**North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative Steering Committee, Conference Call September 5, 2012**

**Minutes**

**Action Items**

Steering Committee members interested in working to develop a strategy and pilot efforts to engage the LCC with community planners are asked to let Andrew know before the October 31 meeting.

Megan Nagel will work with WMI to link LCC website to RCN Grants and to develop an online RFP application and review process analogous to the RCN program.

Steering Committee members interested in participating in revising the LCC communications strategy with Megan Nagel are asked to let Megan know as soon as possible.

Steering Committee members interested in participating or having a staff member participate in a conservation targets team with Ken and Andrew prior to the October 31 Steering Committee are asked to let them know as soon as possible. The purpose is meeting to review completed and ongoing regional and national efforts and guidance related to conservation targets including population-based objectives for representative species and to provide recommendations on the best role and strategy for the North Atlantic LCC in the development, integration and use of these targets.

Steering Committee members or staff interested in attending as a user/manager/decision maker at one of the Designing Sustainable Landscapes workshops, are asked to let Andrew Milliken or Scott Schwenk know as soon as possible. Broadcast information will be provided to this email list.

In order to support the SWAP updates through the regional synthesis of spatial data, we are requesting that the States commit to providing species occurrence data for high regional responsibility, high concern SGCN and other spatial data relevant to describing the extent and condition of habitat for these species (per SWAP required elements). State steering committee members are asked to read handout 12 and provide a contact to Steve Fuller in the next two weeks a contact with access Natural Heritage and other high regional responsibility/high concern SGCN data for the regional synthesis.

**Introductions, roll call, minutes from last meeting**

Ken Elowe (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) opened the meeting and conducted a roll call. There were 23 Steering committee members on the call constituting a quorum.

Deb Rocque, the new U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Deputy Regional Director for the Northeast Region introduced herself, thanked the Steering Committee members for their participation and said she was available to answer any questions.

Ken asked for approval of the minutes from the April 18, 2012 Steering Committee meeting. Patti Riexinger (New York State DEC) moved to accept and Rachel Muir (U.S. Geological Survey) seconded. Minutes were approved with no further discussion.

**Review progress on action items from April meeting**

Andrew Milliken (North Atlantic LCC) reviewed the action items, noting that most items would be covered during the call or were covered in the handout (handout 3). He is still looking for a small team to approach local planners to evaluate how to best provide them tools that are useful. Cathy Sparks (Rhode Island DEM), Patti Riexinger, and Ellen Mecray (NOAA) all volunteered to help find people for this group. Andrew noted that he also attended the Regional Planning Association meeting in New York City in part to reach out to local planners and land trusts. He asked that any additional Steering Committee members contact him if they or staff are interested. Andrew and Steve Walker (Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife) will meet with the Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association in October.

Rachel Muir noted that outreach to the planning community is important and hopes that we can work together - this should also be a priority for the Northeast Climate Science Center.

There was a discussion of hosting a session at the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference in April 2013 to showcase some of our LCC projects. Group agreed to discuss this session at the October 31st Steering Committee. Patty Riexinger as host of the Northeast Conference (in Saratoga Springs, NY) will put a placeholder in the program. Rachel Muir offered to do a combination session incorporating Northeast Climate Science Center projects.

**LCC national and regional communications**

Megan Nagel (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) provided a preview of the new North Atlantic LCC website. She will provide a full introduction at the October 31 meeting.

Ken Elowe noted that as part of the website, we are trying to create a portal for LCC and partner products so that partners can access regional conservation information and tools in one place. Andrew Milliken emphasized that the data portal and website are intended to be seamless.

Karen Bennett (Delaware Fish and Wildlife) noted that WMI did a great job evolving the Regional Conservation Needs (RCN) website (rcngrants.org) over the last couple of years. She would like to create a stronger link to the RCN website projects.

Scot Williamson (Wildlife Management Institute) replied that they are trying to make things easier for responding to RFPs by providing online applications. Andrew agreed that a similar setup for the LCCs would be beneficial. Megan will coordinate with WMI to develop something similar for the LCC.

**Information Management Needs Assessment**

Andrew noted that an information needs assessment was a high priority coming out of the Northeast Conservation Framework (Albany II) workshop.

BJ Richardson (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) summarized the role of Applied Geographics as the contractor for this effort. They wrapped up the online survey at the end of last month. They are having a focus group tomorrow in person or via webinar at 10:00 am. The intent is that the results of the assessment feed into developing the portal part of the website.

Michael Terner (Applied Geographics) provided a briefing. Over the course of the project they have gathered information from many sources, read documents, hosted a focus group in Hadley, and conducted individual interviews with key stakeholders. They then finalized and released the survey. What comes next is one more focus group meeting and then the synthesis and analysis phase. They will present the draft report at the October 31 Steering Committee meeting.

He presented a few preliminary survey results:

* The initial survey mailing went to 100 people;
* The survey closed with 95 completed responses;
* Good cross-section of planners, scientists and managers;
* Largest response was from State and Federal agencies;
* High percentage of people are using and aware of information technologies;
	+ 98% said GIS/Database technology are critical to the work they are doing;
	+ Vast majority of respondents have been using these technologies for over 10 years;
* Looking for collaborative systems that host tools and data viewers and shared web services;
* Most important information products needed include mobile access, visualizations based on user input, decision support tool that is customizable by anybody, and decision support tool that is customizable by a technician;
* People want data that represents the region, but are also interested in value-added products that are derived from the data;
* People are also interested in knowing what’s available and having a searchable index;
* People also want easy access to existing systems like TRACS or Nature Serve – need a common jumping off point for getting this information.

Patty Riexinger asked if anybody is asking about willingness to pay. Partners can say this would be great to have, but how do we factor in the cost efficiency. Do we have the resources to pay?

Andrew Milliken agreed and asked, what is the balance between the dream system and what we can realistically do? The emerging model is that we are pulling from a lot of different places where information is maintained by partners. This will be an important discussion about what our investment could and should be.

Mike Rasser (BOEM) made the point that we need to make sure that each project that we fund includes the commitment to provide the results for this information management system.

BJ noted that the idea is to identify the universe of needs out there and see what parts of that the LCC can help to bring to fruition.

**Conservation targets and Representative Species**

Ken started this discussion by saying at our last meeting in April, we talked about conservation targets for LCCs and agreed that a range of conservation targets that capture the range of missions of our agencies and organizations is desirable. For the Fish and Wildlife Service and State fish and wildlife agencies, these targets need to be fish and wildlife oriented, but there are lots of other targets that need to be included including ecological, water or cultural metrics.

Ken described the representative or surrogate species approach that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is promoting as part of the Strategic Habitat Conservation approach and noted that some of the ideas on representative species originated in the Northeast Region.

He would like to put together a group to develop an outline of a conservation targets approach that is inclusive of our on the landscape. Andrew Milliken put together a handout (6a) to outline an approach and to assess the ongoing efforts and their convergence.

Andrew reiterated - what are the set of conservation targets that we are thinking about in our individual organizations that we can meld into common targets for the LCC that make sense?

Patty Riexinger supports this effort to help define what and how much we are trying to get done so that we know when we get there. She expressed concerns over specialist species that may not be covered by representative species such as grassland birds with very specific requirements. Andrew responded that the representative species approach does not stand alone. We need to consider a combination of approaches to address key features and ecological functions in the landscapes as represented by suites of representative species as well as continuing to individually address species with more specialized needs. He noted that the resources that we already have in the Northeast such as consistent habitat maps, various RCN projects, vulnerability assessments and emerging tools such as Designing Sustainable landscapes will allow us to use a range of tools.

Ken agreed that not all species can be represented fairly in larger groups and need to be taken care of individually. The same goes for the some natural communities or specific landscape features. He reiterated the famous chocolate chip cookie analogy – the chips are the things you can’t let fall through the cracks, otherwise you don’t have a fully functional cookie!

Ken asked for a group to think this through for the October meeting. He is open to any volunteers, you or your staff. He agreed to put out an email reminder/request over the next day or two. A few Steering Committee members responded with volunteers:

* Patty Riexinger will provide support from one of her biologists;
* Rachel Muir volunteered to coordinate input from fish habitat partnerships;
* Ken noted that Atlantic Coast Joint Venture is already addressing population objectives for migratory birds and should be involved;
* Ralph Abele agreed to provide input on behalf of the ecological flows world that have developed flow ecology targets;
* Phil Huffman thought it would be appropriate to include a member from TNC – perhaps Mark Anderson depending on time commitments;
* John O’Leary indicated that Massachusetts and other states have used habitat goals and this approach should be incorporated.

**Review of science needs, priorities, RFP results and next steps for FY 2012 projects**

Scott Schwenk provided an update on science needs (handout 7) focusing on where we have come with science needs that were approved by the Steering Committee and what we have done since then. He noted that LCC staff have gotten a lot of great input from technical committee members. He also noted that as part of our commitment to open competition, we issued an RFP for the two topics for which that approach was appropriate.

He described Phase II of Designing Sustainable Landscapes. Phase I was completed in June which tested methodologies in three pilot areas. Phase II will now develop tools across the Northeast region. A key first step is decision-maker workshops to get immediate feedback on the tools needed for conservation decisions and begin and ongoing engagement process. Three of these workshops are set up for October with live stream broadcasts: October 9 near Portland, Maine (Kennebec Watershed pilot area), October 16 , near Salisbury, Maryland (Pocomoke/Nanticoke pilot area), and October 23 near Amherst, Massachusetts (middle Connecticut River pilot area). If you or your staff would be able to attend and actively participate as a user/manager/decision maker, please let Andrew or Scott know as soon as possible. LCC staff will provide broadcast information to this email list.

He next described the RFP Process for two projects: “Quantify and map habitats, threats, and current range distribution for aquatic (including coastal) species to assess species-habitat relationships, and identify priority areas and corridors for conservation” and “Evaluation of restoration methods that allow salt marshes to adapt to sea-level rise.” A total of 17 projects were received. Two technical teams will recommend one or more projects for each topic. He recognized Emily Greene from the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership, Amanda Babson from National Park Service and Susan Adamowicz with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their leadership on the review teams. There is a good cross-section of reviewers including state representatives. The teams will provide recommendations in advance of the October Steering Committee meeting.

Andrew provided a brief update on foundational coastal mapping. He noted that the first investment is bringing NWI up to date for all coastal quads so that all coastal areas will have been mapped within the last few years. He also noted that the Northeast Climate Science Center funded a sea level rise modeling project and the LCC organized a structured decision making workshop on sea level rise to inform that modeling. That sea level rise model will in turn plug into the overall LCC modeling framework through the Designing Sustainable Landscapes project.

**Proposed demonstration projects**

Ken introduced this section by noting that a priority coming out of the Albany II workshop was demonstrating the applicability of the science. How can LCC be relevant and demonstrate success? A set of three initial ideas was presented by the ad-hoc demonstration project team at the April meeting and the Steering Committee asked them to come back with more detail.

George Gay (National Wildlife Federation) worked closely with Jad Daley (Trust for Public Land) and Steve Walker to develop projects. He described the three projects that were presented in April representing different scales of conservation. The first, led by the Trust for Public Land, is developing a parcel-level plan in the target geography (White Mountains to Moosehead Lake) to prioritize tracts for climate resilience. The second, led by Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, is using science to develop consensus with local partners and planners on the most resilient salt marshes in Maine. The third project ,led by National Wildlife Federation, will identify and showcase ongoing initiatives that are in priority areas identified by LCC and related science. Patty asked for clarification on the third project – what will be amplified? George replied that they don’t know what projects will be showcased yet. They are enhancing efficiency by using climate resiliency science to identify which ongoing conservation efforts can best address vulnerabilities to climate change. Patty recommended that Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture be included.

Steve Fuller noted the importance of engaging local land trusts and associations of lands trusts. Jad Daley replied that the White Mountains to Moosehead Lake project includes 20 partner organizations about half of which are local land trusts. They will also develop an online tracking tool to track progress against metrics.

Ken noted that all three projects bring substantial match. Andrew noted that these projects are an important emerging part of our work linking science to conservation decision making.

Patty made a motion to approve all three projects. George seconded. Rachel asked for additional discussion about this demonstration project approach at the October Steering Committee meeting.

Steve Fuller noted that the ad-hoc demonstration projects team agreed that the team should be dissolved and replaced with a parallel science translation needs assessment that complements the science needs assessment – they will present a proposal for discussion at the next meeting.

*Audio quality on the conference call making it increasingly difficult to hear.*

Ken called for a vote asking if anyone opposed. No opposing votes were expressed. WMI abstained from vote.

Given the audio quality, Ken agreed that staff would give additional information on the rest of the agenda in written form and take these items up in October. Rachel agreed to provide written updates on the Climate Science Center.

Ken noted the next face-to-face meeting will be on October 31 in eastern New York. He appreciated the group’s patience with technical difficulties and asked for a motion to adjourn.

Patti made a motion and several members seconded.

**Meeting adjourned.**

***The following information on the rest of the agenda items was provided in an email immediately following the call.***

**Update from Northeast Climate Center.**

*Information provided in writing from Rachel Muir.*

Eight science projects were selected for funding in the first year as shown in Handout 10.

USGS selected Dr. Mary Ratnaswamy, currently Research Director at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center as the Northeast Climate Science Center Director. She starts this month.

Announcement: [http://necsc.umass.edu/news/northeast-climate-science-center-director-announced](http://necsc.umass.edu/news/northeast-climate-science-center-director-announced_)

The previously scheduled stakeholder meetings have been postponed until January. Dr. Ratnaswamy is planning on attending the October 31 LCC Steering Committee meeting.

**Update on Northeast Regional Conservation Design.**

*Information provided in writing from Steve Fuller.*

The background and status update for this project follows:

1. The Northeast Landscape Conservation Design is following through on Albany 2 priorities by compiling existing landscape and spatial data and making it more accessible to conservation partners.

2. The immediate application of this effort is to provide regional data for State Wildlife Action Plan Updates along with the parallel Regional Conservation Needs projects. A two-day special meeting will precede NEAFWA Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee meeting on September 17.

3. We have initiated the project by creating GIS capacity through two contract GIS Analyst positions - one in the The Nature Conservancy Eastern Resource Office in Boston and one in the Northeast Regional Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Hadley. The FWS-based position has been filled and the contractor, Lori Pelech begins on September 10. They will start out by compiling spatial data and posting it on the website at the appropriate security level.

4. LCC partners will work collaboratively to select which conservation targets, species, or elements to address as we synthesize spatial data.

5. LCC staff assisted the states to filter the highest regional concern/highest responsibility SGCNs, and will review the draft list at the upcoming Diversity Technical Committee meeting.

6. Pursuant to the development of the SGCN list, we need to begin assessing the utility of data available on highest regional concern/highest responsibility SGCNs. Handout 12 is a preliminary request for Natural Heritage and other SGCN data. We anticipate the details of the request will be reviewed and revised by the NEAFWA Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee working with the contacts that you provide.

In order to support the SWAP updates through the regional synthesis of spatial data, we are requesting that the States commit to providing species occurrence data for high regional responsibility, high concern SGCN and other spatial data relevant to describing the extent and condition of habitat for these species (per SWAP required elements). Please read handout 12 (attached) and provide a contact in the next two weeks that we can work with to access Natural Heritage and other high regional responsibility/high concern SGCN data for the regional synthesis to Steve Fuller (sfuller71@comcast.net). In order to meet the deadline set by the states, we need data and analytical methods finalized by the NEAFWA conference in April, 2013 so that final results can be used in SWAP updates. In order to meet that deadline, we will need to have initial information from each state no later than mid-October, 2012.

**Next Steering Committee Meeting**

*Information provided in writing by Andrew Milliken*

The next meeting of the North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee is scheduled for October 31, most likely at the Minnewaska Lodge (http://www.minnewaskalodge.com/) near New Paltz, New York. Delaney Meeting Management is completing final contracts and setting up a room block. The Northeast Directors will meet the next day at the same location. Details will follow.

Draft agenda items include: approval of recommended projects from RFP, guidance on science needs assessment for 2013, guidance on parallel or broader assessment to include science translation, conservation adoption and delivery (in place of demonstration projects), approval of a revised communications plan, approval of initial strategy for conservation targets, guidance on next steps for information management, discussion of decision support tools (based on Designing Sustainable Landscapes workshops), update on regional synthesis, discussion of NEAFWA Conference LCC session.

**Conference Call Attendees**

Patricia Riexinger – New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Scot Williamson – Wildlife Management Institute

Deb Rocque – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Ken Elowe – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Anne Kuhn – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Amanda Babson – National Park Service

Becky Gwynn – Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Mary Foley – National Park Service

Kim Royar – Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department

Jad Daley – Trust for Public Land

Michael Sawyers

Michael Terner – Applied Geographics

Cathy Sparks – Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

Christina Stringer – Bureau of Indian Affairs

Phil Huffman – The Nature Conservancy

Zoe Smith – Wildlife Conservation Society

Steve Walker – Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Gwen Brewer – Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Karen Bennett – Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife

Dave Day – Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Rachel Muir – U.S. Geological Survey

Mike Rasser – Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Ralph Abele – U.S. EPA

Glenn Normandeau – New Hampshire Fish and Game

Doug Bliss – Canadian Wildlife Service

Rob Campellone – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on detail with LCCs

George Gay – National Wildlife Federation

John O’Leary – Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

Mike Slattery – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Steve Fuller – North Atlantic LCC

Tai-ming Chang – U.S. EPA

Jeff Horan – Maryland DNR/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Scott Schwenk – North Atlantic LCC

Andrew Milliken – USFWS, North Atlantic LCC

Megan Nagel – USFWS, Science Applications