

Hey, You Got Your Regional Planning in My Regional Conservation!

Session 2D –Ballroom D
2017 RCP Network Gathering

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Jamey Fidel, Vermont Natural Resources Council

VNRC founded in 1963 with expertise in:

- Research, science and policy, legislative advocacy, education/communication, technical assistance, grassroots organizing, and legal advocacy

Integrated Approach to Conservation & Land Use Planning

- Identify region for conservation and land use planning attention
- Convene steering committee or integrated planning team
- Use science and data to create GIS maps and identify priority natural resource features for conservation
- Review strengths and weaknesses of land use policies (town plans, zoning, subdivision regulations, etc)
- Technical assistance & implementation focuses in consistent approaches across municipalities integrating land use and conservation strategies

Forests, Wildlife, and Communities Project in Mad River Valley

- Diverse steering consisting of members of local conservation commissions, planning commissions, development review boards, select boards, local business owners, planning districts, realtors, local and statewide conservation orgs and agencies
- Held community values forum and conducted ecological inventories, then found overlap between ecological and community values
- Outcomes: provided technical assistance to local conservation and planning commissions, identified gaps, strengthened town plans by referencing maps

Outreach with Engineers and Realtors

- Developed curriculum to explain land development approaches to minimize forest and habitat fragmentation and promote strategic growth
- Conducted training with local engineers and real estate agents

Statewide Land Use Planning

- Forest Fragmentation Action Plan
 - Roadmap for implementing strategies for reducing forest fragmentation and parcelization

- Concrete action steps for planning and zoning, conservation, education and advocacy strategies at local, regional, and state level
- Priority Strategies
 - Planning & Zoning
 - Mapping and inventorying natural resources
 - Improving zoning and subdivision regulations
 - Incorporate standards to reduce forest fragmentation
 - Conservation Programs
 - Increase enrollment in current use tax programs
 - Education and training for local boards
 - Education
 - Educate private landowners and public
 - Promote estate planning
 - Advocacy
 - Pursue legislative changes

Planning has to happen at all these different scales: local, regional, state

- Statewide policy can help promote more consistency across regional planning entities
- Look for opportunities to identify priority conservation areas based on science and use to inform land use policies
- Identifying gaps in land use regulation can justify land use and conservation action
- Lone wolf action will not lead to comprehensive legislation—important to build diverse coalitions

Ryan Friedman, Nashua Regional Planning Commission

- Data mapping perspective

Nashua Regional Planning Commission

- 1 of 9 regional planning commissions in NH, 13 member communities
- Core programs:
 - Transportation
 - Land use and local planning
 - GIS
 - Environmental

Environmental Planning Includes

- Household hazardous waste events
- Hazard mitigation plans
- Energy aggregation
- MS4 stormwater permitting
- Regional and site-specific open space and stewardship plans

Environmental GIS at NRPC

- Conservation lands - Regional steward for the data
- Wildlife habitat
- Public recreation – play deserts
- Trails – 330 miles of trails mapped

Trail data

- Legacy data
- Regional needs: Crossover between public and us/amateur GIS

What Can Regional Planning Commissions Do For You?

- Data analysis
- Regional connections
- Facilitation, hosting
- Staffing support
- Grants and plans

Sally Stockwell, Maine Audubon

Beginning with Habitat – Maine’s Land Use Planning Tool for Conservation

- Different groups came together to coordinate when realized years ago independent agencies trying to provide same types of information to public
 - Can’t buy all the land, can’t protect all the land, need to work with towns on land use planning
 - Came up with program that provides maps
 - Water resources and riparian areas/shoreland zones
 - High Value Plant and Animal Habitats
 - Large Undeveloped Habitat Blocks
 - Large habitat areas
 - Layers add to show high value properties in town to steer development away from, then add conserved lands, then see the mosaic
 - BWH Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance

How is Beginning with Habitat Data being used by towns?

- York displays maps in town office
- North Berwick has used data to bolster a planning board decision not to reduce 250” shoreland and stream buffers
- Scarborough Land Acquisition Committee is using data to help prioritize
- Town of Brunswick Wildlife Overlay Districts – have to follow different rules in overlay district, different from rest of town
- Topsham created open space plan out of Begin with Habitat process – areas people care about, farm land, recreation areas

Mapping part is the easy part

- Took open space plan and from mapping work came up with recommendations to update their zoning and local ordinances to protect high value resources
- Potpourri of different planners

Advice

- Get to know town planners, go to meetings, understand what they are doing
- In Maine, all starts with the Comprehensive plan

Breakout groups: What worked well and why? If it didn't work well, why? Identify new opportunities.

Challenges

- Town boundaries/inconsistent laws/zoning
- Pulling together different interest groups around common thread
- How to come across as credible
- Accessibility of maps, pixels not user friendly
- Story maps
- Partnerships --- different groups with different reasons may have similar solution (eg cons subdivision w/ density bonus)
- Political barriers – use different language
- Turnover
- Hard for small towns to complete comprehensive plans and need to find outside experts who are trustworthy
- Showing trails on private land
- Potential conflict between land conservation and green energy projects

What Worked Well

- Resource: MA maps
- Circuit rider to help towns
- Local land trust recruits planning board members
- Significant Natural Resource map of Cape Cod – requirement to set aside 2x size development
- Partner with real estate industry on how to increase value
- Local groups working on combined maps
- Town planner/manager to help make sure consistent message/info to share with all boards
- Link land conservation to other goals/issues
- Local trails --- statewide map provided
- EPA working with RPC on how to protect drinking water