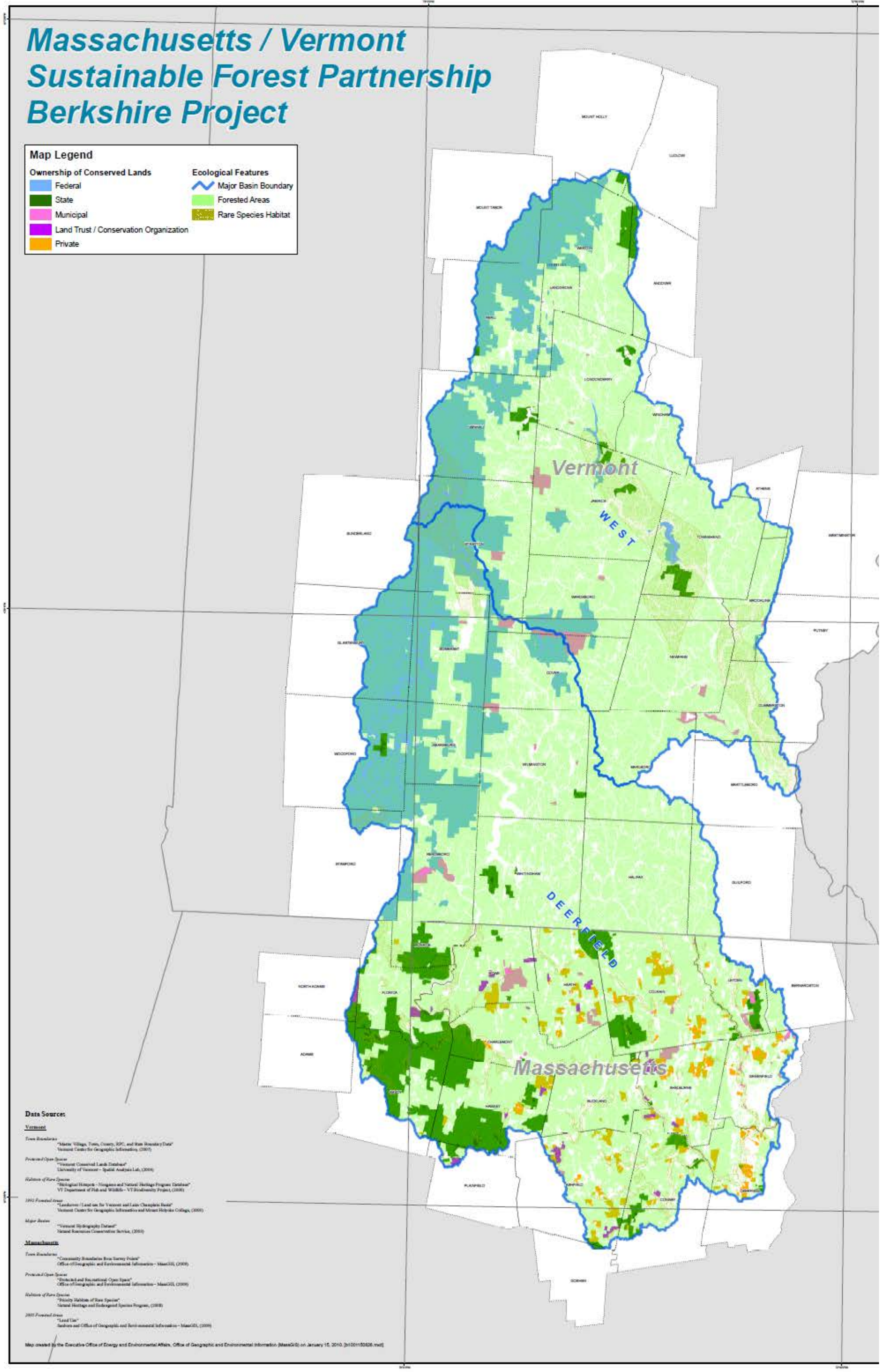

Figure 3: MA-VT Woodland Partnership

5.3 The Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership

Landscape
The Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership's members share a two million-acre, two-state region. It spans 100 miles from the Quabbin Reservoir in central Massachusetts northward to Cardigan Mountain and the White Mountains National Forest, and is bounded to the east and west by the Merrimack and the Connecticut Rivers.

There were two focus areas in New Hampshire:

- Monadnock Conservancy Project—Cheshire County, western Hillsborough County (including all Q2C landscape not just Q2C focus areas)
- Ausbon Sargent Project— Focus areas and supporting landscape in the Q2C that overlaps with 1.) Mt Kearsarge and 2.) Pillsbury/Sunapee to Low State Forest focus areas for Ausbon Sargent

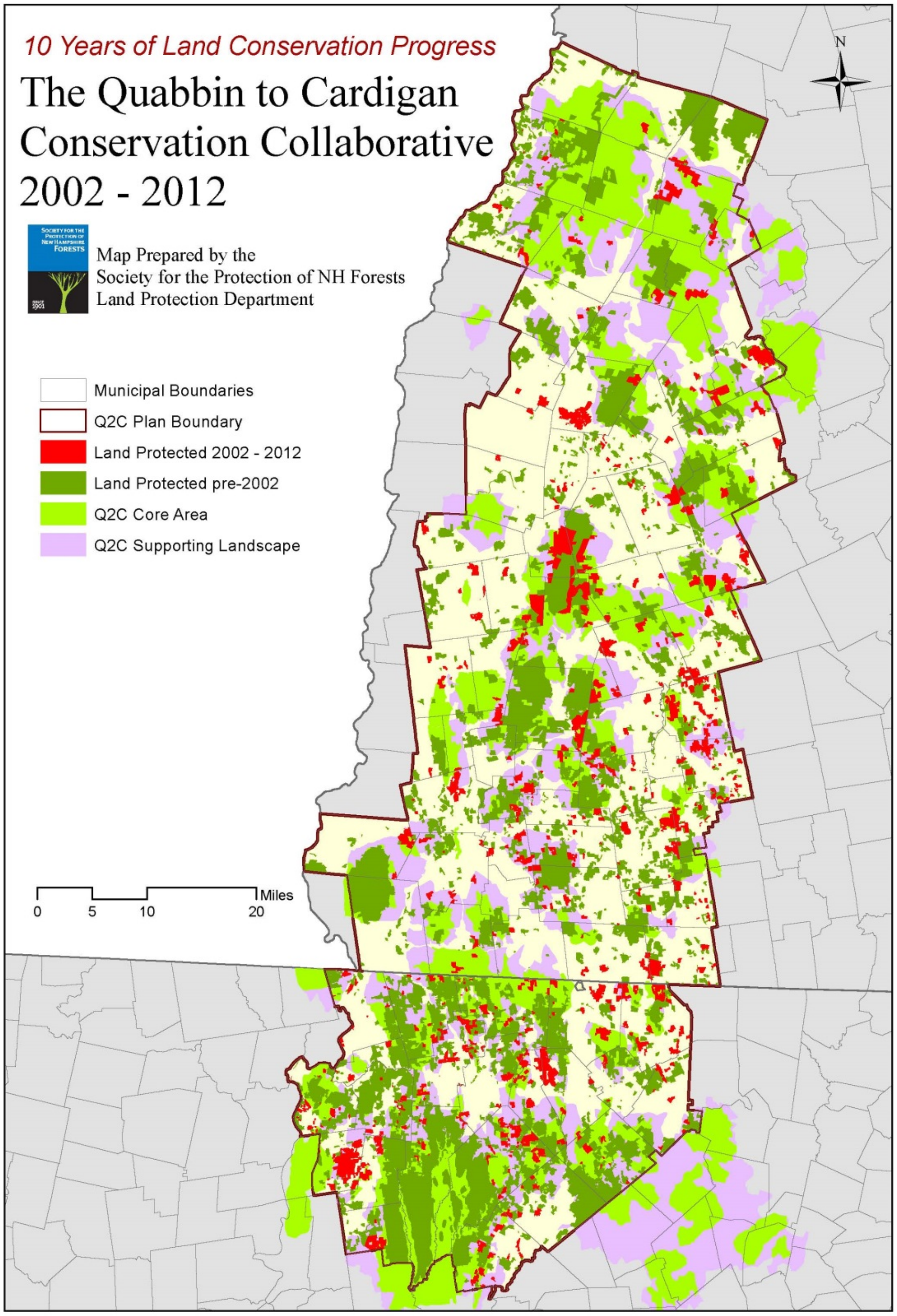

Figure 4: Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership

The focus areas in Massachusetts were defined in this way: Landowners with parcels in the Q2C "core conservation focus areas" and Q2C "supporting natural landscapes" were identified through an analysis by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests' GIS department. These areas have high values for protecting endangered and threatened species, filtering public water supplies, timber production, and public recreation.

Partners:
There are 28 organizational partners in the Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership, which launched in 2003. This project was co-coordinated by North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership's Jay Rasku and UNH Cooperative Extension's Karen Bennett. Several of the Q2C Partnership's member organizations also participated in the Regional Pilot Demonstration Project including:

Non-Governmental Organizational Members:

Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust (NH)

- Beth McGuinn

The Monadnock Conservancy (NH)

- Emily Hague

The Society for the Protection of NH Forests (NH)

- Chris Wells

North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (MA), Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust

- Jay Rasku, Coordinator
- Mathias Nevins
- Sara Wells

UMass Keystone Cooperators (#s involved)
Stew Club 3
Open Space Committee Conference 4
Gardner Estate Planning Workshop 1
Woods Forums 2
Land Tour 1
Municipal officials
Stew Club 1
Open Space Committee Conference 7
Gardner Estate Planning Workshop 4
Woods Forums 4

Kestrel Land Trust (MA) Advisor

- Ben Wright
- Kari Blood
- Kristin DeBoer

Franklin Land Trust

- Rich Hubbard

North County Land Trust

- Janet Morrison

Ashburnham Conservation Trust

- Gary Howland

East Quabbin Land Trust (MA) Advisor

- Cynthia Henshaw

Rattlesnake Gutter Trust

- Mary Alice Wilson

Governmental Agency Members:

University of NH Cooperative Extension

- Karen Bennett
- Steve Roberge
- Tim Fleury

NH Division of Forests and Lands

MA Department of Conservation and Recreation

- Robert O’Connor
- Helen Johnson

5.4 The Southern New England Forest Heritage Partnership

<u>Landscape</u>

The Southern New England Heritage Forest (SNEHF) landscape encompasses lands south of the Quabbin Reservoir, east of the I-91 Springfield-Hartford corridor and west and south of Worcester. It also includes western Rhode Island and the northeastern third of Connecticut. There are three focus areas (22 towns in all) within which the group directed most of their outreach work. These included: 1) Tri-Corner Area: MA/RI/CT; 2) MassConn Central (towns along state line); and 3) Northern Connections (stretch of towns south of the Quabbin Reservoir) (the last two are also priority focus areas of the Mass-Conn Sustainable Forest Partnership).

<u>Partners:</u>

The SNEHF Partnership, coordinated by Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development Area Council's (RC&D) Paul Dolan, includes approximately 12 individuals/staff of the following agencies and groups:

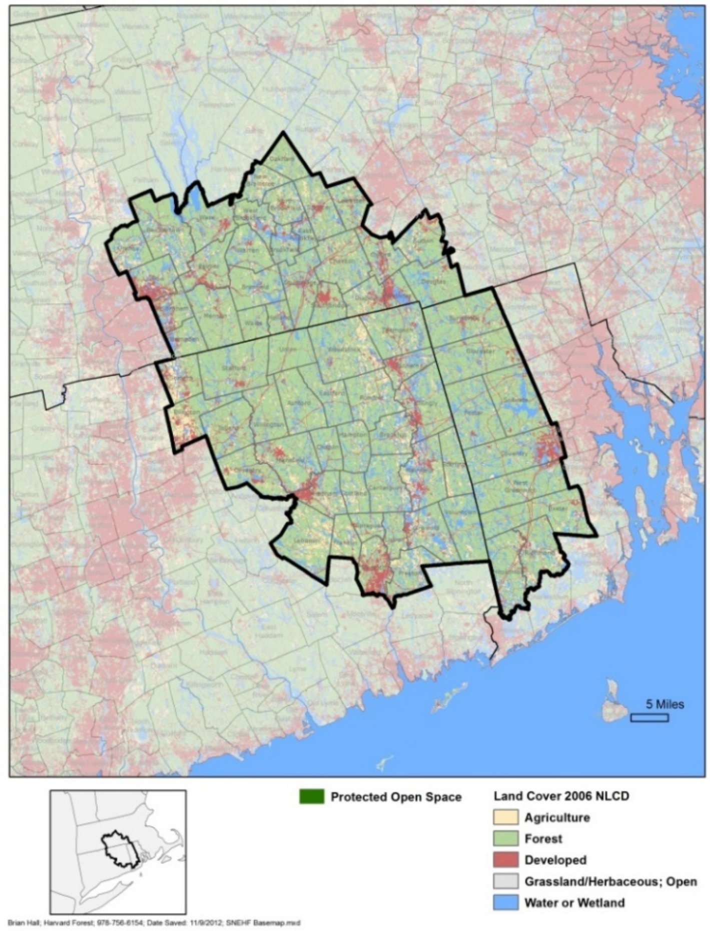

Figure 5: Southern New England Heritage Forest Partnership

Non-Governmental Organizational Members:

MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership (MA, CT)
- Katherine Blake

Northern RI Conservation District (RI)
- Paul Dolan
- Kate Sayles

RI Forest Conservators Organization, Inc. (RI)
- Marc Tremblay

The Last Green Valley (MA, CT)
- Lois Bruinooge
- Bill Reid

TNC – RI Chapter (RI)

Opacum Land Trust (MA

East Quabbin Land Trust (MA)
- Cynthia Henshaw

Governmental Agency Members:

Providence Water Department
- Christopher Riely

RI Department of Environmental Management

CT Department of Environmental Protection

MA Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Carmine Angeloni
- Doug Hutcheson

MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
- Robert O'Connor

UCONN Extension

6. WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED? ACTIVITIES, ISSUES, SOLUTIONS, BENEFITS OVERALL

Between Sept. 1, 2011 and May 30, 2014, over 50 individuals representing regional and statewide conservation organizations, state forest agencies, cooperative extension, landowner association, a conservation district, and regional conservation partnerships (RCPs) participated in carrying out the Forest Owner Engagement Initiative. They coordinated activities in four interstate RCPs, only one of which was in existence at the time (though the SNEHFP already contained the then four-year-old Mass-Conn Sustainable Forest Partnership).

The Initiative followed the Scope of Work very closely for the first two tasks and full quarters. However, the three new partnerships (all but Quabbin to Cardigan) required more time than anticipated to decide their course of action, and who would do what. The training, which is described in more detail below, was successful on all accounts. Groups met to discuss their landscapes, choose and analyze the most important natural and cultural resources of their focus areas, and discuss what people knew about the kinds of landowners in these areas. However, everything slowed for three of the four partnerships as they grappled with putting together an action plan. On top of that, we underestimated the time it would take to finalize the sub-contracts in order for the "vendors" to begin implementing their action plans. Most implementation did not occur until after Jan. 1, 2013.

The following section describes the main activities and issues involving the overall Initiative: Training, RCP Meetings, Work Plans and Contracts, All-Landscape Group Meetings, Evaluation Protocol, Activities of Each RCP, Issues, and Solutions. Finally, the Results, Lessons, and Benefits of the Initiative conclude this report with an analysis of the final reports from the four RCPs and their vendors.

6.1 The Activities of the Overall Initiative

6.11 Training

On Dec. 7, 2011, the North East *State* Forester's Association launched the Forest Owner Outreach Initiative with a full-day training workshop at Harvard Forest (click here for links to presentations and event resources). Highstead was responsible for planning and organizing nine peer-to-peer trainings and for facilitating the event. Working with State Foresters and other partners, Highstead first inventoried 19 strategies and activities for engaging individual, family, and community forest owners that were reported to be effective and field-tested. In close coordination with Charles Levesque and Bob O'Connor, Highstead secured individuals experienced in nine of these activities. These nine were thought to be most representative and likely to be used by the partnerships (see Appendix for "Which nine strategies"). Overall, 70 people attended the training workshop representing the US Forest Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the State Foresters in NY, VT, NH, MA, CT, and RI, and nearly 20 conservation organizations in four large interstate landscapes. Yale and the USFS' Sustaining Family Forests Initiative (SFFI) provided a comprehensive introduction to their program, Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE), and every participant received a binder of detailed background information.

On May 9-10, 2012, 46 participants of the project participated in an intensive, two-day training.. The training was organized and facilitated by the SFFI's Mary Tyrrell and Sharon Smith with Yale University, Brett Butler with the U.S. Forest Service, and Purnima Chawla with the Center for Nonprofit Strategies. Audience members trained in using the

TELE materials to design communication materials for one of the four individual and family forest owner attitudinal groups (click here for more information about these groups and SFFI's approach). This event, also at Harvard Forest, enabled the members of each landscape group/partnership to train and work more closely together and identify their key message, with coaching from SFFI. Each group presented their message strategy including their thoughts on evaluation. A broader discussion on the evaluation of the entire initiative also occurred (see page 16). SFFI staff were available to meet with each partnership over the course of the grant period, which several took advantage of, but not all.

6.12 Individual Partnership Meetings

Highstead's Regional Conservationist, Bill Labich, worked in coordination with MA EEA's Robert O'Connor and NEFA's Charlie Levesque to support the work of the three new groups and the Q2C Partnership members. For the three emerging regional conservation partnerships (RCPs) this included organizing agendas, meetings sites, materials and, in two cases (Green Mt. –Berkshire Hills and Taconics), facilitating the meetings through 2012. The SNEHFP meetings were coordinated by members and mostly by MA DCR's Carmine Angeloni. The three new partnerships continued to meet quarterly for the rest of the grant period while the Q2C Partnership state groups each worked on their initiatives. In 2013 and 2014, each of the three emerging RCPs got together quarterly in meetings organized by one of the vendors, whose organizations received nominal funding to provide modest administrative services.

During the months of January and February 2012, participants in each pilot project area met. The Taconics Partnership on 2/7; Southern New England Heritage Forest Partnership (SNEHFP) on 2/16; Q2C Partnership on 2/24; and, the Green Mt. to Berkshire Hills Partnership on 2/29. In each of these meetings, members discussed the landowners they were most interested in reaching and began answering the following questions:

- What are the main threats to forests in the region?
- What would our objectives be for each threat (i.e. what would we want to achieve on-the-ground to mitigate or combat it?)?
- Which landowner group(s) would we want to reach out to and engage?
- Where in the landscape would we want to focus?
- Who has information to share on these landowners?
- What do we want the landowners to do differently? What's the change in behavior we are seeking?
- Which of the tools/strategies will we use to achieve measurable outcomes?
- What roles are people and organizations interested in playing in the project (e.g. implementing, advising)?

6.14 Action Plans and Contracts

Equipped with available information on landowners in their region, each partnership met later in the spring of 2012 to develop elements of a draft action plan. When completed, the action plan would describe the specific landowner outreach and engagement activities to be carried out by vendors (typically NGO staff) for the remainder of the grant period (Taconics Partnership met on 4/19; Southern New England Heritage Forest Partnership met on 6/3; the Green Mt. to Berkshire Hills Partnership on 6/14; and the Q2C Partnership had a series of calls). The action plans included information on the following:

a. the landowner group they seek to reach out to,
b. local information about landowners in the area,
c. the desired, measurable outcomes,
d. the strategies to be used to achieve these outcomes,
e. the method for evaluating the effectiveness of each strategy,
f. the organization and personnel and the strategies and sub-tasks they will be working on,
g. their timeline,
h. their budget, and
i. their reporting responsibilities (both in-person at annual events and through quarterly reports).

Highstead's Labich developed draft action plans with direct feedback from MA EEA's Robert O'Connor for all three emerging RCPs and then sought feedback during the quarterly meetings. However, it was found that the draft work plans continuously required revisions as people negotiated their contracts with their home offices, with the other members of the partnership, and with NEFA. The lesson here is that the process of developing the contracts became integral to drafting each region's action plan. The action plans do not become "real" until vendors work on their contracts and budgets for specific tasks.

Partners in the Q2C Partnership ended up doing two separate programs for NH and MA, which is not such a "landscape" approach across 2 states as was accomplished by the other 3 partnerships. For the three emerging RCPs, their work plans and contracts took most of 2012 to finalize but they pursued their strategies across the multiple states. We found that outside of the Q2C Partnership, participants required more time to flesh out the activities, to have vendors self-select to carry out specific tasks associated with projects, and to integrate the calendars of related projects within each region. Often participants needed to meet between meetings on their shared activities. Then, when vendors planned out how they would implement projects and what budget was needed to do so, changes were often needed in the action plan for their region. The contract process led to important changes in the action plans for the MA-VT Woodland Partnership (previously called Green Mt. – Berkshire Hills), the Taconics and the Southern New England Heritage Forest:

- MA-VT Woodlands Partnership: The Conservation Fund's Nancy Bell was to be a key vendor for one of the two focus areas for this partnership. This northern focus area comprised a number of large forest ownerships, the subject of an FY14 Forest Legacy application that Nancy was organizing. Nancy opted out of Task 2. Her reasons appear to involve her cost-benefit analysis of her participation in this initiative. As a result, the resources allocated to the northern focus area (a community values forum, GIS analysis and mapping, and the landowner research) were instead invested in the southern focus area and in a new initiative, Foresters for the Birds. This new activity would be led by Audubon VT and Massachusetts Audubon.
- Taconics Partnership: The Vermont Land Trust's Don Campbell decided that his schedule did not provide for his participation as a vendor in this initiative. He hired a sub-contractor to VLT, Kate McQuerry, and supervised her work in the northern focus area of this region (NY/VT). The Foresters for the Birds Program was to be employed in two focus areas and shifted to just the most southern focus area. The southern focus area was more convenient since the vendors working on this activity (Audubon CT and Mass Audubon) were constrained by travel time from working further north.
- Southern New England Heritage Forest Partnership: There had been some confusion about which organization would coordinate meetings, as well as the trainings. Paul Dolan, who now works for the USDA Rhode Island RC&D, is also on the board of the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District. The former was the lead, not the latter. In addition, since Last Green Valley, Inc. and Opacum Land Trust, Inc. would be potentially cutting a hundred or more checks to pay for the expenses of 80 "Woodland Ambassadors," the overall budget for the project changed to account for administrative procedures.

Despite, or perhaps due to, these challenges, the three emerging partnerships are better examples of what it takes for organizations and agencies to collaborate across a large interstate landscape.. The Q2C partners ended up doing two separate programs for NH and MA, which started earlier and, which were more successful based on almost any other measure. However, their work lacked the collaborative cross-boundary "landscape" approach we were intending.

Highstead worked extensively with partners between meetings. In between July and September, 2012, the coordinators of each partnership began to provide administrative support to each of their partnerships even as their contracts were in process. See the Appendix for a copy of all 4 final action plans. NEFA's Levesque worked directly with each vendor to finalize and process their contracts.

6.15 All-Landscape-Group Meetings

Not including the two trainings previously described (Dec. 7, 2011 and May 9-10, 2012), there were three All-Landscape Group Meetings organized and facilitated by Highstead. Each of three meetings had different agendas, but shared a common purpose: convene and update and discuss with each other their activities, challenges and the solutions they used to overcome them.

- November 13, 2012 - Regional Conservation Partnership Gathering. After a presentation by NEFA's Levesque on the Regional Pilot Demonstration Project, each of the four partnerships presented their action plans to 100 people representing GOs and NGOs from across New England and eastern New York. The audience included 51 of the people involved in the Initiative. Click here to see presentation materials for this event.
- Highstead organized and facilitated two more All-Landscape Group Meetings at Harvard Forest in Petersham, MA (see Appendix for a copy of the agendas).
    - May1, 2013. Over 40 people attended the meeting including two people who participated by phone. Of the people attending, 22 people turned in their completed evaluation forms for the event. The meeting was given a 4.4 out of five ranking, where five is excellent. Members of each partnership shared their draft action plans, existing activities, and issues on which the groups then sought feedback.
    - May 14, 2014 – final meeting. Highstead organized and facilitated the May 1 –All Landscape Group Meeting at Harvard Forest in Petersham, MA. Each partnership presented the following information by focus area:
        - overview of each strategy,
        - landowner group they targeted,
        - desired outcomes,
        - messages used,
        - media and outreach methods,
        - what happened, what were the challenges and how did they overcome them,
        - the actual outcomes by the numbers,
        - any press coverage,
        - lessons, benefits, and recommendations (see Appendix for presentation materials).

6.16 Evaluation Protocol

Evaluation was a critical component of the Initiative. The methods used helped achieve the Initiative's objectives (repeated for the reader's convenience): (1) developing effective activities and messaging for the landowners in each of the four areas, and (2) identifying which pilot approaches work best so that these tools can be replicated in other parts of the region. Participants wanted to know: what worked and what didn't in terms of reaching, informing, engaging, and motivating family forest owners? What would each group continue to pursue and what would they recommend to others?

Discussions during the May 9-10, 2012 Training on Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively included the means by which each partnership would evaluate their activities. With SFFI's Yale and the US Forest Service's assistance, we determined at that training that it was not possible to do a statistical analysis since there were too many variables, and not enough replication. Nor would it be advisable to try to centralize the evaluations, or use the Conservation Awareness Index or other survey instruments. **We decided collectively that our overall purpose for evaluation would be instead to learn as much as we could about the effectiveness of each strategy.** We recognized that we could, in fact, benefit from the great diversity of approaches used by four partnerships reaching out to different landowner attitudinal groups. We also decided that we needed a common framework to collect data about the process and that evaluation should be built into each project to learn from successes and failures. SFFI encouraged us to think about interim behaviors that can be tracked throughout the communications process. These would include actions along the way that can indicate whether members of our target audiences were getting closer to fulfilling our objectives for that strategy. We also discussed the need for longer-term evaluation.

In early 2013, after a busy fall focused on finalizing contracts and action plans, Highstead researched and designed a draft evaluation protocol based on discussions with the partnerships and Yale's Mary Tyrrell. Three drafts later, the Initiative had a protocol to use. Highstead, Franklin Land Trust, and Columbia Land Conservancy co-designed a working session at the May 1, 2013 All-Landscape Group Meeting to explore and get feedback on the protocol. We held a follow-up conference call for people who self-identified as the one to keep partners on track with the protocol. We had subsequent email communications that worked to inform all participants of what we had agreed we would use in order to track and evaluate what landowners received and what they did as a result.

The Initiative's participants then employed an Evaluation Protocol to track and evaluate landowner participation and engagement (*tracking activity, results, and outcomes*). The protocol was developed in consultation with the US Forest Service's Brett Butler and Yale's Mary Tyrrell and was field tested by all of the participating NGOs. All 19 partners used the same methodology, in six RCPs in 4 interstate priority landscapes, which includes:

- Tools for tracking and measuring *Process Indicators* (what partners did, what landowners did):
    - Landowner Database (Excel or Access). Outside of basic information (landowner name, address, acres, phone number, email) the field headings are based on the deliverables (e.g. "Sent 5/13 Post Card," "Attended 5/30 Woods Forum," "Attended 6/20 Estate Planning Workshop," "Received a Bird Habitat Assessment," etc.).
    - Sign-in Sheet: Name, mailing address, phone number, email address, where did you hear of this event?
    - Event Survey Form*:*
        - *What will you do next as a result of attending this event?* (How effective was the event in helping the landowner move forward towards a desired outcome?)
        - *What did you learn as a result of attending this event? (*Did the event transfer the desired information or lessons?)
        - Use of SFFI's attitudinal survey questions to identify which attitudinal groups the event attendees belong to?
        - Ask for their name, email address, and phone number (this will be invaluable for the Outcome indicators)
- Tools for measuring *Outcome Indicators* (what was the step that landowners were to take?)
    - Phone calls or emails to landowners who attended an event after which they could do one more thing (e.g. sign-up to meet with an attorney, contact a forester, etc.). These calls are made not more than three months after the event and at least several months before May 2014, which is the end of the implementation phase of the project. Ideally, people would still have time to encourage them to take the next step.
- Tools for measuring *Impact Indicators* (what was the longer-term outcome of the strategy within each focus area?)
    - At 1 year, 3 years, and 5 years, Highstead Foundation will be reviewing the identity of family forest owners listed in the rolls of new stewardship plans and practices and new conservation easements and projects and note which of these were participants in the project. We will compare the % of participation within the focal areas to the % of the larger landscape and the state as a whole.

6.17 Reporting

Local Match Tracking

Each participating organization was encouraged to track their hours and expenses for use as local match. NEFA's Charlie Levesque developed a local match tracking form (see Appendix) that was distributed to all partners for this purpose.

Final Reports

Highstead developed and sought feedback on a set of final report templates (See Form A, B, and C in the Appendix) that each and every vendor and partnership used. Working with NEFA, Highstead read each report and reviewed them for completeness (did they address each of the elements in Forms A and B?). Highstead then reported to NEFA, which vendor's reports were complete so that they could then process their final invoices.

6.2 Issues and Solutions for the Initiative as a Whole

A project of this complexity had no shortage of issues and stumbling blocks that were overcome mainly through stellar levels of cooperation, collaboration, and leadership among all of the participants. This was, of course, coupled with patience and understanding of the members of NEFA. Still, three issues and their solutions are worth describing because they illustrate the work that goes into catalyzing new interstate collaboration.

Working with Three New Regional Conservation Partnerships:

Outside of the Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership, which was established in 2003, and which includes the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership, its predecessor by five years, all of the other interstate RCPs were formed during the Initiative. Soon after the Dec. 7, 2011 Training Workshop, it became clear to the project coordinators Levesque, Labich, and O'Connor that they would need to provide the convener, coordinator, administrator functions for two or more of these partnerships. They thought that it would give them the time to gel as a group and to work on and decide what they were going to do together. This period also gave these three groups the time and direction they needed in order to reach agreement on their action plans. It also enabled those partners that were to become vendors, the time to draw up and finalize their contracts based on the action plans. Levesque shadowed Q2C as they worked out their work plans O'Connor and Labich shared the responsibility of coordinating the three new partnerships through most of 2012, although it must be noted here that the Southern New England Heritage Forest Partnership enjoyed consistent leadership by then MA DCR Service Forester Carmine Angeloni (now retired). By the fall of that year, as the work plans were being finalized, VLT's Joan Weir stepped into that role for the MA-VT Woodlands Partnership as did RPA's Marybeth Pettit for the Taconics Partnership. It was clear to organizers that despite the fact that these three new partnerships took more time to get up to speed (Q2C partners were working on their contracts in the spring and early summer versus winter for the other three), the level of engagement paid off in how well they worked together over the initiative. This is also reflected in their continuing to collaborate after the end of the grant.

Evaluation Challenged by Diverse Activities

During the May 1, 2012 All-Landscape Group meeting it was clear that we needed to rethink how we would evaluate our Initiative. With SFFI's assistance, we came to terms with the fact that because of the great variety of activities and geographies it would not be possible to use the Conservation Awareness Index (a survey measuring awareness of people and resources among residents), or any other statistical tool. In short, we had to embrace our diversity and design an evaluation protocol that worked best, and that took advantage of these strengths. SFFI's Mary Tyrrell helped the group understand the three basic elements of evaluation and the best that we would hope to measure (see page 11). Highstead and individuals from each group devised the protocol and the tools that would be used by each and every group. The usefulness of the Protocol is evidenced in this report and in the Form Bs of each vendor (numbers of landowners who received a postcard and a phone call, % of landowner attendees of a particular attitudinal group, number of owners moving forward with actions, etc.).

Coordinating Activities across State Boundaries

One of the greatest lessons of this project was to examine how four landscape partnerships that all crossed state boundaries worked. At the kick-off meeting, there were several state and non-profit staff that worked along the state boundary lines that had not met their counter parts just across the boundary. This project highlighted the challenges for both state agencies and land trusts that cannot conduct activities across state boundaries (e.g. Mass Audubon and Vermont Land Trust). One unique aspect of the Initiative was that we worked out a budget among the four multi-state landscapes and the lessons learned are applicable to other initiatives. Developing common goals and tasks across state boundaries is also an important undertaking. Working directly with new programs, such as "Foresters for the Birds" allowed staff in other states to feel comfortable with a new program before adopting it. For example, Foresters for the Birds has expanded to four other states as a result of this pilot.

6.3 Overall Benefits of the Initiative – Broad Learnings

The following are some general learning from the Initiative (more detail follows later in the report):

- New step-by-step approach to public-private collaborative landscape-scale stewardship and conservation engagement that is applicable throughout and beyond New England**.** This approach (see page 12) may be ideal for any landscape dominated by private family forest owners and where state foresters and the land conservation community are motivated to work together.

- Deeper understanding of what it takes to attract landowners outside the "choir." Through experience, participants learned that it takes appropriately targeted messaging (TELE), the right messenger (peer leaders and experts), and enough channels (Emails, press releases, personal phone calls, postcards, etc.) to attract the unengaged landowner.

- Universal adoption of peer landowner education as the new gold standard for family forest owner engagement. The Woods Forum, Woods Walks, and any number of other less-formal events were found to be of higher value than others used in the past for informing previously unengaged landowners about their land stewardship and conservation options. Involving peer leaders in designing, outreach, and engagement during the event was seen as important and vital to the event's success. Follow-up from these events invariably led to landowners moving towards conservation and stewardship actions.

- NGOs and state agencies shown to be excellent stewards of a landowner's movement towards a new stewardship and or conservation practice. Clearly, targeting family forest owner outreach to the areas in the landscape where land trusts and state agencies alike value most for ecological, cultural, and economic attributes makes sense. Each organization will be motivated to work together to reach and move each landowner to management and conservation, and the ongoing regional conservation partnership enables that on-the-ground coordination.

- NGO's get new landowner contacts that they follow up with for conservation after the grant ends: This grant is unique because it brought together state forestry staff with land trusts. Traditionally, state land conservation staff regularly work with land trusts but not state foresters. This unique partnership allowed the land trusts to gain access to a new pool of landowners who are interested in forestry programs. After the grant ends, the land trusts will continue to follow up with this new pool of landowners to work towards a conservation future for their property. This is a significant outcome beyond the grant period.

- Easily replicated evaluation protocol for tracking and measuring landowner participation and engagement (*tracking activity, results, and outcomes*). All 19 partners used the same methodology. This included tools for tracking and measuring process and outcome indicators (what partners did and what landowners did as a result): a landowner database, event sign-in sheet, and event survey form. The event survey form includes questions that helped partners identify to which attitudinal groups did the event attendees belong.

- Stronger cross-boundary public-private partnership between the conservation land trusts and other conservation organizations and State, Extension, and private consulting foresters. Each RCP is comprised of state foresters working shoulder to shoulder with staff of land conservation trusts and state Audubon organizations. In addition, many of the activities trained and engaged both state and private consulting foresters in programs that include estate planning, silviculture for the birds, and Woods Forums.

- Targeting landowner outreach to focus areas of conservation value known to be of highest local and regional significance, often the gaps between large, ecologically and economically important forest blocks. Public and private RCP partners are now working across state lines for the first time ensuring longer-term larger landscape conservation values. Each RCP includes land conservation trusts that have great interest in stewarding landowners on the path from awareness to active forest management and then over time, to permanent land protection.

- Nested social network approach comprised of peer landowner networks, conservation and professional networks within each RCP, and a network of RCPs in a community of learning that comprises 38 RCPs in all. All of these networks are made possible through the engagement and partnerships of individuals working within public and private institutions that are at a density common to areas throughout southern, central and large portions of northern New England. It is was only by networking peer landowners, foresters and conservationists, and the RCPs themselves that all of the participating RCPs, as well as NEFA and the US Forest Service, learned how to most efficiently target, evaluate, learn from, and improve their messages and approaches for engaging individual and family forest owners.

7. WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED? ACTIVITIES, ISSUES, SOLUTIONS, BENEFITS EXPERIENCED BY THE RCPS

7.1 Activities /Strategies of each RCP by Focus Area in 2013 and 2014

The partnerships' final reports are in the Appendix. Taken together, they describe a complex set of coordinated activities that have resulted from over three years of collaboration within each partnership's members and between them. In the following part of this report, we have summarized these activities and their outcomes. One of the outcomes of the NEFA Regional Pilot Demonstration Project is a step-by-step approach to engaging landowners in stewardship and conservation in large landscapes that is applicable throughout and beyond New England.

Ideally, this step-by-step approach is taken by people representing private and public organizations and agencies who collaborate over time to implement a shared conservation and stewardship vision across town and sometimes state boundaries. These individuals would meet regularly and in-person as a regional conservation partnership (RCP). They would come to identify their common purpose, mission, goals, and objectives. They would have a map showing the most important areas to either retain in active forest management, protect from development or both.

While the NEFA Project provided three of the four partnerships with an abbreviated planning process (Q2C already had its own mapped strategic conservation vision with priority areas), the importance of having priority conservation areas cannot be overstated. Both RCPs and land trusts working from their own strategic conservation plans and maps, conserve more land. Directing outreach efforts to focus areas ensures that, over time, management and conservation gains occur mostly in those areas that partnership agencies and organizations care most about.

Here are 16 steps to this approach:

1. Share local and regional knowledge of the landscape about:
    a. The focal areas that contain the most important and threatened forests in their region. Use geographic information systems (GIS) to map and analyze the forests in the larger landscape to identify priority focus areas.
    b. The most important forest threats and desired outcomes in these areas.
    c. The individual and family forest owners in the focus areas.
2. Get trained:
    a. In how to think like, and write to attract, your target audience (e.g. Sustaining Family Forest Initiative's Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE)).
    b. In how to help unengaged landowners do the next positive thing towards managing and conserving their land. Identify and collect winning strategies from within and from outside the region.
3. Identify the target landowner audience (by location, acreage, TELE attitudinal group).
4. Build a landowner database (in Excel or Access) for each focus area and fill the database with basic information from local assessors' offices (e.g. names, addresses, acreage). Use the database as a contact manager. Document and track which partner reaches out to and engages which landowners using which specific strategies.
5. Develop and agree on an evaluation protocol that includes process, outcome and impact indicators (or use NEFA's).
6. Develop work plans designed by the partnership (to implement partnership wide objectives) and then by each focus area group of partners.
7. Using TELE, develop outreach messages for each target landowner category in each focus area.
8. Reach out to "Woodland Ambassadors" (WAs) and invite them to help promote and or lead peer-landowner education events.
9. Develop media, like postcards, flyers, press releases, etc., using the outreach messages. Work with WAs and ensure that good design standards or practices achieve media that works well with the target audience.
10. Engage and train private consulting foresters to assist in engaging and following-up with landowners.
11. Implement the strategies and programs.
12. Use the evaluation tools.
13. Track all landowner participation, outcomes, results, and partner investments using the landowner database.
14. Meet regularly in All-Landscape Group meetings so that partners can learn from their own and others' mistakes, lessons, and successes.
15. Communicate these methods, lessons, and outcomes to the larger RCP, conservation, and forestry communities.
16. Continue to engage WAs, foresters, and partners in activities, coordinated via the RCP, that help individual landowners achieve their long-term stewardship and conservation objectives.

Here were each Partnership's main strategies by focus area:

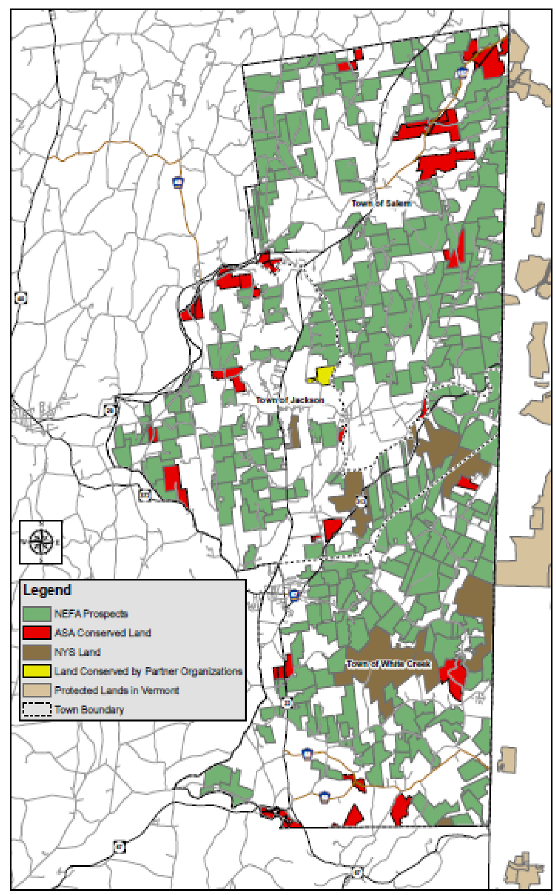

Figure 6: Equinox to Eastern NY Focus Area of the Taconics Partnership – NY side

7.12 Taconics Partnership

The Taconics Partnership considers forest fragmentation from development and poorly managed or under-managed lands as the main threats to forests in their region. The group addressed these issues using two main strategies (Estate Planning and Education for Forest Management) in three separate focus areas. This partnership also facilitated a workshop that enabled experts from across the Northeast to develop the elements of effective estate planning (click here for information on these elements):

Equinox to Eastern NY Focus Area

Strategy: Estate Planning Workshops (NY and VT)

Landowner Group: Woodland Retreat Owners and Working the Land Owners

Desired Outcomes:

- Family forest owners attend a free, one-hour consultation with an estate planning attorney.
- Writing of wills that include conservation goals to promote forestland conservation, sustainable forestry practices, and prevent land fragmentation.
- Attendees meet with a professional forester and consider enrolling in current use forest programs, or placing a conservation easement on major forested parcels of land.

Message: "Do you love your land? And value your woods?" This message was chosen to appeal to Woodland Retreat owners (with the use of "love") and Working the Land owners (with the use of "value").

Outreach: Hand-addressed postcards were mailed to all NY, 168 in VT). Emails using same messages were sent to Vermont Land Trust and Agricultural Stewardship Association members in these 8 towns.

Outcomes for NY event:

Eight individuals representing eight families attended. Five families signed up for a free consultation with an attorney. One family met with an attorney and another met with a land trust staff person.

Outcomes for VT event:

Five individuals representing two families attended the estate planning workshop. Both families signed up for a free consultation with an attorney, and one family met with the attorney.

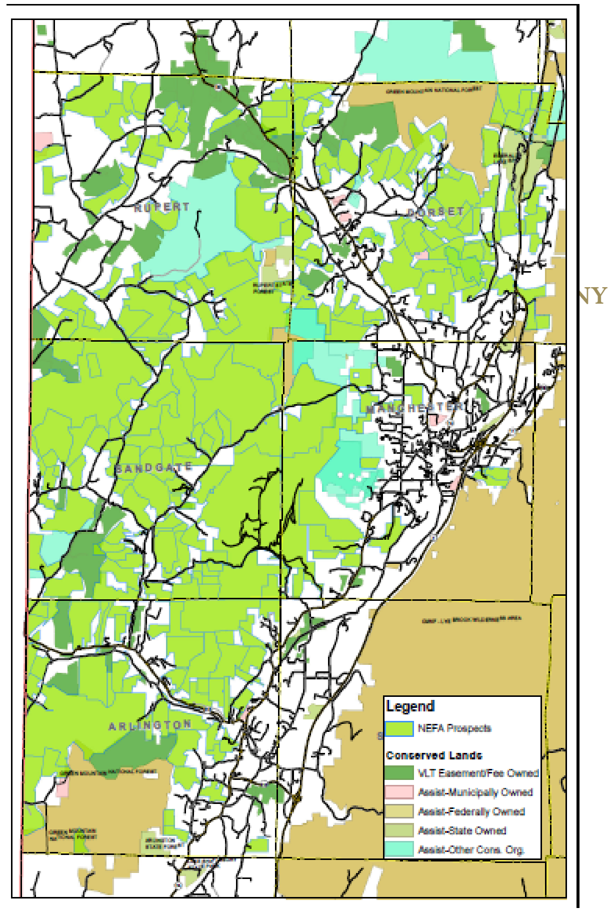

Figure 7: Maps Showing Ownerships Targeted for Estate Planning Workshops in VT in the Equinox to Eastern NY Focus Area – VT side.

Rensselaer Plateau Focus Area

Strategy: Woods Forums

Landowner Group: Woodland Retreat Owners

Desired Outcome: Discuss conservation and forestry management with local forest landowners and provide contacts for additional information.

Message: "Enhance the health of your woods for the enjoyment of your family and introduce ways to promote woodland habitats for wildlife."

Outreach: 500 invitations mailed to landowners in the focal area for the Woods Forum and Estate Planning. Workshop. Flyers with TELE-informed image posted in popular locations. Personal phone calls inviting attendees found to be most effective outreach method.

Outcomes:

Thirty landowners attended, eight signed up for and followed through with a free visit from a participating professional consulting forester. Two of the participants in the Woods Forum from the focus area completed significant donations to the Rensselaer Land Trust. One attendee donated a conservation easement on 127 acres in Stephentown, New York, and another attendee donated eight acres in East Nassau, New York for access to a waterfront preserve. These donations were ongoing, but, hopefully, these benefactors were encouraged by the additional conservation efforts in the region.

Strategy: Woods Forums

Landowner Group: Working the Land Owners

Desired Outcome: Information was presented to encourage landowners to consider conservation easements or land donations and to use a consulting forester when harvesting timber and/or to develop a management plan.

Message: "Join fellow landowners and forestry professionals for a discussion on how to maintain the value of your woods for timber harvesting, recreation, wildlife and future generations."

Outreach: Invitations using the TELE language and illustrated by a family in the Woods were mailed to 533 landowners in the focus area. Flyers were posted in the libraries, town halls, general stores in addition to the local gun club.

Outcomes:

Four of the fourteen attendees were "Working the Land" landowners. Nine of the fourteen, representing six families, had site visits from the consulting forester, and although no new management plans have been developed, several landowners indicated an interest in developing one when contacted in a follow up phone call.

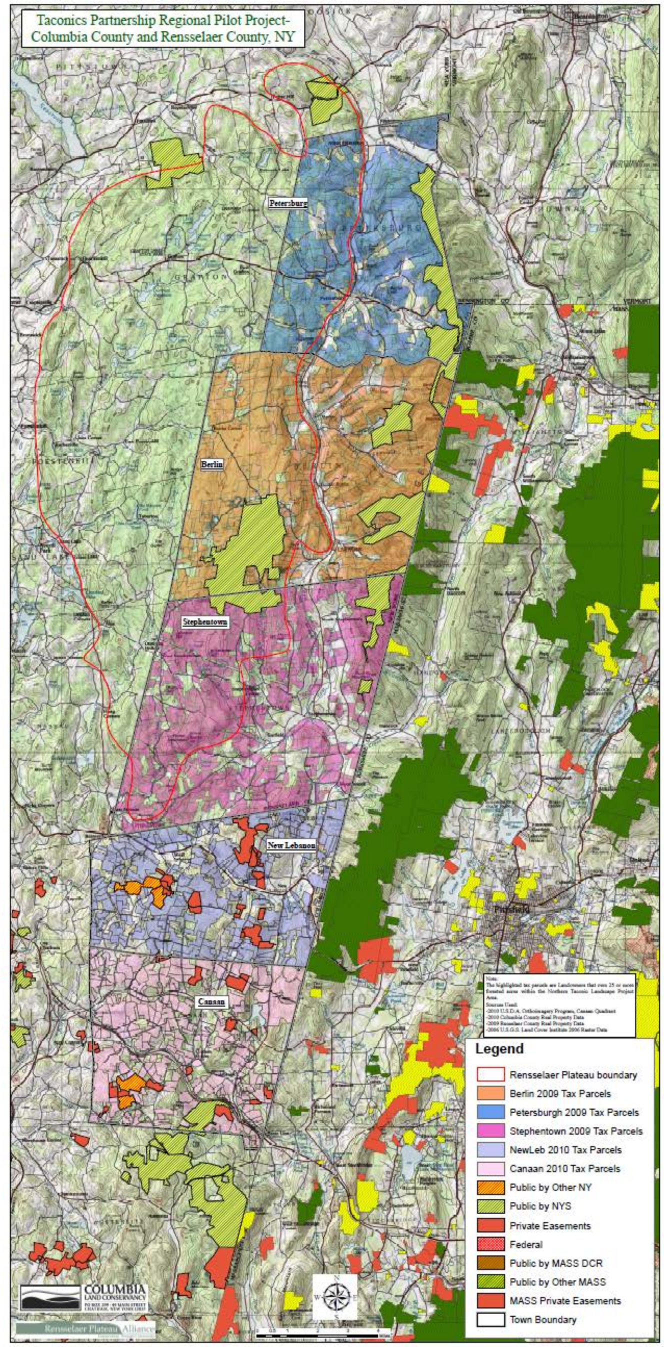

Figure 8: Maps Showing Ownership and Protected Status of Key Parcels in the 5-Town Rensselaer Focus Area of the Taconics Partnership

Strategy: Estate Planning Workshop

Landowner Group: Woodland Retreat Owners

Desired Outcome: To have landowners consider land conservation when developing an estate plan.

Message: "Come get an overview of estate planning from an experienced attorney…this workshop will focus on maintaining family ties to the land from generation to generation, building awareness of key issues facing family woodland owners and motivating families to address this challenge."

Outreach: Same 500 invitations mailed to landowners in the focal area for the Woods Forum and Estate Planning Workshop.

Outcomes: