

Landscapes

Enabling Partnerships in the Northeast Megaregion

Overview

Advancing large landscape conservation means learning to work together and creatively engage non-traditional partners and funders. Building local and regional capacity to do just that was at the heart of Regional Plan Association's Peer Exchange Program for landscape conservation practitioners. This year-long effort provided funding and technical expertise to organizations in four distinct landscapes within the 13-State Northeast Megaregion.

The broad purpose of the Peer Exchange Program was to support the conservation of important landscapes, grow professional capacity of landscape practitioners, and foster relationships with organizations facing comparable challenges. An emerging conservation initiative was paired with an established organization to provide guidance and support for advancing a landscape conservation initiative. Each initiative convened a workshop to foster collaboration among stakeholders and advance a regional conservation project. Reflecting specific needs and varying maturity of each effort, products included strategic conservation plans, grant application resources, and communication materials. Together, these tools formed the basis for outreach to conservation partners, local government and other stakeholders.

Scarce funding has highlighted the need to build partnerships that leverage mutual priorities to share resources. The Peer Exchange Program participants found that articulating a shared vision, developing leadership and capacity within their organizations, and considering issues like economic development helped to substantially increase support for their large landscape initiatives. Such collaboration can enable the conservation community to align protection and management of individual properties while providing a platform for engaging non-traditional partners in their work.

The following emerging conservation initiatives undertook workshops to launch or advance their collaborative efforts:

Common Waters Partnership, *Upper Delaware Watershed*

MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership,
Southern New England

Rensselaer Plateau Working Forests Initiative,
Rensselaer Plateau

Southern Maryland Strategic Conservation Plan, *Southern Maryland*

Technical assistance for the project was provided by:

The Conservation Fund

Trust for Public Land

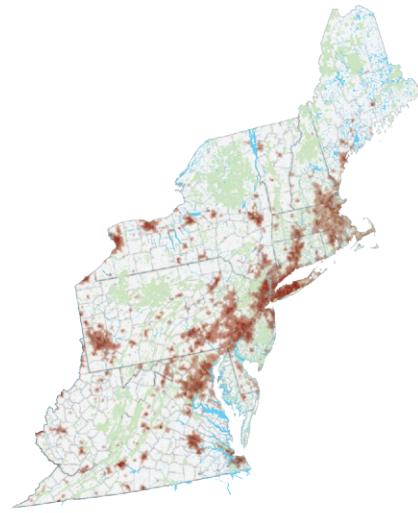
Mount Grace Land Trust

Pinchot Institute for Conservation

National Park Service Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program

US Forest Service Northeast Area Urban & Community Forestry Program

Regional Plan Association



The 13-state Northeast Megaregion, stretching from Maine to West Virginia, is home to 52 million people.

Large Landscape Conservation

Large landscape conservation looks beyond political boundaries and property lines through public and private collaborations. For local land trusts, local government, conservation organizations, and public agencies with limited staff and financial resources, these partnerships can help address regional challenges like urban growth, new transportation and energy infrastructure, and climate change.

Such efforts are especially important in the Northeast Megaregion – a complex geography spanning 13 states from Maine to West Virginia – which is now home to about 52 million people. Its cities, suburbs and rural areas are expected to become home to an additional 18 million people by the year 2050. Where these people are housed, and how their transportation and energy needs are met, will directly influence the vitality of the region's wildlife, water resources, farms and forests, and outdoor recreational opportunities.

RPA and America 2050 have undertaken a multi-year project to highlight and advance large landscape conservation in the Northeast Megaregion. <http://www.rpa.org/northeastlandscapes/>

February 2012 "Landscapes: Improving Conservation Practice in the Northeast Megaregion Report", highlights the 165 landscape conservation initiatives led by public and private organizations underway in the region. The report assesses how these efforts have addressed their goals and overcome key challenges. A Request for Proposals was issued for the Peer Exchange Program.

June 2012 RPA and America 2050 host the "Landscapes: Improving Conservation Practice in the Northeast Megaregion Conference" in New York City. The 125 person, by-invitation conference set out to improve conservation practice by defining common agenda needs across the region and the US.

Fall 2012/Spring 2013 Peer Exchange Partners host stakeholder workshops to advance conservation practice in their region. Over 200 representatives from federal, state, and local government; conservation, land trust, and non-profit organizations; industry representatives and civic associations; academics; and interested citizens attend the four interactive workshops.

Peer Exchange Program in Brief

The goals of the Northeast Landscape Conservation Peer Exchange Program (PEP) are to:

Support conservation of important landscapes in the Northeast, particularly those identified in Federal and State resource assessments and plans, including State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs), USFWS Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, State Forest Action Plans, and National Park Service Wild and Scenic Rivers and park gateway communities.

Grow the professional capacity of the network of landscape conservation practitioners and organizations across the Northeast.
In particular, address challenges posed by land use change, infrastructure investment, climate change adaptation and/or new funding sources.

Foster collaborative partnerships between organizations working with comparable challenges and opportunities, so that the collective knowledge and capacity of this network can be brought to bear on local, regional, and national policy issues.

The PEP began with a Request for Expression of Interest to organizations working on landscape conservation issues in the Northeast Megaregion. The project's Steering Committee helped select grant recipients: established organizations, or those with a proven record of success in influencing public policy and securing investments for conservation projects, were paired with emerging organizations working on new landscape conservation initiatives.

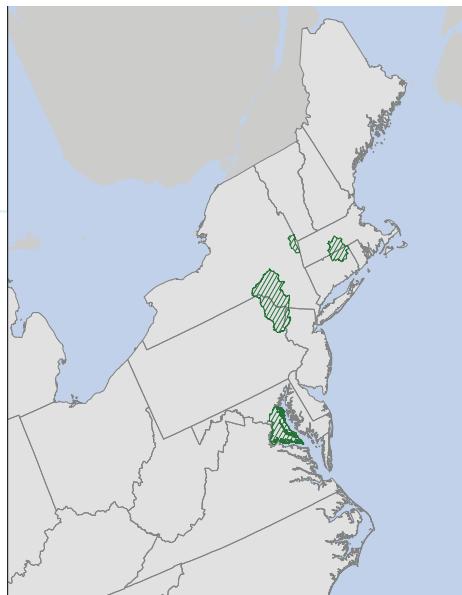
Common Waters Partnership, and the Pinchot Institute for Conservation

MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership, Opacum Land Trust and The Conservation Fund

Rensselaer Plateau Working Forests Initiative, Rensselaer Plateau Alliance and Mount Grace Land Trust

Southern Maryland Strategic Conservation Plan, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust and Trust for Public Land

Partners were provided funding to advance the emerging conservation initiative. Emerging organizations were tasked with hosting a workshop with local stakeholders to launch (or significantly advance) their landscape conservation initiative and identify actions addressing specific challenges. Established organizations provided guidance during workshop planning and presented on conservation best practices as part of the agenda. Both organizations provided a workshop summary and evaluation capturing the strengths and challenges of the peer exchange approach.



The Peer Exchange Program provided funding for four landscape conservation initiatives in the Northeast Megaregion.

Foster Creative Partnerships

Strategic conservation plans identify natural assets, establish conservation priorities, and articulate a future that includes natural resources, recreation lands, and habitats. When the planning process engages local governments, private landowners, businesses, and conservation organizations, a shared vision emerges, galvanizing widespread support and increasing the likelihood of implementation. Three of the PEPs focused on creating or gathering support for a strategic conservation plan for their region – MassConn, Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, and Southern Maryland.

Build Local Support

In cities and towns with little history of conservation, support for landscape initiatives can be weak. In Southern Maryland, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust found that the public focuses on local conservation, but support for regional conservation is limited. Trust for Public Land provided technical assistance to equip PTLT with messaging and materials that led to a brochure that includes a map depicting shared priorities and an illustrative narrative that makes the case for conservation at a regional scale. The brochure will be used in education and outreach activities to build local support for conservation throughout Southern Maryland.

Develop Consensus among Local Partners

The goals of large landscape conservation efforts stretch beyond political boundaries, but local support for conservation is critical. Landscape initiatives are often conglomerations of many smaller initiatives. In developing a strategic plan, reaching consensus among all parties is essential. The Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust found that implementing the conservation priorities of individual counties and towns had resulted in a patchwork of conserved lands. Organizations focusing on specific issues or geographies were missing vital opportunities for connectivity that could serve multiple conservation priorities. The Southern Maryland workshop featured a region-wide mapping exercise that enabled participants to highlight areas of shared priority and identify opportunities for collaboration across boundaries.

MassConn's Strategic Conservation Planning Workshop elevated attention to both the need for conservation in their region and for their own organizational capacity for convening stakeholders. MassConn convened stakeholders across state and municipal boundaries and engaged them in conversations about working together to preserve a shared resource. Two of the four focus areas developed at the workshop actually cross state lines – a tangible display of inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

Cultivate Leadership and Capacity

Large landscape conservation demands a diverse skillset, including negotiation, fundraising, grant writing, mapping, and storytelling – but perhaps the greatest need is in leadership to effectively deploy resources in a strategic manner. The exchange program as a whole helped emerging initiatives by providing support and professional contacts with established organizations with decades of experience in conservation.

Leverage Partner Organizations

The MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership lacked a formal plan that inventoried the region's assets, identified risks, and established conservation priorities. With the assistance of The Conservation Fund, the workshop was designed to gather data and input on all of these from the partners and stakeholders in attendance - writing a substantial part of the Strategic Conservation Plan at the workshop. They worked closely with their partner, Harvard Forest, to conduct a GIS analysis that highlighted the natural assets and threats facing the



This map, featured in a brochure produced through the PEP, identifies shared conservation priorities in Southern Maryland.

MassConn region. These maps helped guide the dialogue around their strategic conservation planning initiative. The workshop was housed at Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary, another partner whose vast conservation holdings and scientific expertise are central to achieving the conservation vision for the area. By working together, the partners created a strategic plan that has helped garner local support, attract potential funders, and increased the competitiveness of grant applications.

Create New Partnerships

Conservation in the Upper Delaware River Watershed has advanced greatly thanks to the work of local land trusts, conservation organizations, and willing landowners. But these like-minded efforts could not generate the political impetus needed to achieve large-scale conservation. The strategic vision developed through the Common Waters Partnership set the stage for convening stakeholders from Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. The workshop centered around the theme of “natural economies”, bringing in new partners to approach landscape conservation visioning through an economic rationale. Following the workshop, representatives from local governments, federal agencies, and conservation organizations discussed how to continue the conversation and identified a signature marketing initiative - a bike trail along an old rail corridor – galvanizing a new partnership around a common initiative.

Anticipate New Challenges

Taking conservation to the landscape scale can be an effective means of addressing important challenges, including climate change, land use decisions, and resource-based economies. Landscape scale conservation can address migratory corridors and wetland retreat and slow the rate of habitat fragmentation. It can also be an important organizing tool for elevating attention to these challenges in public discourse.

Climate Change

Climate change brings a new set of challenges to conservation work in the Northeast. Warmer average temperatures and changes in precipitation patterns lead to disruptions to habitat and wildlife. Addressing priorities in the context of climate change can help ensure the resilience of natural systems. As part of their GIS analysis to set conservation priorities, MassConn included the Nature Conservancy’s Resilient Sites for Terrestrial Conservation, which identifies prime buffers for mitigating climate effects. In Southern Maryland, the Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust is using elevation data to help identify future losses from sea level rise as well as establishing habitat and wildlife corridors to facilitate species migration.

Integrate Conservation and Local Land Use Planning

In Rensselaer County, the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance noted that none of the towns or villages has open space conservation plans, despite incentives from New York State. Further, the basic zoning ordinances in the area contribute to the increasingly fragmented landscape, by encouraging low-density development on large parcels. Rensselaer Plateau Alliance is leading an initiative to develop the Rensselaer Plateau Regional Conservation Plan in collaboration with local leaders to address these dual concerns. The Plan lays out areas to grow as well as areas where growth may not be appropriate – and provides the tools local governments need to guide development, including zoning strategies that promote cluster development. Several of the topics included in the Plan were presented at the PEP workshops and have helped engage new local government officials in this process. Together, these will help future proposals for all kinds of development – to ensure that the landscape is part of the discussion.

Elements of a Successful Landscape Workshop

Pre-conference survey: Query your mailing list prior to the conference in order to gauge the needs and priorities of participants. What topics do people want to learn more about? What resources would be helpful to create? What ideas do people want to discuss with the group? This can help to set an engaging and useful agenda. Surveys should be brief to encourage full participation.

Share Out: For smaller groups, having each organization provide a brief update on current projects can help spark conversations and forge connections.

Content-driven presentations: Case studies of relevant projects, plans, and research that inform workshop participants helps transfer knowledge and inspire new strategies for local work.

Common maps: Have breakout groups work on a common map to identify priority areas and resources for conservation. These help groups identify overlapping interests, but also gaps in connectivity. Working around a map can also help keep discussion focused.

Sector-based breakouts: Breakout groups with a specific focus can help articulate the needs and priorities of different sectors. During a “share” session, complimentary and competing views will be discovered, highlighting opportunities for collaboration and challenges for discussion.

Shared visioning for next steps: Before ending the workshop, have the whole group brainstorm how to continue the conversation on conservation and explore future opportunities for working together. Talking about this as a group will help gain buy-in and establish expectations.

Learn from Participants: Taking only 5 minutes, capture on a flip-chart participants responses to the questions, “What went well?” and “What would you do differently next time?

Post-conference summary: Compile a written account of the workshop, including breakout discussions, to serve as a common record of the day. Share a draft with participants, allowing them to provide additional feedback to refine ideas after the workshop.

MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership

ship is a Regional Conservation Partnership serving the bi-state region of South-Central Massachusetts and Northeastern Connecticut. MassConn, in southern MA, was partnered with The Conservation Fund to advance this initiative. MassConn is a 760,000 acre region that encompasses 38 towns in 2 states. The region is bordered by Worcester, Boston, and Springfield, Massachusetts, Hartford, Connecticut, and Providence, Rhode Island.

Growth in metropolitan areas is increasing development pressure on outlying regions. MassConn is particularly at-risk to development pressure because the majority of forestland is privately-owned – 69% in Massachusetts and 77% in Connecticut – and many of these individuals are nearing retirement age. The region is already becoming fragmented, as forestland is sold and developed for low-density residential uses.

The Strategic Conservation Planning Workshop, held in October 2012, brought together 48 participants from federal agencies, state agencies, state and private foresters, municipal officials, town and regional planners, and land conservation organizations. The workshop focused on identifying shared conservation priorities within the MassConn region.

The workshop provided the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership with a number of successes. Attention to conservation issues has increased, with funders reaching out to MassConn directly. It also established a critical north-south relationship and fostered new dialogues among practitioners working in both states.

Workshop participants identified four focus areas in which there were shared conservation priorities - the Emerald Forest, Northern Connections, Four Corner Woods, and Shetucket Headwaters. MassConn captured the discussion and presentations to generate a draft Strategic Conservation Plan for the region, which will aid in applying for grant funds and serve as the basis for future partnerships. The Strategic Conservation Plan highlights federal and state priorities including SWAPs (in both states), areas with State Forest Action Plans, areas within the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge, the entire US Fish and Wildlife Service's Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Area, and The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Sites for Terrestrial Conservation.



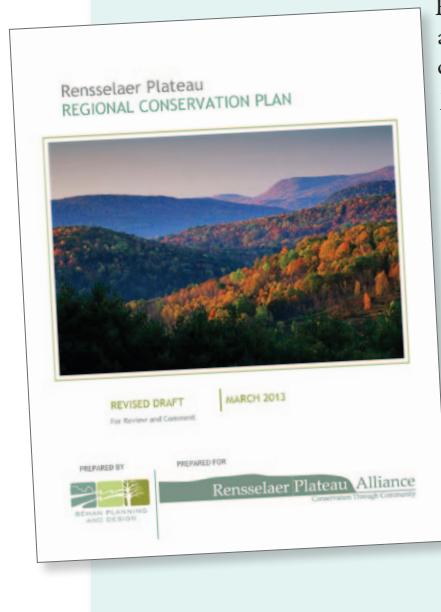
Rensselaer Plateau Working Forests Initiative

Initiative aims to conserve and protect the forested character of the Rensselaer Plateau in New York, by conserving working forestlands. The Alliance was partnered with Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. The Rensselaer Plateau is 105,000 acres of forest 15 miles east of Albany.

The pace of development on the Plateau places the entire region at-risk. Recent economic development in Albany has resulted in rapid population growth throughout the region. The forest lands of the plateau are primarily owned by older individuals, with only 10% of land on the Plateau currently in conservation. From 1990-2010, population growth on the Plateau was 11.5%, compared to 2% countywide. In the area near Dyken Pond, residential development over the past 10 years has resulted in significant forest fragmentation.

The Alliance hosted two workshops in the fall of 2012, the Working Forest Initiative Workshop in September and the Community Forest Program Workshop in November. The Working Forest workshop focused on developing the Forest Legacy Program grant application, to fund the acquisition of conservation easements on 2,583 acres of land, from 14 private owners. The Community Forest workshop promoted the concept of a community forest that would be managed by a municipality as a sustainable, working forest that provides educational, economic, and recreational benefits.

The Alliance has seen an increase in the organization's visibility and to land conservation within the region, with towns not previously participating in conservation work engaging with this process. The Alliance provided conservation planning and land use tools to communities, as well as identified economic development opportunities related to conservation. The Forest Legacy Program grant application received a third place ranking for the Northeast Region. Although it was not selected by the USDA Forest Service for funding in Fiscal Year 2014, the experience of convening stakeholders, negotiating with landowners, developing thematic maps, and communicating the need for conservation in the region resulted in a strong application, which the Alliance will submit in future grant cycles.



Rensselaer Plateau Alliance and Mount Grace plan to continue in a peer exchange partnership, but will reverse roles – the Alliance will mentor Mount Grace on how to conduct an economic value analysis of natural assets in their region.

Southern Maryland Landscape Protection Initiative

Southern Maryland Landscape Protection Initiative, an initiative of the Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust, focused on priorities for protecting and enhancing water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Southern Maryland. Together with the Trust for Public Land, PTLT convened a broad spectrum of stakeholders to identify shared priorities and create a common vision for conservation in the region.

Sprawling development has become increasingly common in Southern Maryland, particularly along transportation corridors emanating from the Washington-Baltimore metropolitan area and in proximity to military facilities. The decline of natural resource-based economies (agriculture and fisheries) in the area and relatively low land values that are attractive to developers and commuters to Washington, DC and Baltimore. Further, the landscape is highly fragmented, with few large, undeveloped parcels remaining. At the same time, Southern Maryland is low-lying and bounded on three sides by water – making it susceptible to sea level rise.

Over 60 federal, state, and local officials, regional and local land trusts, conservation organizations, watershed associations, and agricultural planning organizations attended the workshop in fall 2012. The focus was on developing a regional identity around shared priorities.

During the workshop, attendees worked around a shared map of the region to identify areas their organizations have set as natural resource priorities. After the workshop, PTLT digitized this information and created a map showing priority areas, illuminating common priorities and identifying gaps. The map not only allowed organizations to identify areas for collaboration, but also gaps in connectivity between areas. The result is a more collaborative and comprehensive vision for shared conservation at a regional scale.

Protecting the Values of the Southern Maryland Landscape is a brochure that PTLT created to help cultivate regional support for conservation. It features images of the natural and cultural resources of the region, a narrative articulating its value, and a map delineating cumulative conservation priorities. The brochure will be used to educate residents, foster partnerships, and attract funders to the assets of the region.

Photo Credits: Wink Hastings, Jonathan Charles Fox



Common Waters Partnership is a regional partnership of public and non-profit organizations and agencies within the Upper Delaware Watershed. Pinchot Institute for Conservation, a national organization seeking to advance sustainable natural resource management, convened the workshop. Common Waters works to protect the high quality drinking water supplied by the Delaware River to over 15 million people. Its geographic focus is the 77,500 acres of land determined to contribute directly to water quality, including land in 10 counties across three states – Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey.

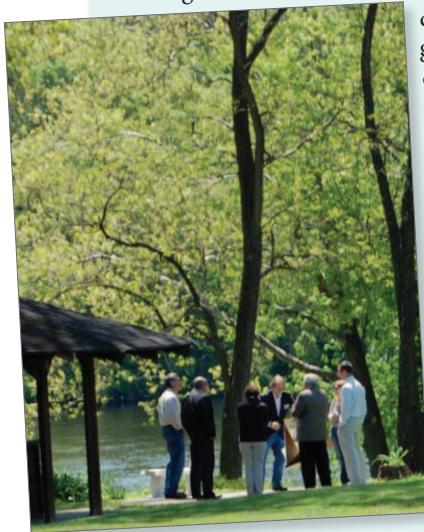
Over 90% of the land contained within the Upper Delaware River watershed is forested, which accounts for its high water quality. Although historically rural, the region is now under threat from development. The second-fastest growing counties from 2000 to 2010 in New York (Orange County) and Pennsylvania (Pike County) are within this watershed, much of this growth is attributed to exurban pressure from New York City. While the economic downturn has since slowed growth in the region, it is expected that a recovery will bring new development. Much of the forestland in the region is privately held, leaving it susceptible to development.

The Natural Economies Workshop, held in May 2013, brought together over 65 participants from federal state, and local agencies and conservation organizations throughout the Upper Delaware Watershed. The workshop focused on creating sustainable economic development strategies while preserving the region's natural and cultural assets. Presentations on the economic value of the natural assets and resource-based tourism from around the US helped guide breakout discussions on opportunities in the Upper Delaware. As Jerry Kauffman of the University of Delaware put it, “The most effective way to manage resource-based economies is at a regional scale.”

Seeing examples of how other communities in the US have leveraged natural assets for economic development triggered a common response from attendees – what can we do here in the Upper Delaware? At the end of the day, a group of workshop participants lingered to discuss how to better leverage the region's assets for economic development.

Drawing

on a case study presented during the workshop, the group brainstormed around creating a multi-use trail along an abandoned rail corridor in Sullivan County, NY that parallels the Delaware River for over 70 miles.



Other Funding Strategies

Financial Planning: Conservation and strategic plans identify the goals of the conservation effort, but financial planning helps an organization develop a strategy for securing funds. It is important to outline the costs associated with programs and projects, as well as resources that existing partners can provide. During this process, opportunities for cost reduction and efficiency should be analyzed. A variety of public and private funding sources should be identified, which will help provide stability over the long-term.

Bridge Financing: The need for fast conservation action – to outbid a developer on a significant parcel, to meet a match for a grant on a deadline – often is at a pace that exceeds a conservation organization's ability to fundraise. Bridge financing, or loans, can quickly provide capital to meet pressing conservation needs. The Conservation Fund and Norcross Foundation both offer such financing and as conservation organizations, the loan programs are designed to meet the needs of small land trusts.

Mitigation Banks: Developers will increasingly be a source for funding for conservation in the area, thanks to the Maryland Forest Conservation Act, which requires a percentage of forestland on development sites to be set aside or replaced offsite. Similar legislation exists for wetlands in New York, New Jersey, and Virginia. Wetland mitigation is also required at the federal level through the Clean Water Act. By tapping into mitigation funding, conservation organizations can leverage private dollars to meet project needs.

Pursue Varied Funding Sources

Funding is a major concern facing conservation organizations. By highlighting the benefits of synergies in conservation projects and looking for overlapping interest areas, organizations can leverage resources to achieve conservation goals. By convening stakeholders from all sectors, broader and more comprehensive strategies can be developed.

A combination of traditional and innovative funding strategies is critical – and the only way to ensure that conservation moves from a plan on the shelf to a project on the ground.

Traditional Funding Sources

A number of federal agencies have programs that provide funding for landscape conservation work.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (Stateside, Federal): Provides funds for park, wildlife, and open space land acquisition, with an emphasis on increasing accessibility to active recreation.

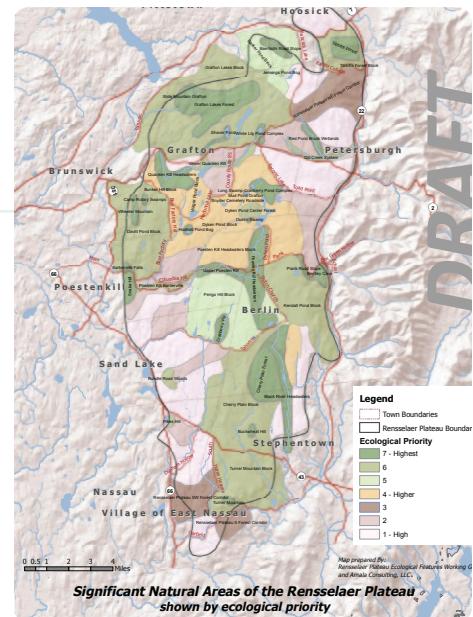
North American Wetlands Conservation Act (US Fish and Wildlife Service): Provides matching grants for acquisition of wetland ecosystems to individuals, non-profits, and state and local agencies.

Forest Legacy Program (US Forest Service): Provides federal funds for conservation easements or acquisition of forestlands threatened by conversion to urban development.

Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (NOAA): Provides funds to state and local governments for conservation easements or acquisition of land within a state's coastal management plan.

Wetlands Reserve Program (USDA): Provides funds for wetlands protection to private landowners.

The funding available for individual projects through these programs is often prioritized for projects that help to achieve landscape-scale outcomes. Because the total amount of federal funds available for conservation is limited, and varies year-to-year, competition for these programs is fierce. Further, federal funds are typically administered through state agencies. This can make working on multi-state projects challenging, as each state has their own priorities, processes, and policies. To secure sufficient funds, conservation organizations increasingly try to braid funding from multiple sources in order to advance their work.



The Rensselaer Plateau Regional Conservation Plan will serve as a guide for future landscape conservation in the region.

Identify Alignment with Funder Priorities

One strategy is identifying priorities of funders in the region and seeking areas of overlap. Determining those areas of overlap can be a challenge, but the Southern Maryland workshop brought together a group of organizations that presented an opportunity.

The US Navy expressed interest in exploring Encroachment Partnering surrounding their facilities in Southern Maryland, through the US Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI). This program provides funds for conservation easements and acquisition projects to provide buffers around training and testing areas.

Strategic Partnerships

Some of the most successful conservation initiatives have developed strategic partnerships at the federal, state, and local levels. Working with local, state, and federal agencies, as well as with resource protection nonprofits and corporate partners, can do more than leverage funding opportunities. These relationships can facilitate the sharing of information and the exchange of resources, creating efficiencies and potentially reducing program costs for partner organizations. These associations can also enable the coordination of priorities for resource protection in a region, generating additional efficiencies. Continuing to strengthen and expand upon existing partnerships will provide



Participants at MassConn's Strategic Conservation Planning Workshop identify conservation priorities within the region.

opportunities to both address capacity gaps and increase capital.

At the Southern Maryland workshop, the US Fish and Wildlife Service shared that the agency is preparing a land protection plan that seeks to conserve an additional 40,000 acres of land in the Patuxent Research Refuge area, an opportunity that conservation organizations in the region had been unaware of. The mapping work completed through the workshop can help to identify the most critical areas for conservation.

Natural Resource-Based Economic Development

Economic growth and landscape conservation are often seen as being in opposition. In areas with large swaths of public land, communities can feel at a disadvantage when trying to grow and sustain the local economy, as land available for traditional development is limited. At the same time, there are a growing number of communities that have leveraged natural resources to spur local economic growth.

The Common Waters workshop focused on "natural economies". Case studies from around the country provided real examples for how communities are using parks and trail systems to support local businesses and generate added property value, while protecting valuable ecosystem services that preserve habitat and water quality. Approaching conservation through the lens of economic development can spur new partnerships – with the business community,

developers, and other private sector interests that have an economic interest in preserving natural lands.

Conclusion

Large landscape conservation is a difficult but necessary task for the Northeast Megaregion. Trying local conditions, scarce funding, and limited professional capacity present daily challenges to grassroots organizations throughout the US. To facilitate a culture of shared resources and support amongst conservation organizations, the Peer Exchange Program was established. And the successes of this approach are clear –

MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership led the effort to draft the region's first Strategic Conservation Plan.

Southern Maryland Landscape Protection Initiative brought together partners around the first map highlighting conservation priorities focused on the region.

Rensselaer Plateau Working Forestry Initiative prepared its first Forest Legacy Program application, showing how large landscape conservation can be done in the complicated landscape of the Northeast.

Common Waters convened conservation and economic development interests to identify shared priorities and a common project.

Beyond these meetings and tangible products, guidance from established organizations grew professional capacity of emerging partners, which will benefit them over the long-term – in building strategic partnerships, particularly with non-traditional partners; convening stakeholders from diverse sectors and working to find common interests; and effectively utilizing data to make a compelling argument. The workshops refocused conservation priorities through shared visioning, elevating the convening organization's profile in the region, broadening community support, and attracting new partners and funding opportunities.

The peer approach has great potential to advance landscape-scale conservation throughout the US. A number of steps can be taken to encourage this model and bolster its effectiveness.

- Funders should encourage peer exchanges by giving additional points to proposals featuring collaboration.
- Conservation organizations should enter such partnerships with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and establish expected outcomes early on.

Resource Sharing

Small conservation organizations may not have the resources or the need for full-time staff for certain tasks. For instance, geospatial mapping is a valuable tool for illustrating the need for conservation and to identify key areas to protect – but once maps are created, they only need periodic updating. Conservation organizations operating in the same region or state will draw on similar datasets to base their analyses, with significant overlap between organizations. Instead of each organization retaining a staff person, service- or staff-sharing may make financial sense. The same is often true for other services important to conservation organizations, including legal, grant writing and communications.

Service sharing is an increasingly popular way for nonprofits to do more with fewer resources. By contracting for professional services as a consortium of organizations, contracts will be more attractive to service providers – by providing a larger, steadier stream of project work – and to conservation organizations – by providing economies of scale that reduce individual costs. Before approaching service providers, it is important for the consortium to agree on how services will be shared. An agreement outlining expectations, timelines, and responsibilities signed by the organizations in the consortium can ensure the process operates smoothly.

Staff sharing is a way for partner organizations to leverage shared resources in pursuit of a mutual interest. It is an efficient way for organizations to attract and retain quality employees or specialized skillsets that organizations want to retain in-house, but may not require on a full-time basis. To initiate staff-sharing, two organizations can enter into an agreement that outlines time allocation, compensation, and responsibilities for that staff person.

- Focus collaborative efforts on a specific, manageable outcome with clear deliverables. A successful initial project will help build and sustain momentum that will keep groups engaged.
- Target outreach to stakeholders that do not traditionally participate in conservation planning or workshops – including sporting enthusiasts, tourism agencies, Main Street and corporate business groups, and developers.
- Collaborate with regional and national landscape conservation networks to promote the success of collaborative efforts.

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The content of this report was shaped by the experiences and reflections of a number of landscape conservation practitioners:

Ole Amundsen, *The Conservation Fund*

Jim Bonesteel, *Rensselaer Plateau Alliance*

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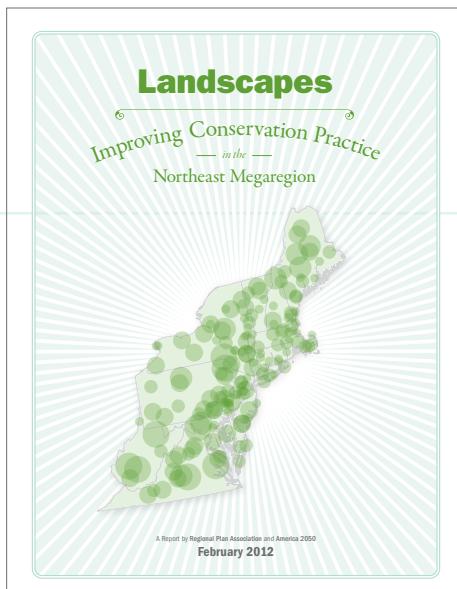
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Landscapes: Improving Conservation Practice in the Northeast Megaregion Report provides an analysis of conservation initiatives in the Northeast.



Regional Plan Association

Regional Plan Association is America's oldest and most distinguished independent urban research and advocacy group. RPA prepares long range plans and policies to guide the growth and development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region. RPA also provides leadership on national infrastructure, sustainability, and competitiveness concerns. RPA enjoys broad support from the region's and nation's business, philanthropic, civic, and planning communities. In its Third Regional Plan, Regional Plan Association identified a dozen region-shaping landscapes and estuaries where conservation could set a green boundary to suburban expansion and improve the quality life for our existing cities and suburbs. www.rpa.org

Related Resources

This report is the third in a series of reports by the Regional Plan Association exploring Large Landscape Conservation in the Northeast Megaregion.

Landscapes: Improving Conservation Practice in the Northeast Megaregion Report catalogs landscape conservation initiatives in the Northeast, identifies conservation priorities, and raises challenges facing these initiatives. www.rpa.org/library/pdf/RPA-Northeast-Landscapes.pdf

Landscapes: Improving Conservation Practice in the Northeast Megaregion Conference Summary provides a summary of the presentations, discussions, and findings from the June 2012 conference on large landscape conservation. www.rpa.org/pdf/RPA-Northeast-Landscapes-Conference_Summary.pdf

The Practitioners' Network for Large Landscape Conservation is an alliance of professionals and citizens engaged in leading, managing, researching, advocating, funding, educating, or setting policy to advance large landscape conservation initiatives throughout the US and beyond. For more information, visit them at: largelandscapenetwork.org.



America 2050 is a national planning initiative to develop a framework for America's future development in face of rapid population growth, demographic change and infrastructure needs in the 21st century. A major focus of America 2050 is the emergence of megaregions – large networks of metropolitan areas, where most of the population growth by mid-century will take place – and how to organize governance, infrastructure, and land use planning at this new urban scale. A project of the independent Regional Plan Association, America 2050 is working to shape and support the new federal High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program because of high-speed rail's potential to realize the economic promise of megaregions and act as a transformative investment for America's future growth. www.America2050.org

4 Irving Place, 7th floor
New York, NY 10003
212.253.2727

This report and the Peer Exchange Program were created by Robert Pirani, Emily Kilroy, Corey Piasecki, and Paul Winters of Regional Plan Association. The report was designed by Ben Oldenburg, July 2013.

Learn more at:
www.rpa.org/northeastlandscapes