**North Atlantic LCC Steering Committee**

**November 5-6, 2013 Gardiner, New York**

**Minutes**

**Action Items**

**Hurricane Sandy:** LCC staff and Steering Committee members will assist with the assessment and coordination of funded Hurricane Sandy resiliency science projects and future proposals through the DOI competitive funding, specifically

* Assemble a database of key information from funded DOI projects that allows for linking together of key projects and identification of science gaps that can be addressed through competitive DOI Hurricane Sandy funding through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation;
* LCC staff , FWS (Rick Bennett), NPS (Amanda Babson), USGS (Pete Murdoch) and NOAA (Ellen Mecray) will collaborate on a database and crosswalk of DOI funded projects and investigate the addition of other Hurricane Sandy science projects from other federal agencies and states;
* Provide database and summary of results to LCC partners, DOI Agencies and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; and
* Help coordinate the development of proposals to address unmet regional science needs through the competitive DOI Hurricane Sandy funding.

**Native genotypes for restoration**: Bill Brumback (New England Wildflower Society) will work with National Wildlife Refuges and National Parks to encourage Hurricane sandy restorations that include plantings to utilize native genotype material and ensure that there's an adequate supply when needed.

**Landscape Conservation Design:** LCC staff will further articulate an iterative process and timeline for Landscape Conservation Design and move forward with key steps including:

* a pilot effort to test the application and seek input and feedback on Landscape Conservation Design in the Connecticut River Watershed;
* individual meetings with several states an NGOs including crosswalks with state design products;
* consider options for meetings, presentations or workshops at the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference; and
* report back on the progress of this iterative process to the Steering Committee at the April meeting and recommend next steps.

**Science delivery:** Science delivery team will take next steps to implement the approved recommendations for science delivery including:

* increasing capacity for technical assistance and information management;
* developing and issuing a RFP with the two themes of demonstration project and technical assistance grants; and
* presenting recommendations on proposals at the April Steering Committee meeting.

**Communications framework:** next steps include

* David Eisenhauer will incorporate comments received on the Communications Framework and provide a revised draft to the Steering Committee for review by November 18.
* Steering Committee members will provide additional input and suggestions for communications team members by December 13.

**Science projects:** LCC staff and WMI will develop scope of work and contracts with P.I.s selected for the two approved science projects for:

* Vernal pools with Vermont Center for Ecostudies et al. and
* Stream crossings with University of Massachusetts Amherst et al.

**Vice chair and Executive Committee:** LCC Chair Ken Elowe and Vice-Chair Patty Riexinger will consider options for next vice-chair or chairs and the possibility of an LCC executive committee and present recommendations by February either via a Steering Committee conference call or email.

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Ken Elowe (FWS) and Patty Riexinger (New York State DEC) welcomed the Steering Committee to New York and to the LCC meeting and the group made introductions. Andrew noted that there was a quorum. Following a review of the agenda and goals for the meeting, Ken Elowe said a chief goal of the meeting is consensus on a process for creating unified landscape designs that accommodate the responsibilities and interests that partners have as agencies or organizations. He said it was important for the partnership to speak with one voice about locations and kinds of conservation necessary to support multiple resources on the landscape.

**2. Hurricane Sandy $100 million competitive funding process**

David O’Neil of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) provided an overview of the Hurricane Sandy competitive process, followed by an extensive Steering Committee discussion on the LCC’s role in that process. The grants program does not restrict work to damaged areas; it is intended to be forward-looking and long-term, rather than focusing on mitigation of existing damage. So regions of whole states are eligible. He said the clock is now ticking to develop proposals and think about concepts to be submitted through the competitive grant program. Proposals are due January 31, 2014. Once the proposals are received, NFWF will take a look at the proposals and the eligibility of the applicants and then forward the eligible proposals to the Department of the Interior (DOI) leadership team and technical review teams. The goal is to allocate the funds ($102.5 million total) by April, 2014.

David O’Neil said NFWF has been working with the Rockefeller Foundation to provide some resources to evaluate the program. He said the LCC can play a key role in this evaluation process (how resiliency projects are working and not working and applying lessons learned to inform future decisions). He said investments are being viewed through the lens of healthy ecosystems, instead of looking through lens of protecting communities, which is a small change in how we undertake coastal conservation. It helps us determine where we will invest. DOI has asked NFWF to facilitate a list of goals of investment.

Patty Riexinger said she was concerned that the resiliency of inland waters is not being looked at closely enough. Patty said an understanding of aquatic connectivity is key, as well as cost and long-term resiliency. She said we need to be prepared to support efforts to increase resiliency in these areas. She also noted the importance of helping towns know what facilities to upgrade. John O’Leary (Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife) agreed on the importance of both hazard mitigation and coastal resiliency planning.

Bill Brumback (New England Wildflower Society) discussed the importance of using local genotypes for restoration and the need to have seed banks and plants developed ahead of time.

Ken Elowe said an important issue related to this process, is that we have a major partnership of organizations in the Northeast in this LCC that should play a facilitation role, prevent redundancy, and come up with tools as a collective group. This is a huge opportunity to do just that.

Andrew Milliken said that 35 science projects were funded by the Department of the Interior through Bureaus and the LCC could help facilitate establishing connections among chosen projects. Reacting to Patty’s comment on inland waters, he said one project that did not get funded was one focusing on increasing resiliency to flooding and for fish passage, an area that the LCC is proposing to support additional efforts.

Responding to a question on how project can help guide local development, David O’Neill said a section of the RFP focuses on coastal resiliency planning/community based planning. It looks at how communities adapt to greater storm occurrence. This may be an opportunity where communities can think into the future and weigh adjustments that can be made.

Responding to questions about allocation of additional funding, David O’Neil said it will depend on the source of the partner money. For example, funds provided by foundations for New Jersey and Delaware will only go to those states. In cases when other funders are supporting the project overall, then that will apply to all projects. Federal agencies are not eligible to apply.

Four workshops will be held in four locations November 18 in Grasonville, Maryland; November 19 in Narragansett, Rhode Island; December 9 in West Long Branch, New Jersey; December 10 in Brooklyn, New York and December 17 via webinar. Marty McHugh (NFWF) will be working on the ground for the entire region and the go-to person for this program. Workshops will walk people through criteria, how to apply, and other information.

Ken Elowe asked Steering Committee members if there is a preferred role the LCC should play. He suggested the LCC could host a meeting with all the bureaus and talk about what the assessments are, the projects, and what is being funded.

**Key outcome:** The group agreed to develop a process for identifying resiliency science needs not yet addressed through funded projects and to work collaboratively on proposals for the competitive grant process managed by NFWF. NFWF will look to the LCC for guidance on priority science needs and priority areas for future investments in restoration.

**3. Review and discussion of progress under Northeast Conservation Framework and LCC Conservation Science Strategic Plan**

Ken Elowe and Andrew Milliken outlined progress under the Northeast Conservation Framework and LCC Conservation Science Strategic Plan and in defining LCC outcomes. Ken Elowe discussed the Northeast Conservation Framework (Albany II) meeting and how the LCC developed a framework and set a direction with partners. We have been strategic about working towards designing a landscape representing the multiple resources we are interested in and the public supports.

Andrew Milliken emphasized that the LCC is in an important point of our evolution because we can now take the information and tools that have already been developed or are under development and translate those to the scale and formats needed by partners and deliver that information through various approaches. We’ve started to think in a lot more detail about how we are going to deliver that science and how we are going to communicate with our various partners.

The LCC two-part mission is first about coming together as a partnership to address landscape scale threats and issues that no one agency or organization can address alone. During the past three years the LCC has developed a strong partnership with more than 100 partners across North Atlantic involved in the steering committee, technical teams and science delivery teams. The second part of our mission is about jointly developing and delivering scientific information and tools needed to prioritize and guide more effective conservation actions by partners toward common goals working towards the vision of sustainable landscapes. We developed a framework and made strategic investments to address priority needs in that framework including:

Foundational projects, such as

* revisions and improvements to the Northeast Terrestrial Habitat map;
* aquatic map revisions;
* coastal and marine classification and mapping;
* vernal pool mapping (under consideration); and
* mapping road-stream crossings and barriers to aquatic connectivity (under consideration).

Vulnerability assessments, such as:

* Climate Change Vulnerability Index (species);
* regional habitat vulnerability assessment (with NEAFWA);
* piping plover and beaches vulnerability to sea level rise and increased storms; and
* brook trout-cold water streams vulnerability to changing flow and temperature.

and Conservation Design, such as:

* Designing Sustainable Landscapes;
* Decision Support Tools to Assess Aquatic Habitats and Threats;
* Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas (PARCAs); and
* Marine bird mapping and risk assessment.

These sets of projects are setting the stage for us to make informed conservation decisions across the landscape in the face of change. We’ve developed a lot of the technical aspects, and have developed the capacity to communicate and deliver it through Data Basin as a management system, the LCC website, electronic newsletters, and the Science Delivery team.

A critical set of next steps for the LCC to achieve its mission is to collaboratively put the information and science together for effectively prioritizing decisions about where we as a set of partners need to do how much of what conservation actions to sustain natural resources across the region and landscapes within the region. We need to utilize the regional information for landscape conservation assessments and designs or (conservation blueprints) that tell us where to focus.

Patty Riexinger said a key next step is figuring out how to get these tools into the hands of people “with boots on the ground” and through mechanisms such as the State Wildlife Action Plan process. Andrew Milliken said the LCC’s regional SWAP synthesis project is geared toward accomplishing just that.

**4. Review and discussion of LCC products and capability to support conservation decisions with landscape conservation designs**

Ken Elowe and Scott Schwenk (North Atlantic LCC) led a discussion on how the LCC (and NEAFWA Regional Conservation Needs) pieces are fitting together for regional conservation design and consensus on next steps and decisions. Scott Schwenk said the LCC is at a critical juncture right now – we have technical capabilities to develop landscape conservation designs collectively. Independent plans can evolve into collective ones.

Scott said landscape conservation design is both a process which involves a collaborative effort among partners to reach common goals about what is important on the landscape and a product of a spatial plan of maps guiding where to do how much of what work to sustain natural resources.

Scott said conservation designs can’t just be developed by LCC staff or project investigators. It has to be a joint effort with managers. We recognize not every organization is going to have the same amount of time available to invest in it. Different partners will have different abilities to participate. It’s going to be a challenge to manage different priorities. The diversity of our group is a strength – we have a broad range of experience and expertise.

Scott described several needs and uses for landscape conservation design including providing the regional context for state and local conservation actions, prioritizing the use of limited resources (funding and staff), guiding infrastructure development, bringing in new (e.g. foundation) conservation dollars, and national and international planning.

Scott said landscape conservation design efforts are the first strategy listed in the National Fish, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Adaptation Strategy with an expectation that LCCs can lead the collaborative development of these designs. Their importance has been recognized by the National Wildlife Refuge System, which has recently announced they would like to focus on landscape conservation design in their work. USFWS nationally is agreeing on representative species and setting objectives; these species can be part of landscape conservation designs.

The South Atlantic LCC has focused extensively on landscape conservation design through the creation of their “habitat blueprint”. Scott said this provides a great opportunity because they are one of the LCCs that border the North Atlantic. They have collectively agreed upon a set of indicators and targets, important landscape areas, and have done some modeling of urban growth, landscape change and projected sea level rise. Scott said it is important to think about where we are now in a time of change, not just land development, but climate. We expect species to move and ecosystems to transform, so planning cannot be static.

Scott indicated that we are focusing initially of species and ecosystems but will be able to address cultural resources. He noted that landscape conservation designs are needed at multiple spatial scales and must help us plan for both current and future conditions. He described a proof of concept using the LCC Designing Sustainable Landscapes project tools to develop landscape conservation designs for species and ecosystems with core areas, buffers and connecting corridors. He indicated the importance of trying and learning from this approach in one landscape, initially in the Connecticut River Watershed and then applying it to other landscapes across the Northeast.

Following Scott’s presentation, Ken Elowe led a discussion on the merits/challenges of large-scale, landscape conservation design.

Responding to a question from Pete Murdoch (U.S. Geological Survey) and a discussion of whether the LCC should endorse or commit to a single regional landscape design or multiple sub-regional designs, Ken said the LCC needs to think about how systems work and how species work (species have a larger distribution among larger areas). Determining what the best contributions of a landscape, state or local area to that entire distributional range is a challenge but is necessary for us to do. But partnerships tend to work in part at these sub-regional scales such as large watersheds, so developing designs at that scale also makes sense. It isn’t picking one scale, but making the different scales work together.

Phil Huffman (The Nature Conservancy) said it is important to emphasize the geophysical aspects of the landscape supporting both ecosystems and species, and how these geophysical aspects will remain constant as the species and ecosystems change over time in response to natural changes. Anne Kuhn (U.S. EPA) agreed on the importance of this “Conserving the Stage” approach. Ken Elowe responded that species help us decide how much is necessary to sustain how many (density, distribution). Focusing on species doesn’t undermine efforts to ensure the functionality of the landscape. Patty Riexinger agreed and added that people and agencies aren’t going to be excited about landscape design if species aren’t emphasized.

Zoe Smith (Wildlife Conservation Society) said human values and socioeconomic information are critical pieces of landscape conservation design. Gwen Brewer (Maryland DNR) and Bill Brumback (New England Wildflower Society) also emphasized the importance of plants as key elements of ecosystems and habitats.

John O’Leary said it seems there are a lot of assumptions built into these modeling projections and noted that these models need to be vetted by the technical committee before use. He cited the use of BioMap in Massachusetts to conserve biodiversity. They try to not to focus all acquisition in one area.

Ken Elowe said conservation design decisions need to be made in collaboration with those who determine how land gets used. Maybe what we do is help describe total amounts necessary and some generalized patterns that are helpful and understandable and can be applied with local collaboration and local information.

Scot Williamson (Wildlife Management Institute) suggests a “Noah’s ark” approach where we ensure that we conserve what we have now, and then consider change on top of that in conservation design. Steve Fuller (North Atlantic LCC) emphasized the importance of the governance and decisions – how will the design be accomplished?

Adam Whelchel (The Nature Conservancy) discussed the importance of user-defined designs and tools with flexibility. Bill Brumback emphasized the importance of a network of lands that allow for adaptive capability. Ralph Abele (U.S. EPA) suggested using indices of biological integrity and noted the importance of ensuring that aquatic systems were part of conservation design. To address concerns about model uncertainties, he suggested comparing the results to other, finer-scale efforts, such as Massachusetts efforts for sustainable watershed management. Eric Walberg (Manomet) also noted the importance of translating to parcel level priorities.

Ken Elowe discussed the proposed pilot effort to develop landscape conservation designs for the Connecticut River Watershed. He said it is important to have an approach aligned with what people are using on the ground. What decisions do we need to make, what scales and formats are best to help you make a better decision tomorrow than you would have made yesterday. It’s all conceptual until you tangle with it on ground level.

Kim Royar (Vermont Fish and Wildlife) emphasized the importance of getting feedback from staff trying to use these tools to do conservation on the ground. Bill Brumback agreed on the importance of making the bridge to conservation actions.

Phil Huffman noted the challenges in achieving consensus around multiple objectives among the many partners. John O’Leary suggested that efforts may really want to focus on identifying what should not be a conservation priority, such as endpoints that are too vulnerable to future changes. Using a healthcare system analogy, Mike Slattery (USFWS) said too many choices can paralyze and overwhelm partners. He urged the LCC to make landscape conservation design tools simple enough to be usable and understandable to people who are trying to figure out what they will do differently. He said the LCC needs to get users to talk through needs. Gwen Brewer recommended building in a sensitivity analysis and multiple scenarios, so users can better understand how any one input influences the final design.

Kevin Kalasz (Delaware Fish and Wildlife) emphasized the importance of making better decisions such as thinking through land acquisition scenarios with cost constraints. He also raised the concern about reactions by those whose areas of conservation concern appear to be excluded once the lines in a conservation design are drawn.

Ellen Mecray said there are analogous efforts in the coastal realm through NOAA including the ecosystem-based fisheries efforts, the Habitat Blueprint, and the Ocean Planning Team.

Sharri Venno (Houlton Band of the Maliseets) said Tribes work locally and can sometimes be left behind when working on regional and national priorities. This should be considered in developing collaborative regional landscape designs.

Bill Hyatt raised the question about what constitutes success: a good design, or actual implementation? Discussion ensued about how far toward implementation the LCC would be involved vs. presenting tools that others can choose to adopt if they wish.

A closing discussion focused on the idea of using the Connecticut River pilot as an opportunity to learn including cross-walks with state efforts and the importance of one-on-one state meetings with state, NGO and federal agency staff in those states starting with the Connecticut River Watershed states.

**Day 2 (November 6, 2014)**

**Opening Discussion**

Ken Elowe and Patty Riexinger led a discussion of previous day discussions focused on landscape conservation design and planning. Key take-home messages from yesterday’s discussion included:

* Content and context of landscape conservation design is good, but lots of questions about the process (the “how”). Roles and actions need to be defined.
* Need to consider cultural resources elements
* Need to try it with practitioners
* Should incorporate local knowledge and needs/values
* Results should be presented as amounts and patterns – not a single design solution
* Need to cross-walk designs with already built systems in states to identify contribution to knowledge/approaches
* Individual state/NGO meetings to brief state staff would be helpful
* Use Connecticut River watershed geography with team of LCC partners for learning
* Use NEAFWA conference to reach a broader audience
* Bring back lessons learned to April Steering Committee

Ellen Mecray (NOAA) said the LCC needs to figure out a process for how it will make decisions and guide the effort.

Patty Riexinger likened the landscape conservation design process to making a quilt – the LCC helps create the regional background and then partners and communities stitch in their own local piece. So the LCC would provide regional and landscape context and be locally relevant.

Becky Gwynn (Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries) agreed on the idea of focusing on one geographic area, such as the Connecticut River Watershed, and learning from it.

Between now and the April 2014 Steering Committee meeting, the LCC will work on further learning, individual meetings, and partner application with users involved. All agreed the LCC should be mindful in recognizing this is a regional process incorporating other landscapes across the region and stepping down to local scales. In April, LCC staff will provide a more fleshed out strategy. The Steering Committee suggested using the NEAFWA conference to get broader feedback (with findings from CT River watershed pilot).

**Key Outcomes**:

As a group, the Steering Committee agreed to continue collaboration and support for an iterative process of landscape conservation design testing and learning in the LCC. This process includes:

* + Continued development of regional and sub-regional landscape habitat designs for sustaining: representative/surrogate species; rare fish, wildlife and plant species; and important and resilient ecosystems and geophysical features;
  + Working more closely with practitioners to understand their decision needs and to collaboratively apply and test these regional and sub-regional designs;
  + Incorporating local knowledge, needs and values into conservation designs;
  + Cross-walking designs with other regional and state conservation systems to identify the most effective way to complement existing knowledge and approaches; and
* Piloting a watershed-scale landscape conservation design process with regional context in the Connecticut River watershed.

**6. Delivering the science and tools: review and discussion of Science Delivery Team’s recommendations on translating, delivering and helping partners adopt conservation information and tools**

Zoe Smith (Wildlife Conservation Society), Amanda Babson (National Park Service), Kevin Kalasz (Delaware Fish and Wildlife) and Steve Fuller (LCC) provided a presentation on LCC understanding and consensus on needs to deliver science and priorities through capacity and demonstration project grants (RFP) for science delivery. They collectively laid out priorities and a budget that the team had developed through several team conference calls and draft documents including:

* staff capacity and contracts sufficient to develop and implement a program of science delivery (in addition to existing capacity);
* workshops with users to provide information and get feedback on the most effective way to integrate information and to provide training;
* demonstration project grants to encourage partners/ partnerships to use, test, or develop applications of data/tools;
* grants to support state, NGO, university and federal partners to provide technical assistance to local communities and other groups;

**Discussion:**

Steve Fuller and Ken Elowe discussed linking science delivery and landscape design through efforts such as the Connecticut River Watershed pilot.

Pete Murdoch asked whether everything can be based in the Connecticut River or do we need different application scales in areas like watersheds in the Chesapeake or the Chesapeake as a whole.

Mike Slattery said partners in the Chesapeake Bay are developing a landscape conservation design process in Chesapeake and allowing for an opportunity to enact with the Connecticut River Watershed pilot and the Northeast Regional Synthesis for State Wildlife Action Plans.

Sharri Venno pointed to NRCS as a good model of using a locally-led process for delivering science.

Zoe Smith outlined the importance of demonstration projects and technical assistance in the science delivery process.

John O’Leary emphasized the importance of influencing towns to include climate information into their planning process. State-level incentive programs are important.

Tai-Ming Chang (U.S. EPA) said the science delivery process should have way to reach federal agencies, like EPA dealing with industry and permitting.

Bill Brumback indicated that the highest need was to reach out to and provide technical support to partners including local partners that have limited capacity.

Ellen Mecray emphasized the train the trainers approach for climate change information and the importance of being able to provide ongoing support.

Curt Griffin (University of Massachusetts) noted the opportunity of leveraging the resources of the Northeast Climate Science Center and also not to overlook the cooperative extension programs.

Jim Connolly (Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife) emphasized the importance of building on existing networks, so that for example communities continue to work through their states rather than going directly to the LCC to discuss specific needs. Kim Royar agreed on the importance of helping build the capacity to reach the local level.

Phil Huffman emphasized the importance of the LCC being able to help tangible work on the ground. LCC-sponsored demonstration projects that build on current conservation implementation are a way to accomplish this.

Jad Daley (Trust for Public Land) emphasized the importance of developing the delivery network.

Scot Williamson noted the importance of understanding what happens after the Connecticut River pilot. This should involve laying out timeframes, next steps and being able to define success. Gwen Brewer emphasized the importance of making sure that results are transferable elsewhere.

**Key Outcomes:**

* Strong agreement on the importance of having an organized program of science "delivery" – the translation of science into usable conservation planning tools for on-the-ground conservation decisions through a network of partners. Next steps include:
  + adding additional capacity for translating science and data to meet user needs and providing technical assistance on landscape conservation science;
  + a grants program supporting demonstration projects to encourage partners and partnerships to use, test, or develop applications of data/tools and providing initial support for partners to provide technical assistance to local communities and other groups, and;
  + organizing and customizing spatial data and other information relevant to specific geographies and partnerships.
  + There was initial agreement on funding but need expressed to see full budget; final funding decisions to be addressed later.

**7. Update and discussion on Regional Synthesis and SWAP Updates**

Steve Fuller provided a summary of the Regional Synthesis and support for State Wildlife Action Plan Updates. LCC staff have been helping to synthesize regional species and habitat data for the region. The regional species data are assembled and have been reviewed by state biologists for data quality and completeness through taxonomic teams and by determining which species we should focus on for further analysis. Steve organized a database relating the species occurrences to multiple environmental factors and threats. For habitats, the spatial data layers have been organized through the LCC Data Basin site and a nested SWAP website through the LCC website. Information will be discussed at a meeting with SWAP planners in February.

Andrew Milliken, Steve Fuller and Patty discussed State Wildlife Action Plan Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) as another need for regional conservation design. Kevin Kalasz asked if the LCC had audited what has been done and an evaluation of what value would be added for regional COAs. He noted the importance of a Regional COA perspective.

John O’Leary indicated that COAs in Massachusetts will be “key sites” determined through Biomap where specific management was needed. They would have to make decision on how to include Regional COAs but they would do so in some way if available.

Ralph Abele indicated that EPA is changing the way it tells states to assess waters by catchments substituting a broader set of protocols for just reporting total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). This broader definition could be an opening for state water agencies to connect with state wildlife agencies working on SWAP updates.

**Key Outcomes:**

* Importance of continued LCC efforts to support State Wildlife Action Plan efforts;
* Link to science delivery through training state staff on available regional data layers;
* Link to conservation design through development of regional Conservation Opportunity Areas.

**8. Communications**

David Eisenhauer led a discussion on a proposed communications framework working towards consensus on communications objectives, messaging, and tools as part of science delivery. He walked through the key elements of the proposed strategy including target audiences, objectives, topline messages, tactics and tools, design and delivery and evaluation.

Jim Connolly indicated the importance of language and asked how we are defining “community” for our communications. David responded that community was defined broadly. Jim is concerned about who tells the communities what and is it the Fish and Wildlife Service or the LCC speaking. Ken Elowe indicated that we are talking about communicating as a partnership not as FWS staff – that needs to be clear in communications document. He suggested we remove the bullets with private stakeholders and local communities as target audiences.

Ellen Mecray added that we need to be more specific not just “state” but “State wildlife agencies”; not just “NGO” but “DU, TNC”; make it clearer what is meant by “public at large”.

Patty emphasized that we need the basic messaging about the LCC to communicate with staff and partners.

Andrew indicated the importance of engagement by involvement; including a wide range of partners in LCC activities so that they have input and buy-in.

Ken reiterated the importance of showing relevance for on-the-ground partners. Zoe agreed with Ken and the second bullet - understand the demonstrated value and relevance of LCCs through concrete examples and stories.

Pete Murdoch suggested that two-way communications should be built in, not just one-way from the LCC to others.

Mary Ratnaswamy suggested that we be direct about climate change and land use drivers.

Bernie Marczyk (Ducks Unlimited) suggested we learn from the extensive joint venture experience with communications. He suggested proceeding in manageable steps rather than taking on too much at first.

Ken summarized that Dave will revise based on input. Steering Committee members asked to provide additional input by the middle of December.

**Key Outcomes:**

Support for a comprehensive communications framework that provides for consistent messaging on the North Atlantic LCC and underscores its value and relevance through use of real stories and examples. The communications framework will be aligned with the LCC’s science delivery program to ensure that users understand, have access to and can apply the best science available to inform conservation decisions and actions.

**9. Review of approved annual process for science needs and projects budgets**

Understanding of LCC annual science needs process and budget status. Scot Williamson reviewed the budget and status of contracts. WMI has executed 24 contracts on behalf of the LCC, six are completed and several final reports are due soon. He discussed the OIG audit results and the adjustments made by the Service and WMI including the shift to charging direct vs. indirect costs. Andrew added that Scott has developed a peer review process for completed reports.

**Key Outcomes:** Understanding by Steering Committee about status of budget and issues associated with WMI agreement

**10. Review of RFP results, science needs and priorities and next steps for FY 13 and 14**

Scott Schwenk and Andrew Milliken reviewed the overall status of science projects for FY 13 and presented the recommendations of the technical committee and proposal review teams with regard to the 1) Vernal Pools and 2) Aquatic Connectivity RFPs.

1. There were five proposals received in response to the RFP for “Conserving Important Habitat for Amphibians and Other Wildlife: Compilation of Vernal Pool Mapping Efforts across the North Atlantic Region”

The Technical Review Panel with 10 members co-chaired by Phillip deMaynadier of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and North Atlantic LCC Staff recommend that the Steering Committee select the proposal of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) and collaborators to receive the full $100,000 funding amount requested. Reviewers noted VCE’s experience in mapping and compiling vernal pool data, their ties to regional experts, and their proposed commitment to sustain the work rather than just delivering a static product.

Becky Gywnn noted that they should add criteria like vernal pool size to help with prioritization. She also emphasized that state wildlife agencies be consulted. John O’Leary noted that climate would likely affect vernal pools and that should be taken into account.

1. There were two proposals received in response to the RFP for “Collaboratively Restoring Aquatic Connectivity while Increasing Resiliency for Culverts and Road Stream Crossings to Future Floods”

The Technical Review Panel with nine members and North Atlantic LCC Staff recommend that the Steering Committee select the proposal titled *Increasing Resiliency for Culverts, Road and Riverine Ecosystems via Collaborative Culvert Assessment in the North Atlantic Region* submitted by Scott Jackson - University of Massachusetts Amherst, Keith Nislow - U.S. Forest Service and Erik Martin - The Nature Conservancy to receive the full ($150,000) funding amount requested under the September 2013 North Atlantic LCC Request for Proposals (RFP). Strengths identified for the UMass/USFS/TNC proposal were the experience of the project team, the existing database that they would start with, the link to LCC projects, the partner network and approach identified and the willingness to initially maintain the database. This project will need to be coordinated with any similar efforts funded through the Hurricane Sandy mitigation funds.

Patty Riexinger noted that New York now has a new standard for culverts (almost released) that took 5 years to get established. That guidance should be considered in the project.

Scott then reviewed the overall science project budget for FY 13. Of the total FY 13 project funding of $1.3 million available:

* ongoing projects account for $467,000;
* $100,000 was allocated for projects approved in April (Migratory Bird Stopover Habitat for $75,000 and Compilation of Aquatic Biological Data for $25,000);
* recommended projects (Vernal Pool and Aquatic Connectivity) from the RFP add up to $250,000 for a total of $817,000;
* The balance of project funds would then support the various categories of science delivery and capacity with an outstanding balance of $77,748.

Scott noted that the two main coastal and marine science needs were addressed through Hurricane Sandy resiliency funding. This balance could go to supporting additional science needs associated with stream temperature and flow, forest structure and condition and compilation of terrestrial species data or to additional science delivery work.

Scott reviewed the usual annual process for the technical committee assessing science needs in the winter, recommending needs at the April Steering Committee meeting and approving projects in the summer and fall. His recommendation is that given the number of ongoing projects that are resulting in products, the new science delivery projects and the conservation design work being planned for the winter, that we shift the annual process by a few months. Specifically, the technical committee and sub teams could meet in May and June to review ongoing projects to consider any additional phases, consider complementary additional needs and make recommendations for needs to the Steering Committee on a summer call. The Steering Committee would then consider specific projects at its fall meeting. The Steering Committee supported this change in annual schedule.

**Key Outcomes:** Support for the two recommended science proposals and the 2014 science needs review and recommendation process. Funding decisions addressed later.

**11. Review of discussions and decisions on science projects, science delivery and communications**

Ken Elowe reviewed discussions and decisions on funding for science projects, science delivery and communications. After some discussion, the Steering Committee developed a motion to support vernal pools and aquatic connectivity science projects for $250,000; support the science delivery capacity grants for $150,000 from FY 13 funds and use the balance of $77,748 for science delivery capacity. The motion also included an additional $150,000 for science delivery grants and capacity $62,252 for capacity from FY 2014 funds pending the availability of these funds. See table for details. The science delivery RFP would go out in January with decisions at the April Steering Committee meeting. Motion was made and seconded. Wildlife Management Institute abstained from voting. The motion passed unanimously.

**Budget table showing new funding decisions in *bold and italic***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Funding | **FY 13** | **FY 14** |
| FY 13 Allocation Adaptive Science North Atlantic LCC | $ 1,218,015 |  |
| Available funds with 6.8% sequester | $ 1,135,190 |  |
| Carryover from FY 12 | $ 19,662 |  |
| Unfunded RFP rollover from FY 12 | $ 180,000 |  |
| Total Available Funds | $ 1,334,852 |  |
|  |  |  |
| Science Delivery |  |  |
| ***Recommended Science Delivery Projects*** | ***$ 150,000*** | ***$150,000*** |
| Information Management | $ 40,000 |  |
| Science and Delivery Staff | $ 250,000 |  |
| Total Delivery and Staff | $ 440,000 |  |
|  |  |  |
| Science Projects |  |  |
| Ongoing Projects | $ 467,104 |  |
| Funded Projects | $ 100,000 |  |
| ***Recommended Projects*** | ***$ 250,000*** |  |
| Total Science Projects | $ 817,104 |  |
|  |  |  |
| Total Funded and Recommended | $ 1,257,104 |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Science Delivery Capacity** | ***$ 77,748*** | ***$62,252*** |
| **Total allocated** | $ 1,334,852 | $212,252 |
| **Balance** | $0 |  |

**Check In and Discussion on the Progress of the LCC**

Patty Riexinger led a discussion on the Steering Committee’s assessment of the progress of the LCC. She asked is the LCC going in the right direction, doing the right things the right way? Can you influence decisions, are you heard?

Gwen Brewer said she supports what the LCC has done and noted that it is up to the partnership to make things happen, not just the FWS LCC staff. Members need to make their collective voice heard and enable the LCC staff to facilitate getting work done. The LCC staff role is to pull us together and give us support and tools to do our jobs.

John O’Leary asked how can we become focused rather than being all things to all people? He wants to focus on species and habitats that we have regional responsibilities for but asked how important is regional context by itself? Regional scale looks important only if it informs the landscapes in which partners are working.

Becky Gwynn asked are we making things happen on the ground?

Anne Kuhn supports the LCC and really would like to see more discussion on monitoring and planning. She suggests more high level federal coordination and identification of redundancies. Pete Murdoch agreed particularly on the need to share data.

Zoe Smith noted that in response to Patty’s question, the LCC is an important umbrella and network for an NGO like the Wildlife Conservation Society to leverage and extend their expertise and support with state and federal agencies and other NGOs.

Jim Connolly noted that this is the first partnership to put it all together to identify priorities and overlaps. That’s a huge benefit if done properly. It is way to get out of the “emergency room” reactive approach and into proactive “family practice.”

Mary Ratnaswamy noted that the Northeast Climate Science Center has been able to improve their success by working with LCCs.

Kim Royar is very impressed with the progress of the LCC, in its integrative and forward-looking work, and somewhat overwhelmed by products. The challenge is going back from the Steering Committee meetings and translating it to the staff in her agency so that it gets incorporated. LCC could help reinforce importance of state landscape initiatives.

Patty noted that the LCC allows us to accomplish what we couldn’t do alone. Don’t have the focus on all the science that needs to be done, just on those things that it makes sense to work on together.

Gwen Brewer noted the importance of not losing track of what science we can’t do so that other partners and partnerships can pick up the ball. She would like to see more emphasis on plants. Bill Brumback echoed the need to work on plants and natural communities.

Scot Williamson added that partners need to be assisting with funding if true partnership. States are able to help through the Regional Conservation Needs (RCN) program.

Pete Murdoch thinks that the LCC work on conservation science has been phenomenal and the representation of fish and wildlife agencies is particularly strong. He wondered if we need a broader environmental science component and more engagement with the coastal conservation community and water agencies. It would be helpful for integrating and coordinating Hurricane Sandy.

Ellen Mecray noted that there are a set of groups like this in other sectors, and also other coordinating groups such as NROC and MARCO and state CZM managers in the coastal zone. We should coordinate with and listen to these groups. She also would like to see us work on more transparency in decisions and process with clearer options and final decisions. If it feels like decisions need to be made at Steering Committee meetings we need to make sure they are. For example, we never decided anything about conservation design - a lot of conversation but no end or definitive decision.

Jim commented that everyone does not need to be at the table - we don’t necessarily want to increase the size of the steering committee. We can bring in others as appropriate.

Patty summarized the conversation she had heard and her sense of the committee. She doesn’t see any fatal flaws in the partnership. But committee members should speak up if they have concerns – it is important to feel that we are comfortable where we are going. She also proposed developing a “Beginners Guide” to the North Atlantic LCC for new Steering Committee members.

Curt Griffin commented that from his perspective, he thought the group was doing very well.

Phil noted that landscape conservation is whole “Brave New World” and this has been a great start. He suggests that we increase emphasis on role of LCC to advance conservation on the ground. Science delivery of conservation and support to reinforce existing partnerships would be important. Not just financial support but spotlighting our tools and what we want to achieve.

Jad Daley (Trust for Public Land) summarized – “You’re doing it right .. you’re the gold standard.”

Leadership of LCC was then discussed. Gwen suggested that we consider revising governance, particularly considering if we should have an executive committee. Patty will need to step down as vice chair. Engage more people in leadership of what’s going on with LCC. Patty will stay on until April with expectation that we will have a new structure in place. Ken to work with Patty and others to present a recommendation on a new vice chair and structure at the next meeting.

**12. Update on LCC Network**

LCC Network National Coordinator Elsa Haubold introduced herself described her background in part as a state Fish and Wildlife administrator in Florida and provided updates on efforts to form a National Council, the status of national LCC projects, and the LCC assessment and allocations. She provided handouts on the National Council Charter and list of LCC network projects. She noted that the Council is picking members and will meet for the first time the last week of January. The Northeast Directors discussed selecting a NEAFWA member yesterday. The LCC science coordinators are working on a national science agenda.

**13. LCC and relevant DOI internal Hurricane Sandy Projects and Army Corps of Engineers Comprehensive Study**

Next steps for LCC Hurricane Sandy LCC projects and coordination of DOI and partner Hurricane Sandy science projects Andrew Milliken, Rick Bennett (USFWS), Amanda Babson, Pete Murdoch, Mike Rasser (BOEM), Richard Cole (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).

Rick Bennett concurred with recommendations from Pete Murdoch and Ellen Mecray to coordinate with similar projects led by USGS and NOAA, respectively. It is important that products be additive, not duplicative.

Need to look at LCC capacities and teams and how we can support Hurricane Sandy projects. Ideally partners could evaluate proposals for overlap prior to submitting competitive proposals. We need to collaborate on assessments science and decision making tools for Hurricane Sandy. Rick, Pete, Amanda, Andrew and Ellen will coordinate on a database to facilitate the development of new science proposals that complement or build on the currently approved Hurricane Sandy projects.

Patty raised the question of how should we coordinate with state projects, as there are a lot of state level construction and restoration projects.

Richard Cole described two Corps reports that are being prepared, a their Comprehensive Study and a Nature-based Infrastructure study (natural factors that reduce flood risk). Comments on these would be valued.

Mike Rasser discussed BOEM’s role. Their jurisdiction is federal waters (more than 3 miles offshore) and over sand and gravel, which is used in shoreline restoration. They are investing $11 million in data collection and state proposals.

Andrew led a discussion on the aquatic connectivity project. We need to work with partners to make aquatic connectivity project not yet funded by Department of the Interior Bureau funding happen initially through the LCC project and additionally through competitive funding. John O’Leary would like to see emergency management agencies to be incorporated into the project. Curt Griffin noted that Climate Science Center can help in addressing climate change modeling aspects. John O’Leary note that it is important to think about how to deal with stochastic events.

Arpita Choudbury from AFWA is a good contact. Marty McHugh (National Fish and Wildlife Foundation) noted that information on competitive grants process is posted. How are we doing to monitor these projects going forward and how do we adaptively manage? LCC can play a role.

**14. Review and Approval of Minutes and action items**

The minutes from the Steering Committee Conference call from Thursday, June 27, 2013 were reviewed and unanimously approved. Motion to approve was passed, seconded and approved unanimously. Andrew reviewed the short list of action items from last Steering Committee call and actions taken noting that the letter from the LCC Steering Committee to the National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Conservation Adaptation Strategy was sent.

**15. Selection of new Vice Chair, Other Business, Next Meeting**

Andrew indicated that he would get a summary of action items out to the group within two weeks. Next in-person meeting to be held the Wednesday after the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference in Portland, Maine, April 16, 2014. The need for a call in January or February will be assessed in January. Motion to adjourn was made, seconded and approved.

**Meeting Attendees**

| **Organization** | **Representatives** | **Attend.** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection | Bill Hyatt | Y |
| Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife | Kevin Kalasz | Y |
| Karen Bennett | Phone |
| Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife | Jim Connolly | Y |
| Andrea Erskine | Y |
| Maryland Department of Natural Resources | Gwen Brewer | Y |
| Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife | John O’Leary | Y |
| New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife | Dave Chanda | Y, 11/5 only |
| New York Department of Environmental Conservation | Patricia Riexinger | Y |
| Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission | Diana Day | Phone |
| Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management | Cathy Sparks | Y, 11/5 only |
| Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife | Kim Royar | Y |
| Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries | Becky Gwynn | Y |
| United South and Eastern Tribes  Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians | Sharri Venno | Y |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | Deb Rocque | Y |
| Ken Elowe | Y |
| Rick Bennett | Y |
| Mike Slattery | Y |
| U.S. Geological Survey | Pete Murdoch | Y |
| Department of the Interior Northeast Climate Science Center | Mary Ratnaswamy | Y |
| Rick Palmer | P |
| Curt Griffin | Y |
| National Park Service | Amanda Babson | Y |
| Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement | Mike Rasser | Y |
| National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration | Ellen Mecray | Y |
| Darlene Finch | Phone |
| Laurie McGilvray | Y |
| U.S. Environmental Protection Agency | Tai-ming Chang | Y |
| Ralph Abele | Y |
| Anne Kuhn | Y |
| Environment Canada Canadian Wildlife Service | Doug Bliss | Phone |
| Ducks Unlimited | Bernie Marczyk | Y |
| Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences | Eric Walberg | Y |
| National Wildlife Federation | Chris Hilke | Y |
| The Nature Conservancy | Phillip Huffman | Y |
| Adam Whelchel | Y |
| National Fish and Wildlife Foundation | David O’Neill | Y |
| Marty McHugh | Y |
| New England Wildflower Society | Bill Brumback | Y |
| Trust for Public Land | Jad Daley | Phone |
| Wildlife Management Institute | Scot Williamson | Y |
| Wildlife Conservation Society | Zoe Smith | Y |
| **Staff** |  |  |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | Andrew Milliken | Y |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | David Eisenhauer | Y |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | BJ Richardson | Phone |
| North Atlantic LCC | Scott Schwenk | Y |
| North Atlantic LCC | Steve Fuller | Y |
| North Atlantic LCC | Lori Pelech | Y |
| **Other LCCs** |  |  |
| South Atlantic LCC/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | Ken McDermond | Phone |
| **Guests** |  |  |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | Elsa Haubold | Y |
| U.S. Army Corps of Engineers | Richard Cole | Phone |