

# Natural & Working Lands Work Group Meeting

**April 10, 2024**

Goal is review from 3 subgroups and discussion of deliverable template.

## **Andy Cutko & Adam Bishop-Land Conservation Subgroup**

The group spent a lot of time discussing the definition of Conserved Lands, primarily around 'durable' (including tribal lands) or 'permanent' (does not incl. tribal lands), does not include compatible land use. Goal is no net loss compatible land use.

Rec: Priorities-conservation lands within focus areas, add ecological reserves, fill DEI gaps, focus on working forest conservation/sustainable ecosystem services

Rec: Funding-key item, it all comes down to funding. Expand funding and funding eligibility.

Rec: Capacity-bottleneck here for conservation acquisition work, also need to be sure lands managed well (stewardship responsibilities). Develop non-regulatory Landscape Conservation Design to suit biodiversity and people.

Rec: Comprehensive Farmland Action Plan. No net loss, keep farms viable. Farmland called out as it is behind other parts of conservation achieved in ME in recent years.

### ***Discussion***

Andy W, farm viability issue, programs that drive the economy, is there a deeper conversation to try to understand wood products and farm economies. JoD-was there conversation about farm viability in recs? Adam-last bullet point about expanded funding dedicated to farm viability-importance can't be underestimated.

Andy C, There was parallel conversation about keeping large landscapes intact through forestry. Craig-integration opportunity, focus farm viability in food subgroup, let's look at how to pull together. Compatible uses/no net loss, we have a lot of opportunity there RE no net loss. Ultimate goal has to do w/ carbon, but we also have new Maine healthy soils program, let's look at already existing programs that support these efforts. John Naylor-NJ/DE having more farmland protection... what kinds of crops do they grow close to markets, do our crops hold back viability ME farms? Adam-yes, part of it. Can't compare apples-apples in terms land value/funding. Amanda- ramping up commitment to farmland now makes sense. Karin-not as familiar farm vs forest, what are obstacles that are important to identify-what's the hard thing in here? Adam-Money and capacity. Demand/interest from ag community hasn't been tapped yet. JoD-GOPIF identified issues crossing over multiple work groups, land use is one of those. One issue is competing uses for lands-housing and energy are needed and attractive to farmland owners. Land value (money) vs land ethic. Pat S-not sure working forest conservation easements fit under the definition of conserved land, discussion of public values, private values, ecosystem services... working forest easements, may or may not have public access-generally focused primarily wood products. Does the public have rights to those values. Andy-alternate suggestion? Tom likes to see 'wood' in the definition. Jeff R-many of those working

forest easements include public dollars, but do not necessarily legally guarantee public access, cited Pingree easement as biggest issue. Karin felt like working forest easements do fit that def, support C sequestration/storage, even if they don't provide public access or only walking public access. Jeff-while we have def up, def includes tribal lands, but baseline doesn't... those should be connected to each other. Justin-this def opens door to including tribal lands as determined by the tribes (we don't know what lands those are yet, not all tribal lands would be considered conserved lands). Andy C-have initiated that conversation, might take a while.

JoD-what we deliver to climate council, combined intro, will need to shorten each subgroup intro into 1. JoD-is the def background info or important enough to be included? Andy-yes, important to include.

Pat S-landscape design concept, overlays values on private lands, need to have more discussion about that. JoD-that's an action that might go forward to climate council, so a lot of discussion needs to happen soon.

Bethany H-Specific next steps-capacity recs-looking for concrete steps RE recruitment, recs feel vague.

Karin-rec funding p 6 FSM supportive of federal funding but can't avail themselves of forest legacy funding. Flexible funding for easements might be good language to include, as much of funding for these easements comes from private dollars vs state programs/funding. 'we support funding for working forest easements and working farm easements'.

Andy-will make phone calls to get number to put in recs vs \$5-100M.

Andy W-what is dollar amount for stewardship? Andy C-good suggestion to think about prior to next meeting. Don't have a current cost number for that.

JoD-Bethany H and Andy C have conversation about template RE implementation between now and next meeting, April 30. Want to send packet on 4/20, def by 4/23, so not a lot of time between now and then (aka get cracking).

## **Craig Lapine & Brittany Peats-Food Subgroup**

The group worked to identify challenges, what is standing in way of being at 30% now, what are strengths that could be leveraged to get there, what specific actions could we take to get there.

Technical challenges, throwing money and people at it would solve these. The group agreed there is willingness and desire to support local producers, this could be leveraged.

Rec-Create Maine Food Plan to create markets/move food from sea/field to point of sale. This allows analysis of 'where we are' so we can build on it.

Rec-Strengthen viability ME farms, fisheries, other food producers, w/ permanent funding mechanisms to support the work.

Rec-Create more ME markets, increase access to ME food.

### ***Discussion***

Brittany P- Maine Food Plan overarching goal. We don't have a baseline for food like land conservation does. This would allow landscape analysis of 'where are we' so we can build on it.

Brittany H, anecdotal, culture change, was at Youth Day of Action yesterday, everybody wanted to talk w/ Kate Rice about food, what are they concerned/hopeful about-was almost exclusively about food, what are we eating, in our schools, food waste, composting. Would be interested in seeing recs youth led because there is so much interest. HS students still live at home and can lead conversations w/ parents, growing into purchasing power and making their own decisions. Do outreach to get youth perspective.

Andy W-food waste-we know it's ~30%, fasted way to increase proportion ME food in diet is to reduce waste, most of our food from out of state, huge chunk greenhouse gas getting that food here. The group didn't talk a lot about food waste-waste mgmt. The group is going to touch on that and will get updates from the other group.

Ivan-what is waste group? It's Materials Management Task Force, like a 7<sup>th</sup> working group that was added. Not part of org chart, but there will be some recs that come from the task force. Ivan-do we have list of what exists for Maine plans? (yes). Bethany P-Sea Maine Plan, Ending Hunger, Economic Work Force, Maine Food Strategy a small non-profit. Ivan-mission creep.

Craig-localization of food systems shrinks carbon footprint. It also increases resilience, even if production of food doesn't lower C footprint, is a mitigation strategy. Amanda-the idea that we consume more of what we grow means we have opportunity to ensure are using climate friendly practices vs we don't for food grown elsewhere.

John-we need understanding of what we produce-who/what/where/when. How much food is left in the field?

JoD-would not be surprising if two questions are asked... don't we already have a plan? How do we make clear this is needed. Have assumed in intro that people understand that reaching 30% ME food consumption by 2030 is a climate strategy-how is this a climate strategy-needs to be in intro... shorten intro, this is why it's important from climate perspective and these are the things we need to do to accomplish that.

JoD-Envisioning if each of subgroups could boil intro to 1 paragraph each... that goes forward to GOPIF as stand-alone. 4 pg doc intro, recs, actions.

Pat-big commodity producers, have you thought about how they factor into this? (potato/bb/milk) Craig-it varies by commodity, most ME milk is consumed in ME. For a ME farmer, any customer is a good customer; we don't want to get in the way of that. We know McCain's is part of the school lunch program, most of that leaves the state. Blueberries-high value growth in more local markets/that product.

Ivan-the 3-paragraph intro-will be important to make clear what we're saying now that we didn't before... what's new, what's different, what we're reinforcing/going deeper on.

Adam-did it come up in group the idea to bring more land in ME to ag production vs ability to achieve goal by diverting crops/land already in production? Is there a place to look at adding to ag landbase? Craig-yes, but push-pull issue, markets need to be there, don't want to invite more

producers into production if we don't know customers are there. We need to drive things on demand side, see market channels are there, and intermediate supply chain...

Andy W-ag is naturally must bigger than forestry, but forestry must have Plan to get funding, wildlife has SWAP, etc. Odd that ag doesn't, given how much money does state get from feds. Craig-it's not a requirement. Some Plans are driven by state agencies, some by NGO sector, yes is part for many actors to play, for creation and execution.

John, still struggling w/ goal as we don't know where we are. JoD, on a call yesterday w/ contractor doing that work to understand current consumption, preliminary figures may come out mid-May.

Craig-it quickly gets complicated, Hannaford participated in process, they have own definition local, paying attention to regional supply... no code at cash register that tells them that ME food is consumed in ME.

Andy C, have other states generated these numbers? Bethany P-yes, VT has been tracking for at least 10 years. Amanda-VT is providing tech assistance to process so can compare apples-apples.

## **Forest Carbon-JoD**

Discussion of why forest carbon recs are so important in terms climate action plan when Maine's north woods are the primary sink for greenhouse gas emissions other parts of state and industries in it. Maine's forests ever-evolving landscape, threats and realities that current sequestration no guarantee will happen in future (privately owned lands). Ability to sequester today in part result of management decisions made 40 yrs ago.

3 foundational principles: maintain existing forestland, improving forest condition, increase economical viable markets low-grade wood.

Rec-improve forest carbon data, monitoring, verification.

Rec-increase tech assistance, training, education.

Rec-provide incentives.

### ***Discussion***

Andy W-develop set climate friendly practices to participate in Woods Wise and expand footprint of program to engage more landowners.

JoD as DACF, we could explore pilot programs on state lands to contribute, knowledge private landowners could benefit from, revenue public reserve lands/self-funded, could ultimately result in greater C sequestration.

Need low-grade markets tasks state/partners to work on development of those markets.

Modify open space taxation program to incentivize climate friendly management practices.

Andy W-carbon is so complex, acknowledge that where we are for C today and those benefits is a reflection of forest mgmt. in the past, so if we want to keep having that benefit, we need to have management that will allow that. Forest carbon of tomorrow.

Andy C-'climate friendly forest practices', what does that mean? Where did the group land on that? Is it in statute that we need definition of that? JoD-we did investigation that issue through Forest Carbon Task Force, there are categories of mgmt. practices, seen as gold standard to increase carbon sequestration (avoid forest conversion, intermediate treatment, sustainable harvest, reserves). Andy W-enhance capacity forest mitigation potential, ability to sequester/store carbon, if losing forest to climate related impacts, also losing carbon. Isn't thinning good for carbon and resilience? Yes, but we need some clarity. Mitigation/resilience.

Karin-relied on initial list of practices to feel comfortable with recs here, paired w/ rec to track those to see which are most effective.

Chris-as far as rec in report, part of rec is MFS develops, list w/ public input. Anything that would be incentivized should be tracked.

Ivan-list from Forest Carbon TF reinforced by commercial landowners, revisiting practices... set practices science suggests are beneficial to carbon.

Andy C-incentive programs, any discussion where funding would come from? JoD-no. Pat-NRCS has approved practices that can be funded. JoD will look to see if have acknowledged federal funding.

Karin, worded one rec as did (given revolving nature), there are a number of carbon groups separate from government (carbon brokers, sales), can provide incentives, some are quasi-governmental. Different opportunities for landowners. Not so much create new incentives but figure out what's out there. JoD, not incentives, but need for Tech Assistance.

Pat-revised open space law has new category, quite a bit revised, incentives come closer to tree growth than in the past, focused generally on smaller landowners this area-large landowners have capacity.

Dana-recognition logging contractor, equipment is costly, logging is costly, whatever techniques that are climate friendly will cost contractor... cost share around equipment, etc., needs to be funded in some way. Contractors can't be expected to absorb all of this.

Ivan-multi state conversation around carbon. Task Force put 3 recs forward, revolves around rec to continue those conversations at multi-state level, particularly around carbon credits and tracking ME net carbon emissions, not just C neutrality. Can NWL group include this.

Continue to engage in multi-state collaboration regarding role forest carbon ... (12:17), how ME will account for voluntary/regulatory carbon.

JoD-question is how the state meets statutory mandate net zero greenhouse gas emissions without knowing how we account for forest carbon. We need an answer to this at some point.

Ivan-how do you count carbon? How do you do your inventory?

Public Comment

Jennifer Melville-Is there a process to send in written comment? Between now and the next meeting? If received before 4/22 can go in next packet.

Tweaks based on this conversation should go into the next packet. Conversation around public comment prior to adding to recs.

Food waste came up in local food subgroup, task force does have food waste focus, one of recs will likely be formation Food Waste Task Force.

Is packet good? Should it be product w/ some tweaks? Or should we combine recs as are similar between subgroups? Is this the best format or would it pack more of a punch by combining things?

Craig-opportunity around economic viability of local food production, logging, and degree to which climate friendly practices in those two sectors can be incentivized. We were getting at that separately and in multiple ways, can be combined to say something stronger? Jeff-'viability' 'profitability'?

## **Deliverable Template, Combine things?**

Karin-looking for punch, we have this amazing state w/ a huge forest and a lot of farm infrastructure, farmers, loggers, how lucky are we to be able to address climate change w/ focused collaborative recs. We have potential that many other states may not have. Would like a set of recs to keep us on a course that is strong and helps us move into the future to sequester/store emissions. Is a big punchy thing missing in the report.

Andy C-thinking about commonalities 3 presentations-capacity state and others to make things work moving forward, stewardship, outreach, statewide farmland action plan... simple bullet capacity to cover all those bullets (Karin, and planning)

Adam-question for JoD, this is 10 recs w/ 3 sub recs, what is your vision? Not unlike what was submitted 4 years ago. This will probably feel like a lot to Maine Climate Council. The more prioritizing we can do now is better. Amanda-these are recs we put forth, will be up to GOPIF to package up.

Ivan-number of instances where people dug into recs from 3 yrs ago, what was rec'd, why, what was background info-the granularity has value. JoD, where there are actions that ref just 1 program, is there a way to roll up? Thinking about the Woods Wise program, is there a way to pull up into another action? But Open Space taxation deserves its own. These 3 topic areas were addressed in previous report as distinct sections, not sure if would be a benefit to argument to combine, but hearing commonalities can inform what introduction statement reads like.

Deliverable Template Questions. One is focused on priority populations... to what extent do these recs benefit priority populations? What are they? Could these pops be impacted negatively? Mitchell Ctr hired to do outreach to priority pops, NWL group was invited to decide what those questions would look like. They're covering 6 working groups, so timing is an issue. First written body of results comes out 5/15, last day NWL meets as subgroup. Somebody from Mitchell Ctr to

next mtg to provide preliminary input. Will provide opportunity to build some of that into answers to the template questions. Then it will be up to the Climate Council to integrate that info.

2 of the questions rise up, priority pops, metrics. Are we thinking broadly enough about how we've worded rec to ensure broadest group benefits. 2<sup>nd</sup>, have we written rec in way we can measure progress? The thought is to finalize wording based on today, hear preliminary thoughts Mitchell Ctr, look at wording those 2 questions.

Andy W-Mitchell Ctr can provide some information regarding our capacity to do those things such as serve underserved / priority pops. How do we measure baseline? How do we measure progress? Don't add outcomes we can't measure. What's our capacity to assess progress to serve underserved pops? JoD-yes, raise this w/ Mitchell Ctr next mt.

Karin-one of effects climate change, climate refugees, so future underserved pops, is there any way to be mindful of this? Lots of different kinds of people are moving here for different reasons as well as current pops. Predicted doubling population in Maine. Diversity and volume of pop of ME and how do recs relate to that? Doubling by 2050. Pat-Mills and companies are looking at creating communities for people to move to Maine.

Andy W-nice to have shortlist of what we know about the future? Good to hear about the possibility Pat mentioned. Has been hearing for years about the wave of climate refugees. What's more practical are what are financial growth strategies? Revenue for these areas... gap what we hope for and reality. Would be helpful to know. JoD-ability to predict that no greater than ability to predict incoming residents. What is the strategy to help you w/ 9 of 10 tidal waves that'll hit you.

JoD-dive into questions 1 and 6 (priority pops and metrics) so are prepared for general convo those two topic areas. Propose covering all recs 1 subgroup in a lump.

Brief ex Mitchell Ctr outreach, working w/ some council to conduct outreach w/ Mano a Mano.

**Next meeting is April 30, 10-1 in Marquart**

**Final meeting is May 15, Deering 101 (time?)**