30% Land Subgroup
DRAFT Key Considerations and Recommendations
Funding/Capacity/Systems
Working Draft Adapted from Group Presentations/Discussion
2/2/24

Big Picture

- Consider 2030 a milestone rather than an endpoint. Large, complex conservation transactions take many years and transcend state and federal administrations. How can we insulate this work from political fluctuations at the state and federal levels?
- Pragmatism: This is a broad, challenging topic, and we need to be realistic about how detailed/specific we can be in this time frame.
- Role of tribal lands, interests and needs requires further attention – likely continuing beyond this process.

Parking Lot Topics (recognize the importance, but not delve deeply)

- Forest economy: concern over viable forest product markets for large landowners to retain opportunities for large-scale conservation. Also note that there is an impact of reserve lands on Maine's wood-basket/fiber needs, as well as possible displacement of harvesting to other geographies.
- Need to balance other community needs (e.g., housing, economic growth) with conservation.
- Workforce housing availability is a concern for conservation jobs
- 'The other 70%': recognize the importance of …
    - tree growth/open space,
    - regulatory protections (i.e., riparian) via DEP, LUPC zoning,
    - carbon projects – generally not permanent but serve multiple conservation purposes.

Conserved Land Tracking/Monitoring

State government (internal DIFW/DACF initiative)

- Tracking progress: Conserved lands GIS database and conservation registry; combined them?
- Funding/staff support for Conslands – need 0.5 FTE or more
- 'Active projects' database (per FSM suggestion), perhaps by county and acreage?

Funding

Back-of-the-envelope funding needs to reach 30% through conventional conservation:

- $770M at $500/acre
- $1.54B at $1,000/acre

Forest Legacy Program (USFS)

- Seek greater flexibility in public funding to allow NGOs to hold publicly funded easements; some landowners are reluctant to sign on to publicly held easements (example: Forest Legacy vs. FCEP)

- Include carbon-focused management in FLP easements with added financial incentive (Question: are we capable of specific management provisions?)
- Advocacy regarding possible funding recisions and funding bottlenecks.
- Aside from time delay considerations, are other barriers to Forest Legacy easements?

Land and Water Conservation Fund/Stateside (NPS)

- 50% match capacity for stateside projects (particularly community-based) is lacking for smaller/less affluent communities. Voters in Maine municipalities have supported all but two local conservation finance measures, creating $18 million in municipal funding for local conservation. TPL also cites examples in other states.

Land for Maine's Future (State)

- We need another round of funding! If current project inquiries become proposals, we'll have $0 left for new Conservation & Rec Proposals (including working forest).
- Other barriers: beyond funding, there is a shortage of outside expertise (appraisers, surveyors, lawyers) qualified to do this work (see 'Capacity').
- Continue to streamline Designated State Agency (DSA) role
- Incentivize carbon in scoring (?) understanding it's management dependent.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act (USFWS)

- Grant administration is aggregated, with multiple grants administered by one source – cumbersome for anyone, but particularly for smaller land trusts

Other IFW Federal Funding Sources

- Coastal Wetland Grants and Recovery Land Acquisition Grants (USFWS) require the state to be the grant administrator; also require long-term grant oversight and administration.

ALL state conservation funding could benefit from increased internal efficiencies regarding the timing of funding availability and state and federal approval processes. State allotment is in quarters, and moving funds from quarter to quarter is time-consuming. Procurement processes are slow.

Some funding sources do not lend themselves to tribal collaboration or ownership.

Other Funding Possibilities

- Continue to explore other conservation funding scenarios. TPL has research/experience with multiple mechanisms across the country. Examples
    - Sporting goods allocation (not a new tax): Overwhelmingly approved by voters in Georgia (83%) and Texas (88%) for parks and conservation. Maine sales of goods in this category totaled roughly $362M = $20M annual revenue with a 5.5% state sales tax applied
    - Real Estate Transfer Tax. Used in several other states
    - Mitigation funding for renewable energy?
    - Allocation of a certain percentage of real estate or income tax?
- Trails bond – not directly related to conservation but to stewardship

Capacity

- Contractors: Provide incentives for appraisers, surveyors, environmental consultants, and others involved in due diligence. Many grants require 'yellow-book' appraisal (federal standards), which is costly and time-consuming.
- The importance of stewardship: In the long-term, it's about stewarding the land, not just conserving it. Agencies and NGOs need management capacity for restoration (e.g., aquatic connectivity), carbon-friendly forest management, and monitoring.
- Landowners: Outreach to influence landowner perceptions, willingness to engage in transactions; perception that process is not aligned with goals or is too cumbersome.
- Agency: DACF and MDIFW have finite resources for acquisition (BPL and MDIFW both have ~1 FTE dedicated primarily to acquisition/grant funding, and both rely heavily on contract assistance).

Equity Considerations

- Geographic: access to lands both close to urban centers and rural hubs (cite examples, e.g., Talking Brook, Bethel Community Forest, others)
- Funding: are there barriers to accessing funds? Tribal eligibility?
- Workforce: recruit the next generation of conservation workers (land stewards, park rangers, foresters, ecologists) that reflect the future of Maine.
- University of Maine work on priority groups – parallel process