**Connecticut River Watershed Landscape Conservation Design Pilot Project**

Wednesday, January 15, 2014

Action Items and Meeting Notes

**Participants (T = on phone)**

Andrew Milliken, Scott Schwenk, Nancy McGarigal, Jeff Horan, Ken Elowe, Andrew French, Ken Sprankle, Dave Perkins, Randy Dettmers, Andrew MacLachlan, Colleen Sculley, David Eisenhauer (T), Barry Parrish (T), Rachel Cliché (T), Jeremy Goetz (T), Mark Maghini (T), John Warner (T), Georgia Basso (T), (*Members missing: Jan Taylor and Mitch Hartley*)

Wendi Weber, Deb Rocque, and Paul Phifer stopped by

Listening in: Stewart Fefer (T) and Michael Slattery (T)

**Action Items**

**For Core Team Members—**

**By January 22, 2014 :**

* Email Nancy McGarigal if you are interested in participating in a smaller group discussion on aquatics resources in the CT River and what information is available to develop objectives. Small group is likely to meet within the next 2 weeks.
* Review list of potential partners (see email attachment from Nancy dated 1/14/2014) and provide feedback to Nancy on whether you propose additions or subtractions, or otherwise have comments on the list.

**By January 31, 2014:**

* Review “LCC Pilot - Team Guidance” and “Responsibilities” documents (see email attachment from Nancy dated 1/10/2014), and provide feedback to Nancy. Please note that the “Team Guidance” document is meant to serve the full core team (FWS and partners) as a framework.
  + ***In particular, we are interested in what success for this project means to you***

**For Ken Elowe—**

* Schedule meetings with State Fish and Wildlife Directors to explain the pilot project and affirm which members of their staff they would like to be on core team.

**For Nancy McGarigal—**

* Refine the project timeline and share updated schedule with core team.
* Revise “Team Guidance” and “Responsibilities” documents based on comments received
* Coordinate outreach to partner core team members
* Schedule the first core team meeting

**For Science Applications—**

* Develop a workspace on North Atlantic LCC website to store information/handouts/etc.
* Develop a paper recommending a process for developing population objectives.

**Meeting Notes**

**Core Team Introductions and Setting the Stage –** Nancy McGarigal, Core Team Leader

* Nancy welcomed everyone to the team and expressed excitement about the collaboration.
* She emphasized the interest this project has generated both inside and outside the agency.
* She discussed how she hoped the team would function, and what guidelines or “givens” we were working under.
* She encouraged feedback on how the meetings go and on the materials prepared to date.

**Purpose and Scope of Pilot Project** (see handout “LCC Pilot – Team Guidance”) – Andrew Milliken

* Not new but a step in an ongoing process of assessments and Biological Planning
* NALCC has been focused on partner building over the last 3 years
* The pilot project is a continuation of Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) and will focus on conservation design and will help build the partnership needed for future conservation delivery.
* Project objectives:
* Demonstrate and test the LCD process using the Connecticut River watershed as a pilot.
* Help partners target specific conservation actions to help conserve ecosystems and the fish, wildlife, and plants that rely on them.
* Take what we learn from this pilot process and apply to other landscapes across the Northeast Region.
* Conservation Delivery is beginning, but this project will focus on Conservation Design
* Geographic scope is the 7.2 million acre Connecticut River watershed in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont which is roughly synonymous with the boundary of Silvio O Conte NWR
* Will explore the conservation aspect of Conservation Design and focus on species and habitats, with less emphasis on cultural resources, recreation and economics
* The project will also focus on Terrestrial and Wetland habitats and species which is the focus of the Designing Sustainable Landscapes (DSL) Project which is a collaboration between NALCC and Kevin McGarigal and his team at UMass.
* We will be incorporating representative species approach
* We need to discuss at length how to focus on or incorporate Aquatic Species and Habitat since aquatic species and habitats are not the focus of the DSL
* The process will be collaborative; we will be working with partners and will be bringing them into the process early.
* The process will be an iterative, learning process.

Q – Dave Perkins – Are we going to be creating our own biological goals and objectives or using objectives that have been previously developed (e.g., BCR population goals)?

A – Andrew Milliken – We will be working with partners with the hopes we can get a consensus on biological objectives that relate what the Connecticut River watershed’s best contributions are to the larger region (e.g., we will be looking at species, habitat capability, and ecological integrity data at both the watershed level and then comparing that to what is occurring at the larger regional scale). We will review/compare what BCR and other previously developed goals there are, but they won’t drive the design process and objective development in the pilot study.

**Expectations for FWS Team Members** (See “FWS Staff Responsibilities” handout) – Ken Elowe

- Reviewed responsibilities handout and discussed expectations.

- Added that participation would potentially include:

* Attending monthly, half-day meetings with the full core team (including partners).
* Possible participation on subgroups (e.g., aquatic species sub-group, species-specific subgroups).
* Reviewing and providing feedback on materials.
* Participating in conference calls.
* Projected time commitment: approximately 25% of time (but this is just an estimate).
* Some members of the core team were concerned about balancing work on the pilot project with other important, time-sensitive, priorities (e.g., FERC relicensing). Others were concerned with how and when they would need to provide input (e.g., how/when are we developing population objectives?).
* The group discussed what “success” would look like.

Q – Colleen Sculley – We are most successful when we accomplish things on the ground and work with our partners. Is the focus only on Conservation Design? Will we be working with partners on the ground (eg Conservation Delivery)?

A – Andrew Milliken – The focus of this project is not Conservation Delivery but will instead work with partners on landscape level Conservation Design that will set up a Conservation Delivery.

A - Ken Elowe – Conservation Delivery, or accomplishments on the ground, will eventually be an outcome but they will likely occur in the next phase of the project.

A – Andrew Milliken – Pilot should result in better Conservation Delivery.

A – Andy French – Partnerships are crucial to us in everything we do. We need to engage the right partners and engage them as early in the process as possible or you will begin to have problems.

A – Jeff Horan – Partnerships are very important and these partners are focused on a more local scale than the ones on the NALCC Steering Committee. When we re-engage with CT River partners we should remind them of the engagement process we started with them on this project back in the fall of 2011 with the DSL Workshops. In the time since that workshop we have been continuing our effort of refining the science (biological planning) and now we are ready to re-engage with them on the Landscape Design phase of this project. Hopefully, the Conservation Delivery phase will follow quickly behind.

**Reflections on Purpose of Pilot Project** – Deb Rocque

* We have been talking about doing landscape scale conservation design with new tools since I got here; important that we move this project forward
* Don’t get “paralyzed”; we can’t be all things to all people
* Don’t worry about the details and getting everything exactly right first – for instance for aquatics, presence and absence data might be just fine.
* I am concerned that we need to quickly show the value of this landscape scale approach to our own programs and to our partners. NALCC is one of the highest functioning LCCs and yet I am not hearing praise internally or among partners for all the great science they have created or work they have done. We need to get the tools on the ground.

Andrew Milliken – This is a Multi-scale endeavor. CT River is analogous to an ecosystem scale similar to the northern forest. We will need to define very specific goals and objectives within this landscape.

**NALCC Technical Components** (See “CT River Pilot –Technical Inputs” handout) – Scott Schwenk

* Landscape scale conservation design requires regionally consistent data layers
* What are we designing conservation for? Species and Ecosystems
* DSL Model (McGarigal, UMass) will be major part of conservation approach
* Model Surrogate Species – 30 surrogate species models are in development
* Include state SWAP Synthesis data on 500 high priority species
* DSL also includes a landscape level Ecological Integrity approach
* TNC’s Terrestrial Resiliency (Conserving the Stage approach) will also be used
* Create Core Network Areas using: 1) Surrogate species; 2) Unrepresented species (SWAP Syn.); 3) Ecological Integrity and Resilience

Q – Ken Sprankle – I am concerned there is not a focus on aquatic species and habitat in a geography that is dominated by an aquatic feature – the CT River. In the CT River Basin we have rich fish migration data going back to 1967. In the psst our focus has been Atlantic Salmon – but no more. We do not however have good aquatic habitat data. Major concern that the suite of anadromous fish in the CT River including; salmon, shad, herring, sturgeon and American eel are all at historic lows and all represent species of greatest conservation need. It is also crucial to engage our state and NGO aquatic partners. FWS Fisheries staff are currently engaged with partners on a major FERC Licensing process that will govern conservation of aquatic species over the next 40 years and beyond. This FERC Licensing effort is currently a FWS Fisheries priority and could significantly hinder my ability and the ability of many key partners to participate in this pilot project in a timely way.

A – Andrew M and Ken Elowe– Although we do not have habitat modeling capabilities for the aquatic habitats like we do for the terrestrial habitats, we do have a lot of fisheries/aquatic data (e.g., lists of priorities, information on populations and their needs and threats) that we can incorporate. Not everything included in the LCD will need to be a model. We will also create an aquatic subgroup to continue this discussion (see action item).

A – Andy French – There is lots of interest in the Aquatics side of this project. One real benefit to this project could be in addressing these aquatic issues with partners.

Q – John Warner – Will we be expected to produce or assist with development of aquatic species populations models for this project and how quickly will these be needed?

A – Andrew Milliken – We will likely not have time to develop new models for this phase of this project. We will need your help in determining an aquatic approach.

Q –?? – How are we going to develop population models for species in such a limited timeframe?

A – Andrew M and Scott S – We will do the best we can with available data. We will also continue this discussion at future meetings. Science Applications will develop a paper recommending a process for developing population objectives given the tools we have.

**CT River Pilot Core Team Commitment** – Wendi Weber

* It will be very important to have all of the FWS programs engaged in this pilot project.
* It will also be very important to engage the right partners.
* The estimate of a 25% time commitment for each of the FWS Core Team members was just an estimate. However, it will be important to have significant commitments from each of the programs. You should talk to your Supervisor and ARD about this.

**Partners and the Core Team** (see “Potential Core team” handout) – Nancy McGarigal

**-** The group discussed the potential partners list shared as a handout. Some suggested possible other partners to include on either the core team or extended team:

* Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission.
* Connecticut River Joint Commission.
* Regional/local planners; conservation commissions; local land trusts.

Q– ?? – What do we want partners to do, and what do we want them to bring to the table? Also, when should we get them involved? If we get them involved early, they will likely have more buy-in and feel more ownership in the process.

Q – Colleen – Are we only focused on having partners with “biological” expertise? What about regional planning associations, local land trusts, conservation commissions?

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A– Ken Elowe – We want to engage partners in setting objectives and priorities. However, we also have a need to move the project along. We need to think carefully about bringing in a manageable number of partners who will be committed to working with us to move forward. We should be focused on partners who have responsibility, authority, and a primary interest in, and motivation for, managing resources in the watershed.

**Communications** (see Core Team Communications” handout) – David Eisenhauer

* David Eisenhauer discussed 2 handouts he prepared which
* highlight how the core team will serve as lead messengers for communicating both inside and outside the agency
* Some key communications products and actions that are proposed
* Communications and information exchanges about the pilot project between the core team, vs extended team, vs general audiences
* **Wrap-up and Action Items (see above)** – Nancy McGarigal
* Provide review and provide comments on documents and approach provided.
* Make recommendations on partners and Core Team members.
* Think more about what success looks like to you, your program and partners
* Schedule a separate discussion with a sub-set of the group to discuss aquatic approach.