

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

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Speakers: Stephen Blackmer, Lee Dassler, JT Horn

Moderator: Mike Wilson

Mike Wilson – Maine West RCP, Northern Forest Center

The Northern Forest Center radically changed landowner perceptions of conservation workers by changing the way they approached landowners:

- Before: “Seeking community support for conservation”
- After: “Supporting communities through conservation”
- By designating high-potential “Rural Destination Areas”, the RCP aims to show people that this protected land benefits their living experience, economic livelihoods, and well-being.
- Data shows high obesity and low education levels in communities within the RCP area.
 - Message = showing people that getting outdoors benefits their health.
 - The RCP puts on hiking challenges, “tourist” type programs for local residents
- Partnering with environmental education programs integrated into the local public education system.

Challenges addressed:

- Healthy activity
- Internet/broadband access and improvement
- Educational attainment and aspirations

Lee Dassler – Western Foothills Land Trust

Conserved land: 700 acres across 10 towns

Mentioned pressure from Gov. LePage

A few key properties have made a significant impact on the local community in Norway, ME:

- Addition of public sculpture displays and new recreational trails on an easement
- Nordic skiing / biathlon trails with free equipment rental at Roberts Farm Preserve
- Hosting of triathlons, skiing, and biking events has boosted the local economy
- New shops and social/sport groups have sprung up as a result
- Public health is improved

WFLT asked a local healthcare center what they could do to encourage healthy lifestyles, as the area was formerly one of the least healthy areas in the state. This spawned all kinds of snowshoe, hiking, and skiing events hosted/attended by the LT members.

Functions of the Barn / Community Center at Roberts Farm Preserve:

- Summer school education tied with local school district

- Community gardens
- Planned office space and more community/education space (telescope donation)

Take away message: Meet the needs of the community first, and tie the conservation agenda into that.

JT Horn – Trust for Public Land

Usually, conversation starts by saying “Community, this is what we want to conserve, what say you?”

Now, instead, TPL starts with “What are your community needs, special places, economic outlook, and how can we help you meet your goals?”

Opportunistic vs Strategic Conservation:

Communities will rally around parcels that are under threat of development / splitting / selling etc.

All types of people can usually agree on the idea that a particular parcel is important. The points of argument are usually taxes and the question of usage.

To be successful, you must create social capital.

Examples:

- Ski areas
- Large, connected trails
- Revenue from forest products
- (do an economic study)

Community Forest Program

Community forests:

- Owned by the Land Trust
- Operated by a local committee / governing body
- The benefits/production of the land flow back to the community
- The land is permanently protected.
- Projects always match the community values and inherent value of the land

Stephen Blackmer – Kairos Earth, Church of the Woods

Kairos Earth church holds all its gatherings outside in the forest on a conserved piece of land in Canterbury NH.

The idea of sacred landscapes can be a vehicle for conservation. The designation of sacred landscapes is mostly absent in our culture, but many people still cherish their favorite natural places and may feel a spiritual connection to them.

The landscape of Standing Rock, ND plays an important role in the identity of the Standing Rock Sioux community. Most Native American communities have languages and traditions involving

sacred places, and much of modern society does not have the language for “sacred places” anymore. Conservation is a way of doing this: connecting us to that which matters most.

The land ethic shifts the role of the human from conqueror of nature to a part of nature. By integrating the land ethic into religious practices, Kairos Earth helps people see why conservation is so important and energizes those working to protect the land. Kairos Earth is forming something called the Common Ground Network with other churches, which aims to explore the role of nature in religion and spirituality.

Take away message: We can and should take the motivations and emotions involved in conservation deeper, and speak more to the true base-level reasons why people love the land.