

Landowner Engagement across Urban, Suburban, and Rural Landscapes

Session 2C – Trafalgar

2017 RCP Network Gathering

Speakers: Ed Hood, Lisa Hayden, Kara Whelan, Colin Novick

Moderator: Hallie Schwab

Hallie Schwab, Highstead

- Most land in New England in hands of private individual and families, taking largely uncoordinated actions that will decide the future of their land. Any regional conservation efforts in this landscape will have to involve deep engagement with landowners across the full spectrum of land use, from rural to suburban to urban.
- *Wildlands and Woodlands, Farmlands and Communities* provides one framework for thinking about what engagement at the regional scale might look like. It envisions an interconnected network of protected lands linking population centers, farmland, rural communities.
- There are multiple levels/scales of the landscape to consider:
 - Municipal Level → RCP → Watershed → Region (RCP Network)

At the local level, organizations may tend to work primarily in one portion of the landscape spectrum. As we move up to the RCP level, partners bring local expertise to bear on collective action for a larger region. We often work at the watershed level because we know that land use in a rural area up north has implications for water quality in more populated areas downstream. And here at the RCP Network Gathering, through partnerships, we can begin to think at the regional scale. In this network and in this room, we have a wealth of experience with landowner engagement in every landscape context. Our presenters today will share some of the strategies they've used to cultivate and sustain relationships with landowners in their landscapes, and we invite you to join in too.

What are some common barriers to engaging landowners in your region?

- Responses (Generated by Audience)
 - Perceptions:
 - People think easements are tax havens for the rich
 - People think an easement is “taking” the property away from them
 - We already have so much protected land, why conserve more?
 - There are doubts about direct benefits to the landowner
 - Disagreement among family members

Ed Hood, Opacum Land Trust, MassConn RCP

- The MassConn RCP covers part of the “Last green valley” region between Hartford and Worcester/Boston (Exurban / Farm & Forest)
- The RCP is looking to conserve 80,000 more acres to reach 256,000 acres total, or 33% of the region.

- They have created a Regional Conservation Map using a grant from the Cox Trust:
 - The map shows the results of co-occurrence modeling, which determined the top 20% most valuable unprotected land in the region.
 - Based on a 2012 dataset of assessors' information on land parcels, the map also shows who owns each parcel of land.
- They contacted and followed up with top-20% landowners by creating a database and using tracked communications
- They also used what's called the Woodland Ambassador Program, a peer to peer communication system where current easement holders / allied members of the community begin conversations with their neighbors about conservation options.

Lisa Hayden, New England Forestry Foundation

- NEFF is using postal mail campaigns, with a total reach of 2,500 landowners representing 10,000 acres.
 - The mailer offers a free 2hr session with a forester to discuss stewardship and conservation considerations on their property. NEFF follows up by providing tools/literature such as a climate adaptation checklist and fact sheet.
 - This represents a coarse-scale interaction campaign – designed to be the first point of contact for a large, diverse base of landowners.
- Received a Wildlife Conservation Society grant to incorporate a climate change and stewardship strategy, which led to the checklist and other materials
- Their tools are available to all RCPs – climate messaging, parcel-level forest adaptation plans, etc.
- Advice: Reach out proactively with a clear call to action for landowners.

Kara Whelan, Westchester Land Trust, Hudson to Housatonic RCP

- The collaboration started with a 2-year grant to protect water supply areas for the greater NYC area. The RCP encompasses two counties in east NY State and one county in west Conn.
- Previously created GIS co-occurrence model to identify conservation priorities in 13 cross-boundary focus areas, forcing land trusts to work together across borders.
- Since formalizing partnership as RCP, currently undergoing new round of co-occurrence mapping that uses different matrix criteria in rural/suburban portions of the landscape, and the urban centers within our region. In urban contexts, we are considering values like accessibility to schools and public transportation, environmental justice indicators like respiratory risk, and distance to existing open space.
- Communication and Marketing Strategies:
 - Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE) workshop through Yale University's Sustaining Family Forests Initiative
 - Focus on certain key people (targeted audience segments), as you cannot talk to everyone in the landscape.
 - Woods Forum model: Host small gatherings at libraries/community spaces to discuss conservation, with professionals as moderators

- Messaging for events/social media: “You live in a special place, find out why”
- Use guides and handouts to demonstrate good stewardship strategies that resonate with your audience’s interests and values, ex: “Buffers for Beauty: A Guide for Planting in your Wetland Buffer” handout emphasized aesthetics for suburban landowners
- H2H has a landowner engagement working group, and one focus of this group is to determine the qualities of good ambassadors and find ways to energize them. Many times, the messenger is more important than the message.

Colin Novick, Greater Worcester Land Trust

- Urban/Suburban landscape, 15 or 20 key landowners. The GWLT has been operating collaboratively in the manner of an RCP before the existence of the network. They only have 2 full time employees with around 300 members.
- Options for connections fairly limited in highly fragmented landscape. Often just a handful of landowners you can work with—Important not to burn bridges. GWLT seeks to form extremely close relationships with these 15-20 families that own key properties, and sometimes communications span across generations to finally secure an easement.
- There are public user issues in the urban landscape because people will want to use the parcels for trails, rec, pets, hunting, etc., and not everyone agrees on certain uses.
- If geologic processes are a metaphor for landowner engagement, there are generally two types of events: Large, fast events like floods, and slow steady processes like erosion. GWLT uses the “erosion” tactic: slow, careful communication.
- They handled the threat of developers by publishing a list of the top 10 biggest and most important parcels, effectively saying that there will be pushback from the community if development is attempted there.

Take away Strategies (Generated by audience and panelists)

- Targeted marketing
- Use a Peer to Peer approach
- Begin the conversation with stewardship and move towards conserving from there
- Partner with Plant Conservation Districts
- TELE is a crash course in marketing and communication, based on a national survey of woodland owner types and strategies for communicating with each type. H2H RCP researched some of their own landowner types and used the general strategies to attract big donors.
- The messenger and intermediaries are highly important
- Think about long-term engagement + tactics
- Track your communications in a database
- Anticipate and address barriers to conservation
- Avoid jargon!