

## Notes from Conservation of Diverse Landscapes in Your RCP

### Session 1: Working the Land—Conserving Farmed and Forested Landscapes

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*Notes Prepared by Sarah Ganong*

#### **Working Forest Conservation Easements, *Brian Hotz***

- In past, forestry was often a “permitted use” of an easement, but not the main purpose.
- WFCE: Working Forest Conservation Easements add language to affect forest management to protect specified forest values. Goal is to ensure professional forest planning, careful management, and BMPs as well as protect ecological and landscape values.
- It is important to include goals in a WFCE – i.e. maintenance of soil productivity, protection of water, improvement in quality of forest products, conservation of scenic quality, protection of unique/fragile areas, habitat for endangered species, protection of cultural and historic features, protection for plant and animal species.
- There needs to be a statement of landowner objective, a forest type map, prescriptions for each stand type, soil types, access roads, wetlands, surface waters, an explanation of protection of important areas, and it needs to be made sure that forestry doesn't conflict with easement purposes.
- Having a forestry management plan with details, not in the easement, makes it easier to adapt – as opposed to dealing with changing an easement since that takes more legwork.
- The [\*Forester's Guide to Conservation Easements\*](#) makes it easier for foresters to work with landowners that have easements.

#### **Conserving Farmland, Woodlands, and Wildlands in the Connecticut River Valley of Western Massachusetts, *Kristin DeBoer***

- The price per acre for farmland is astronomical, especially compared to forests.
- [\*Forever Farmland\*](#) aims to accelerate pace of conserving farmland and generates excitement about local food. Farmland conservation is the basis of the local food system.
- There are three types of farmland:
  - **Prime:** best soils, breeds both traditional farmers (mechanized monocultures) and CSA systems (organic agriculture, community, volunteers, interns).
  - **Hilltown:** people expect more out of these, so they are more challenging to protect. Can't use state eligibility agriculture preservation restriction program. This can sometimes be more of a burden for landowners to achieve diverse goals.
  - **Floodplain:** these are the farms along the Connecticut River. Not highly developable, but have high resource values and many include wetlands.
- How can farmland conservation be done better so that it includes other values?

#### **Farmland Access, Tenure, and Transfer: Conservation Tools or Context? *Jim Hafner***

- Access is more than affordability. How can farmers get opportunities to get land beyond simply needing money?

- How is farmland transferred from one owner (farmer or non-farmer) to the next?
- It takes more than buying the land. Someone needs to farm it too!
- 70% of New England farmland is expected to change hands in the next two decades. 2/3 of retiring farmers lacked an identified successor (2007 USDA agriculture census).
- How do we as conservationists help get younger generation involved and supported? How do we balance the needs of exiting farmers? We can't just look at those entering.
- Challenges for new farmers: non-farm backgrounds, preference for ownership instead of renting, land values and competition, affordable housing, depleted support services, unsure how to find a farm, business planning doesn't address land acquisition.
- Crisis-Opportunity: farmland access, staying on land, and passing on farms are not new problems. The new urgency and complexity requires new approaches with multiple stakeholders, and landowners need to be involved in all steps.
- Access: is land available in sufficient quantities, in suitable locations, and is it accessible and findable? Is it appropriate for farming with security/housing/infrastructure? Owned or rented? Equity in rights/responsibilities, especially for rentals, are very important.
- Leasing is a reality—young farmers without mortgage debt are more likely to succeed.
- Buy-protect-sell programs can be good examples of integrating farmland protection and access. Innovative leasing/ownership models are being developed and tested.
- RCPs can factor in the farmer-land equation: create workable agriculture easements, build awareness of access issues, become aware of options (alternatives to ownership, nontraditional tenure/lease models, sources of help), help seekers/owners find each other, encourage/support use of public/institutional land for farming, engage diverse stakeholders, integrate land-use planning/conservation/farming into projects, and support policies/reforms that secure farmer access

