

Regional Landscape Conservation

Based on previous Quality of Place Council meeting discussions, a focus group at the July meeting on this topic, and follow-up discussions over the summer, the following findings are offered for the Councils consideration:

- I. Good Examples of regional approaches exist. Maine has several good examples of “cooperative regional conservation efforts” underway. Much can be learned from these successful efforts when organizing regional landscape planning and conservation efforts (see brief descriptions attached):
 - A. The Downeast Lakes Land Trust
 - B. The Mount Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative
 - C. The Kennebec River Initiative
 - D. The Maine Coast Protection Initiative
 - E. The Mahoosuc Initiative

- II. State Recognition and Reward for regional efforts is critical. Regional planning for regional landscapes will matter less if the State does not recognize and reward these efforts. These state rewards need to be significant enough for individual municipalities and other interests to see benefits in participating in regional efforts. Recognition/support includes:
 - A. Financial assistance for planning—keyed to implementation
 - B. Technical assistance (e.g. GIS support, resource info. & data)
 - C. Policies that recognize and provide priorities/bonuses for regional efforts.
 - D. Identification of state conservation priorities and goals suitable for providing regional consistency.
 - E. Diversified funding to support conservation:
 - Real Estate Transfer Tax, Meals and Lodging Tax;
 - explore creation of a Regional Purchase of Development Rights program, estate tax exemption on certified woodlots, a “quality of place” fee that supports expanding and maintaining landscape preservation;
 - create a support system for private landowners preserving critical landscape values (e.g. public access, high value habitat)

- III. Regional Planning should reflect true regional priorities, be informed by State policies and goals, and consider the role played by regional service centers. The regional planning process needs to be shielded from special interests that threaten true cooperative regional priorities.

- IV. Regarding the Unorganized Territories (LURC): Three key recommendations surfaced:
 - A. Now, more than ever before, it is time to be bold.
 - B. Eliminate the Subdivision “exemption¹”.
 - C. LURC Comprehensive planning should be done at the regional level (i.e. several regional plans instead of one plan for the whole jurisdiction) which includes adjacent organized towns.
 - D. New/resurrected tools are called for: TDRs; floating “smart growth” zone; standards for “Developments of Regional Impact”

- V. Opportunity to change DEP Site Location of Development Law
 - A. Streamline DEP permitting with regional growth area designations
 - B. No Site Location Permits allowed in non-growth areas

¹ Creating or selling one or two lots within a 5 year period is not considered a “subdivision” of land. Eliminating this exemption would require a LURC permit for any newly created lot and, under current LURC zoning, would prohibit the creation of new lots in all LURC “management zones”.

Regional Landscape Conservation Examples

The Downeast Lakes Land Trust, established in 1991, is the first northern Maine forest conservation project that is community incubated, community supported, community led, and designed to sustain a natural resource based, rural economy and lifestyle of residents in Washington County, Maine. Working at the landscape scale, the Downeast Lakes Land Trust has protected over 340,000 acres, working in partnership with others.

The Mount Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative (MtA2C) is a coalition of ten national, regional and local partners representing federal and governmental agencies, statewide land protection organizations and three local land trusts. The goal is to conserve a mosaic of critical lands, waterways and working landscapes in the six-town area between the Tattler Hills of Wells and Gerrish Island in Kittery Point. Working together, the partners of the MtA2C Conservation Initiative are protecting both community values and environmental health across a project area spanning 48,000 acres in southernmost Maine.

The Kennebec River Initiative (KRI) is the result of several decades of continuous effort by diverse parties to identify common goals and form collaboration. The KRI strategy is based on three key premises:

1) To be place-based. 2) To invite everyone at any time. 3) To be focused on actions.

The proposed KRI Action Plan reflects a desire to change the persistent dynamic in Maine regarding land use and abuse: “The participants and others understand that our “brand” and our future and is entirely dependent on the place. Prosperity will not come from traditional development but from well thought out growth and preserving the sense of place that is the Kennebec corridor.” (From draft Action Plan, September, 2007).

The Maine Coast Protection Initiative (MCPI) is a landscape collaborative of seventy-member organizations, formed in 2004 in order to focus on increasing the pace and quality of conservation along the State’s coast. With their shared vision in mind, the many partners of the MCPI Coalition created the **Strategic Conservation Framework** that outlines three shared goals to be achieved through collective efforts:

- Create a viable network of conserved land that protects Maine’s priority coastal habitats, recreational and working access, and scenic and cultural features;
- Help land trusts acquire the professional and technical resources needed to proactively protect priority lands and attend to long-term stewardship needs; and
- Build strong public support and increased funding for coastal conservation.

The Mahoosuc Initiative (N.H. & ME.) has a mission to provide Mahoosuc communities with information and tools to guide future change for the prosperity and well-being of all residents. The Mahoosuc Initiative seeks to play a leadership role by convening community conversations, providing technical assistance and research, and bringing new federal, state, and private funding to support projects in land conservation, sustainable forestry, and other community priorities.