Got Map, Now What? How Great Bay Partners Use Science-based Priorities to Choose the Best Places to Protect and Manage

Session 3B – Amphitheater
2017 RCP Network Gathering

Presenter: Dea Brickner-Wood

Objective: How can RCPs integrate new information into the decision-making processes?

Context of partnership:

- 1994 RCP with 9 principal partners
- Collaborate with partners (associate partners) in town as opportunities arrive
- Program areas: conservation planning; land conservation; stewardship; education and recreation
- Group had two maps identifying priority conservation focus areas:
    - One based on CELP – Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program
    - Second identifying core and supporting landscapes
    - These priority areas were confirmed using fieldwork
- NH Coastal Watershed Conservation Assessment Project guided with the following questions:
    - How to evaluate new information as relevant to conservation decision-making?
    - What new information sources to integrate with existing information sources?
    - What new information or analyses were needed to further define conservation priorities
    - Best way to inform conservation practitioners on availability of new information and how to use?
    - How can new and emerging information be continually integrated into conservation decision-making process?
- Jessie B. Cox Innovative Grant (2015-2016) allowed Great Bay to answer these questions and create the adaptive conservation planning process.
- Adaptive conservation planning process: “engage conservation partners in the appraisal of new data and integration of new and existing information in the assessment of land conservation projects”
    - Continually adjusting plan to make sense in decision-making
- Service area: 42-town NH Coastal Watershed
- Project tasks and accomplishments:
    - Inventory and analysis of conservation information resources
    - Conservation property assessments
    - Partnership engagement
    - Adaptive planning process

1. Information Resource Inventory:

- Created an inventory of conservation data sets, models, studies, etc.

- Excel sheet which can be broken down by attribute
- Broken down by criteria (i.e. agriculture, water, bird, climate), primary organization, geographic area, data format, last year updated, need GIS assistance
- Also wrote User Guides available to Partners on Google Drive

2. Conservation Property Assessments

- Purpose: assist land trusts and public agencies in assessment of conservation projects by incorporating value-added information
- Conducted property assessments for land conservation action and stewardship management
- Field Assessment Team (FAT) visits to evaluate properties with team of experts
- Field Form created to link conservation priorities, inventory info, and partner property assessments, consolidate field evaluation, and provide support for funding applications
    - One part filled out in house, on filled out in field
    - Field form is essentially a series of questions to truth information, verification of the same categories
    - This is important for writing grants to get properties protected, as well as for stewardship and management of that property moving forward
        - FAT examples: Stonehouse Forest; Horsburgh; Zanard; Bodwell; Caveretta
- The field assessment team evaluates: water quality; climate resiliency; healthy ecosystem (diverse habitat and species); past and present land uses on a property assessment/inventory form and checked with the field observations and verification form
- FAT is 9 steps, beginning with a property request by a conservation partner, followed by coordination by Great Bay Coordinator and conservation partner, the assembly and completion of a FAT and field form with information sharing and photos, and the final property assessment given to the conservation partner.

3. Partnership engagement

- Importance of collaboration of partners, including Conservation Assessment Project Committee (CAP), Field Assessment Team (FAT), the 9 partners of Great Pay, the NH Audubon, and public agencies, NGOs, etc. conducting the research to create the inventory

4. Adaptive Planning Process - how Great Bay will implement the process

1) Information Resource Inventory
    - Evaluate the information resource inventory and conservation criteria used to screen information annually
2) Conservation Planning - next steps
    - Update conservation priority areas in watershed
    - Assess integration of new information - climate resiliency for example
    - Conduct education and outreach
3) Education and Outreach

- Outreach to Principal Partners (i.e. presentations during quarterly meetings)
- User Guides

4) Field Assessment Practicum
    - Continue evaluating prospective conservation properties
    - Revise Field Property Assessment/Inventory form annually

Project Outcomes

- Developed Adaptive Planning Process
- Conducted conservation property assessments using inventory and forms
- Goals to increase acres conserved and money leveraged, engage partners and strengthen collaboration

Adaptive planning activities 2017 – 2018

- Water Resource Analysis - public water supply, pollution attenuation, flood management
- NH Wildlife Action Plan
- Land Protection and Transaction Grant Program - project eligibility and evaluation
- Connecting the Coast: Wildlife Connectivity
    - Incorporate critical connections for wildlife movement into Field Form

Audience Discussion

- How audience incorporates new info into decision-making?
- How do you decide what properties to collect information on?
    - Previously based on 97 plan and inventory work targeting properties
    - 2012 shift to individual partners (NGOs mostly) direct conservation work with partnership in supporting role
    - Rely on conservation partner initially to say this is a priority property and why – they do initial assessment based on own and RCP priorities
- Basing conservation priority areas on GIS science-based approach versus word of mouth properties with high value?
    - Beginning with priority areas grounded in science, followed by the incorporation of add ons such as readiness factor
- Incorporating scale into previous question.
    - Practicality of GIS-based identification for larger scale projects
- Funding?
    - Cox and New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
- How to cite trails as eco-friendly to wildlife resources on properties (within context of wildlife connectivity initiative)?
    - Grant program for stewardship is a potential project idea, still in the works.