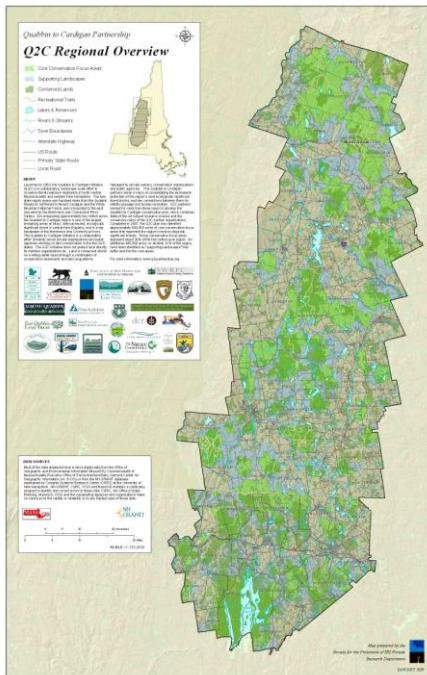


Opening Remarks of Emily M. Bateson *RCP Network Gathering ~ November 13, 2012*

Thank you, Bill. And thank you for organizing this major event. Bill has been analyzing Regional Conservation Partnerships for Highstead for more than 5 years, been gathering RCPs in this annual forum for at least three years, and on behalf of Highstead also spends considerable time helping specific RCPs with strategic planning and finding new funding, and otherwise building the RCP Network and a robust community of learning. Bill's research and analysis of RCPs and their elements for success are encapsulated in an article under review at the *Journal of Forestry* and should be published soon, so many thanks for all that you do in this field.

It's a pleasure to be here today and part of this impressive gathering of conservation practitioners. And to be here at a time in New England when we are seeing an extraordinary growth of Regional Conservation Partnerships.

But what are regional conservation partnerships or RCPs exactly? And what is their role in New England (and NY) conservation today?



At the risk of talking to the converted, RCPs are generally informal and diverse partnerships that work across town and sometimes state boundaries to achieve conservation at a larger landscape scale.

It is conservation that is firmly tethered to the local community and to the deep knowledge of the people who live on that landscape and need to have a meaningful say in how this land will be conserved for future generations. But RCPs also work to achieve conservation at the larger landscape scale and harness the knowledge, resources, and commitment of larger conservation organizations and state and federal agencies pivotal to conserving the broader landscape.

RCPs achieve conservation that saves local swimming holes and favorite trails, while also conserving the larger blocks of habitat and the habitat connectivity that we now know is vital for biodiversity and for ecological resilience in a time of climate change.

Bonded by a shared commitment, RCPs build expansive networks, knit together partner agendas and activities, build trust, craft shared conservation visions, and raise the money to get the job done. This is not a top-down approach; this is not what has been called the “black helicopters” of the federal government. It is the new generation of locally-fueled Yankee ingenuity. RCPs are the new face of conservation in New England.

Conservation at Multiple Scales

Local Species and Special Places



Natural and Human Communities



NOT:



Landscapes and Connected Habitats



Since 1994, RCPs have been advancing land conservation in places like Maine's Mahoosuc Mountains, New Hampshire's Great Bay, the Maine Coast, the Taunton River Watershed, the Green Mountains, and the North Quabbin region of Massachusetts. The number of RCPs has grown rapidly, and the number of organizations involved in these informal collaborations has risen from about 50 to more than 350 today.

See the North Quabbin Partnership looking a little lonely in the middle of MA in 1994? By 2010, it is the southern anchor of Q2C and a key piece of regional connectivity both north and south. This is a telling example of how one RCP is important, but how together you make an extraordinary difference.

Today: 30-plus RCPs cover over 55% of New England's forested landscape



See: wildlandsandwoodlands.org/RCPNetwork for an interactive RCP map including contact information and acreage conserved.

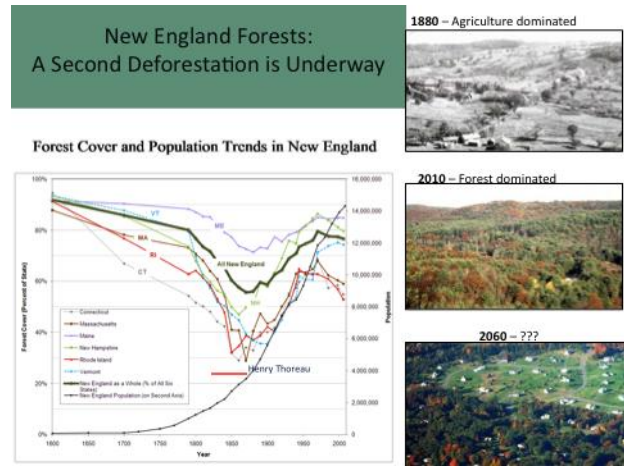
With the emergence of five new RCPs within the past two years, the area covered by RCPs now totals 18 million acres – or more than 55% of the forestland in the region. Not even counting the Staying Connected Initiative or the Conte Wildlife Refuge.

All of you, working in your own RCP are making a difference at both the local and regional levels - a trend that is both heartwarming and essential.

But before I move forward, I do want to encourage you to visit the RCP Network site on the W&W website, where we have an up-to-date map of all RCPs... This is a screen shot I took this morning.... **SLIDE** And it is an interactive map that include TNC climate resilient landscape information, as Jen Melville will discuss this afternoon... and other information. **SLIDE** including contact and website info for each RCP and % of acreage conserved. So...Lots of fun, but the growth of RCPs is also serious and vital business.



Our forests were once devastated by agricultural expansion and timber exploitation, and they have been growing back for 150 years. But today we are now losing forests on net annual basis in every New England state. And this time it is not a soft deforestation – Development is not like farm fields that can grow back. We have a second chance to save our forested landscape, but we will not have a third. Pavement, as they say, is the final crop.



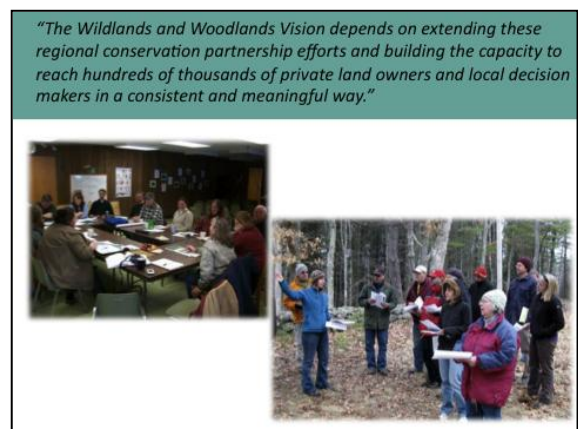
This is a forest trends map developed by Researchers at Harvard Forest working with academics and conservationists across the region for the Wildlands and Woodlands report, and they concluded that we need to conserve **70% of our region’s natural landscape if we are to retain New England as we know it** – a natural landscape that continues to clean our air, filter our water, safeguard our wildlife and biodiversity, conserve ecological resilience in a time of climate change, and provide the wood products, jobs and recreation that sustain us all.

The W&W vision also calls for local decision-making, voluntary conservation only, and for about 90% of the region to be conserved as sustainable timberlands, with the remaining 10% as special ecological areas.

Although we call this the “Wildlands and Woodlands vision,” you can call it what you will, because I know we all agree. We need to reverse current development trends and conserve the lands we both love and depend upon. We need protected forests that we can rely on for fuel and timber, and maple syrup and tourism dollars. We need our special places protected. We want to pass New England on, intact, to our grandchildren’s grandchildren.

The Wildlands and Woodlands report in 2010 embraced the concept that conservation must be locally led and voluntarily endorsed, and stated that the

“The Wildlands and Woodlands Vision depends on extending these regional conservation partnership efforts and building the capacity to reach hundreds of thousands of private land owners and local decision makers in a consistent and meaningful way.”



Highstead supports the W&W vision and we support RCPs because we believe that RCPs are the boots on the ground in the current conservation battle in New England.

A recent study on land conservation concluded:

“It is increasingly imperative to address (land and water conservation) at the scale of large landscapes.... there is a gap in governance and a corresponding need to create informal and formal ways to work more effectively across boundaries.”

Lynn Scarlett, and Daniel Kemmis; Published by Lincoln Institute. 2010. “Large Landscape Conservation: A Strategic Framework for Policy and Action.” Matthew McKinney,

And that is exactly what RCPs – what all of you – are doing through innovative collaborative conservation. Not that this kind of approach is new to New Englanders.

In a national ranking of civic engagement, every New England state ranks in the top ten of all 50 states. – we have a proud history of getting together to solve problems and move forward, dating back to the town meeting approach and even the Mayflower Compact itself. We also rank extremely highly in terms of sense of place – we cherish the landscapes that surround us. And Yankees have a deeply engrained ethical sense that conserving and stewarding our natural resources is the right thing to do. And against all odds, that is what we continue to do, generation after generation, as the conservation leaders of America.



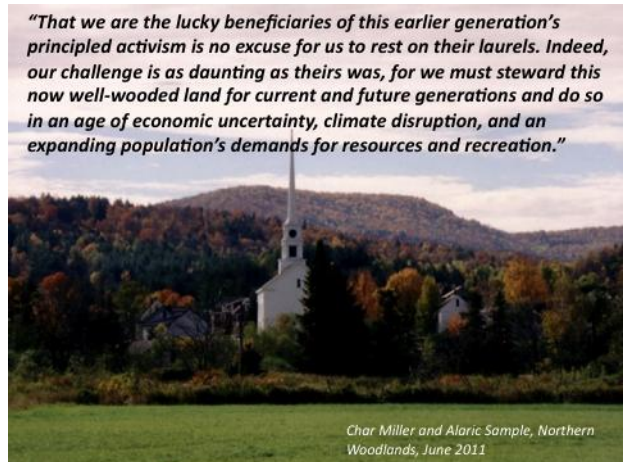
At the turn of the last century, our forests were largely denuded due to agricultural expansion and timber exploitation. Right here in Concord and south to Manchester, when the White Mountains were being timbered and burned, laundry hanging on lines would be covered in soot. The Merrimac River ran dry. This slide shows the White Mtns ablaze because of timbering in the bottom slide, near Owls Head. We have a tribute to New England conservation visionaries Henry David Thoreau and Henry Perkins March in the upper right.

Our forests were denuded and ablaze, our waters despoiled, but 101 years ago, state legislators, farmers, business people, women’s groups and more banded together to form the SPNHF and work with AMC to pass the Weeks Act, which allowed purchase of private lands for the national forest system, and led to protection of the White and Green Mountains and other key areas in 48 states – it has been called one of the most important conservation laws in US history. In this era we also created Baxter State Park, Acadia National Park and conserved the Catskills and Adirondack in neighboring NY. It was an extraordinary era.

However:

“That we are the lucky beneficiaries of this earlier generation’s principled activism is no excuse for us to rest on their laurels. Indeed, our challenge is as daunting as theirs was, for we must steward this now well-wooded land for current and future generations and do so in an age of economic uncertainty, climate disruption, and an expanding population’s demands for resources and recreation”

And New Englanders have not rested. As the economics of the forest products industry started changing 20 years ago, there was a mass exodus of international timber corporations that held much of the Northern Forest of NE and NY. Two thirds of the land base changed hands and massive development was feared. But we created the Forest Legacy Program, to help conserve sustainably managed *private* forestlands, and other innovative funding programs including the Community Forest program. We have conserved millions of acres in fee and easement. And we have created major new conservation areas, including the Conte National Wildlife Refuge.



And now today, through RCPs – through your work – we are tackling the greatest challenge and opportunity of conservation today: the central demographic fact that we are a region of myriad small, private landowners, faced with escalating population and development pressure. Our region is 80% in private ownership. **We have 873,000 family forest owners that own 14 million acres in New England – many in very small parcels. And development pressure is growing.**

- U.S. Forest Service researchers estimate that by 2050, 60-70 percent of Rhode Island and Connecticut could well be urbanized.
- A 2006 survey of New England's aging forest owners revealed that 70,000 owners of about 2.25 million acres planned to sell or subdivide some or all of their land in the near future.

We need to reach these landowners and give them both the tools and the inclination to – as President Theodore Roosevelt said, “leave your land as a heritage to your children, increased and not impaired in permanent value.”

Collaborative large landscape conservation is a new approach, and to succeed we need new tools – we need to successfully reach these small landowners on stewardship and conservation; we need to aggregate bunches of small conservation deals into bigger success stories; we need to understand what's at stake regionally; we need conservation planning that incorporates both local and regional concerns -- and we need to find the money to get the job done. All of these topics are covered in one way or another during today's sessions.

Highstead has twice surveyed all the RCPs in the region to help us collectively understand the growth and significance of this form of conservation, share effective strategies, find new pathways to success, and raise new monies to get the job done.

And we have identified three basic RCP stages:

1. Some of you are just getting started with community outreach and setting priorities: you are new or EMERGING RCPs.

2. Some of you are MATURING - well along that path, with agreed on priorities, and working through conservation mapping and outreach strategies and looking for the capacity to get the job done.

And some of you are CONSERVING RCPs - leading the way with conservation on the ground, coordinated strategies and at least some capacity in place.

You may be at different stages, but you are all on a similar conservation trajectory, and it is forums like this that provide critical peer exchange and technical training so that we can build the best community of learning possible in this exciting new conservation arena. And so that together we can achieve the greatest success.

It is not the first conservation battle in New England, and perhaps not the last. But it is an epic battle and it is on our watch: to reverse escalating development trends and work collaboratively at multiple scales of land and community to conserve the farmed and forested landscapes of New England.

Through the Looking Glass slide

As the Queen observed in the Lewis Carroll classic, *Through the Looking Glass*: “Now here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast.”

And so we must run twice as fast. We must double the pace and scale of conservation.

Looking at the rapid growth of RCPs across the region, and looking around this room, I have no doubt that this is exactly what we will do.

Once again, New England is leading the way in conservation, thanks to all of you. Thank you for your leadership and commitment, and we hope you enjoy the day ahead.

