Sustaining and Restoring a Connected Forested Landscape

Session 3C – Main Ballroom
2017 RCP Network Gathering

Speakers: Laura Marx, Bridget Butler, Phil Huffman
Moderator: Jessica Levine

Introduction – Jessica Levine, TNC Canada

- Risk of fragmentation of Northern Appalachian Acadian region, a globally significant ecoregion
- Identified key connectivity areas between healthy intact core forest
- Connectivity important for climate change resilience
- The Staying Connected Initiative (SCI) partners with lots of different kinds of groups, on many different scales
- Laura, Bridget, and Phil will talk about strategies to sustain and restore
- Strategies: science, land protection, land use planning, landowner outreach, transportation mitigation, policy

Science and land protection – Laura Marx, TNC Massachusetts

- Not a landscape of little bridges, but a connected landscape of protected lands – has a host of benefits
- Mapping analysis to identify areas and roads where an investment in land protection has a disproportionately high impact on connectivity
- Verify with camera traps, road kill studies
- Studies require landowner permission and/or citizen science, so trying to identify places to conserve has led to some land protection (e.g., Cook land, mink tracking leading to land donation)
- Discussion
    - Bigger picture aspects can be important for landowners

Land use planning for connectivity – Phil Huffman, TNC Vermont

- Why is land use planning a strategy? We can't buy it all
- Technical assistance and community engagement at the local scale (where it happens) – identifying local priorities, creating and affirming a shared vision
- Sharing best practices
- Spectrum from regulatory to non-regulatory of ways to move forward – depends on community and local context
- Ex: Enosburg, VT, changes informed by science incorporated into town zoning
- Ex: Austin, QC has many provisions incorporating connectivity
- Discussion
    - CT has mandatory setasides, so one way to influence planning is to steer setasides to most important areas

    - Not anti-development, but smart growth and steering development
    - What was the overlap between your science-based prioritization and community-based consensus? Typically fairly good overlap with biologically-driven prioritizations

Landowner outreach – Bridget Butler, Cold Hollow to Canada

- Cold Hollow to Canada thinks of itself as an hourglass, bridge between hyperlocal (towns, conservation commissions, landowners, public) to state agencies, land trusts, TNC, countries, SCI, regional initiatives
- Woodlots group: identify landowners in priority habitat blocks and invite them to woodlots group to focus their practices and values on a larger scale
- Honor, fear, pride, eye-candy
    - Pride: largest intact broadleaf canopy in the world
    - Eye candy: wildlife
    - Fear: the world is in trouble, esp. forest birds and climate, so empower people
    - Honor: empathy with where people are coming from, listen
    - One love: work together
- Keep it social, bring in other partners (Audubon), woodlots groups have demonstration areas
- Discussion
    - Meet regularly and share best practices with Canadian groups. Canada challenges are different, but the work continues on both sides
    - RCPP goes to NRCS practices, out to landowners

Transportation – Jessica Levine

- Cost-effective solutions: NYDOT, with partners, installed a linkage in a culvert to connect wildlife through culvert stream
- Wildlife-friendly designs: rip-wrap covered in dirt for ungulates, fences to funnel animals to the linkage
- Bridges and culverts with additional space by the streams, good for terrestrial animals and floods
- Sharing best practices
- SCI involved in many initiatives, some in French
- Leveraging investments: example of a busy road along private protected lands

Institutionalizing connectivity through policy – Phil Huffman

- State-level action (SWAPs, climate adaptation plans, open space plans)
- New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers, coneg.org/negecp

Discussion

- Floodplain connectivity important in planning

- Riparian corridors, look at overlap with watershed groups. CH2C, want to make new bridges and corridors good for aquatic, terrestrial organisms, humans. Brought together watershed partners, state reps, looked at flood event scenarios.
- How much connectivity do you need, and how far are you? What are your metrics?
    - Number of acres, observed changes in land use plans, starting to get there
    - We have a framework for assessing metrics; easier to answer specific questions as opposed to region-wide summary of progress on connectivity
- Protecting existing connections vs. creating missing links, what is the balance?
    - Both. Starting with what is there but also looking at pinch points
- NEGECP – broad-ranging attention to environmental issues
- Don't try to move landowners, listen to landowners for how they can be moved. Same with local communities re: land use planning