

**Notes from the “Emerging: Getting Your RCP Organized” Breakout Session:
Moderators: Marcel Polak and Lee Burnett from the Forest Works! Project in Southern Maine**

Notes prepared by Steve Falivene

Fifteen participants gathered to discuss challenges and tips for emerging RCPs. Much of the time was spent on introductions of RCPs and their challenges; the rest on addressing those challenges.

Lee Burnett & Marcel Polak’s experience with Forest Works!:

- Peer-to-peer example promoting high standard of sustainable forestry across their region
- The biggest challenge they face is how to keep their collaborative going, because they’re grant and small foundation funded—both difficult to sustain
- For them, a grant manager is incredibly important

Attendees or regions represented by attendees:

- Pennyvale Environmental Education Center, southeastern Vermont
- Southern Maine
- Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (most of its land has RCP overlap)
- Nashua River Watershed Association
- Aton Forest (an organizational member of the Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative) has a new RCP: Sandy Brook Conservation Corridor (Connecticut, Massachusetts)
- Westchester Land Trust (New York)
- Providence Water, Rhode Island Woodland Partnership
- Massachusetts AmeriCorps members
- Massachusetts Forestry Alliance
- Kestral Land Trust
- Stewardship Network of New England
- University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension (Rockingham County)
- Taconic Landscape Partnership (four states)
- State land trusts and several Audubon groups looking to get involved with RCPs

Discussion Outline:

Introduce yourself:

- Name
- Organization
- Name of RCP
- What’s next for your partnership?

Discussion on Biggest Challenges, Needs, and Opportunities

- What is the number one challenge and or need your partnership has faced or is facing?
- What strategy has been particularly effective in your efforts?
- What are the most compelling opportunities for RCPs in this group?

What challenges does your group face?

- Cultural gaps exist between states and private groups that need to be bridge
- Communities don’t want to cross boundaries
- Separate, solo culture in New England is a barrier. There’s a resistance to sharing resources and personnel—have to combat this to achieve culture of collaboration instead. But people are more likely to be willing as long as each member is familiar with other collaborators.
- Land trusts do not want to have other groups involved on their “turf.”

- Direct landowner outreach efforts (letters/newspaper articles/etc) take a long time to get responses, as well as require multiple outreach mechanisms to begin. Knocking on doors and being patient after personal contact has been the most effective.
- Takes a very long time (years) to feel like outreach is actually succeeding. Establishing a brand is very important, but a lot of work and can feel like you're not actually achieving success.
- Marcel Polak: Need to get people to think regionally and think in partnerships
- Bill Labich said the Fairfield County RCP grew from a few RCPs to many, so he feels that this RCP is RE-emerging. Challenge is to get the now larger RCP as a whole to collaborate. He has to find a way to serve the partners to keep them leaning towards collaboration.
- The brand of the RCP brings out a competition for resources and equal partnership. Partners become focused on just getting the work done, instead of on branding and growing to increase future success.
- Municipal and business participants find they require more payback to get involved
- Hard to measure success of efforts, especially in beginning and branding stages

Strategies that work:

- Reach out annually using a list of landowners that are willing to tout their conservation efforts to other landowners
- Hands-on demonstrations and outings that bring together neighbors and conservationists who promote their management plans that work.
- Identify management issues and engage people
- Demonstrations of different kinds of low-impact forestry (horse logging, cut-to-length mechanism)
- Cater outreach to interests of landowners already involved in successful efforts
- Follow-up is very important
- Advertise with wide variety of media: newsletters, newspapers, radio, and cable TV.
- Don't force participation. Just spread the word and sometime down the road others will team up.
- [The Stewardship Network](#) (Michigan) had charismatic and capable organizers that knew state laws/community decision-making skills.
- People in the collaboration have to bring something to the table (office space, expertise).
- Water as a driving force for conservation need



How do you keep diverse participants together so they each get something significant?

- Coordinate staff that is a shared field crew for different faction, trails, or field efforts.
- Membership must be more than just attending meetings—do something that demonstrates partnership and make gestures so giving is built into the collaboration

What do you want to try to make a collaboration come together?

- Promote regional identity through informal trail development—build corridors.
- Getting handshake agreements and raising public profiles helps conservation happen.

- These sorts of informal branding and building can raise momentum towards established and lasting conservation. First creating regional cooperation is an indirect route that gets people connected to the outdoors.
- GIS and mapping can be powerful tools to get people involved—their land is integrated into the bigger picture.