

RCP Network Gathering 2017 Takeaway Points

Session 1:

1A: Organizational Ecology: Adapting Principles of Network Ecology to Scale Up Large Landscape Conservation

Presenter: Prentice Zinn

Confronting the big environmental challenges in New England requires regional conservation partnerships to scale up to a level that dwarfs current efforts. The bold leadership for this effort demands a high degree of partnership literacy – an awareness of the challenges and opportunities related to human networks. Fortunately, the ecological principles that we use to promote biodiversity at the landscape level mirror the principles that will help us build social capital and scale up. The goal of this hands-on workshop is to introduce the ecological metaphor as a tool that can help guide the organizational strategy of conservation networks. Once the metaphor has been fully developed, it has the power to become a tool that can help us understand how RCPs as human systems can thrive or fail.

Highlights:

- RCPs can cultivate and make better use of their connections by applying systems thinking and creating visual representations of their networks.
- Individuals and organizations in the periphery can make important contributions to the partnership. These “weak ties” are a source of strength, and often bring new knowledge or expertise. RCPs do not have to try to do or provide everything if they partner effectively with outside groups.
- When collaborating beyond the core partnership, ask lots of questions and keep eco-jargon at a minimum.

1B: A Bigger Vision Needs a Bigger Team: The New Wildlands and Woodlands Report as Guide

Speakers: Susan Adams, Charlie Baeder. Moderator: Cheryl Daigle

With stories of regional conservation efforts in Maine as a backdrop, we will examine selected themes presented in the Wildlands and Woodlands report and explore how scientific information and calls to action can inform RCP efforts to expand their base of support and build alliances. Participants will be asked to contribute their own ideas on how the report – or other resources, including the “act” of networking itself – can best advance RCP goals while contributing to a stronger sense of community and sustained conservation action.

Highlights:

- The broadened Wildlands and Woodlands vision emphasizes the need to bring in people from all communities and forge new alliances, which will require language that speaks to what is important to stakeholders.
- Bridges can be built on a foundation of shared passions, one-on-one interactions, and listening to local residents.

- The vision needs local champions to be realized. RCPs can play important roles as conduits, implementers, and adapters of this information to local contexts.
- Small group discussion focused on digging deeper into two issues: 1) forest to water connections and 2) climate resilience and storm water management. Emphasis on how to get the message out, existing and needed resources, and finding partners and the activities that inspire dialogue.

1C: Keeping Farmland in Farming: Preserving Farm Legacies through Viability, Access, and Transfer
Speakers: Stacy Gambrel, Vanessa Johnson-Hall, Jamie Pottern. Moderator: Jim Habana Hafner

How can farmland preservation fit into a landscape conservation strategy while supporting land access, farm viability, and transfer? Learn about the issues and how three land trusts work with diverse partners to support and protect viable, working farms.

Highlights:

- Supporting farm businesses should be thought of as a critical component of any farmland conservation strategy, as economically viable operations are less susceptible to conversion.
- Land protection can contribute to farm viability by helping to keep land prices affordable, prompting earlier succession planning, and encouraging stewardship.
- Cultivating trust with the farming community takes time and requires organizations to address the issues that matter most to farmers such as access to affordable land and housing, business and estate planning, natural disaster relief. These relationships may lead to conservation down the road.
- Understanding the entire local food system in which farms operate can illuminate needs and identify opportunities for innovative approaches.

1D: The AT Landscape for the 21st Century: Trail to Towns

Speakers: Peter McKinley, Bryan Wentzell. Moderators: Simon Rucker, Dennis Shaffer

Conservation of the Appalachian Trail landscape is accelerating and New England states are leading efforts to protect the Trail and its surrounding lands. Learn how organizations of different sizes and types are working with local, state, and federal partners to protect a landscape that encompasses forests, farms, and towns.

Highlights:

- The Northern Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership is currently drafting a values statement that will guide efforts to map priority areas in the Northeastern region and strengthen future applications to funders.
- While a narrow corridor around the footpath itself is almost entirely conserved, the broader landscape surrounding the AT encompasses a wide range of values that are worthy of protection.
- Bolstering connections with “AT Communities” in a way that supports economic development and human health is a key feature of several current and future initiatives.

1E: Tapping our Forests: Investments in Healthy Watersheds for Drinking Water

Speakers: Jeff Lerner, Spencer Meyer, John O’Neil, Paul Susca. Moderator: Marcy Lyman

Regional and local land conservation is an increasingly important strategy for protecting water supply and quality and for stormwater management. The panel will present efforts to identify and target priority lands for water, partnerships between water utilities and land trusts, and new sources of funding to support land conservation investments for water services.

Highlights:

- Much of the forestland owned by public water utilities lacks permanent protection, which means that some of the most important lands safeguarding drinking water quality in New England are among the most threatened by development. Easements can help alleviate tax burden, and returns can be reinvested to purchase additional water supply land.
- Messages about water quality resonate with wide range of audiences and can be highly effective at garnering public support for forest protection
- Savings from avoided costs associated with water treatment can sometimes pay for additional investment in watershed land protection, but not always. There is a need for more research that quantifies multiple co-benefits of forest protection.
- Multi-sectoral partnerships are key features of several innovative models harnessing new private and public capital for watershed protection in New England. RCPs can play a significant role in fostering relationships between the conservation community and water utilities.

Session 2:

2A: What is the Role of Land Protection in the Future of Your Region’s Communities?

Speakers: Kristin DeBoer, Ryan Owens. Moderators: Rebecca Washburn, Rob Aldrich

Our world is changing in many ways. Climatic, demographic, social, political, and economic changes are affecting how people live, where they live, and why they live where they live. Conservationists are coming to realize that conserving large tracts of land cannot happen in a vacuum and that land conservation wins are inextricably linked to wins for the people on and adjacent to those lands. Instead of asking, “What is the future of conservation in [name of a place]?” savvy strategists are asking “What is the role of conservation in the future of [that place]?” Kristin DeBoer of Kestrel Land Trust (MA) and Ryan Owens of Monadnock Conservancy (NH) will talk about the impacts of including more people in your conservation work – both on the organization and the community. Rebecca Washburn and Rob Aldrich from the Land Trust Alliance will moderate and facilitate a lively discussion.

Highlights:

- Community conservation is characterized by authentic, deliberate approaches that engage a diverse constituency in stating its shared values, needs and goals.
- Embracing principles of community conservation does not necessarily require radically altering *what* your organization does, but tweaking *how* your organization operates and talks about its work. Working in this way comes with a certain degree of risk, but will open

your organization to new relationships with community members, funders, and partners from other sectors.

- Land trusts are community institutions with a certain skillset. Partnering with community groups that bring other areas of expertise can help ensure that initiatives have the support they need to be successful.
- Listen closely, and community members will identify the things that matter most to them—this is a good place to start.

2B: Nature’s Network: Your Local Treasure—Our Landscape Posterity from Maine to Virginia

Speakers: Michale Glennon, Brian Hall. Moderator: Scott Schwenk

“Nature’s Network” (naturesnetwork.org) is both a network of partners and a vision for a connected network of lands and waters from Maine to Virginia. It identifies many of the most important places for conserving aquatic, coastal, and terrestrial habitats across the region and includes tools for setting conservation priorities. During this interactive session, you will learn about Nature’s Network and discuss how your RCP can contribute and benefit.

Highlights:

- Nature’s Network can complement local planning efforts by providing an additional perspective on how local information and priorities fit into the larger landscape picture.
- The Nature’s Network Conservation Design brings together key datasets in four categories: terrestrial habitats, imperiled species, aquatic habitat, and connectivity. A suite of accompanying tools enables users to prioritize, view maps, and download data.
- This data has been applied in projects of different scales, from regional visions, to the parcel level and has been called on to inform activities that run the gamut from planning to policy reform.

2C: Landowner Engagement Across Connected Urban, Suburban, and Rural Landscapes

Speakers: Colin Novick, Kara Hartigan Whelan, Lisa Hayden, Ed Hood. Moderator: Hallie Schwab

In a landscape dominated by private ownerships, realizing a vision of forests, farmland, rural communities, and dense population centers linked through a network of conserved lands will be achieved largely through voluntary actions taken by families and individuals. This session will showcase proven strategies for initiating and sustaining relationships with landowners across a spectrum of landscape contexts as a jumping off point for a discussion on the role that partnerships could play in forging connections at the regional scale.

Highlights:

- Landowner engagement is about cultivating relationships with people, often over long timeframes in the case of land protection. In more fragmented landscapes, your options for connectivity can be fairly limited, and there may be just a few key landowners and parcels. Persistence and a long-view are essential, as it can take generations. It’s important not to burn bridges.
- Mail campaigns are a coarse-filter strategy to reach a large pool of landowners, but it’s important to tailor your message to a targeted audience segment and provide a clear call

to action. Craft messages that reflect your audience's values and emotions, or that address their barriers to action. Follow up is crucial.

- The messenger can be more important than the message. Enlisting ambassador landowners to talk with their peers can be a powerful way of amplifying your message and building relationships in your community.

2D: Hey, You Got Your Regional Planning in My Regional Conservation!

Speakers: Jamey Fidel, Ryan Friedman, Sally Stockwell. Moderator: Elisabeth Hamin

The new Wildlands and Woodlands, Farmlands and Communities report highlights what people working in RCPs know but less often effectuate. The relative permanence of any regional mosaic of interconnected forests, farms, wetlands, waters, corridors, and parks is ultimately dependent on the engagement of all communities from cities and suburbs to rural villages, as well as the alignment of land use, conservation policies, and priorities. As such, it is imperative that RCPs work collaboratively with local, regional, and state government and quasi-government agencies to align their efforts to conserve and develop in patterns most supportive of thriving communities for people, plants, and animals. Our session will introduce this topic with examples from Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine pointing to how RCPs can partner with the land use planning sector and knit closer ties with residents and town officials for mutual benefit. Our discussions will identify key issues, challenges, and opportunities that will be explored next year as a major theme of the 2018 RCP Network Gathering at UMass Amherst.

Highlights:

- Look for opportunities to shape consistent approaches across land use planning entities.
- Cultivating diverse coalitions containing members of conservation and planning community, policy makers, local boards, state and regional agencies is a key strategy for affecting comprehensive legislative action.
- RCPs should look to Regional Planning Commissions as a resource for data analysis, mapping expertise, planning support, and facilitation.

2E: Collaborations Beyond the Classroom: Partnerships Between ALPINE and RCPs

Speakers: Bob Heiser, J.T. Horn, Marianne Jorgensen, Adair Mulligan, Philip Nyhus, Sarah Wells, Jim Wooster. Moderator: Jim Levitt

Academics for Land Protection in New England (ALPINE) is a growing network of faculty, staff, administrators, students, and alumni committed to increasing the pace of land protection. ALPINE engages the academic community to protect both institutional lands and areas in their surrounding communities by working with RCPs and other conservation organizations and agencies. In this session, we will discuss examples of how RCPs and other conservation organizations have worked together with faculty, alumni, students and administration to protect land.

Highlights:

- New England has among highest density of higher education institutions in the country, which points to tremendous potential to catalyze large landscape conservation through engagement with students, staff, faculty, administrators, and alumnae. Academic institutions have many resources to bring to bear, from research expertise, to student internship programs, to specialized equipment and materials.
- Open space owned by academic institutions is often treated as financial asset and not part of the campus, and is thus vulnerable to liquidation if not permanently protected. Middlebury College's 2100-acre easement on Bread Loaf Campus provides a model for collaboration between land trusts and academic institutions.
- When working with educational institutions, think like a business person with regards to money and community relations. Colleges and universities are often responsive to pressure from alums, so engaging these graduates as land trust board members or project champions can be an effective entry point into conversations with institutions.
- RCPs considering hosting interns should look to colleges beyond the immediate geographic vicinity and investigate multiple points of contact within institutions, such as career services offices, who may be able to provide administrative and financial support.

Session 3:

3A: Grounded and Nimble: RCP Leadership and Communication Structures for Memory Retention and Adaptability

Presenter: Jill Weiss

This workshop is inspired by research conducted between 2011 and 2015 on the RCP Network. The findings from this research suggest that (1) RCPs utilize both codifiable and tacit knowledge – the latter quite difficult to share and store; (2) some management and communication habits are more effective for RCPs than others; and (3) many RCPs are reaching a point in their development where their structure is changing or will change radically. These changes may include the number of member organizations, the capacity of the RCP, or leadership. Such changes can disrupt institutional memory. This workshop starts the knowledge inventory and reflection process to prepare your RCP for such changes, whether planned or unplanned.

Highlights:

- RCPs formed under grants are most at risk when external funding dries up. Partnerships formed organically tend to be stronger. Non-brittle, fluid structures are often the most successful.
- Organizational fatigue is normal, but anticipating it can help mitigate it. Consider changing routines, engaging new members, and remaining open to dissolution or mergers.
- Risks to RCP resilience include loss of institutional memory, and failure to transmit tacit knowledge (information that is difficult to record or communicate). RCPs can alleviate these risks by identifying activities that require tacit knowledge, expanding the leadership circle, and treating strategic planning as an ongoing operational procedure.

3B: Got Map, Now What? How Great Bay Partners Use Science-based Priorities to Choose the Best Places to Protect and Manage

Presenter: Dea Brickner-Wood

How does an RCP select the most useful sources from the avalanche of new information? How can new information be integrated with existing information and priorities? How can this information be used to inform conservation decision-making?.....The Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership's attempt to answer these questions (and others) led to the development of an adaptive planning process that engaged conservation partners in the appraisal of new data and integration of new and existing information in the on-the-ground assessment of land conservation projects. Learn how the Conservation Assessment Project furthered the Partnership's collaborative efforts to promote landscape-scale land conservation and stewardship in the 42-town New Hampshire coastal watershed.

Highlights:

- The Great Bay Partnership developed an Adaptive Conservation Planning Process in order to engage partners in the integration of new and existing information in the assessment of land conservation projects. The inventory of relevant datasets, models, and studies, as well as the conservation criteria, are updated annually.
- The 42-town project included the development of a property assessment tool used by a field assessment team to verify shared conservation values. The partnership begins with science-based priorities, and then considers other factors like readiness and partner input.
- Partners expect this systematic and coordinated approach will increase acreage conserved, leverage additional funding, and strengthen the RCP.

3C: Sustaining and Restoring a Connected Forested Landscape

Speakers: Bridget Butler, Phil Huffman, Laura Marx. Moderator: Jessie Levine

The Staying Connected Initiative (SCI) is a bi-national collaboration of over 40 partners – including conservation groups, universities, and public transportation and natural resource agencies – working since 2009 to ensure landscape connections across the globally significant, 80 million-acre Northern Appalachian-Acadian region. To sustain a connected forested landscape at this scale, SCI partners use an innovative, multi-pronged approach including conservation science, land protection, land use planning, engagement with private landowners, transportation mitigation, and policy advocacy. In this session, speakers will provide examples of how this multi-faceted approach is applied on the ground, at state and provincial levels, and at the regional scale.

Highlights:

- SCI uses mapping analysis to identify areas and roads where an investment in land protection will have a disproportionately high impact on connectivity.
- There are a range of land use planning options on a spectrum from regulatory to non-regulatory, and no one tool is right for every community.
- Cold Hollow to Canada's formula for hooking landowners includes appealing to sources of local pride, empowering people in the face of global threats, and fostering a collaborative spirit.

- Developing good metrics for assessing connectivity is still a challenge, but we are beginning to have the tools to measure impact through acres protected and observed changes in land use plans. We need to protect existing connection and create missing links, but we can start by identifying and addressing pinch points.

3D: What Does Regional Resilience Look Like?

Speaker: Stefanie Covino. Moderator: Trish Garrigan

In this session, we will explore the questions, “What does Regional resilience look like – and how do we get there?” The session will be a mix of small and large group discussion and speaker presentations. Discussion questions include: What does regional resilience look like? What is in the way of moving in that direction? What are RCPs successfully doing in this area, and what are ways RCPs could engage? Stefanie will present the organization and the work of the Resilient Taunton Watershed Network, and Trish will facilitate discussion and present other examples of regional resilience and available tools. Together, we will work to develop a set of action items at a variety of scales for how to move toward regional resilience.

Highlights:

- Reactive responses to catastrophes blow up existing funding programs. There is a need to develop proactive planning and funding strategies.
- With complex problems like climate change that are difficult to understand, there is need for specific action plans that articulate roles for different organizations and stakeholders.
- Bolstering the resilience of social systems, through tough dialogues, workshops, and other civic activities is another critical aspect of community preparedness for crisis.

3E: Community First: RCPs in Service of Community Health, Economic, and Educational Needs

Speakers: Stephen Blackmer, Lee Dassler, J.T. Horn. Moderator: Mike Wilson

Maine West is an unconventional RCP with a focus on improving connectivity across the conservation, economic, health, and education sectors in western Maine. From this backdrop, participants will explore the role of conservation and RCPs in helping to address community issues ranging from education and health outcomes, to municipal income streams, economic development, and even spirituality. How do we move from seeking community support for conservation to providing community service through conservation?

Highlights:

- Maine West has embraced an ethos of addressing community needs first and adapting the conservation agenda to support these needs. This has led the RCP to partner with local healthcare, education, and business sectors to develop programs that draw on the region’s protected open space resources to improve health outcomes, support educational attainment, and bolster local economies.
- When important local places are threatened by development, this has the potential to rally a broad swath of the community in common cause. Taxes and usage tend to be sources of friction. Successful community campaigns to protect these important places need to be founded on social capital.
- Love of land can be a deeply emotional and spiritual connection. Faith communities can play a role in fostering an ethic around “sacred landscapes” as a vehicle for conservation.