

**North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative
Steering Committee Meeting
October 24 - 25, 2016
Lakeville, Connecticut**

Meeting Minutes

Day 1 - Monday, October 24, 2016

1. Welcome and Introductions - Ken Elowe (FWS), Bill Hyatt (Connecticut DEEP)

Recognition of outgoing Coordinator Andrew Milliken for his leadership since the LCC's establishment in 2010, followed by introduction to Acting Coordinator Mike Slattery (FWS).

Approval of Minutes from Spring 2016 Steering Committee Meeting: Motion to approve, and voice vote to approve, with request to capture only general comments during discussion in the future, rather than verbatim quotations.

2. Action items from last Steering Committee call, and actions taken - Mike Slattery (LCC)

- Comparing initial results from Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas (RCOAs) with state Conservation Opportunity Areas
 - LCC compared priorities outlined in the regional design work with those outlined in the New Jersey and New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plans to show complementarity.
- Working with New York State DEC and other organizations to schedule workshops on available information and tools
 - There was agreement that state agencies and other partners would take advantage of RCOA workshops, webinars, and other opportunities to become acquainted with LCC tools. In addition to the RCOA Version 1.0 Review webinar series, workshops were hosted in New York and other states throughout the year to provide in-person training on LCC tools and information.
- Outreach to Chesapeake Bay Program Habitat Goal Implementation Team (HGIT) to contribute to discussion on landscape conservation design:
 - LCC staff attended the HGIT meeting in May to offer technical support and lead discussion about applying results from the RCOA process to help define and map priority areas to focus Chesapeake habitat conservation and restoration actions.
- Working with the North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative to assess the feasibility and options for including a terrestrial passage module into the existing aquatic connectivity assessments, database, and prioritization

- The NAACC is developing a model to consider Terrestrial Passage as a part of the assessment of road-stream crossings, recognizing that terrestrial organisms also use streams and riparian areas as corridors for movement
- Developing success stories and case studies from partner organizations
 - LCC has reached out to some Steering Committee members who volunteered to share success stories, but the process is ongoing, and unsolicited submissions are welcome. Currently we are focusing on developing testimonials that speak to the applicability of the RCOA project.
- Distribution of survey to gather input regarding performance measures in response to the National Academy of Sciences 2015 Review of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives.
 - The LCC developed and distributed a survey to Steering Committee members in May, and provided the results to the LCC Network during the comment period.
- Posting files from federal agency presentations at Spring 2016 meeting
 - The files are available here
- Working with the Northeast Climate Science and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to explore websites that can serve as clearinghouses for data.
 - Maintaining a current catalog of climate-adaptation tools is an ongoing challenge, but the effort is underway. However LCC tools have been included in a climate change clearinghouses developed by NOAA, FWS, and states, which offer good models for approaching this challenge
- Next steps for updating strategic plan
 - The completion of the RCOA project has taken precedence over strategic planning in recent months, but specific next steps and opportunities for strategic planning could be informed by what we learn through early efforts to test and use the resulting tools.
- Development of individual fact sheets describing relationship between the LCC and the Northeast Climate Science Center, Joint Ventures, and Fish Habitat Partnerships
 - Although this has been overtaken by other tasks, this remains a priority for the near future.

Discussion/Questions:

Andrew Milliken: Important to calibrate expectations about degree of overlap between regional design and state Conservation Opportunity Areas. They should not match perfectly, and we can learn from both their similarities and their differences.

Gwen Brewer: It is also important to think about overlap areas with the Appalachian LCC.

Mike Slattery: Where we have overlapping priorities and partnerships, what are our respective roles? We need to take advantage of capacity without duplicating efforts, or being “wildly divergent” in our approaches.

3. Review of project budgets and contracts - Scot Williamson (WMI)

Scot Williamson provided an update on the LCC budget, explaining that the LCC has \$50,000 in unobligated funds, not counting \$200,000 set aside for science delivery. The estimates include contractor support through September of 2017.

In response to a question about unobligated funds, Scot explained that the funds will not go away, and that members will have the opportunity to apply at the appropriate time.

4. Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas: Fostering testing and use - LCC Staff, all

Presentation by Science Delivery Coordinator Steve Fuller: “A conservation design for the Northeast region: Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas (RCOAs) Version 1.0”

Testimonials from partners on potential applications for RCOA products:

Patrick Comins, Audubon Connecticut - Used data from *Connect the Connecticut* to help make the case for funding a project that will protect a key conservation inholding in the Eightmile River watershed as part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ In-Lieu-Fee Program. RCOAs will provide a lens for evaluating projects outside of the watershed.

- Bill Hyatt, Connecticut DEEP, pointed out that Connecticut’s statewide Greenprint is another tool that can help justify priorities and identify opportunities to collaborate in the state.

Gwen Brewer, Maryland Department of Natural Resources - Partners in the Patuxent River watershed in Maryland are using RCOAs as the foundation for comparing different datasets and identifying information gaps as they build a Patuxent Waters Conservation Area Landscape Conservation Design.

- Andrew Milliken explained that National Wildlife Refuge system is now mandating landscape conservation design for Refuge expansion with partners in their landscape. Since the RCOA products are stratified by HUC 6 watersheds, a Refuge can look at relevant watershed scale to identify important areas for future land protection.

Becky Gwynn, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries - The Coastal Zone partnership is putting together a GIS based tool called the Virginia Ecological Assessment, which defines the most ecologically valuable areas in Virginia’s coastal landscape. It’s time for an update, and the RCOA project helping us hone in priorities for species of greatest

conservation need. The tool is used by local and regional government entities as well as the state, and though we are just getting the data to them, they are excited to bring this information to bear, to help communities that are struggling to keep pace with rate of development in coastal communities.

5. Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas: Breakout Discussion - LCC Staff, all

Steering Committee divided into subgroups to discuss how the tools and context represented by the Regional Conservation Design work can be applied to help address priority conservation work of their organizations, and help partners work together to address shared priorities across state boundaries.

After breakout discussions, each group reported back to the full committee. Here are some notes from what each group shared:

Group 1:

Priorities

- Further enhancing regional conservation plans
- Facilitating the assessment of at-risk species regionwide, to inform recovery and avoid listing
- Early successional habitats, fire management, and TN River basin (collective work in a specific watershed, landscape where there are overlapping efforts)

Approaches

- Building a network of deliverers, through Aquatic Connectivity networks
- Collaboration with organizations, looking at existing funding mechanisms
- Replication idea of Staying Connected partnership - with a focused geography and set of actors to involve
- Train the trainer
- Making it so using the tools become standard - beware of “tool fatigue”

Group 2:

Key issues moving forward

- Aquatic connectivity and dam removal
 - How to get the right incentives for DOT to encourage proper culvert design
- Floodplains and their intersection with flood protection benefits
- How to embed LCC tools into large-scale protection, for both agency land acquisition and management of private lands, recognizing context of priorities of each organization
- Identifying needs of end use, best mechanism for getting information to them, and roadblocks to adoption
- Tools for assessing priority areas for monarch butterflies

- How to synthesize and integrate with existing work, not replicating what's already out there

Group 3:

Areas where partnerships are making a difference

- Riparian restoration
- Early successional forest
- Saltmarshes

Opportunities to address needs

- Identifying areas where mid-late successional forests are threatened by climate change and/or other factors to protect species that are dependent on mature forests
- In person trainings directed at work of practitioners
- Science delivery that offers meaningful engagement with the data
- Coastal: work with ACE, habitat suitability models, etc.
- Emphasis on place-based conservation, but incorporating high-priority issues:
- Don't separate the place-based by the issue-based
- We need to figure out what these issues are as a region

Questions:

- Can we synthesize lessons learned where there have been successes and maybe failures?
- What doesn't work for training?

After the breakout groups reported back, LCC staff agreed to review the collective input to identify key themes for follow up during discussion on Day 2.

Day 2 - Tuesday, October 25, 2016

6. Review and reflections from Day 1 - Ken Elowe, Bill Hyatt, all

In reviewing the collective input from breakout groups on Day 1, the LCC identified three big questions to be addressed by the partnership:

1. Where can the LCC make the greatest conservation impact?

The sub groups reported back the results of their discussions, and generally affirmed several joint conservation priorities. Among them, aquatic connectivity, coastal resilience, young forest/early successional habitat (American Woodcock), riparian buffers, saltmarshes and obligate birds (saltmarsh sparrow, black rail, American black duck), and at risk species

(RSGCN), were foremost. In addition, interest in place-based collective conservation efforts in specific landscapes where concentrations of identified habitat and species priorities converge, and where overlapping interests of other large-scale partnerships like JV's, FHP's and National Estuary Programs occur, was high. Examples of such places included the Connecticut River watershed, the Gulf of Maine, Hudson Valley, Long Island Sound/NY Bight, and Chesapeake landscapes.

2. Who are the key players in these arenas, and how can we collaborate with and support them?

NEAFWA Committees, Joint Ventures, Fish Habitat Partnerships and Endangered Species programs were identified as belonging to a preliminary, initial list of likely users of LCC decision support tools. A good way to begin working together to address the list of shared priorities that we identified (see above) will be to discuss with each of these conservation implementers what specific science and technical assistance needs they face in addressing the list of shared priorities. A structured approach is needed to make use of their feedback, to gather input on other potential user groups, and to respond to needs of organizations to develop and deliver issue-based training tailored to their needs.

3. How do we connect the dots between all of these efforts build to something bigger?

It was agreed that we would establish a forum and unified process to develop science and science delivery needs as a means of continued communication and collaboration, and to make sure we are serving the needs of our partners. The same that engagement process will be useful to assess how well the "dots are being connected", and document needs as a basis for next steps.

7. Update on products and tools - Scott Schwenk

Updates on the three major categories of products supported by the LCC, all intended to serve management needs:

1. Foundational information
2. Conservation designs
3. Decision support tools

Scott highlighted the official launch of the searchable products database on the LCC site, and touched upon ongoing maintenance of project pages.

Going forward, the LCC will not take on additional science projects without first determining how the end results will address specific needs.

Discussion/Questions

Sea-level rise modeling:

Pete Murdoch: Given numerous different approaches for modeling sea-level rise, how do we know when to use what? We need to synthesize tools to identify differences, and best applications. There needs to be a baseline map of condition for the coast. If we had that, each model would show a best practice for a certain type of condition. Models can be adjusted to reflect different scenarios.

Glenn Normandeau: Condition is what is most important in my mind. You can model what will happen with 2-meter sea-level rise, but will we get there?

Amanda Babson: NROC produced a document related to marsh migration modeling.

Black duck model:

Pete Murdoch: What does this tool help you do?

Sarah Fleming: Hot spots reflects ten years of data collection related to habitat requirements, food availability, etc, all went into these hot spots.

Mike Slattery: The idea is to help you identify the places that are most likely to provide lasting habitat for black duck with the right conservation action.

Sarah: One of the goals is to bring in other partners -- land trusts and towns -- to showcase models and application.

Northeast Aquatic Classification

Pete Murdoch: Has there been talk of consistency between classification schemes? How do you make them seamless?

Scott: It's being led by TNC Canada, but TNC U.S. has been involved to help make it consistent. The NECSC supported a project looking at classifications and trying to describe their different strengths.

Ken: Also, as you know Northeast Classification came out of Regional Conservation Needs program. LCCs have a role to pull things together where different geographies meet, and to try to make them useful across boundaries.

Jim Connelly: At the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture meeting there was discussion about the possible harm of removing culverts. Is there any discussion about those trade offs? Are competing considerations clear?

Scott: I don't know if they are in there yet, but they are important to keep in mind.

BJ Richardson: This is a prioritization tool. It won't tell you what is happening on the ground, but it will tell you where to look first.

Jim: The challenge of an agency faced with this issue is that if you are trying to make a strong case and leverage your resources, the more robust the tool is to point out competing considerations, the better you can do to address all of the concerns.

8. Science Delivery: Status of efforts - Steve Fuller

- a) Results of recent partner meetings – what we are hearing
- b) Plan for utilization of approved resources:
 - Science Delivery funding started in FY 2011: All projects are complete
 - Science Delivery funding for FY 2012: Funded staff and 4 grants
 - Science Delivery funding for FY 2015: Funds to keep capacity, support technical assistance
- c) Update on progress of science delivery efforts and input on next steps

Update from Zoe Smith, Wildlife Conservation Society Adirondack Program:

Just finishing up products from Science Delivery grant to convene a group of land-use practitioners, and create a network of people who work with municipalities and other entities to strengthen ordinances for wildlife. We used LCC data to see which communities popped out for having both wildlife-friendly tools and high quality habitat. We identified ten towns in New York, and created conservation profiles that show the relative value of land in that town versus the rest of New York state. These profiles will be available in a gallery on DataBasin similar to biofinder, that allows anyone to go in and find that data more easily.

The grant also allowed us to dig into these datasets ourselves, and we raised a lot of private money to do our own work with the grant working with land trusts. We used the LCC data to help with the pending decision for the state to buy a 20,000 acre parcel in the Adirondacks. We have also been heavily involved in RCOA project.

Summary of Science Delivery program: The desired outcomes for Science Delivery grants and funding was a network of people who are able to use and teach others to use data. Body of people who now are really there and able to help with GIS. Next steps: Continuing to expand the network of deliveries and meet the needs of the people.

9. Meeting the needs of partners: Strategic next steps for LCC including Science Needs and Science Delivery - Mike Slattery, Steve Fuller, Scott Schwenk, all

LCC staff reviewed the typical process for considering science needs, the alternative approach used in 2016, and outlined a proposed modification in the approach for 2017, focusing on taking stock of progress to date and identifying future strategic directions.

Rationale for modification:

- Need for more concerted effort to review current needs of users
- Reflect last several years of work on science delivery and conservation design
- Reflect call for National Academy of Sciences to reinforce work with partners, and in particular 1) joint ventures and fish habitat partnerships, and 2) state wildlife agencies
Incorporate needs of major initiatives such as Chesapeake Bay and Gulf of Maine

Proposed approach for 2017:

- Building upon the work of the science delivery team to learn what limits the ability of conservation practitioners to apply science to support their work, systematically evaluate the relationships between major users and the current assemblage of LCC-sponsored tools. One product could be a strategic planning matrix of organizations, initiatives, and implementation programs, current decision making processes, and potential opportunities of LCC tools to contribute. This work will inform a unified process for developing new science and science delivery needs for 2017.
- Engage a forum of users in a process to simultaneously consider needs in science delivery (e.g., trainings, guidance materials on using existing tools, awareness building etc.) and science products (e.g., need to update existing foundational data, refine existing science tools, address science problems that to date have been intractable). Users will be comprised of representatives of key organizations, initiatives, and implementation programs.
- Use findings to recommend how allocations for science projects and science delivery should be divided and chart a course for future effort.
- For priority needs identified through this process, engage Technical Committee and Science Delivery Committee in prioritizing, refining, and scoping the needs for consideration by Steering Committee.
- Bring science priorities (and science delivery priorities) to Steering Committee meeting for consideration in April, and after feedback and approval, proceed to develop relevant projects.

Discussion:

Establishing credibility and fostering use

For some committee members, it is desirable to make LCC tools integral to management practices within their organizations and agencies, whereas others expressed concerns about casting the use of these tools as standard operating procedure. The tools are not designed to be one-sized fits all, or to replace existing tools and relations; they are intended to complement them. With that caveat, there was general agreement about encouraging colleagues and staff to use the LCC tools as another lens for evaluating work.

In presenting this work, it is important to communicate the added value they provide by offering regional context, which can help identify areas that might warrant a closer look, find opportunities to work with partners, and reinforce existing priorities.

In order to reach users who will benefit from this perspective, it is important to take stock of and take advantage of conservation forums that are already in place for disseminating information. Rather than creating new infrastructure, we need to integrate LCC tools into existing infrastructure to reach out to groups who already operate in this space.

Reviewing needs of the network

There are two tiers to consider: Our collective work, and the individual work of our home agencies/organizations. The ideal is for the LCC to become an extension service to meet the needed capacity need.

In order to effectively assess needs, we need to use a standardized approach that looks broadly at the conservation community, and ideally incorporates social science expertise. That requires taking advantage of larger forums to interact with and get input from more people, rather than just reaching out to individual organizations.

General framework for advancing Science Delivery:

- 1) Develop an approach to identify needs within the network
- 2) Work within existing entities to ensure we are serving and meeting their needs
- 3) Be responsive to organizations to deliver training

While there was much discussion about approaches and challenges, the clear next step that emerged was to focus on refining and strengthening science delivery in order to provide meaningful outreach and training to diverse audiences with different needs. In particular, a strong interest was expressed to organize future science delivery around case studies, to engage staff in familiar and relevant topics, rather than hypothetical, geographically distant or "generic" training examples. Using this approach could also help to embed the use of LCC tools in the routine work of member organization, wherever to do so is found to be of value, which was also a desire expressed by some (but not all) Steering Committee members.

10. LCC Network updates and budget - Ken Elowe, Bill Hyatt, all

11. LCC Communications check-in - Bridget Macdonald

Role of communication in the mission to put conservation on the ground with LCC tools:

- Packaging information for target audiences
- Telling stories that show impact
- Curating information to tell one cohesive story
- Equipping others to communicate about our work

Potential areas to focus communication:

- Presentations on case studies
- Story maps
- Template for presentations
- Restructuring website for usability

Discussion followed on developing an appropriate and compelling name for the RCOA project, and there was agreement that the Steering Committee members are not the right people to take on that task. However, members brought up several important considerations:

- The term “Northeast” alienates Mid-Atlantic states
- Use of “nature” excludes cultural resource
- Asking for input from people who will actually be using the tools

12. Highlights from Steering Committee members - Steering Committee members

Following up to the discussion about Virginia’s Ecological Values Assessment (VEVA), Becky Gwynn said the preliminary results from the regional database look good, and a fully reviewed product should be ready to present to the LCC by this time next year.

13. Other business, next meeting - Bill Hyatt, Ken Elowe, all

Members indicated that they were amenable to the alternate structure of this meeting. The next Steering Committee meeting will take place after the conclusion of the Spring 2017 Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Conference in Norfolk, Virginia.