

# The 2015 Regional Conservation Partnership Network Gathering

*Conservation Leaders Gather to Discuss Innovation in Land Protection*

The 6th annual Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network Gathering was held November 17 and 18, 2015. The event brought together more than 170 conservation professionals from the academic, state and federal agency, non-profit, business, and philanthropic sectors across New England and eastern New York. The event featured 12 workshops with topics ranging from engaging landowners to advancing conservation finance.



2015 marked the five- and ten-year anniversary of the New England and Massachusetts Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W) vision reports. Building on the years of accomplishments since the reports were released, attendees were asked to focus on a central question: “What can we all do together to advance conservation in our region and beyond?”

New this year, the RCP Network hosted a Coordinators Meeting and Dinner the day before the gathering. Representatives from 31 RCPs met to discuss successes, needs, and priority actions for the regional conservation partnership community as a whole. Prentice Zinn, Director at GMA Foundations spoke at the dinner about innovative organizational structures that could be applied to the RCP Network. After dinner, there was a screening of *Bob and the Trees*, a 90-minute film about a forester/logger in the Berkshires, which also played at Sundance and won first prize at a Czech Republic film festival.

## Keynote

This year’s keynote speaker was David Foster, Director of the Harvard Forest, and Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W) co-author, who delivered a talk titled *Whither New England? The role of conservation in the region’s history and future*.

His talk focused on building on previous success and increasing the pace of conservation across the region. Foster stressed that forests are critical infrastructure and urged the audience to value trees not just as nature, but as an infrastructure necessary for the life and health of humans, plants, and animals.



## 2015 Gathering at a Glance

- ✓ 173 attendees
- ✓ 35 of 44 RCPs represented
- ✓ 7 RCP Success Stories featured
- ✓ 12 workshops
- ✓ 35 presentations
- ✓ 4.6/5 overall rating



## Workshop Highlights

### **Strategize for RCP Success: What will you be and what will you do?**

This workshop brought together a group of experienced RCP leaders who know that organized RCPs are more effective than disorganized ones. The trick is knowing when to start a strategic planning process. Kim Lutz (Friends of the Silvio O. Conte Fish and Wildlife Refuge), Jerry Bley (Mt. Conservancy Collaborative), and Donna Merrill (Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership) described why and how their partners sought consensus on goals, strategies, and short-term, mid-term, and long-term objectives.

### **Using Birds to Advance Your Land Conservation Goals**

Focused on connecting RCPs with local bird conservation partners, this workshop offered tips to attract new flocks of supporters. Ashley Dayer (Cornell Lab of Ornithology), Jim Shallow (Audubon Vermont), and Deborah Reynolds (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) showcased user-friendly tools and resources available to strengthen the case for protecting land and managing habitat. The workshop emphasized that bird conservationists offer strong scientific justification for such efforts, can suggest new funding sources, serve as partners to match existing grant funds, help mobilize community supporters, and provide volunteers and tools for stewardship.

*“The RCP Gathering is consistently the BEST conference I attend on any subject in terms of content, pedagogy, and curation. The progress and enthusiasm of this network is made palpable by this event.” - 2015 attendee*



### **Making Capital Campaigns Work for You**

To carry out a successful collaborative capital campaign, an RCP needs to develop an approach that works for and adapts to its unique situation. Karen Young (Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative), Jim Bonesteel (Rensselaer Plateau Alliance and Rensselaer Plateau Working Forest Initiative), and Jackie O'Connor (12 Rivers Conservation Initiative) shared their experiences, insights, and lessons learned from their three RCPs, which were at various stages in planning and implementing campaigns.

### **Informed by Science: New approaches to conservation planning**

As technology advances, new and better ways to meet conservation goals emerge. The tools become more sophisticated and customization helps meet conservation needs better now than ever. This workshop detailed how mapping technology can help model future land use scenarios, identify priority parcels, increase efficiency and generate maps at a regional level for specific conservation and funding goals. Presenters included Jonathan Thompson (Harvard Forest, Harvard University), Jeff Collins (Massachusetts Audubon), James DeNormandie (LandVest), Ed Hood (Opacum Land Trust and Mass-Conn Sustainable Forest Partnership), and Brian Hall (Harvard Forest, Harvard University).

## Learn more

More information about the 2015 RCP Network Gathering, including videos and workshop presentations, is available online at: <http://www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/2015-RCP-Network-Gathering>.