**30% Land Group**

**Funding/Capacity/Systems Group**

**DRAFT Recommendations**

**Feb 23, 2024**

**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.
* The role of tribal lands, interests, and needs requires further attention – continuing beyond this process.
* Markets for forest products are important for maintaining the patten of large ownerships that enables landscape scale conservation.

1. **Reinvest and modify *existing funding programs* to expand and accelerate the pace of land conservation. Examples include:**
   * Secure *permanent and ongoing* funding for the Land for Maine’s Future Program.
   * Encourage carbon-friendly forest management in acquisitions and easements (e.g., Exemplary Forestry Fund; minimum stocking, enhanced sustainability provisions) -- including landowner incentives.
   * Consider expanding the eligibility of public funding programs to reflect tribal interests, including holding land and easements. (CA example)
   * Establish a single administrator for NAWCA projects.
   * Maintain unified advocacy at the federal level for various conservation funding programs (DOI, USDA).
   * Streamline state procurement and approval processes for land conservation.
   * Support the Trails Bond as a way of investing in conserved lands.
2. **Explore and encourage *new funding programs* for land conservation. (Maine lacks the necessary state/private funding to match federal programs).** 
   * Support the creation of the federal Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP/NRCS) in the next Farm Bill as an alternative/complement to Forest Legacy; FCEP would allow NGOs to hold conservation easements using federal funding.
   * Direct mitigation funds -- particularly from energy development -- to land conservation using a trust fund that accrues interest; consider inter-state conservation payments as part of regional energy distribution.
   * Explore other state conservation mechanisms, including real estate transfer tax, re-allocation of sporting goods or rooms and meals tax, enhancing dedicated funds for deeryards (as an umbrella habitat for many species), and others (e.g., reports from TPL’s conservation finance team), in service (in part) to creating a match for federal funds.
   * Increase the state’s (and the conservation community’s) ability and efficiency in tracking federal and private funding opportunities.
3. **Increase and invest in staffing and capacity for land conservation.**

* Provide incentives and facilitate training for appraisers, surveyors, environmental consultants, and others involved in due diligence.
  + Ensure sufficient funding and capacity (with wage and workforce housing considerations) for land protection, grant administration, and stewardship (including management, restoration, and monitoring) for state agencies and other holders of conserved land.
  + Secure funding and staffing to maintain the state’s Conserved Lands Database.
* Foster collaboration and partnerships between groups working on land conservation, including sharing priorities, implementing joint projects, and tracking/awareness of funding opportunities.
* Establish a central land conservation coordinator in the GOPIF or another influential office.
* Create or incentivize one or more local sources for native plant materials for restoration.

1. **Encourage other policy and land management mechanisms that provide climate benefits and increase outdoor equity.**
   * Recruit conservation workers (land stewards, park rangers, foresters, ecologists) that reflect the diversity of future generations.
   * Maintain incentives for tree growth and open space enrollments, which cover more than half of Maine.
   * Explore the value of additional investment in projects that promote sequestration of forest carbon (*X-ref with Carbon group*?; additionality??). Maine currently has ~650,000 acres of carbon offset projects.
   * Support the University of Maine Mitchell Center’s initiative to engage priority groups in Natural and Working Land objectives.