

The Regional Conservation Partnership Handbook

10 Steps
*to Effective and Enduring
Collaborative Conservation
at Scale*



The Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network

A Community of Learning and Innovation for New England, Eastern New York, and Beyond

Although Regional Conservation Partnerships (RCPs) began convening in 2007 as part of the Massachusetts-based Wildlands and Woodlands Partnership, their first annual conference was organized by Highstead in November 2010. A year and a half later, the Regional Conservation Partnership Network was launched. As of the printing of this handbook, the RCP Network includes 43 RCPs that stretch from the lower Hudson River Valley to Vermont's northern boundary to Downeast Maine.

The RCP Network helps RCPs advance their goals in three main ways.

Networking. The RCP Network Gathering is the premier annual conference for RCPs in New England and beyond. Webinars, coordinator conference calls, state RCP events, and the RCP Network LinkedIn group give people many ways to connect with peers.

Research on best practices. Biennial surveys and peer-reviewed research keep RCP Network members informed about the ways partnerships perform best, so that network services can be most responsive over time.

Targeted technical and funding assistance. Informed by research, RCP Network members collaborate on grants and initiatives to build skills and capacities. Philanthropic foundations, other conservation organizations, colleges, universities, and state and federal agencies partner with the RCP Network to deliver services to RCPs.

Highstead Foundation

Highstead is a conservation organization and operating foundation based in Redding, Connecticut, that is dedicated to conserving New England's natural landscapes. Highstead works with many partners to achieve the Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W) vision. The W&W vision calls for 70 percent of New England to be protected as forest permanently free of development by 2060 (see Box 1 on page 5 for more information or go to www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org). Highstead launched the RCP Network as part of a broader strategy to work collaboratively to help double the pace of conservation in New England and eastern New York.

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Visit www.highstead.net to learn about the Highstead Foundation.

Visit www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/RCPNetwork to learn more about the Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative, RCPs, and the RCP Network.

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Introduction

Across New England and eastern New York, conservation organizations and communities are banding together to meet the interests of countless landowners who wish to protect their land from development. Together, these groups work to achieve conservation on a larger scale. These collaboratives, called Regional Conservation Partnerships (RCPs), vary in size and scope but share a desire to increase the pace and connectivity of their conservation activities. RCPs are informal networks of people representing private and public organizations and agencies that develop and implement a shared conservation vision across town and sometimes state and international boundaries. RCPs in New England and eastern New York play an increasingly important role in achieving large-landscape-scale conservation that is also firmly woven into the needs and interests of the local communities.

RCPs began emerging in the mid-1990s (see Figure 2), each one initiated by individuals working within their unique circumstances. In one case, a regional land trust responded to the momentum produced by both a new regional state park planning process and an academic paper calling for greater coordination for land protection. In another, leading staff with a state wildlife agency and a statewide land trust convened conservation organizations in a region to take advantage of its federal designation for waterfowl habitat.

RCPs have been advancing land conservation in places like the Mahoosuc Range in northeast New Hampshire and western Maine, the Green Mountains, the North Quabbin region of Massachusetts, and the Lower Connecticut River watershed. The first RCP established in New England was the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership (see Box 4, page 20). Formed in 1994, Great Bay was then followed by three other RCPs in the late 1990s. Since then, the number of RCPs has

grown rapidly, and the number of organizations involved in these informal collaborations has risen from 50 in the 1990s to more than 350 today. With the emergence of seven new RCPs within the past three years, the area covered now totals 19 million acres — or roughly 60 percent of the forestland in the region (see Figure 3).

As of 2015, 19 RCPs have protected land as a partnership and at a pace they believe to be greater than what they could have accomplished working alone. These “Conserving RCPs” get more done by coordinating their various activities under one conservation vision,

which is often depicted in a map showing shared priorities. They work together to get foundation grants and state and federal funding for their conservation activities. The other RCPs are at different stages of maturity, moving toward the goal of increasing the pace and connectivity of land protection.¹

The stakes are high. New England is the most forested region in the country, and these vast forests provide clean air and water, wildlife habitat, climate change mitigation, and flood resilience. They also provide

local communities with healthy outdoor recreation, local wood, fuel, jobs, and more. However, the 2010 Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W) vision (see Box 1 on page 5) documented that the resurgence of New England’s forests has peaked and that every state in the region is now experiencing net annual forest loss. W&W calls for doubling the pace of conservation to protect the region’s irreplaceable forests. Much of the forest loss occurring



Members of the Hudson to Housatonic RCP meet to discuss focus areas and mapping.

¹ The RCP analysis in this handbook comes primarily from a survey of 21 RCPs in 2012 and a study of 20 New England RCPs conducted by Highstead Senior Conservationist Bill Labich from 2009 to 2011 with academic colleagues from the University of Massachusetts and the Harvard Forest. Their paper, “Regional Conservation Partnerships in New England,” was published in the *Journal of Forestry* in September 2013.

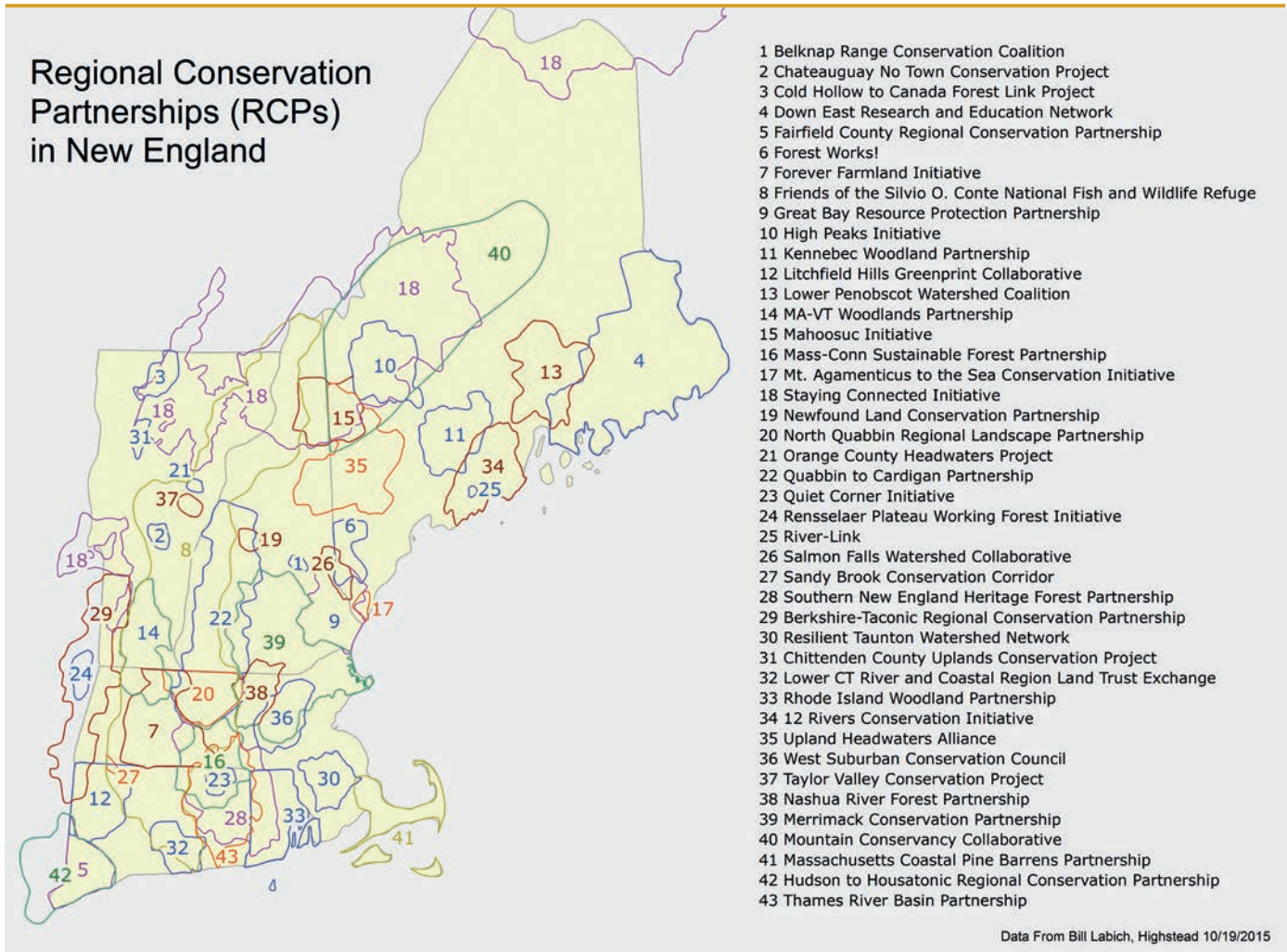


Figure 1: Regional Conservation Partnerships in New England

today is from development and fragmentation within the landscape of small ownerships that characterize the region.

The region's farmland is similarly vulnerable, even as demand for fresh, local food grows. A recent report from Wildlands and Woodlands coauthor Brian Donahue, *A New England Food Vision*, estimates that the region could produce 50 percent of its food, but only if it were to triple its current 2 million acres of farmland.

To achieve the W&W vision across New England, we need to reach out and engage with many thousands of landowners and hundreds of municipalities. In doing so, we will assist more landowners to preserve their lands from development and to manage them for multiple goods and services one parcel at a time.

However, we also need to think of owners and their lands in the context of a larger regional landscape. New England's forested landscapes are composed mostly of these privately owned lands. Together with municipal, state, and federal lands, they serve as the building blocks for larger wildlife habitats and corridors, drinking water supply recharge areas, and larger blocks of contiguous commercial timberlands.

“The most important land and water issues facing North America —including land use patterns, water management, biodiversity protection, and climate adaptation— require new approaches. While most of these challenges need to be addressed at several scales simultaneously, ranging from the local to the global, it is increasingly imperative to address them at the scale of large landscapes. The territory of these issues often transcends the legal and geographic reach of existing jurisdictions and institutions.”

Matthew McKinney, Lynn Scarlett, and Daniel Kemmis, “Large Landscape Conservation: A Strategic Framework for Policy and Action.” (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA 2010)

We need to find ways to coordinate our activities across boundaries and over time to foster more connections for trails, water, wildlife, and plants. We need to bring more funding and other resources to bear so that many more landowners and towns have the opportunity to conserve and steward their lands and help achieve their objectives and the W&W vision.

RCPs are an important part of the answer. They work at various scales with both local and national organizations and agencies. Their members help individuals and families achieve their land conservation and stewardship objectives, and they cultivate relationships with community leaders and landowners. In turn, these local partners inform each RCP's land protection and stewardship activities in priority conservation focus areas.

At the same time, RCPs can work with other public and private partners to protect extensive forested habitats and corridors as well as farm landscapes through a combination of public funds, tax incentives, and private monies. Habitat connectivity, flood control, and soil conservation at the landscape scale are particularly important in a time of global climate change, a compelling need for multi-scale collaboration and conservation.

RCPs represent what U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell recently called the “epic collaboration” essential to achieving conservation at the landscape scale. RCPs represent innovative, collaborative conservation at multiple scales of land and community. RCPs are engaged in protecting, connecting, and restoring the farmed and forested landscapes of New England and eastern New York for the future.



Mt. Abraham / Simon Rucker / Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust

Stages of RCP Growth and Development

Regional Conservation Partnerships are established by individuals and organizations that seek to achieve greater conservation and stewardship objectives through coordination and teamwork than they could do on their own. Although approaches vary, our research and experience suggests there are often common steps that characterize RCP growth. RCPs can learn from each other how to proceed along the path from “emerging” to “maturing” to “conserving” — to achieve enduring conservation success.

Emerging RCPs

Partners meet and decide on their shared region and its boundaries. They select a coordinator to convene and administer their meetings. They determine how they will make decisions as a partnership. Partners usually use this time to identify sources of funding for acquisitions, conservation planning, coordination, and programming. They draft the RCP’s mission, goals, and objectives. In the process, they often find they are more efficient when they create a steering committee, take meeting notes, and, in some cases, create working groups. Working groups can be used to think through, plan, and perform activities that would be too cumbersome for the whole partnership to execute. They also develop a website that at a minimum lists partner organizations, goals, and objectives and provides a map of their region.

Maturing RCPs

Partners in Maturing RCPs use geographic information systems (GIS) to map, analyze, and prioritize their region’s natural and cultural resources collaboratively. They often designate focus areas to be championed by the RCP as a whole, and by particular RCP partners. Some RCPs develop a strategic action plan for implementing their regional conservation vision as laid out on a map.

In this stage, RCPs also reach out to and engage the individuals (for example, landowners and foresters), groups (other environmental organizations), and agencies (municipal, state, and federal) that would most likely need to be involved in order for the RCP partners to achieve their short- and long-term objectives. RCP members often

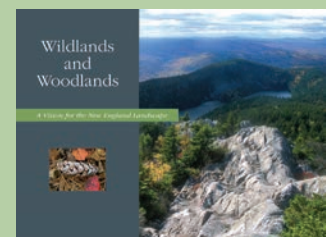
obtain funding from philanthropic foundations and state and federal agencies in the form of grants to augment in-house capacity to support these activities. Engaging new partners can also increase the capacity of the partnership. RCPs in this stage may advance activities (such as educational programs and trail projects) separate from any planning process to produce momentum and keep partners involved.

It is worth noting that among all the stakeholders in a region, the most important are the individuals and families who want to conserve their land. Much of the RCP’s effort in this stage is devoted to developing the capacity to help more landowners protect their land in perpetuity.

Many landowners cannot afford to transfer the title or development rights to their land without compensation. The RCP’s primary job is to increase funding for land conservation in its region, but doing so takes time, resources, and coordination.

Box 1: Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the New England Landscape

The Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W) initiative is a collaborative 50-year effort to protect 70 percent of New England as forest permanently free from development.



This broad vision seeks to incorporate forested, farmed, and developed land in a way that protects the immeasurable economic, environmental, and cultural benefits provided by our natural landscapes. W&W envisions an expanding amount of acreage devoted to local, sustainable agriculture, compact development, and local communities that adopt sustainable transportation, energy, and land use policies. W&W is based on the conviction that we must better understand natural systems, manage them wisely, and conserve them for future generations. To learn more about W&W, visit wildlandsandwoodlands.org

Conserving RCPs

Most of the partner groups of Emerging and Maturing RCPs are likely to have their own substantial track records of completed land protection projects. Conserving RCPs are on the way to significantly increasing the pace, scale, and connectivity of their collective land conservation and stewardship activities by taking advantage of the synergies that greater coordination and collaboration can provide.

Conserving RCP partners often follow up on their strategic conservation map and plans with a case statement to illustrate and communicate their large-landscape conservation project to prospective donors or agencies. The case statement can take the form of a Forest Legacy Program application, a PowerPoint presentation, or a brochure, depending on the source of funding.

Conserving RCP partners determine how to obtain financing and manage the activities and processes necessary to conserve land. Will they use private money or public or a combination of both? Which organization(s) will raise funds? If more than one group participates, how will they do it?

Will they coordinate their individual efforts under one shared vision, or work together in more collaborative ways? Usually, the answers depend on a combination of factors and constraints, such as the capacity of partner organizations, which agency or group will hold the land or interest, and the landowners' objectives.

Unable to meet the objectives of so many landowners who want to conserve their land, more and more RCP partners are considering using a capital campaign to raise private and public funds. Partners may run their campaigns under one shared vision or collaboratively with a jointly established development committee and coordinator, or use a hybrid approach.

Transitions in leadership and base funding can follow multi-year capital and land protection projects. Partners of Conserving RCPs may take the time to work these issues out before they begin planning for their next land protection and stewardship opportunities.

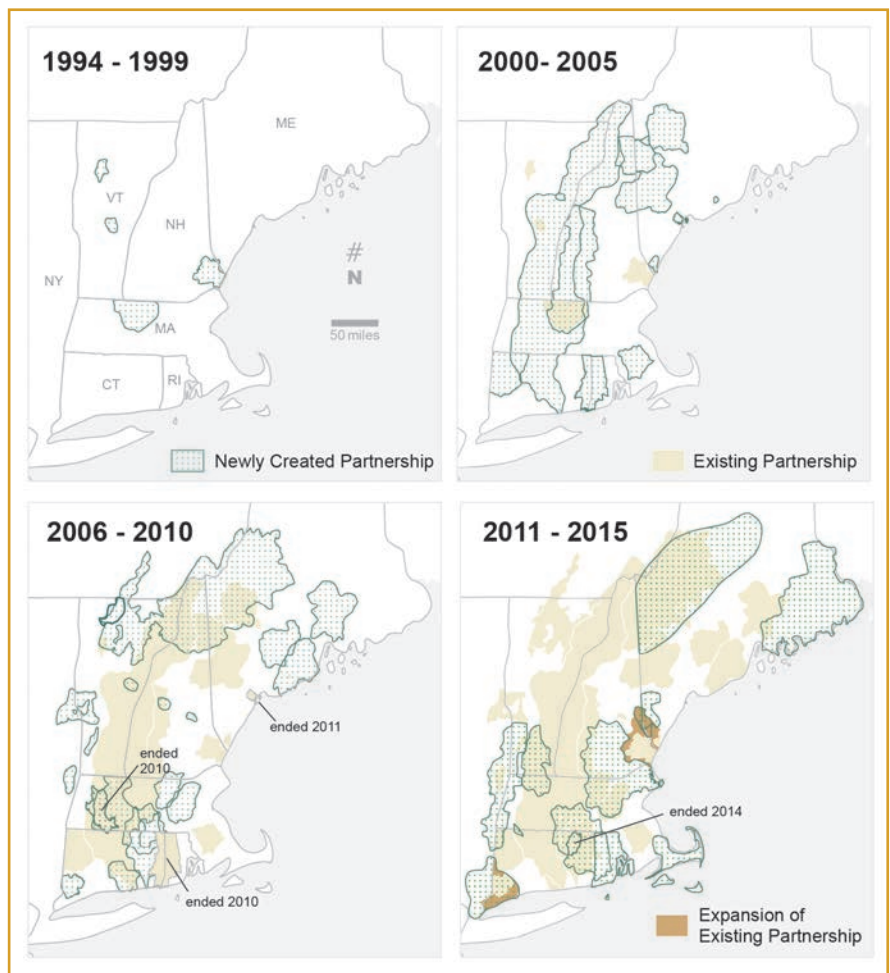
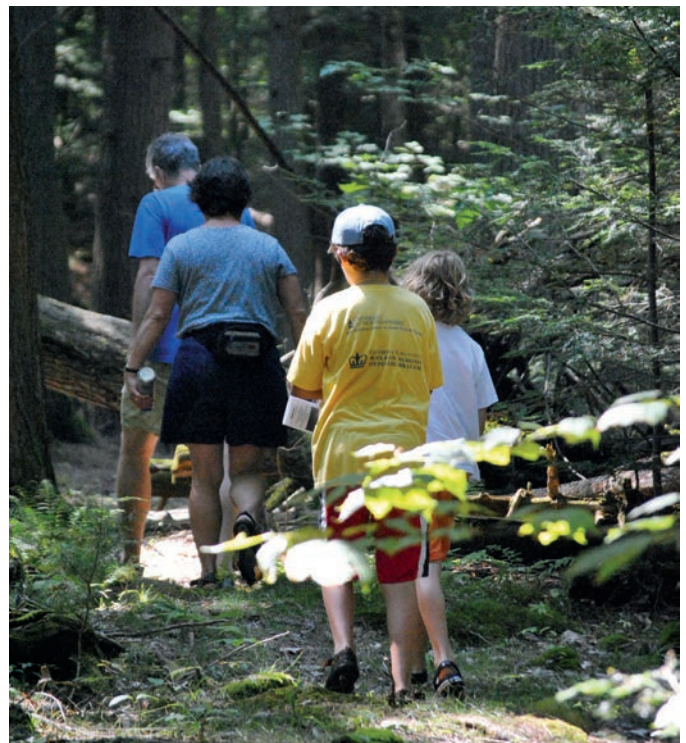


Figure 2: Growth of RCPs in New England (1994-2010)



Perkins Woods / Brian Kent / Kennebec Land Trust



How to Use the Handbook

The RCP Handbook is organized around the three fundamental stages of RCP growth (Emerging, Maturing, and Conserving), summarized in the previous section, and 10 overall steps. It is intended to help people organize, plan, coordinate, and implement land conservation and stewardship activities as an RCP. Here are the 10 steps:

- Step 1:** Convene and Define Your RCP
- Step 2:** Further Organize Your RCP
- Step 3:** Increase Capacity as You Prepare to Conserve
- Step 4:** Plan and Map a Strategic Conservation Vision
- Step 5:** Plan to Implement Conservation Activities
- Step 6:** Engage Potential Partners Within Your Region
- Step 7:** Engage Potential Partners Beyond Your Region
- Step 8:** Promote your Shared Conservation Vision
- Step 9:** Raise Funds and Conserve Land
- Step 10:** Manage Transitions

By capturing the experience of RCPs to date, and the successful methods they have developed through trial and error, we hope that other RCPs will not have to reinvent the wheel. Instead, they may proceed more efficiently along the path to effective, collaborative conservation and stewardship. However, even as you consider these steps, we urge you also to build upon the unique qualities of your regional landscape and the ingenuity and leadership that will naturally arise from the close collaboration of your partners.

Less prescriptive than a step-by-step instruction manual, but much more than a primer, the RCP Handbook was also written to assist the members of any and every RCP in developing a stronger and more effective partnership.

RCP Coordinators: Find ideas for keeping their partners engaged in moving the RCP towards achieving its goals and objectives while increasing their own organization's potential to succeed.

Host Partner Organizations and RCP Steering

Committee Members: Use the steps as a guide to examples, tools, methods, activities, and resources to help them make their partnership more effective.

Land Conservation Trusts and Other Organizations:

Collaborate with peers to access more funding and advance their land protection and stewardship objectives.

Conservation Districts: Partner with existing RCPs to deliver and leverage more resources through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).² By working in partnership with members of an RCP, they will be able to support more private farm and forest land conservation and stewardship efforts to conserve water, soil, and habitat.

Municipal Commissions: Identify the RCP that includes their town and work with it to help municipal boards and commissions engage with similar groups in surrounding towns and participate in regional conservation planning and receive assistance with conserving land from development. By working with other members of their area RCP, municipal commissions can help create a more connected and conserved regional landscape within and outside your community.

² According to the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the RCP Program "promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance to producers through partnership agreements and program contracts or easement agreements.

"RCPP combines the authorities of four former conservation programs – the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative and the Great Lakes Basin Program." (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>)

The USDA RCP Program was launched in 2015. Highstead and the Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative began convening RCPs in New England in 2006.

State and Federal Agency Staff: Decide how best to invest their time and capital for greater conservation outcomes. Partner with the RCPs and the RCP Network to advance their agency's approaches to large-landscape stewardship and conservation for more significant, more sustainable, and measurable results.

Consulting Foresters, Wildlife Biologists, and Other Natural Resource Professionals and Consultants:

Determine when and where to get involved with an RCP to help advance shared objectives. Increase access to networks of individual, family, and community forest and farm owners.

Individual and Family Forest and Farm Owners: Work with partnership members to more fully realize conservation and management objectives.

Colleges and Universities: Partner with existing RCPs to participate in and lead innovative applied research and extension initiatives, to the benefit of students, faculty, and the larger community.

Skipping Steps

This handbook presents 10 steps in three stages (Emerging, Maturing, and Conserving). It is designed to help people optimize the development of their RCP to protect, connect, and restore their regional landscape based on their shared vision. Although few RCPs have addressed all 10 of the steps in this exact order, we suggest that each step be considered.

However, there are significant differences among RCPs, and those with greater capacity in such areas as funding and staffing can expect to move more quickly toward the Conserving stage. Some of these "stronger" RCPs might skip over some steps. The RCP Handbook even suggests a possible reordering of Steps 4–7 depending on the capacity of your Maturing RCP. If your RCP has all of the following attributes, it can be less concerned about following each and every step.

- The host partner organization has full-time staff to coordinate, administer, and organize multi-partner projects. (The host partner organization typically funds and employs the RCP coordinator.)

- RCP member groups are mainly conservation groups made up of professional staff with a long history of working in the RCP region. Staff have the wherewithal to coordinate their existing conservation activities to increase the pace and scale of land conservation. In other words, the RCP's members have the capacity to organize and coordinate new and more complex conservation projects from the start.

- The RCP's members already know of possible sources of federal, state, or foundation funding. If you believe you have a good shot at accessing these resources, your RCP may be able to move to a coordinated or collaborative land conservation project early in its life.

But if one or more of the following apply to your RCP, it should consider each and every step within each stage of development.

- The host partner organization has less than one full-time staff person. Research (Labich et al. 2013) shows that the capacity of the host partner organization is a significant factor in how quickly the RCP will develop and conserve land as a partnership.
- A significant number of the RCP partner groups

are represented by volunteers. Volunteers and volunteer organizations are often constrained by time and resources in their contributions to regional conservation activities.

- RCP partners do not have a history of working together in the region. Building trust takes effort and time. Trust is necessary for successful collaboration, especially when it involves raising money.
- Sources of funding for coordination, programming, strategic conservation planning, and acquisition are not known, or the known grant programs are extremely competitive. In this case, the RCP members need time to build their case for conservation, as well as to enlist local support and identify various sources of funding for their activities.

We hope that this RCP Handbook will help you, and your partners (current and future), establish, organize, plan, coordinate, collaborate and catalyze enduring on-the-ground conservation within your regional landscape.



Valpey Property / Dea Brickner-Wood / Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership



Sunderland, MA / Clarisse Hart / Harvard Forest

Emerging RCPs: Convene, Define, and Organize Your RCP

If you are just starting to think about establishing an RCP, you will do well to learn as much as you can about this form of collaborative conservation before launching your partnership. Review all of the materials listed in the Resources section of this handbook and make sure to reach out to coordinators of other RCPs, especially those whose regions are similar in size to the one you are contemplating. Coordinator contact information is available on the RCP Interactive Map: <http://hfgis.fas.harvard.edu/flexviewers/RCPWebMap/>.

As you move forward to plan your RCP's development and early activities, every part of every step should receive extra-careful attention, but especially those of the first two steps. For example, care should be given to choosing the ideal host partner organization, before people are convened for the first time, if possible. Research on RCPs (Labich et al. 2013) shows a direct correlation between the capacity of the lead or host partner organization and how quickly RCPs protect land.

The host partner of an RCP is the one that typically employs the partnership coordinator. It may also be the original convener. Host partners with staff often have more resources to help the RCP get established and organized. The strongest host partners are those that include most, if not all, of the partnership's geography; they may often exceed it. Having a host partner that cares about the entire territory of the partnership can be an important benefit, especially if the coordinator is expected to serve all member partners equitably, which is usually the case.

RCPs without a high-capacity host partner (for example, one that has staff and a shared geography with the RCP) are not doomed to failure — far from it. Instead, these RCPs may need to spend a bit more time in the Emerging stage. Initiators of RCPs with more modest resources would do well to convene trusted partners that know how to obtain funding for a conservation plan, reach out to landowners, and spur their large-landscape land protection projects forward.

Frequent, regularly scheduled in-person meetings will be necessary. Holding regular meetings is doubly important for host organizations with less capacity. In-person meetings give partners from across the regional landscape time to get to know each other and to discuss their ideas for what they want to do together. Frequent communication among partners is critical in these early stages of partnership building.

Once you've completed the steps in the Emerging phase, you'll be better positioned to succeed in the subsequent steps. Just as there is more than one approach to large-landscape conservation, there are at least as many ways to organize partners, parcels, and resources. Coordination is needed to knit a well-connected landscape of woodlands, wildlands, and farmlands. Take the time to check in with other RCPs throughout the year. Check out www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/rcpnetwork for more information on opportunities to engage with other RCPs.

Step 1: Convene and Define Your RCP

1.1 Convene the members of your RCP.

Become the host partner, or choose another. Which organization will be your RCP's best host partner(s), given the general geography of the region in question? Choosing the host partner organization is one of the most important early decisions your partnership will make. This kind of assessment may or may not have been made in the past. If you are thinking of starting an RCP, it is important to consider whether or not the host partner organization completely shares the region of the partnership and whether it has at least one full-time staff person or the equivalent. Host partner organizations should also have missions that can be implemented through the work of the RCP. When the RCP's success helps the host partner organization achieve its own goals and objectives, its board and staff will be more likely to want to advance the partnership over time.

Choose partners to convene. To move forward more quickly toward coordinating land protection projects, choose members who represent organizations with capacity, such as staffing, expertise, skills, and resources. Partners who have working relationships with other relevant stakeholders in the region (for example, local, state, federal, private, and public organizations and agencies) could also be of value. Consider whether to convene partners with diverse or complementary interests and capacities. Host partners interested in convening a diverse set of partner organizations should have enough capacity to build consensus among potentially disparate perspectives.

Consider these methods for selecting partners.

Contact all stakeholders. Use this method if you think a large-landscape conservation initiative will need many of the conservation organizations and agencies already working in the region. You might also choose this approach if any of the following apply.

- Your region comprises two dozen municipalities or fewer. In that case, each municipality can send a representative, and your full-RCP meetings will not be too large to manage.
- Your partners and their resources are not yet well known to you, and you do not have well-established working relationships with other conservation land trusts and other organizations in the region.
- You do not yet know the sources of funding that will help your RCP engage landowners and partners in land conservation projects.
- You have a federal or state agency as a host or a strong partner. Public agency representatives may want greater stakeholder and public participation, not less. Your RCP may need to walk the line between having more people invited as partners and then have governance structures (for instance a steering committee) in place to help with the decision-making and coordinating of a larger partnership.

Pick your best team. The following conditions might warrant selectively choosing your partners, at least in this Emerging stage.

- Your region is more than one million acres in size. With a large region, you may want to work with a core group of people rather than try to represent every group and agency. You can always expand your partnership later.
- Your host partner organization has a history of working with specific conservation land trusts and agencies within a shared geography.
- Your host partner and strong partners know where the resources are to advance conservation; they know how to get them, and they have the capacity to get started right away.

Use a hybrid method. Pick your strong partners, and then invite others. This way may be best if the combination of factors does not point to a single preferred method. Factors may include the size of your region, your partners' working relationships, and the knowledge and ability of your partners to access resources.

Convene partners and run meetings well.

Organizing and facilitating in-person meetings is an important activity for RCP coordinators. In fact, running regularly scheduled, in-person meetings has been found to be a good predictor of whether the RCP will conserve land at a pace or scale reflective of their goals as a partnership (Labich et al. 2013). Here are some considerations for administering your RCP meetings:

Decision-making. Agree on which governing bodies (steering committee, working groups, full partnership) will make decisions and how. Decide on a method from the start and then use it — consistently.

Agendas and meeting notes. Send out draft agendas by email in advance of meetings and invite feedback on them. Take meeting notes. Record who attends, the main discussion topics, any decisions made, and who will do what by when. Distribute these meeting notes for review and approval at the next meeting.

Meeting facilitation. You should not need an outside facilitator for meetings. Facilitation is part of the coordinator's role. Having someone else do it will likely be an unsustainable practice for your RCP. Coordinators do not need to be expert facilitators to start with, though some experience is helpful. They will likely improve as they facilitate more and more meetings. Poorly run meetings will retard an RCP's development.

Meeting in person versus by phone. Although there may be reasons to have conference calls, especially for RCPs with very large regions, in-person meetings should be the norm, especially for Emerging RCPs and when important decisions are being made.

Regularly scheduled versus ad hoc meetings.

Similarly, having meetings occur on a predictable schedule can keep the momentum going and provide partners with meaningful accountability. For instance, check-ins can be used to review progress on key initiatives recorded in the meeting notes.

1.2 Define your region's preliminary boundaries.

Choose a region. Study your region, its location, and boundaries. Does it have natural (for instance, watersheds) or political (such as county) boundaries? For any number of reasons, you may choose to extend your RCP's geographical boundaries while working on your strategic conservation plan. For example, you could shift your partnership's boundaries when you add new

partners with different service areas. A new designation nearby, such as a federal agency priority area, could benefit your RCP if you included it. Updated science and new state and federal priorities or partnerships might also result in an expansion of your partnership's territory.

Carefully consider the relationship between your host partner's territory or service area and your RCP's boundaries. Ideally, the host partner's territory will be equal to, if not larger than, the partnership region selected by the RCP. If this is impractical, be sure to shore up the RCP with strong partner organizations that are committed to collaboration. Strong partner organizations bring resources, staffing, and expertise, and will likely be an important factor in any RCP's success.

Here are some ways to view the range or extent of your RCP's region.

Ecological or natural resource boundaries.

Landscape features that have been used to define partnership regions include watersheds, areas of large contiguous forestland or farmland, mountain ranges, and other topographical features. Habitat blocks or ranges for particular species can also help define ecological boundaries.

Sociopolitical boundaries. County, state, and town boundaries have been used as the edges of partnership regions, or as a reason to create a multi-jurisdictional RCP. Recreational and cultural resources are often considered too. These, like natural resources, can span sociopolitical boundaries. By definition, an RCP's area must include more than one political jurisdiction. Otherwise, it might be called a Community Conservation Partnership. Recognize that choosing a multi-state region has both costs and benefits. (See Box 2, Case Study – Interstate RCP Example: MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership, page 12).

Funding considerations. Recognize and seek to align with any designated priorities of state or federal agencies, charitable foundations, or an influential non-governmental organization.

Hybrid approach. Select boundaries that consider as many of these criteria as possible, while recognizing the costs of extending the boundary well beyond that of the host partner's territory or that of the majority of strong partner organizations.

1.3 Choose or hire your RCP's coordinator.

Coordinators are selected in many different ways. The coordinator may be the person who initially convened the partners. Perhaps the host partner organization has given a newly hired person the coordinator's job. The coordinator might also be employed jointly by the partners.

However the RCP selects the coordinator, several important questions should be considered.

For whom does the coordinator work? As coordinator, the person should seek to serve all the partners equitably and work under the direction of the governing body, such as a steering committee. Ideally, the coordinator would be employed or funded by the host partner organization, or by the full partnership. One partner might serve as the fiscal agent for the RCP. When the coordinator serves a particular function for the host partner organization that is separate from its role in the partnership, he or she must attend to the work plans associated with each.

What are the coordinator's primary functions?

These can include administrator, meeting facilitator, event manager, communications hub, educator, trainer, and project manager. Just which functions are needed depends on the skills and capacity of other partner organizations (and their staff) and their current activities.

What else does the coordinator do? Members may perceive the coordinator as the leader of the RCP. Whether this is deserved or not, the coordinator may be the person best positioned to help members of the partnership, individually and collectively, benefit from and contribute to the RCP. Thus, coordinators often keep abreast of partners' needs and interests that are aligned with the mission of the RCP.

Step 2: Further Organize Your RCP

2.1 Continue to convene and build trust among partners.

Learn about and act on each other's activities, needs, and objectives. Do not underestimate the benefits that your partners will accrue from sharing news of their activities with each other. Encourage them over time to express both what they want from the partnership and what they can contribute to it. Sharing information can help build trust, which is the foundation for your partnership's success.

RCPs use e-newsletters and email as well as sharing updates at in-person meetings.

Use meeting time to share updates and activities.

Consider spending a good portion of every, or at least every other, meeting on partner updates.

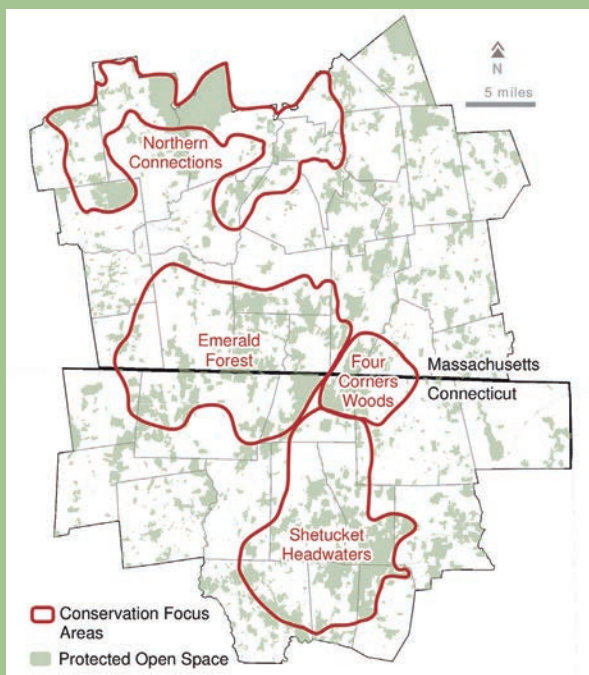
Invite guest speakers to meetings. Invite guest speakers to address early meetings on different topics that reflect values people assign to natural areas, farms, parks, or watersheds, landscape ecology concepts, and tools and approaches used elsewhere to increase the pace and connectivity of land protection. This can be especially helpful if your partners do not know each other well. Pay attention to those topics that arouse the most interest among the partners – they could point to future projects. Guest speakers on related topics might also be brought back to join the RCP, or to serve as informal advisors.

Box 2: Case Study

Interstate RCP Example: MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership

The MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership formed in 2007. A group of conservationists working in south central Massachusetts and north central Connecticut responded to an invitation from two of their peers to meet. Land trusts from the two states were asked to consider developing a multi-parcel aggregation land protection project. Working across the state line introduced many challenges, including incompatible GIS mapping data, different state-based funding sources, and no Forest Legacy Area on the Massachusetts side. Other problems came from inconsistent staffing among partner groups and lack of interest in holding conservation easements. MassConn members took their time to identify areas of common interest despite these differences. They took advantage of early technical assistance from Highstead Foundation and leaders from other RCPs, as well as consistent funding from the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, and built momentum one success at a time. They became a Conserving RCP in 2015.

<http://www.opacumlt.org/massconn/>



Use polls, surveys, and meeting discussions to get feedback. These tools can inform the RCP over time about which partners want to do what next and which activities would likely lead to more engagement (if that is an issue).

Do something together early on to build momentum. Almost every RCP that has conserved land as a partnership can point to one thing they did in the early stages that helped get the ball rolling. These modest early activities include a landowner workshop, a new regional trail, a significant new regional conservation map, or neighborhood meetings on the possibility of a large-landscape-scale land protection project. Sharing agendas and building trust is important, but nothing creates a partnership like making something happen that would apparently never have happened without the collaboration.

Determine where funding will come from. Funding for coordination, programming, and land protection and stewardship projects is critical to developing your RCP's capacity to conserve and steward more land at the landscape scale. Keeping an eye on likely sources of funding is crucial at every stage, but it is most important early on.

If sources of financing are lacking at the present moment, plan accordingly. Discuss with your partners where the money for different needs could come from in the short- and longer-term. Take the time to coordinate your partners' current activities where possible. Look for opportunities to work together to apply for grants instead of doing so in competition. Conditions will change for the better, or for the worse, so try to build flexibility into the partnership. In some cases, slightly modifying the RCP's boundaries can open up new sources of funding. Consider which potential funding sources could warrant such a change.

Design your RCP's programming, outreach, and land protection activities to meet and cultivate the funding sources necessary to sustain your RCP and its work. Consider strategies for raising and using funds in the future. Collaboration may require a fiscal agent, memorandums of understanding, or membership dues. You can revisit this in Step 7 as you prepare for your approach to land protection as an RCP.

If your partnership began with funding (perhaps because the partners had funding or the promise of funding before they got together), take special care to consider whether these resources might be masking weaknesses in your RCP, and, if so, work to overcome them. Two promising RCPs have begun and ended in step with the arrival and departure of grant funding.

To overcome the weakness that initial funding can enable, take the time to discuss what partners want from the RCP and what they can give to it separate from the current funded activities. Make sure partners understand that collaboration requires give-and-take. All partners

at one time or another will need to review the costs and benefits of membership in the RCP. A stable and productive RCP is one where the current partners have done their cost-benefit analysis and have chosen to work together in partnership with a clear understanding of what it takes to do so.

2.2 Draft your vision, mission statement, goals, and objectives.

Your deliberations on these topics will help clarify what you will do as a partnership as compared to what different partner organizations and agencies will do on their own. Be prepared to go through this process more than once during the life of your RCP.

Vision is the future condition that your RCP seeks to achieve.

The **mission statement** reflects the RCP's purpose and may include preferred strategies the RCP uses to help achieve its vision.

Goals are bold accomplishments to be met by a well-run, mission-driven organization on the way to achieving its vision.

Objectives spell out what the RCP will do (objectives and action plans) to get from where it is now (current status) to where it wants to be (vision and goals). Objectives can be measured.

2.3 Develop a steering committee and working groups as needed.

Members of Emerging RCPs may realize that it can be challenging to have every decision, administrative or strategic, made by the entire partnership membership. Research on RCPs (Labich et al. 2013) shows that Conserving RCPs commonly have two or more decision-making bodies (for instance, the full partnership, a steering committee, or working groups).

Steering Committee. This committee can oversee the coordinator's work plan, recommend actions for the full partnership's consideration, help guide the coordinator, and make timely decisions. Its members might represent a core group of partners and the different sectors and geographies within the region. Treat this committee as the RCP's board of directors. It should meet in person and more frequently than the full partnership.

Working Groups. Working groups can be either standing or ad hoc. Some RCPs have standing working groups focused on different ongoing or relatively permanent

objectives: capital planning, conservation mapping, stewardship, education, policy, and advocacy. Ad hoc working groups can be organized to tackle projects between meetings that are expected to take months, not years, to accomplish. Members of some Conserving RCPs view working groups as integral to the business of conservation. They have found that working groups increase their effectiveness.

2.4 Facilitate periodic communication between partners outside of meetings.

Members of RCPs typically value communication between meetings about successes, events, and partners' activities, but not always to the same degree. Ideally, information flows from the coordinator to RCP members, from RCP members to the coordinator, and between members of the RCP. Constant communication is one way to keep partners involved, but don't overdo it. Moderation is the rule and the potential for email fatigue is real. Make sure each communication has a purpose. If partners are bombarded with emails, they may not recognize or respond to critical correspondence.

2.5 Develop a website.

A website is a must. At a minimum, it should include the RCP's mission, its goals, a list of the partners, and a map of its region. These days, simple websites can be developed affordably, generally for under \$1,000, depending on your partnership's needs. Crafting site content takes

some practice, and so does navigating website applications, but it can be done even by people with very limited technical skills. Understand your main audience(s) — including RCP partners and the general public — and design the site and content to speak to them. Have member organizations link their sites to the RCP site and vice versa. Some host partner organizations also use their RCP's website to highlight the work of partner organizations and agencies. This can build trust among partners and promote greater awareness of the partnership among each member group's leaders.

2.6 Learn from peer and mentor RCPs.

In your partnership's first years, take the time to learn about funding, organization, and programming lessons and opportunities from peer RCPs. Attend events like RCP Network Gatherings and state meetings of RCPs. Invite other RCPs to help you with projects. Consider collaborating with other RCPs on grant proposals to access funding to support your outreach and conservation planning activities.



Members of the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership meet two or three times a year. The steering committee meets quarterly. All meetings take place at the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary, which is centrally located on the state line between Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Maturing RCPs: Plan a Conservation Vision and Engage Stakeholders

Introduction

Maturing RCPs begin to develop the tools and contacts needed to conserve more land than partner organizations could do on their own. In this stage, public education can be a priority and often takes many forms, including focused outreach and training programs for landowners and municipal officials. These outreach efforts are often intended to increase awareness among both potential allies and partners of the partnership's mission and activities.

RCPs whose local connections are already well developed might move forward to craft a shared strategic regional conservation plan for the RCP's member organizations. What are the most important areas and parcels to protect from development? Which existing opportunities are significant and complex enough to warrant an RCP approach? RCPs differ in their use of strategic conservation planning. Some begin mapping right away. Others are more focused on acquiring funding for projects already under way, so strategic mapping is less important. Still, by the time an RCP reaches the Conserving stage, it typically has a mapped strategic conservation vision, and many also have focus areas.

Before an RCP pursues outreach and educational programs and strategic conservation planning, it is important to evaluate the overall potential of the RCP and its members to benefit from these activities. RCP activities can raise all boats, or they can sink smaller boats. To make the most of every activity your RCP advances, pay attention to building the capacity of member organizations even as you improve the capacity of the RCP as a whole.

Take a good look at your partner organizations. Are many of them lacking capacity? Without enough staff, partners will be challenged to follow up on any landowner, municipal, state, and or federal interest in either conserving their land or funding it. They may not be as able to facilitate land protection campaigns, and their on-the-ground outreach activities may produce opportunities that end up spoiling on the vine.

Each of your partner organizations has its own developmental path, and some may need help that is typically beyond the missions and expertise of most RCP member groups. Fortunately, there are people and organizations with resources to help local and regional land conservation trusts in such areas as strengthening their organizations, practices, and procedures. Reach out to organizations like the Land Trust Alliance or your state's land trust service organization for ideas. Chances are that these groups will be grateful for the opportunity to partner with your RCP in delivering services to your member groups. If your member organizations do not have the capacity to push forward into new areas, how can your RCP expect to increase the pace of conservation?

Step 3: Increase Capacity as You Prepare to Conserve

Member groups and agencies of Maturing RCPs would do well to engage in any partnership activity with self-interest firmly in mind: "How can this RCP activity help my organization succeed?" At the same time, coordinators and other leaders can manage the activities of the RCP to benefit more partner groups. Speaker series, training, and other educational programs can expose partnership members to new ideas, thinking, and information on innovative conservation practices, land use issues, or on any other topic of interest. Recognize that the success of your RCP depends on the success of your member organizations and agencies. Know that how you take the next steps will have a considerable influence on whether your RCP succeeds.

3.1 Build partner capacity.

First, consider using online survey tools to understand your RCP members' challenges and needs. Invite them to discuss how to attract new resources — needed services, funding for projects — while helping to plan for a large land protection project. Almost any

activity can be pursued just to check it off the list. With a little forethought, the activities in Steps 4–7 can be implemented in ways that strengthen member organizations and agencies.

3.2 Help partner organizations obtain grants and work on open space plans.

RCP leaders can build the capacities of partner land trusts and municipalities by helping them write grants and pursue local open space and recreation planning within the partnership's region. RCPs can prioritize those activities that achieve their mission while also accomplishing projects that advance the objectives of member organizations within the region. Successful planning processes and on-the-ground projects can then inspire other partners or clusters of partners to work together.

3.3 Connect with your state's conservation land trust councils (or service bureaus).

Your RCP's ability to increase the pace of conservation in your region will largely depend on the capacities of the different member organizations in your partnership. Land trusts with professional staff can typically get more done than all-volunteer organizations. RCP members can do a lot on their own to help organizations and agencies achieve their mission. RCPs can serve as a forum for members to share accurate, up-to-date, and regionally relevant information about conservation threats and opportunities. RCPs can provide opportunities for land trust staff and volunteers to mentor or otherwise support organizations in need. RCPs can increase member organizations' funding, access to GIS technology and maps, training, and opportunities to participate in larger, more complex land protection projects. Stronger organizations are better able to collaborate with partners to plan, raise funds, and conserve land. See page 31 for RCP resources to ensure your members get the organizational development support they need.

Step 4: Plan and Map a Strategic Conservation Vision

Planning and mapping its strategic conservation vision is one of the most important steps your RCP will take. Some RCPs take three years to discuss and map their priority conservation areas. Other RCPs have succeeded with a conservation vision and a shared commitment to working in the same areas to buffer and connect existing protected lands. If your members have a very clear understanding of where they need to work, or if their projects are mostly in response to opportunities, strategic planning and mapping may seem less important.

Even in these cases, RCP leaders would be wise to encourage all partners to develop a shared strategic conservation map with focus areas. Based on its 2010 national survey of land trusts, the Land Trust Alliance has found that, on average, a land trust with a strategic conservation plan conserves twice as many acres as a land trust without such a plan. Foundations, state and federal agencies, donors, and residents all like to know that land conservation organizations have a thoughtful, meaningful plan and know what needs protecting most. There are some excellent materials that describe the steps to strategic conservation planning. Visit the RCP Network's Resources page for a list of them (www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/node/186).

Lay out a planning and mapping process that works best for your RCP. Check in with your members. You may find that your RCP's members are most interested in having just a general conservation vision for the region, without focusing on specific areas. Your RCP might also skip this step completely at first in favor of strengthening ties with stakeholders within and outside your region. These are all perfectly fine options, each with its potential costs and benefits.

Probably the most important decision to make about your strategic conservation planning is whether the plan will be for partners, for the public, or for both. If your RCP members intend to produce a strategic conservation plan that engages a larger group of stakeholders than you have presently, consider reordering the steps in this section in this way:

- Step 6:** Engage Potential Partners Within Your Region
- Step 7:** Engage Potential Partners Beyond Your Region
- Step 4:** Plan and Map a Strategic Conservation Vision
- Step 5:** Plan to Implement Conservation Activities

By taking the steps in this order (6, 7, 4, 5), your RCP will likely engage a larger and more diverse group of partners in your planning process. Reaching out to more stakeholders will take longer, probably result in a more complicated planning and public engagement process, and have a less predictable outcome. On the other hand, a strategic conservation plan produced in this way can endure as long as the partners continue to find value in and benefit from it. All projects that come from this plan will likely have a pronounced level of buy-in from local organizations, government agencies, and individuals.

Conversely, maybe your RCP plans to share the vision and strategic conservation map only with partners and funders. If that is your intent, you may want to stick to the original order of the steps: 4, 5, 6, and 7.

4.1 Draft a description of your shared conservation vision.

If your RCP has already developed a mission statement, you might consider looking to it for the essential elements of your regional conservation vision. What is your RCP's purpose? What are your member organizations trying to do together that they cannot do on their own? If you could not have a strategic conservation planning and mapping process, and you had only a statement about your priorities and the future conditions you were all trying to bring about, what would it be? Here is an example: "A permanently protected network of conserved and connected core forest habitats on private and public lands in X region."

Developing a conservation vision for your RCP will take time and effort, but the result will be worth it. Review your goals, objectives, and mission statement. Make your vision statement a natural extension of these, and tether it to landscape-centered and longer-term outcomes. At the same time, use words that will encourage people to engage with your RCP. Your vision statement can be your elevator speech, your reason for existing, and it can help your members share in the creation of something inspirational early on in your RCP's formation.

Developing a conservation vision can also reveal what kinds of natural and cultural resources and constraints partners want to include in mapping their vision. Don't be surprised, though, when after completing the mapped conservation vision, you end up modifying your vision statement. New data and information can point to exciting and previously unconsidered opportunities.

4.2 Collaboratively map, analyze, and prioritize your region's natural and cultural resources.

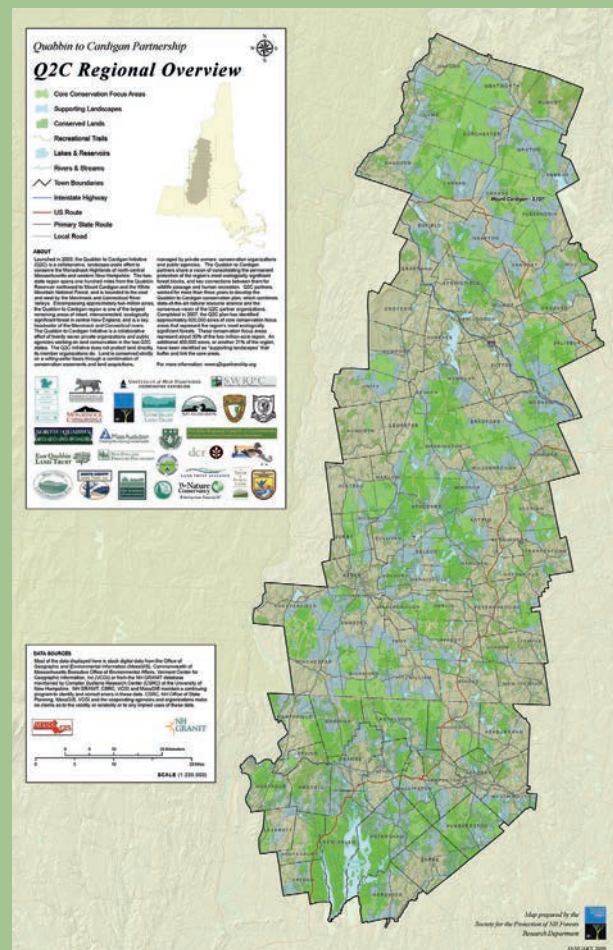
Determine the sources of geographic information systems (GIS) data in your region. Ask a partner organization to supply maps of your region, or otherwise obtain necessary funding for mapping. RCP members may also partner with regional planning commissions or universities if none of the current partners have access to GIS.

Consider what resources go into this kind of analysis. Look at your regional conservation goals and objectives for elements to include. Consider the role of local, regional, state, or national priorities for various natural and cultural resources. Consider both the value of the resources and their associated political values. Which resources have known funding sources and at what scale? Which of these resources have the support of legislators or communities? Include resources that have other local, state, and federal champions, if appropriate.

Box 3: Case Study

Strategic Conservation Map with Focus Areas Example: Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership

The Quabbin to Cardigan (Q2C) Partnership formed in 2002. Partners took three years to develop a strategic conservation vision and mapped core forest habitats that together equaled one-third of the partnership's 1.9-million-acre landscape. They endorsed Forest Legacy projects in the cores and later established a small grants program to cover transaction costs for land protection projects within the core focus areas. Eight separate grant rounds, four funded by the Natural Resource Conservation Service and four by an anonymous donor, helped to conserve 90,000 acres in the region between 2002 and 2012.



Map, analyze, and prioritize your region's natural and cultural resources. For more comprehensive books on this important subject, the reader is urged to go to the RCP Network website (www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/rnp-network/resources-and-funding-opportunities-for-rnps). Also, some RCP service providers may be available to assist your RCP with strategic conservation planning consulting (see a list of RCP service providers on the RCP Network website). Nonetheless, we encourage RCP members to discuss for themselves the following factors in planning their GIS analysis and mapping process.

Public versus private maps. Public maps may be useful in showing the RCP's overall vision, but be careful of what you show on the map. Residents may take issue with maps that are parcel-specific, especially if they think the RCP is targeting their property. Private RCP maps that show parcel boundaries and other details can be effective planning tools for partners in coordinating their ongoing outreach and conservation activities.

Analysis complexity. Mapping and analysis techniques can range from simple to complex.

- **Simple:** A co-occurrence model is used to show where different resource values (for instance, large forest blocks, aquifers, rare species habitat) in your region are found, and specifically which areas have overlapping values. A map using this kind of model layers resources in patches or polygons on top of (or below) parcel data. Parcels with the darkest colors have the highest ranking due to the number of overlapping resources in one area. Resources can also be weighted differently, and this can give the RCP flexibility to prioritize specific resources.
- **Complex:** Gravity models can highlight portions of the regional landscape based on the land's relative proximity to existing resource areas like large forest blocks, agricultural lands, wetlands, aquifers, or rare species habitats. Gravity models can also be used in conjunction with co-occurrence models.

Regional context. Use regional contexts like state and federal areas of importance (such as bird flyways or National Forest and Park investments), and climate-change- and resilience-related habitat priorities. Using state, regional, or national priorities may lend credence to your conservation corridors, or result in state agencies and NGOs being more interested in working with you.

Look to federal agencies like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service. They may be able to provide your RCP with access to new scientific datasets and the tools needed to use them for strategic conservation planning and evaluating projects. The North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative is a very good source for these datasets (See <http://nalcc.databasin.org/>).

4.3 Identify focus areas to champion.

Whichever strategic conservation planning process RCPs use, they often produce maps showing priority resources or focus areas. Focus areas can represent RCP members' shared interests as well as the interests of individual member groups. Regional priorities may be resource-based and found across the region, without being explicitly identified on a map. For example, an RCP could have as its priority conserving half of the region's remaining large forest blocks.

Site-specific focus areas can also be determined through the strategic conservation planning process. Local land trust and municipal priorities can be general or site-specific. An example of a site-specific priority is a parcel that a city or town wants most to conserve. Examples of local resource-based priorities include active farmland with prime farmland soils, floodplain forests, or large unfragmented forests.

RCPs would benefit from working with municipalities and local, town-level land conservation trusts and other local groups. A key strategy for many RCPs is encouraging local groups to coordinate their individual efforts for greater regional outcomes. This can be especially useful where there are overlapping priorities within the RCP's conservation and stewardship priority focus areas (such as protecting larger contiguous areas of farm and woodlands as well as trails and wetlands). (See Box 3, Case Study—Strategic Conservation Map with Focus Areas Example: Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership.) Focus areas typically represent landscapes with the highest value compared to other lands in the region. Each focus area should have at least two partners that plan to conserve land there.

There are many ways to advance your mission using focus areas once you have identified them on a GIS map. Study the focus areas and prepare a written inventory or summary of their resources, surrounding land use patterns, threats from development, conservation activities, and stewardship opportunities. Develop a database of landowners in each focus area, targeting them for future outreach and educational programs. Spend more time engaging residents and owners of land in your focus areas. If you can access grant monies for transaction costs (such as appraisals and surveys), prioritize these funds for parcels found within these focus areas. Promote and track your success by describing the percentage of the focus areas that have been conserved.

Step 5: Plan to Implement Conservation Activities

Like the other steps, Step 5 can be pursued to varying degrees, depending on how ready and well-resourced your RCP is. RCPs whose member organizations have ample staff, funding, and other resources, and a history of working well together, may have a new strategic conservation map that simply highlights where they

should direct more of their resources. However, if RCP member groups have insufficient staffing and funding or lack a solid track record of working well together, or if the methods or strategies for achieving the conservation plan are not altogether clear, a strategic action plan can help the RCP collectively chart its next steps.

5.1 Develop a strategic action plan for achieving your mapped regional conservation vision.

A strategic action planning process can provide RCP members with a useful framework for entering into, working through, and concluding discussions about often challenging topics before or even after the partnership has completed its conservation map. Action plans can also be designed to address all of the activities of the RCP; in this case, the elements and process are roughly the same.

Creating a strategic conservation map (see Step 4, page 15) requires agreement on which resources are most important to conserve. A strategic action plan completed either before or after the map can help RCP members revisit or reach agreement on the bigger picture questions such as these: What is the vision and mission of our RCP? What are our primary goals and objectives? How do these differ from those of individual member groups? What are the best strategies for achieving the RCP's objectives (or those of its member groups)? Which individuals and groups will do what? Reaching agreement on the answers to these questions will take time, but the process can help ease partners' concerns about where they fit in, what they get from the partnership, and what they might contribute.

The RCP steering committee can focus on managing the process and advancing drafts for review by the full partnership. The Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership spent 18 months developing its strategic action plan, with most of the work done by volunteers. The plan helped partners identify the most important and popular strategies to initiate at the beginning, from landowner outreach to strategic conservation planning.

An action plan for a strategic conservation plan could just lay out the relevant goals and objectives of the RCP. For example, the goal might be to increase the connectivity of protected open space across the region over the next 10 years. One measurable objective could be "to assist landowners in the focus area to protect their land from development such that 10,000 acres of contiguous forestland are conserved by 2025." For each objective, the RCP members would identify what strategies they would use to achieve it. For example, a strategy could be to inform landowners about estate planning, or to raise a regional fund for appraisals and other due diligence costs. For each strategy, RCP members would list the specific, concrete actions that each partner could take.

Each action would help achieve the related objective. An example might be "two land trusts collaborate to produce three educational events for landowners in the focus area in 2018."

5.2 Partners choose to work together on specific tasks.

Each partner organization would decide which actions it wants to support, at which level (lead, co-lead, or partner), and by when. Ideally, any activity in your plan has the support of at least two member organizations.

Any plan your RCP puts together will likely need to be flexible and adaptable in order to take full advantage of the nature of the RCP's combination of informality, networking, strategy, and serendipity. Identify all of the activities you'll work on together and prioritize the most important collective projects to advance. However, be ready to take full advantage of opportunities that might appear, because other conservation organizations may not be able to respond as quickly as your RCP.

5.3 Plan your work, and work your plan, but don't wait too long before doing something, anything.

Even before the ink is dry on your plan, make sure you have projects in the works. Identify and advance your best prospects: projects that are easy, popular, and relatively inexpensive. Take the time to invest in your long-term projects, but remember that nothing builds momentum like success.

Step 6: Engage Potential Partners Within Your Region

Steps 6 and 7 are about engaging with other people and groups beyond your current partners to more fully achieve your goals and objectives. Although RCPs can add members at any time, we intentionally address this activity here, after the planning is done (or before, depending on your course of action).

Reaching out and engaging with other stakeholders in the region can connect your RCP with new allies that can help achieve a large-landscape conservation vision. Working with stakeholders is important even if the individuals or groups do not become "official" members of the RCP. As noted in Step 4 (see page 15), you may choose to pursue this community engagement work (Steps 6 and 7) before your strategic conservation and action plan (Steps 4 and 5). We recommend that you build local support (Step 6) before reaching out to state and federal agencies and other conservation organizations and foundations (Step 7). For state and federal agencies, one of the RCP's primary values may be its connection to local communities. Building relationships with community groups, municipal boards and officials, and landowners is critical for most RCPs. At some point, the investment

will reap dividends in local buy-in and support for stewardship and land protection projects in the region.

6.1 Identify the people, organizations, and agencies that would help the RCP achieve its regional conservation vision and plan.

Landowners and municipal officials are two categories of potential partners that every RCP should be engaging with at some level. One of the best ways to engage and inform these partners is by cultivating peer-to-peer networks of each in your region. Again, this takes time, but there are many RCPs (Emerging, Maturing, and Conserving) that do this work for all the benefits it produces. Peer networks of knowledgeable, networked champions of smart growth, land conservation, and stewardship could be living and working to fulfill your RCP's mission in your region's focus areas.

Individuals and families own 86 percent of the forested landscapes of New England and the Northeast. Individuals and families will, therefore, have the biggest impact on the environmental, economic, and social values of your region's woodlands. They affect their woods when they choose whether (and how) to harvest their trees, and whether they should plan for the development or the conservation of their land.

Municipal staff and volunteers can be great partners for RCPs for several reasons. Municipalities can have a significant impact on how land is used in your region (developed or not, for which kind of use, and at what density). Consider engaging city and town staff and officials in your planning and conservation activities.

Work with local commission members and encourage them to revise land use policies in ways that contribute to the regional conservation vision of the RCP. For example, cities and towns often invest in land conservation. RCPs can help cities and towns facilitate a more connected network of conserved land across the regional landscape. They can help adjoining municipalities plan and coordinate their investments across town boundaries. They can also help cities and towns apply for state and federal grants to protect more land. Municipal staff and volunteers can also help RCPs with strategies that can result in significant conservation gains. RCPs can also partner with regional planning agencies to cultivate an interest among cities and towns in smart growth planning. Towns can revise their zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations to more directly contribute to local and regional conservation visions and plans.

Other potential partners that can provide more depth to your "bench" include the following:

- business owners, including real estate agents
- foresters
- farmers
- conservation districts
- universities and colleges (faculty and students)

- nature centers
- regional planning agencies
- outdoor enthusiasts (anglers, snowmobile clubs, mountain bike associations, etc.)
- birding clubs
- hiking and mountain biking clubs

Universities, colleges, other educational institutions, and scouting and faith-based organizations may own land in your region. Engaging people in these groups may result in their active involvement in your RCP. It can also bring your group added allies, deeper connections to communities, land protection projects, and people with different skill sets, and capital — both human and financial. It can also bring new values, priorities, and needs into your shared vision, which is another reason to consider treating the vision, map, and plan as "living" documents.

6.2 Reach out to and engage other people and organizations in conservation education leading to stewardship and protection of their land.

Researchers from Utah State University and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst recently found that peer-to-peer learning can attract and inform not only landowners with forestry backgrounds but previously unengaged landowners, as well (Ma et al. 2011). A family forest owner outreach initiative in eastern New York and New England had similar findings. The participants in that initiative also used targeted messaging and peer-to-peer outreach and education. Their events attracted audiences of previously unengaged landowners with a greater interest in stewarding and conserving their lands than they had experienced with conventional outreach methods (Labich 2014). Some RCPs in New England are seeking to cultivate peer networks of landowners and conservation commission members to increase local buy-in for their regional conservation activities. Other RCPs have developed networks of municipal liaisons to great conservation success.

Step 7: Engage Potential Partners Beyond Your Region

There are four types of potential partners or allies that Maturing RCPs should consider approaching: state and federal agencies, other conservation organizations, colleges and universities, and charitable foundations. However, as described in Step 6, RCPs may want first to establish productive ties with local communities, groups, and individuals. This group of local partners might also include other RCPs in your region.

7.1 Compare your RCP's region to the priorities of state and federal government agencies, and conservation and philanthropic organizations.

RCPs have been established in regions with local, state, multi-state, and national landscape designations. Priority landscapes come in many shapes and sizes, including interstate forest landscapes, metropolitan watersheds, national forests, national bird flyways, and core or resilient habitat areas. (See Box 4, Case Study—Taking Advantage of Special Landscape Designations.) Here are some examples, with their related funding sources or proponents.

- Metropolitan water supplies like Lake Sebago (Portland Water Department) or the Quabbin Reservoir Watershed (Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation)
- Terrestrial Ecosystems with High Resilience to Climate Change in the Northeast (Open Space Institute and various funders)
- Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies by memorandum of understanding)
- Highlands Conservation Act (a four-state coalition)
- New England Governors' Conference Priority Landscapes and State Wildlife Action Plans (state forestry and wildlife agencies)

In addition, several RCPs have regionally focused charitable foundations as partners.

7.2 Engage in new activities that could add relevance, funding, and capacity to your RCP and its members.

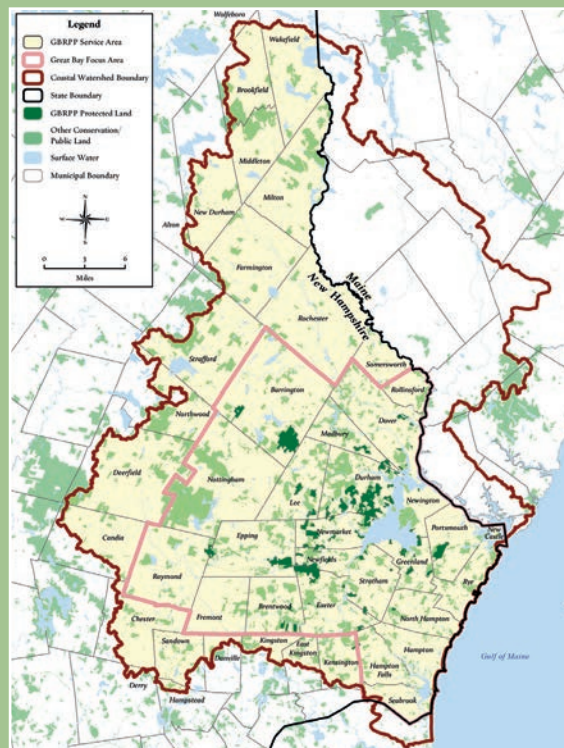
Conservation is an evolving field. Be sure to keep abreast of trends in conservation practice and be ready to take advantage of new opportunities. Examples include landscape-scale stewardship and conservation, climate-informed biodiversity conservation planning, social impact investing, payments associated with ecosystem services like carbon storage, peer-to-peer outreach and education for landowners, local food security/agriculture, land trust capacity-building, and public health. Look for opportunities to capitalize on one or more of these trending strategies in order to access new sources of funding, ideas, and partners.

Promote a culture of creative innovation in your RCP and don't be afraid to take risks. Encourage your partners to make use of any new RCP activity to reach and engage their own members, donors, and constituencies, which will in turn help your RCP better achieve its mission over time.

Box 4: Case Study

Taking Advantage of Special Landscape Designations: Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership

The first RCP established in New England was the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. The partnership initially came together to collectively support conservation action in the 43,000-acre Great Bay Focus Area, which the North American Wetland Conservation Plan identified as significant migratory waterfowl habitat in the North Atlantic Flyway. More than 80 percent of all waterfowl that winter in New Hampshire's coastal areas are found in Great Bay. The partnership has since expanded its service area to include the 42 New Hampshire municipalities in the coastal watershed. Partner groups collaborated to leverage significant federal funding with state, municipal, and private funding to conserve 109 properties and 6,100 acres of critical waterfowl habitat and key recreational resources. The conserved lands are concentrated in blocks known as conservation areas, ranging in size from 264 acres to 2,594 acres. The partnership's stewardship program promotes landscape-scale management in conservation areas, and ecologically compatible public access on the conserved lands. (See www.greatbaypartnership.org for more information.)



7.3 Seek and work with allies in the RCP Network to further your partnership's mission and activities.

Launched in early 2012, the RCP Network is a community of learning for collaborative conservation. The RCP Network is an informal and voluntary association of 43 RCPs in New England and eastern New York. The Network was developed in response to feedback from participants in the 2011 RCP Gathering. At that conference, RCP leaders said they would value more opportunities to engage with other RCPs to learn about successes and failures, and to consider collaborating on projects and grants. Beyond RCP members, the RCP Network welcomes numerous organizations and individuals who are interested in advancing large-landscape conservation by working with RCPs and the RCP Network. Highstead Foundation serves as the RCP Network's host partner organization and employs the coordinator.

Every state in New England, as well as New York, is represented on the RCP Network's steering committee. The steering committee, in partnership with other Network members, cultivates ongoing opportunities for RCP members to engage with peer RCPs across the region. Moreover, the Network lists over 20 RCP service providers online. Through the RCP Network, Highstead and its regional partners have raised more than \$4 million

in private and public capital. These funds have supported RCP coordination, programming, strategic planning, and land protection. RCPs, Highstead, and the RCP Network acquired these resources by partnering with organizations, agencies, and philanthropic foundations. All of these groups now routinely work with the RCP Network and RCPs to achieve their objectives.

This modest increase in capacity has led to a greater level of engagement within and among RCPs and helped in almost doubling the number of Conserving RCPs between 2010 and 2015.

The RCP Network has joined forces with a new network of colleges, universities, and research institutions: Academics for Land Protection in New England (ALPiNE). ALPiNE is associated with the Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative and is being coordinated by the Center for Conservation Innovation at Harvard Forest. ALPiNE considers the RCP Network a key partner in helping academic institutions to engage their students, faculty, and alumni in the conservation of New England's natural landscapes. The RCP Network steering committee is working with ALPiNE to enable academic institutions to engage with RCPs. Contact the RCP Network coordinator if you are interested in engaging with ALPiNE or go to their website (<http://www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/ALPiNE>).



Shed Pond / Norm Rodrigue / Kennebec Land Trust



Peter Miller Woodland / Nicole Rhodes / Kennebec Land Trust

Conserving RCPs: Collaborate to Raise Funds and Conserve Land

Introduction

An RCP enters the Conserving stage of development when it begins to raise money and conserve land at a pace, scale, or scope greater than what member groups could have done on their own. Steps 8–10 can make up the ongoing activity of the RCP.

Many Conserving RCPs protect land over an extended period (longer than a capital campaign). They do this by more closely coordinating their partners' individual efforts to raise monies and to protect land from development. Some of these RCPs have succeeded in protecting a significant share of their regional landscape (see Labich et al. 2013). They may have begun by promoting their common conservation vision using maps, a website, and brochures, and well before they sought grants from agencies and foundations. Other RCPs know they need to develop and execute a very strategic, time-sensitive, and tightly coordinated capital campaign. In that case, the promotion of the RCP's conservation vision would likely be used as a case statement, the development of which could be integral to the capital campaign process.

Typically, Conserving RCPs plan and complete various land protection projects and campaigns over their lifetime. Between projects, they may transition to a less active period that will end when they choose to move forward with a new grant-funded initiative or to begin work on a new land protection project. These RCPs may also pursue additional outreach and stakeholder engagement activities, redo or revise their strategic conservation plans, and otherwise remain nimble and ready to capitalize on new opportunities.

Some Conserving RCPs may also experience a longer period of relative inactivity. They may be stuck. They may not know how or have the resources or land protection project(s) to transition to the next phase of their regional conservation activity.

Fortunately, the RCP Network can help RCPs connect with others that have had similar experiences. Most RCP leaders are more than willing to share what they did to move on to their next set of projects.

Please note that Steps 8 and 9 draw heavily from several key sources. Of particular note is the RCP Network's Capital Campaign Training and Assistance Program's working paper, *Practical Guide to Capital Campaigns*, by Tom Curren with Highstead. Also of great importance are materials documenting various RCP Network Gatherings (2011–2013) and other training presentations. Presenters included Leigh Youngblood, Tin Smith, Stephen T. Johnson, Jay Rasku, and Ala Reid. Finally, the content of Steps 8 and 9, like that of the other steps, reflects the direct experience of people involved in RCPs and the RCP Network.

Step 8: Promote Your Shared Conservation Vision

Whether your RCP is developing its long-term conservation vision for the next 50 years or its current campaign, telling your story well is critical to financing conservation. The purpose of the case statement is to support the RCP in organizing its marketing strategy for its conservation activities.

Your case statement may take the form of a glossy brochure, donor letter, website, online video, or all of these. It could include images and messages that convey the values associated with the RCP's vision and strategy. It could target major donors in one iteration, and show the public how it could help in another.

8.1 Draft a compelling case statement.

A case statement illustrates and communicates your conservation vision to foundations, donors, landowners, and other organizations and agencies.

Define your RCP's (or your campaign's) strategic context. Take the time to catalog the components of what might be called your RCP's credo. Much of this consists of things you might take for granted, but it is important for you to articulate them. Here are some elements that should be included.

- **The broader landscape’s unique value.** Include its salient characteristics such as “the last great north-south assemblage of large forest blocks from the Quabbin Reservoir to the White Mountains.” Another example is “a part of a chain of wetlands that have been given the highest threatened species rating in western Maine by the Maine Natural Areas Program.”
- **The value of your RCP’s mission.** Describe the particulars of your RCP’s goals, focusing on the benefits and synergy that result in working together (for example, “working together to marshal the broadest possible public support for watershed protection throughout the Tri-county area”).
- **General information about the particular property or properties you want to protect.** Use language like “the largest active heron rookery in the town of Alton,” or “the last remaining dairy farm in the Southern Berkshires.”
- **Accurate data about the properties.** Information should include the acreage you wish to protect, location names (“known as the old Gilpatric place”), and the types of habitat (northern swamp and northern hardwood and conifer). It should also note the kind of protection associated with each property: fee simple or easement.
- **The project’s or campaign’s specific goals.** These include the acreage, or what percentage of the resource you plan to conserve, and why it is so critical to the region’s communities. In other words, the case statement also needs to include information about the value of the land and how its resources are relevant to society. What is the value of the forests and farms your RCP plans to conserve? What is threatening those resources? Why is it vitally important to act now? (Example: “protecting 50 percent of the remaining prime farmland soils in Happy Valley, our region’s largest remaining unprotected agricultural area.”)
- **Historical and cultural context.** Include applicable stories, events, and historical and cultural connections. Some examples: “part of Colonel Stark’s campground before the Battle of Bennington,” “referred to in Henry Thoreau’s diary entry for July 6, 1852,” and “part of the landscape painted by Grandma Moses.”
- **Wildlife benefits.** List the prominent (rare or charismatic) species living on or traveling through the property. Describe the region’s longer-term large-landscape habitat values once you have completed the conservation projects. Identify areas of above-average resilience to climate change.
- **Appropriate public use potential.** Describe how the RCP partners will maintain or enhance the traditional public recreational uses of the natural landscapes for hiking, wildlife observation, fishing, hunting, and snowmobile trails. Note the project’s proximity to public schools, if appropriate.

Other ingredients of a case statement. The degree to which you include all of these factors, and the manner in which you explain the “ask,” will depend on the temporal scale of the initiative. Your statement can be adapted based on whether it needs to describe your RCP’s conservation strategy for the next 10 years or just a single short-term phase of a campaign. It may be helpful to be prepared to do both: tell the longer-term story and what your group has on the docket right now. This may include the following elements:

- **Map:** An attractive, easy-to-grasp representation of what you are working to conserve and its location.
- **Color photographs:** Landscape and wildlife/recreation close-ups.
- **Historical images:** If applicable.
- **Key highlights of the RCP region and why they are important.**
- **Description of the properties:** Name, acreage, location — or other campaign goals such as protecting XX acres or XX% of the unprotected critical habitat.
- **The deal/the ask:** What is the conservation outcome your RCP seeks. Include the following details: type of acquisition (fee or easement), price, remaining funding needs, the amount of money raised/pledged thus far, and deadline.
- **Motivating terms:** “We need an additional \$50,000 by December 31, 20XX! Please be one of our local heroes!”
- **Action steps:** “Persons interested in helping us make the effort a success should do so by contacting (fill in name, title, and email address of a responsive human being).”
- **Members of the team:** Logos of all members of the RCP.
- **The magic words:** “Thank you for your thoughtful consideration!”

Step 9: Raise Funds and Conserve Land

By the Conserving stage, RCP members ideally will have discussed likely sources of financing, reached out to stakeholders, developed a strategic conservation map with focus areas and an action plan, and cultivated buy-in for their plan or their general vision or mission. Most importantly, they will have periodically met in person over time, and built and sustained trusting working relationships among all the members and groups of the partnership. The work involved in these prior steps will help leaders overcome the challenges associated with coordinated and collaborative fundraising and large-landscape conservation and stewardship projects and campaigns.

RCPs use a variety of methods to raise funds to conserve and steward a more interconnected network of forests, farms, rivers, and parks within a regional landscape. RCPs apply for grants from a mix of private

philanthropic foundations, as well as from state and federal agencies and programs. They support municipalities to issue bonds for purchasing open space to conserve prime natural areas or develop future parks, or to buy the development right and keep the land in private ownership. RCPs manage capital campaigns to solicit monies from individuals, families, and corporations. They regrant foundation and other funds to cover due diligence costs (see Box 6) or use a combination of these fundraising approaches.

While we can point to 18 RCPs that have successfully increased resources to conserve land as a partnership, many more are striving to join this circle. The funding landscape has changed significantly since the mid to late 1990s when RCPs first became established in New England. Federal and state funding for land conservation becomes more competitive with each passing year. As a result, RCPs now consider a wider and more diverse array of funding sources to finance the implementation of their conservation plans over time.

9.1 Choose the funding sources to pursue for land conservation.

Even with a strategic map that includes focus areas, your RCP still needs willing landowners interested in conserving their land. Hopefully, with all of the outreach and engagement activities your RCP will have completed while in the Maturing stage, this won't be an issue. However, landowners can have different objectives and financial needs. Which source(s) of funding fit the parcel(s) and owner interests best?

Potential Sources of Conservation Finance

FEDERAL

- **U.S. Forest Service** programs conserve private and municipal woodlands. These include the Forest Legacy Program and the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.
- **Land and Water Conservation Fund.** Monies for conservation projects as part of U.S. Fish and Wildlife refuges, national forests, and national parks.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)** and the 2014 Farm Bill programs, including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Numerous programs provide funding for easement acquisitions.
- **North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)** grant program. NAWCA provides matching grants for wetlands conservation projects to benefit wetlands-associated migratory birds and other wildlife.

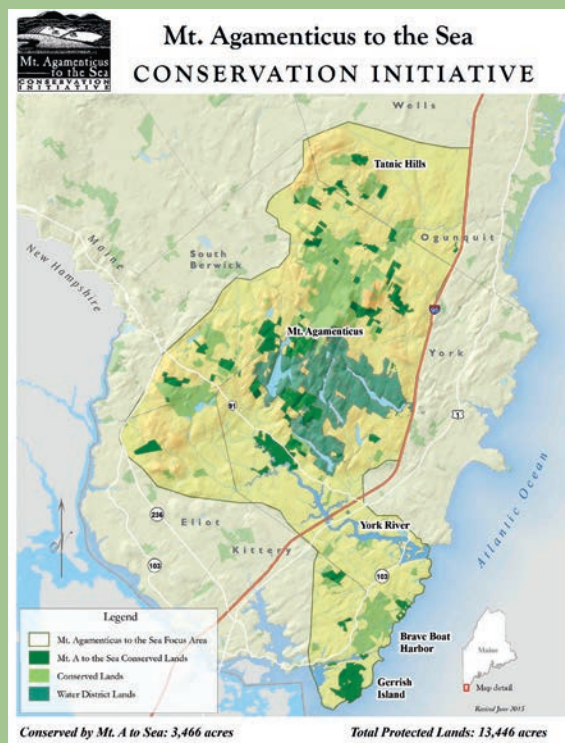
STATE

- Individual states' open-space grant programs
- State conservation land tax credit programs
- Ballot initiatives

Box 5: Case Study

Promoting Your Conservation Vision: Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative

The partners of the Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative, or MtA2C, completed their first collaborative capital campaign in 2006, raising nearly \$20 million in capital and land and protecting more than 2,000 acres. One of the tools they used was a full-color brochure case statement. Use this link to download a copy: http://mta2c.org/mta2c_case_statement_brochure.pdf. The brochure highlights the region's unique value. The area is considered "the largest unfragmented expanse of coastal forestlands between Acadia National Park and the New Jersey Pine Barrens." The partners' case statement describes their resolve to save key community resources from development and thus the quality of life residents have come to expect. MtA2C is in the process of launching its next campaign, and will be producing a new case statement.



MUNICIPAL

- Municipal open-space bonding and grants
- Natural resource protection zoning bylaws

PRIVATE

- Philanthropic foundations
- Landowners' bargain sales or donations
- Other private donors
- Bridge financing from such organizations as the Norcross Wildlife Foundation and The Conservation Fund

OTHER

- Limited development
- Lease agreements

If you have follow-up questions about the best sources of funding, consider reaching out to one or more Conserving RCPs in the RCP Network, or look at the RCP Resources web page (see www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/rcpnetwork).

9.2 Decide how to raise funds and conserve land as an RCP.

What kind of strategy will your RCP use to raise money to protect land from development? The best source of funds and how you go about getting them will depend on the attributes of your project.

Land/Landowners

- What are the main characteristics of your RCP's conservation focus areas?
- How many parcels/projects would you need to protect over the next X years to make a difference?
- What makes these land protection projects stand out? Why is it important to conserve this parcel or set of parcels? How does this project fit into the overall story of your RCP's strategic conservation plan?
- What are the landowner's objectives and how long can they wait?
- Is there an imminent threat to any of these parcels to which your RCP's member groups can respond in time?

Capital Needs

- How much money do you need to raise for acquisitions, easements, stewardship, and operating costs?
- Which sources of funding are the easiest to obtain?
- Which funding, if sought, could also help to build the operational capacity of member organizations?

Organizational Capacity

- Which of the RCP partner organizations would likely participate, and in which roles?
- To what degree do RCP members have the trust, interest, and need to coordinate or collaborate in writing grants or soliciting donors?

Box 6: Case Study

Choosing How to Raise Funds and Conserve Land as an RCP: Orange County Headwaters Project

Formed in 2003, the Orange County Headwaters Project (OCHP) began when a group of family forest owners sought to conserve their lands from development. After an application to the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program failed, they sought assistance from the Vermont Land Trust and The Conservation Fund. A feasibility study completed by the University of Vermont showed the potential for conservation easements to be donated on 4,100 acres (worth \$2.5 million) if there were no costs to the owners other than appraisal and legal fees and if those fees did not exceed a certain threshold. Foresters in the area served as paid staff and as a clearinghouse for information. Local commitment by landowners attracted foundation support. Together, they designed a method to help each and every landowner protect their woodlands from development at no cost to the owners. OCHP raised \$500,000 in grants to cover the costs of baseline documentation, other staff time, legal costs, and stewardship endowment associated with donated conservation restrictions. The OCHP conserved 34 parcels and 5,800 acres. This effort strengthened their previously failed Forest Legacy application, which was later funded, resulting in the protection of an additional 1,600 acres. Learn more: <http://orangecountyheadwaters.org>



Boydon Farm / Vermont Land Trust

Collaborative Conservation

What do we mean by collaborative conservation? Most Maturing and Conserving RCP members work together to produce maps, plans, programs, and land protection projects. Conserving RCPs may work differently based on the above questions and considerations.

Each RCP and each partner group will ultimately need to determine the approach that is best for them, for a particular project or set of projects. To realize their regional conservation vision, some will delegate specific tasks, such as grant writing or donor solicitation, to different partners. This approach is very common. It is rare for RCP partners to do all of these tasks together.

Here are several examples of approaches taken by Conserving RCPs to collaborative conservation using a variety of funding sources over time. Not included are capital campaigns, which will be covered in greater detail below.

The Quabbin to Cardigan (Q2C) Partners conserved 90,000 acres between 2002 and 2012 in New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

- Q2C completed a three-year strategic conservation planning process identifying focus areas equaling one-third of the total 1.9-million-acre landscape.
- The Q2C Conservation Plan was used to prioritize land protection projects and help partners secure Forest Legacy funding in both states.
- Since 2009, this RCP has secured more than \$750,000 to administer an ongoing small grants programs to support trail work and transactional expenses related to conservation projects within the focus areas.

River-Link, Maine (600 acres)

- RCP partners shared the promotion of the overall project to connect protected open space and a trail across two towns and between two north-south running rivers.
- One partner served as the leader for each parcel, but all partners supported each one.
- Partners jointly applied for state (Land for Maine's Future) and private foundation grants.

Mahoosuc Initiative, New Hampshire and Maine (56,767+ acres)

- The initiative produced a regional report, interactive GIS, and community outreach to build local buy-in for their vision. Followed up with extensive conservation efforts and tourism resources to support the local economy.
- The RCP is led by the coordinator, who facilitates decision-making, always striving for collaborative projects that have roles for multiple organizations in land conservation, stewardship activities, tourism support, communications, and the like.
- A working group of development people from each partner organization helps raise money collaboratively through joint grants, with funding going to each

partner group to support operations, coordination, land protection, and the partners' other operating needs. The working group held a funders briefing to attract additional foundations.

- Individual organizations sought and received funding from federal and private foundations for specific land conservation and local community projects using the Mahoosuc Initiative's compelling story.

Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project, Vermont (9,807 acres)

- The project developed a formal vision and coordinated landowner outreach.
- The RCP partners applied for grants and Forest Legacy funding together.

Enduring Success: The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership

Members of the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (NQRLP), located in north central Massachusetts, have together raised funds from private and public sources to conserve more than 14,000 acres of land. They have acquired funding from the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy and State and Private Forestry programs, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, municipal funding, and philanthropic foundations.

Attract State Investment with Recreational Trails

Within a year of its first meeting, the NQRLP began establishing the 22-mile regional Tully Trail, which provided an exciting target for greater connectivity and future state funding. The host partner of the NQRLP, the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, led a major conservation aggregation project (104 parcels in two years), using \$8 million in funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Local, regional, and state partners collaborated to protect most of the Tully Trail that was not already on state lands or roads.

Endorse Local Land Protection Projects as an RCP

NQRLP members also developed a process whereby local volunteers proposed land protection projects to NQRLP members. These volunteers were shown how to organize well-documented proposals. They then sought and received support from a professionally staffed land trust or state agency to help carry the land protection project to completion. They established a method by which partners could propose projects for official NQRLP endorsement based on shared vision and priorities. They also cultivated local liaisons who would then lead municipal conservation activities in support of the overall NQRLP vision.

Hire a Full-Time Coordinator and Conserve More Land

The NQRLP's first full-time coordinator was hired in 2006 to administer multi-parcel, multi-partner land conservation projects using Forest Legacy and state program funding. The steering committee regranted foundation funds to pay for the due diligence costs of partners' projects. Also, the coordinator helped partner municipalities apply for grants for open space planning and conservation projects that in turn supported the NQRLP's priorities. As a result, the NQRLP has conserved significant acreage through greater levels of coordination over the past 17 years:

- Tully Initiative (104 parcels, 9,100 acres).
- Quabbin Corridor Forest Legacy Project (20 parcels, 2,100 acres).
- Metacomet-Monadnock Forest Legacy Project (15 parcels, 1,875 acres).

Considerations for a Capital Campaign and Multi-Parcel Land Conservation Campaign

RCP Capital Campaigns

As noted earlier, many RCPs working together to raise funds and protect more land have not done so through a capital campaign, but this may be changing. Before 2010, only one RCP had attempted a capital campaign. However, with public funding uncertain, more and more RCPs are interested in learning about raising funds from donors through a coordinated capital campaign.

Toward that end, Highstead developed the *Practical Guide to RCP Capital Campaigns*, which can be found on the RCP Network website. The New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) also has a toolkit for land trusts pursuing collaborative, multi-parcel land conservation projects that includes information on capital campaigns. It can be found on their website:

www.newenglandforestry.org.

Before an RCP commits to a capital campaign, its member land trusts should evaluate the effectiveness of its case statements and the ability of member organizations and the RCP as a whole to succeed.

Here are the basic steps to organizing and executing a successful capital campaign (see the *Practical Guide* for more information):

- Develop a campaign committee for the RCP.
- Assess the potential of the RCP and partner organizations to succeed in the campaign.
- Draft a case statement to promote the project and evaluate its value based on feedback from potential supporters.
- Train volunteers in how to approach donors.
- Identify and carry out a survey of prospective donors.
- Produce an external feasibility assessment based on the results of the survey.
- Make the go/no-go decision.

- Develop a final financial capacity strategy and implementation framework with a timeline for the private and public phases.
- Identify and obtain the lead gifts.
- Launch the campaign with publicity when the private phase is complete.

Depending on each member land trust's objectives and the RCP's goals, decide whether you need to draft and adopt agreements between partner organizations. Consider including a memorandum of understanding, project criteria and tracking database, and fiscal management agreements (NEFF's toolkit includes templates for these).

RCP Land Conservation Campaign

RCPs that want to facilitate a multi-parcel land protection initiative might find these actions useful, regardless of how they raise funds for it.

Meet regularly and in person with members of your RCP to map and plan your conservation initiative.

The area in question could be a focus area of your overall conservation plan (see Step 4). Identify common goals and motivations, develop interest, and determine both the resources in hand and those that must be obtained to carry out the initiative.

Promote your initiative. Tell a story about it using a multi-faceted, strategic, and coordinated outreach approach. Use maps, meetings, events, handouts, mailings, and phone calls to engage stakeholders, landowners, and prospective donors. Make sure to share resources among partners throughout the life of the initiative and use principles of fairness and trust both with partners and landowners.

Coordinate RCP partners effectively. If you are not going to have the RCP coordinator manage the land conservation initiative, make sure to identify an individual or organization to play this critical role. The coordinator can do much to make a collaborative effort run smoothly by delegating tasks and responsibilities, following up with partners periodically, and making sure everyone is sharing credit. The coordinator can also help ensure that decision-making is transparent, fair, and responsive to partners' needs. Use spreadsheets for tracking match funding, parcels, and other important information. Have one contact person for each fund or grant administrator.

Standardize elements of the project for multiple parcels to save time and money. Agree to rank projects according to a set list of criteria; this will aid in project selection because not all projects may be funded. Use the same messaging and schedule for landowner communications, standardize conservation easement or restriction (CR) language, and use streamlined CR templates where possible.

Save money by aggregating costs for economies of scale for services required for each and every land project. You may want to aggregate services and products, including appraisals, negotiations, surveys, legal services, baseline documentation, easement monitoring, and signed options.

9.3 Document and evaluate your campaign and ongoing funding strategies.

Track your funding campaign using regularly scheduled in-person meetings to continue coordinating with partners. Meetings will be useful whether your RCP is working to complete individual land protection projects on deadline or you are running a time-intensive capital campaign.

9.4 Celebrate your successes.

Discuss and agree ahead of time how partners will tell their members, as well as the general public, about their conservation campaign and any successes along the way. News and social media can be excellent ways to promote your RCP's mission, vision, and highlight the work of partners collaborating to achieve something exciting. Intentionally sharing the credit is also a way to maintain trust between partners, particularly when strong RCP partners have overlapping territories and a shaky (or nonexistent) past relationship.

9.5 Repeat and reinvigorate Step 9 as opportunities arise that align with your mission, vision, and plan.

Once your RCP has raised funds and conserved land together, the number of times your RCP repeats this process to complete more projects and campaigns is almost limitless. The only constraint is your members' willingness to extend themselves to find new funding sources and engage more individuals, families, and communities in considering the conservation and stewardship of their land.

Step 10: Manage Transitions

Although this is the final step of the RCP Handbook, it may be the one that successful Conserving RCPs experience most. Changes and periods of transition are inevitable. The RCP's ability to handle these changes can determine its sustainability.

10.1 Discuss changes in leadership, funding, priorities, and organization and make decisions about how to navigate them.

Change happens to RCPs in various ways: a new person in the coordinator position, a new host partner organization, changes in funding, size and make-up of the partnership's geography, member groups, and primary

activities, and so on. Change is the one constant, and the RCPs that endure are the ones that best navigate and capitalize on transitions.

Here are some examples of the types of transitions RCPs experience.

An RCP succeeds in conserving a significant percentage of its focus area over multiple projects and years. Their next step includes a final land project and a wildlife highway crossing. The latter slows their momentum. They consider expanding their region to continue conserving even as they explore other longer-term options for connecting habitat.

RCP leaders develop the idea of a large-scale, multi-partner land conservation campaign, which is subsequently rejected by partner organizations. Although there has been little activity in years, a new grant program reinvigorates interest in a regional conservation plan.

A local foundation reduces funding for member groups. As a result, the RCP spends a year reflecting on its next steps. This planning is time well spent for soon the foundation recommits its financial support.

An RCP grows organically over several years from a 5-town to a 10-town region to one that includes all 23 towns in the county. The RCP developed a conservation plan and case statement to prepare for landowner outreach in their 10-town region. Within six months, a subset of partner land trusts choose to form a shared services collaborative. In response, RCP leaders decide to expand their region to encompass the entire county. They then take two more years to produce a brand-new set of goals, objectives, strategies, and conservation plan for the now much larger region and its expanded group of partners.

An RCP loses its volunteer coordinator. Two members serve as co-chairs to keep partners involved. A regional foundation supports a part-time staff coordinator position, and the RCP begins many years of unparalleled success.

An RCP gets established with a grant. The grant ends, and the host partner organization terminates the RCP. Another RCP experiences the same situation, but instead of terminating, the RCP expands to include new partners. Another organization takes on the host partner role and convenes the partners, and other members contribute modest funding for coordination.

An RCP sees its coordinator position change three times in five years. A member land trust hires its first-ever executive director, who from that point forward also serves as the RCP coordinator.

When an RCP faces any of these situations, its members need to answer the question “What will we do next?” Some RCPs manage the transition successfully while others do less well. The latter can often operate at a much lower level than they had in the past while they wait for new funding or project opportunities to appear. Some RCPs that lose key leaders may need engagement from outside partners to reinvigorate themselves.

10.2 Move forward with subsequent conservation campaigns or transition to a new set of stewardship, smart growth, and supplemental activities.

In each transition, RCP members have the opportunity and the flexibility to do something brand-new. RCPs are informal organizations that offer their members a way to have a collective impact on their shared landscape. These are some possible next steps.

- **Try new ways of raising money** using their shared vision.
- **Reach out and engage family forest owners** using new technologies (see Yale and the U.S. Forest Service’s website *Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively*, <http://www.engaginglandowners.org/>).
- **Work with new public and private partners**, from state and federal agency staff to local business owners.
- **Make connections between natural resource management, land use planning, and related science**, and such sectors as farming and forestry, development and land protection, water and soil conservation, universities, and public health agencies.
- **Cultivate a peer-to-peer network of landowners and municipal liaisons** to further your reach and conservation activities even when funding for land protection is scarce, or highly competitive.
- **Learn from other RCPs about how to successfully manage transitions.** Your RCP may want to keep it simple. Look at your strategic conservation plan. Are you done? Most likely you’re not. Consider revisiting your focus areas, the case statement, and strategic action plan and begin plotting your new course and reaching out to your partners, new and old. Connect with other RCPs in the region. Use the Resources page on the RCP Network’s site to get the contact information for RCP coordinators or RCP service providers. Help can be found. Just reach out!



Graf Amendment / Vermont Land Trust



Conclusion: What's Next?

As of 2015, RCPs have enjoyed a 21-year history in New England and eastern New York. The RCP Network, however, is only three years old. But like an RCP, we have determined that we will be more successful with an additional level of guidance from peers. A six-member steering committee was formed in early April 2015. They and Highstead Foundation staff are busy planning and coordinating various networking, research, training, and capacity-building activities for RCPs for 2015, 2016, and beyond.

The RCP Network continues to grow in membership and to broaden its connections. There were 39 RCPs at the time of the 2014 RCP Network Gathering, and four more have been established since. What can you expect from the RCP Network? Where's the next frontier for RCPs? We will conclude this first edition of the RCP Handbook with two notes of encouragement.

What can you expect from the RCP Network?

Expect the RCP Network to continue to respond well to your interests while looking to RCP leaders to help chart the future for large-landscape conservation. Since the RCP Network officially launched in March 2012, members have had access to numerous networking opportunities, including the RCP Network Gathering and state RCP meetings.

Through surveys, our own formal and informal research as well as that of others, the RCP Network has sought to collect valuable insights, best practices, and ideas for how and what RCPs can do to further their missions in the most effective ways. The RCP Network and Highstead Foundation in particular have worked with leaders in the Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative, state and federal agencies, other conservation organizations and leaders, and other foundations. Together we have coordinated various training, capacity-building activities, and grant programs that have helped bring more than \$4 million to RCPs, enabling swifter movement from Emerging to Maturing to Conserving.

In the coming years, the RCP Network will also be looking to identify and develop relationships with other RCP-like groups and their networks in the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Southwest, Midwest, and Northwest regions of the U.S. We believe that exchanging ideas and other forms of collaboration among RCPs, their networks, and their partners will provide our region's partnerships with the additional innovation needed to conserve our regional landscapes well into the future. We will achieve our regional conservation visions and, together, help achieve the Wildlands and Woodlands vision.

The Future of Your RCP: Look to Your Members' Imagination.

The most successful RCPs are not afraid of change. In fact, they look to cause it. Their members know that the way to conserve an interconnected network of intact natural areas in a relatively large landscape (meaning one of 250,000 acres or more) requires periodic reinvention. They know that funding programs, political leadership, and members and member organizations are all subject to change. What the public thinks is reasonable also changes.

Work the 10 Steps. As you do, take advantage of your members' knowledge of what is and their sense of what could be. Do not be afraid to try something new. When you do, document what you did and what you learned. Then share it at the next RCP Network Gathering.

Good luck, and keep in touch!

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Appendix 1: RESOURCES

New England Forestry Foundation Land Trust Toolkit:

<http://www.newenglandforestry.org/resources/for-land-trusts/land-trust-toolkit-1-0>

Northeast Regional Pilot Demonstration Project to Strengthen Forest Product Markets, Forest Stewardship, and Forest Conservation — Task 2: New York – New England Family Forest Owner Engagement Initiative Final Report Summary. North East State Foresters Association. Published online:

<http://www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/NE-Regional-Pilot-Demonstration-Project>

RCP Network Website: **www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/RCPNetwork**

RCP Interactive Map: **<http://hfgis.fas.harvard.edu/flexviewers/RCPWebMap/>**

Appendix 2: STEPS AT A GLANCE

Step 1: Convene and Define Your RCP

- Convene the members of your RCP.
- Define your region's preliminary boundaries.
- Choose or hire your RCP's coordinator.

Step 2: Further Organize Your RCP

- Continue to convene and build trust among partners.
- Draft your vision, mission statement, goals, and objectives.
- Develop a steering committee and working groups as needed.
- Facilitate periodic communication between partners outside of meetings.
- Develop a website.
- Learn from peer and mentor RCPs.

Step 3: Increase Capacity as You Prepare to Conserve

- Build partner capacity.
- Help partner organizations obtain grants and work on open space plans.
- Connect with your state's conservation land trust councils (or service bureaus).

Step 4: Plan and Map a Strategic Conservation Vision

- Draft a description of your shared conservation vision.
- Collaboratively map, analyze, and prioritize your region's natural and cultural resources.
- Identify focus areas to champion.

Step 5: Plan to Implement Conservation Activities

- Develop a strategic action plan for achieving your mapped regional conservation vision.
- Partners choose to work together on specific tasks.
- Plan your work, and work your plan, but don't wait too long before doing something, anything.

Step 6: Engage Potential Partners Within Your Region

- Identify the people, organizations, and agencies that would help the RCP achieve its regional conservation vision and plan.
- Reach out to and engage other people and organizations in peer-to-peer conservation education leading to the stewardship and protection of land.

Step 7: Engage Potential Partners Beyond Your Region

- Compare your RCP's region to the priorities of state and federal government agencies, and conservation and philanthropic organizations.
- Engage in new activities that could add relevance, funding, and capacity to your RCP and its members.
- Seek and work with allies in the RCP Network to further your partnership's mission and activities.

Step 8: Promote Your Shared Conservation Vision

- Draft a compelling case statement.

Step 9: Raise Funds and Conserve Land

- Choose the funding sources for land conservation to pursue.
- Decide how to raise funds and conserve land as an RCP.
- Document and evaluate your campaign and ongoing funding strategies.
- Celebrate your successes.
- Repeat and reinvigorate Step 9 as opportunities arise that align with your mission, vision, and plan.

Step 10: Manage Transitions

- Discuss changes in leadership, funding, priorities, and organization and make decisions about how to navigate them.
- Move forward with subsequent conservation campaigns or transition to a new set of stewardship, smart growth, and supplemental activities.



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