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Land Conservation in the Presumpscot River Watershed: Vision, Values & Priorities, Appendix A, Project Context: Process, Organization, Landscape, Stakeholders, & Lessons Learned

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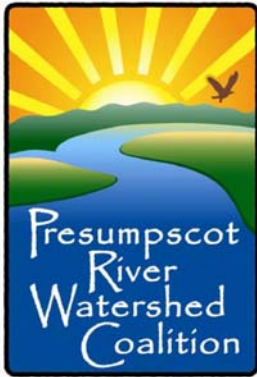
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Land Conservation in the Presumpscot River Watershed: Vision, Values and Priorities

APPENDIX A:

Project Context: Process, Organization, Landscape, Stakeholders, & Lessons Learned

Compiled by Matt Craig, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership. January 2014.

I. Process and organization

Why develop shared Vision, Values, and Priorities for Land Conservation in the Presumpscot River Watershed?

The Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition (PRWC) formed in 2004, following a three year plan development process, to implement the goals and objectives outlined in the Presumpscot River Management Plan ('Plan')¹. Among other high priority action items, the Plan identified the need to prioritize land conservation efforts. However, limited resources during that process led participants to focus on identifying land conservation priorities immediately adjacent to the Presumpscot's main stem. Over time, it became increasingly clear that the initial conservation vision needed to be extended in order to incorporate conservation goals across the watershed and integrate a broader range of conservation priorities.

In February 2009, PRWC identified the need to expand upon the Plan in order to develop a shared vision for land conservation in the 205 mile² watershed area. PRWC convened an initial meeting with representatives of land conservation organizations, municipalities, and the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP), which led to creation of a working group that identified next steps and initiated efforts to raise funds and gather commitments for participation from stakeholders. The goals of the project were to create a common conservation vision, with supporting values and priorities, and to foster collaborative approaches to conservation, leading to greater success identifying and protecting high-value habitat, culturally significant areas, and agricultural lands.

Now complete, this vision – *Land Conservation in the Presumpscot River Watershed: Vision, Values, & Priorities* - provides a blueprint or roadmap supporting a locally meaningful Quality of Place for generations to come. The vision empowers a pro-active approach to land conservation and provides common ground for protecting large tracts of land that cross service area and/or municipal boundaries or that serve multiple interests and constituencies. Organizations are able to leverage this regional alignment to attract funding, supporters, and volunteers. The project also strengthened ties among land

¹ Online at <http://www.presumpscotcoalition.org/plan.html>.

trusts, municipal conservation commissions, state agencies, and other stakeholders in land conservation.

Quality of Place

This project touches upon two specific recommendations from the Governor’s Council on Maine’s Quality of Place regarding regional landscape conservation². First, *this project recognizes and supports the crucial role of private landowners in protecting Maine’s quality of place*. A primary goal of the project was to develop a vision that supports conservation of open space, environmental, recreational, and cultural resources on private land in collaboration with private land owners. Numerous land conservation efforts in the watershed have been driven by land trusts and conservation commissions working side by side with private landowners. Such efforts have generally received broad public support. Development of a shared vision for land conservation – and communication of that vision to the community at large – creates the opportunity for landowners to see the value of private conservation in a larger context. It also helps land conservation organizations think creatively about ways to partner with private land owners to achieve shared goals.

Second, *this project recognizes, incentivizes, and rewards regional landscape conservation*. The project takes a regional perspective, and did so from the very beginning. By convening a regional conversation on conservation priorities, PRWC and other stakeholders recognized the need to step outside conventional local political boundaries to identify and preserve broader ecological and cultural landscapes. As a result, a more inclusive understanding of what Quality of Place means has been articulated as compared to what local entities would likely develop on their own.

This project *strengthens the link between the natural and built environments* by articulating how natural and built environments together generate the unique Quality of Place that characterizes the region. For example, municipally-designated growth zones, which are tracked and updated by the State, were integrated into mapping and prioritization from the beginning. The final report and other products also enhance Quality of Place with an integrated land conservation vision that identifies conservation values across both the natural and built environments, through a cultural lens. The Presumpscot’s rich cultural resources range from ancient native villages founded on abundant salmon runs to the Cumberland and Oxford Canal. Such resources provide opportunities to preserve and promote the natural and built environments simultaneously. Significant cultural resources such as industrial mills and dams serve as direct linkages between human and aquatic ecological communities. Today they form the backbone of a built environment that embodies the Presumpscot’s industrial past. At the same time, the river’s industrial heritage provides a unique opportunity to protect land along the river, which remains undeveloped largely because of past residents’ desire to avoid the pollution and fumes associated with past uses.

² See *Charting Maine’s Future*, aka, “The Brookings Report” at <http://growsmartmaine.org/brookings-report>.

Potential Impact

CBEP and PRWC believe that approaching land conservation on a watershed basis is the best way to serve both the human and ecological communities that rely on the watershed. Maine-based research studies suggest that the ability of Maine's streams to support aquatic communities becomes degraded when impervious surface exceeds 6-10% of the watershed³. There is a direct correlation between the character of a landscape and the health of the aquatic ecosystems within it. Similar relationships link landscape structure to terrestrial biodiversity, human health, natural resource-based industries, agriculture, and community wellbeing.

By bringing together conservation stakeholders, providing them with relevant information and using consensus decision-making, this project produced an integrated vision for land conservation rooted in a regionally defined sense of place. This shared vision enables increased effectiveness for existing conservation efforts, and generates novel partnerships to garner resources and raise funds. The effort complements conservation and planning work of land trusts, local government and other stakeholders.

A Transferrable Model

Despite more than a decade's worth of academic writing on ecosystem based management and community based conservation that highlights the importance of community involvement in conservation planning, broadly based efforts to develop community-wide visions for land conservation priorities are unusual. This project represents one of the first large-scale efforts in the region to take a watershed approach to land conservation combined with a consensus-based, collaborative, stakeholder-driven visioning process.

While the project was novel in scope, it built upon and drew inspiration – and technical support – from prior efforts. The Maine Land Trust Network has worked to coordinate land conservation efforts on a regional scale for years. The Portland North Land Trust Collaborative (PNLTC)⁴ undertook conservation planning for the shared service area of its three member land trusts. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) applied their “Greenprinting” process to facilitate public development of regional conservation priorities in the Bangor area. The Center for Community GIS (CCGIS) demonstrated the value of nimble application of GIS to facilitate public discussion of conservation priorities, most recently in support of the PNLTC and TPL planning efforts.

Representatives of all these organizations attended initial scoping meetings. Lessons learned in prior efforts were incorporated into this project's process, which became known as the “grassroots” approach.

³ For more information, see *Measuring the Impact of Development on Maine Surface Waters at:* <http://umaine.edu/mitchellcenter/files/2012/06/Stream-Digest.pdf>

⁴ In 2011, PNLTC became the Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative.

Convening Entity: The Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition

PRWC is a partnership of individuals, organizations, and agencies collaborating to restore and protect the Presumpscot River watershed. PRWC works to realize the greatest good for the human and ecological communities that share the river's resources by cooperating on various projects to realize the goals set forth in the Presumpscot River Management Plan. The Plan has three focus areas: restoring fisheries, mitigating and reducing cumulative impacts, and *improving and preserving open space*. PRWC meets every other month to discuss projects, upcoming events, and important issues. Smaller committees meet more frequently to work on specific projects. PRWC members include: Maine Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, CBEP, Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District, Cumberland Mainland and Island Trust, Friends of Casco Bay, Friends of the Presumpscot River, Maine Audubon, Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative, SAPPI, Portland Trails, Portland Regional Land Trust, Presumpscot River Watch, Windham Land Trust, City of Westbrook, Town of Cumberland, Town of Falmouth, Town of Gorham, and the Town of Windham⁵. PRWC served as the convening entity for the *Presumpscot Land Conservation: Vision, Values, and Priorities* project, by incubating and facilitating initial discussions among interested stakeholders, drafting a project, and collaborating with CBEP staff on developing an initial grant proposal to the Environmental Funders Network.

Organizational Model

The process approach was developed from scratch, and evolved with each new phase. As such, the process was 'grassroots' in nature, with a considerable amount of improvisation and circling back to reexamine and redefine roles, goals, and desired outputs.

The organizational model evolved through three phases. The first phase was a version of the 'status quo' – in other words, the current collaborative, consensus-based working model of PRWC. A PRWC subcommittee met over the first few months and worked, with limited success, to map a path forward. Since PRWC is volunteer led and lacks designated staff, between meeting work fell to the people sitting around the table. Not surprisingly, that core group soon became taxed and began to dwindle. PRWC lacked the capacity to proceed without help. So, with funding from the Environmental Funders Network, CBEP hired an external facilitator from the Institute for Civic Leadership (ICL) to work with PRWC on organizing and focusing meetings, defining the organizational structure, and establishing a process model (Figure 1). This second phase, which lasted for nearly a year, focused almost exclusively on process work. While this emphasis was insightful and produced important shared understanding, it did not incorporate the existing relationships and roles within PRWC. Stakeholders expressed a sense of being bogged down by the emphasis on process, and frustration with the lack of progress on project implementation.

⁵ Additional information is available at www.presumpscotcoalition.org.

The Big Picture: Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition

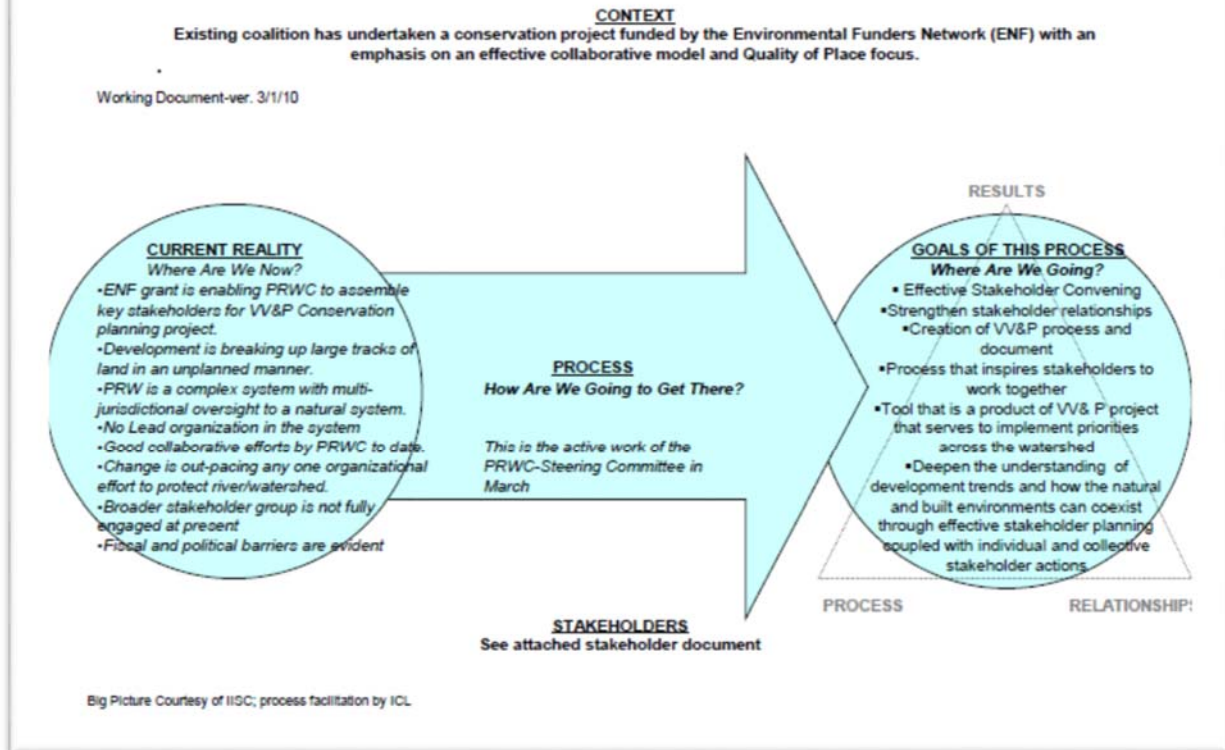


Figure 1. Working draft, situational assessment. P. Mentag, ICL.

Recognizing that overarching project objectives were increasingly jeopardized by stakeholder burnout, PRWC leaders again reorganized in order to incorporate and build upon PRWC’s existing robust collaboration and to emphasize progress toward overarching project goals. The facilitator position was dissolved and a new project coordination role was established. The Project Coordinator, Vanessa Levesque, reported to CBEP and was responsible for day-to-day staffing work ranging from process mapping to outreach, research, logistics, coordination, and facilitation. At this time, the Center for Community GIS was fully engaged, providing GIS mapping and analytical services while also informing overarching process. Vanessa, Matt Craig of CBEP, and Stephen Engle of CCGIS formed the ‘Project Team’, responsible for implementing process, visioning, data collection, and mapping work on a day-to-day basis. A Steering Committee of core PRWC land conservation stakeholders was established, and met monthly, or as needed, to provide guidance to the Project Team at key junctions. The broad stakeholder group met twice per year, and provided the core input on conservation values, conservation priorities, outputs and outcomes, and future direction used by the Project Team to prepare maps and the content of the final report. This third and final organizational model proved to be the most streamlined and productive, and carried the project to completion, allowing for needed flexibility to engage a broad group of stakeholders, with varying capacity and knowledge levels.

Stakeholder Mapping, Narrowing, and Engagement

Initial stakeholder mapping exercises were led by ICL (Figure 2) and helped organize thinking around *who* within the Presumpscot community should be engaged as a stakeholder.

Refinements on *how* to engage stakeholders were subsequently envisioned by the Project Team as a tiered approach, based on sphere of influence to affect implementation, as well as relative interest in and commitment to land conservation.

The first tier of stakeholders was defined to include land conservation practitioners - primarily land trust staff and board members, and municipal conservation commissions and staff/planners. The second tier included resource providers – NGOs, agencies, and other entities that could provide data and expertise for development of conservation values and priorities. The third stakeholder tier was defined as the interested public, including so-called ‘non-traditional voices’. Strategically engaging stakeholders through a tiered approach proved to be more flexible than a completely open stakeholder process, and allowed for the Project Team to tailor process to the specific needs, knowledge, and interests of each group.

Engaging stakeholders at a local community level, and identifying local conservation values and priorities, proved to be a significant challenge. Eleven municipalities together comprise the watershed landscape, and engaging each community in a consistent and balanced way proved to be difficult, if not impossible. After repeated attempts to invite representatives of each watershed community into the process, we acknowledged that expecting single individuals to represent the views of entire communities was not realistic. Consequently, we shifted our approach to incorporating local priorities, and determined that a more objective, fair, and balanced approach would be to systematically assess municipal planning documents, such as comprehensive plans and open space plans, to learn what communities formally articulated as conservation values and priorities in official documents.

II. Identification of core conservation values

Stakeholders articulated qualitative elements of a conservation vision, values, and priorities at the first full stakeholder meeting in June 2010. These were used to inform data collection efforts for developing conservation values maps. The following is drawn from the meeting summary prepared by R. Schaffner, Greater Portland Council of Governments.

Participants were divided into 6 breakout groups. Each small group was facilitated by a member of the PRWC Steering Committee. During the small group session participants were invited to brainstorm 6 questions: (1) What inspires you to conserve land in the Presumpscot River Watershed?; (2) What are the most important landscape elements that need to be protected in the watershed?; (3) What

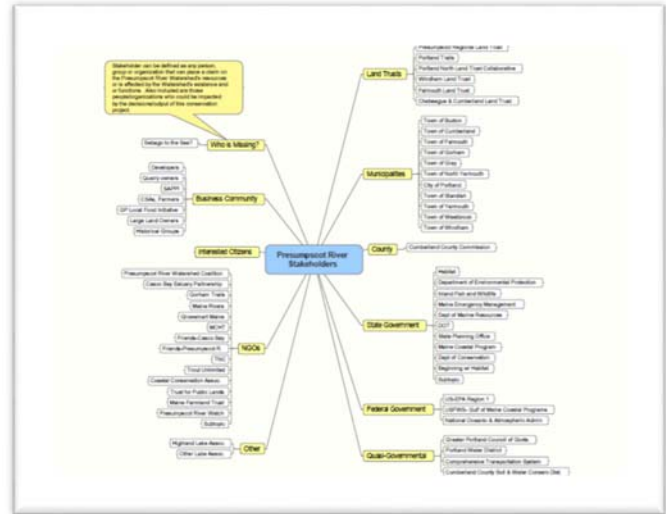


Figure 2. Working draft stakeholder map that informed a 'tiered' approach to engagement. P. Mentag, ICL.

potential land conservation goals do you feel deserve consideration as this project advances?; (4) What current and future trends need to be considered?; (5) Given a collaborative approach as promoted by this initiative, what are the biggest opportunities that may emerge as a result of an engaged stakeholder group?; and, (6) What other land conservation planning or activity is underway in the watershed that overlaps with the aims of this initiative? Facilitators recorded the brainstormed ideas on flipcharts. The facilitators then went through the brainstormed lists and had participants indicate by showing of hands their top three priorities within each brainstorm.

The brainstorming exercises were intended to produce a list of components that will lead to a shared vision statement for the Presumpscot River Watershed, as well as a list of components that will lead to a set of values for the Watershed.

Reporting: A summary of “like ideas” was prepared based on each group’s brainstormed questions. The “like ideas” were grouped by those associated with a vision, those associated with values, and those associated with land conservation priorities. Following is a summary of the like ideas are the ideas recorded on flipcharts from the breakout groups. The raw data was listed by each group (1-6), as it was recorded. Groups used different methods for recording priorities within the brainstorms.

What inspires us to conserve?

Vision would include:

- *Development of a land ethic that includes creating a legacy for future generations*
- *Raising awareness regarding the river and connecting people to the land*
- *Seeking a balance between the built environment and nature that emphasizes the river’s economic impact in terms of viable uses and recreation*
- *Recognizing the river’s impact on the bay and its environment and preserving and strengthening its native and natural communities*

Values would include:

- *The need for a healthy watershed and ecosystem*
- *The river’s role culturally both historically and for future generations*
- *Access to local recreational opportunities*
- *The river’s role in the economy and the need for sustainable development within the watershed*

Priorities would include:

- *Areas of wildlife and aquatic habitat*
- *Large undeveloped blocks of land the corridors that connect them*
- *Recreational areas, access to recreational areas and trails*
- *Areas of active farmland*

What are the most important landscape elements that need to be protected in the watershed?

Vision would include:

- *Preservation of historic spaces that contribute to the sense of place embodied by the developed areas of the watershed*

Values would include:

- *Clean, safe water to support habitat and drinking water supplies*
- *The need for, and access to, open space, forests, riparian areas, agricultural resources, scenic viewsheds, recreational areas and wetlands*

Priorities would include:

- *Lands around water bodies including unprotected 1st order streams and tributaries*
- *Locations – historic and recreational – that resonate with the public*
- *Open space, specifically, rare and threatened species/communities, forest blocks, working farms, view sheds, recreational areas and access to recreational areas*

What potential land conservation goals deserve consideration as this project advances?

Vision would include:

- *Conservation of X% of the undeveloped lands within the watershed*
- *To maintain the undeveloped character of the watershed*
- *Sustainable and smart growth oriented development within the watershed*
- *Diverse recreational opportunities with adequate access*
- *To promote stewardship of the watershed*
- *Improved and restored fisheries*

Values would include:

- *An emphasis on ecosystem preservation*
- *A need for tools to assist with sustainable, smart growth oriented development*

Priorities would include:

- *Identification of large, undeveloped blocks of land*

What current and future trends need to be considered?

Vision would include:

- *Increase environmental literacy and support for stakeholders' efforts*

Values would include:

- *Trends in alternative energies and the role and benefits of the watershed in regard to these*
- *Trends in children's health and the role the watershed can play in improving health*
- *Trails and recreational opportunities within the watershed and their ability to connect communities and provide alternative transportation choices*
- *The need to identify and share knowledge about global warming and climate change trends and their effects on the watershed*
- *The need to understand development trends and alternatives and how they affect the watershed and communities (choice, affordability)*
- *Trends in demand for local food and associated land conservation opportunities*

What are the biggest opportunities that may emerge as a result of an engaged stakeholder group?

Vision would include:


- *Collaboration among stakeholders leading to the successful: sharing of resources, widespread agreement on conservation priorities, a collective voice, and increased ability to compete for funding*
- *Development of a watershed wide land conservation plan (as opposed to one adhering to political or other jurisdictional boundaries) based on agreed upon values and priorities*

Values would include:

- *The opportunity to engage and further educate the public increasing watershed awareness and support*

The information collected at the June 2010 stakeholder meeting provided the raw elements from which mapping data was targeted. CCGIS collected available data sets, and developed new data sets as funds permitted, which were incorporated into GIS maps. A subsequent CCGIS memo, fall 2010, summarized mapping data sets:

GIS DATA LAYERS FOR VVP

 **CENTER FOR
COMMUNITY GIS**

Partner: Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition

Project: Conservation VVP

Dates: 19 October 2010

The following list of GIS layers was generated to help inform and guide thinking about conservation vision, values, and priorities in the watershed. Individual data layers were selected because: **(a)** they reflect current values articulated by stakeholders and steering committee members, and **(b)** exist in a readily available, digital format to allow for timely mapping.

Water Quality/Resources

- Wetlands
- Sand and gravel aquifers
- Public water supply sources (intakes/wells)
- Recharge areas predicted to be important for public water sources
- Surface water sources predicted to be important for public water sources
- Riparian corridors/buffers
- Percentages of riparian buffers that are forested (summarized by watershed)
- Groundwater threats
- (Sub-)Watershed boundaries, streams, lakes, ponds
- Lake transparency/clarity
- Dams and barriers (partial)

Habitat Values/Habitat/Ecosystem Integrity

- Undeveloped habitat blocks (>500 contiguous acres)
- Critical wildlife corridors predicted to exist between habitat blocks
- Inland waterfowl and wading bird habitat
- Tidal waterfowl and wading habitat
- Migratory shorebird feeding/roosting areas
- Essential, threatened or special concern habitats by species (e.g., eastern box turtle)
- Rare wildlife species, rare plants observations
- Deer wintering areas
- Modeled habitat values (multiple data sources – USFWS, TNC)

Land Use/Land Cover/Soils

- Impervious surfaces (summarized by watershed)
- Forest cover and composition (from satellite imagery)
- Agriculture lands (from satellite imagery)
- Soils (prime farmland, soils of statewide significance)

Open Space/Conserved Lands/Recreational Assets/Cultural Assets

- Conserved lands/Open space (4 sources)
- State maintained boat launches
- Trails (partial)
- Documented archaeological sites

Related data layers were grouped into conservation values maps as follows:

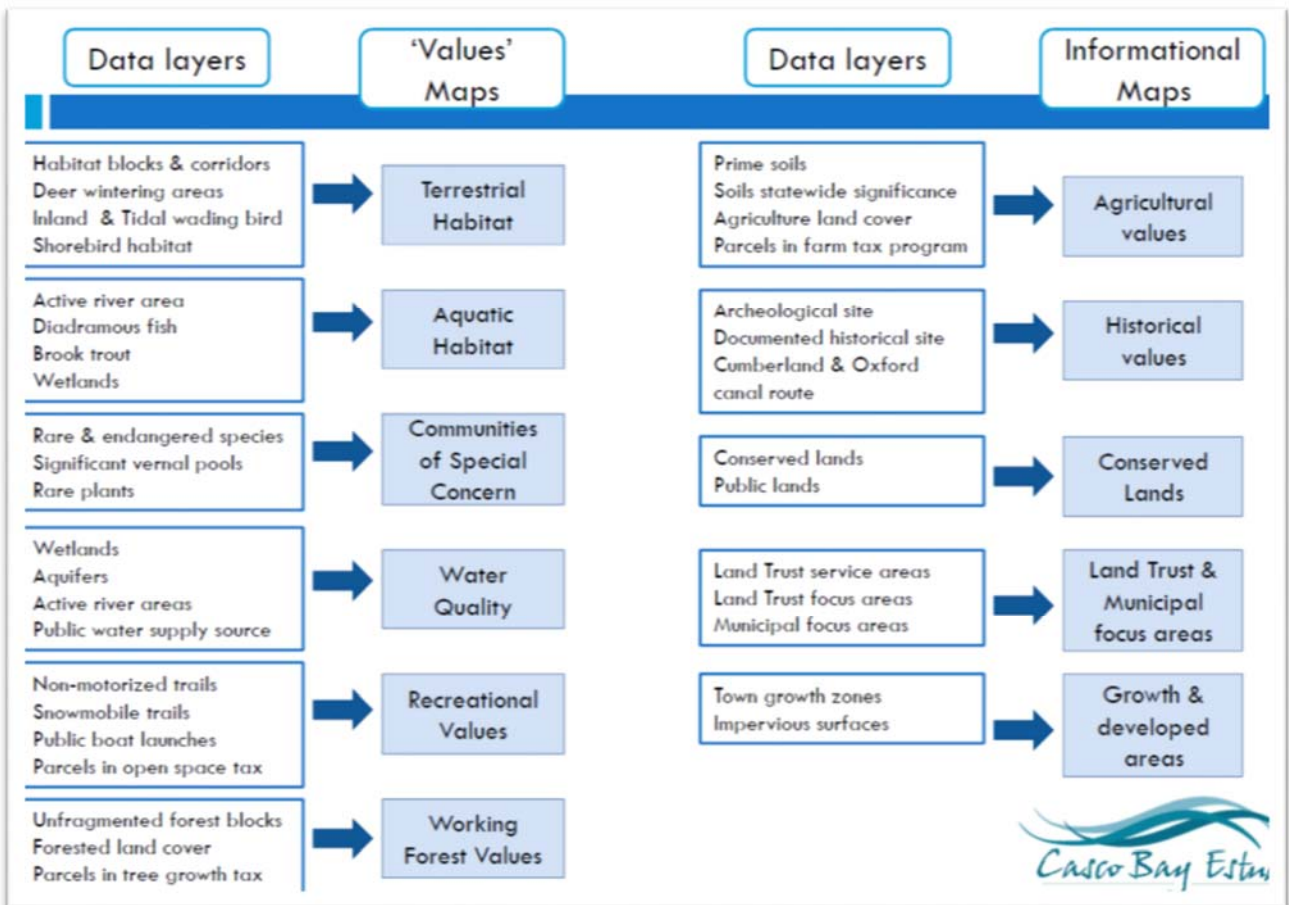


Figure 3.

III. Learning

CBEP and PRWC participated in numerous Environmental Funders Network (EFN) evaluations during the course of three years of EFN grant funding. Evaluations were qualitative and narrative in nature, and referenced a logic model (Figure 4) developed in conjunction with Kathryn Hunt of Starboard Leadership Consulting for EFN. Evaluations documented changes in project organization and process, as well as successes and challenges that were encountered. These self-evaluations serve as useful documentation of learning, which may be useful to others, about what worked and what didn't. This section compiles information about our collective lessons learned.

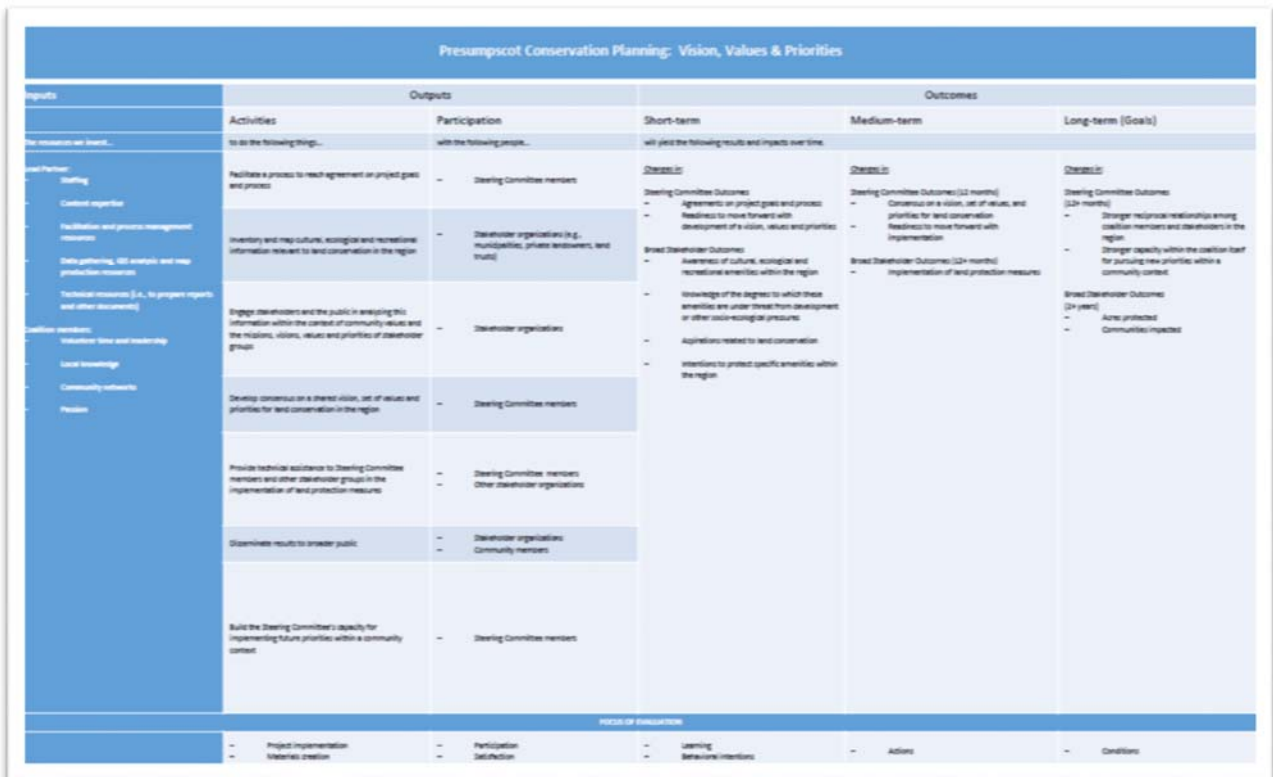


Figure 4. Logic model for the Presumpscot Land Conservation: Vision, Values, & Priorities project.

Data availability

As the project advanced, we became increasingly aware of limitations on data availability, particularly those associated with discussing land conservation. Several entities – often public agencies - that hold useful GIS data sets on farms, off-road vehicle trails, and other resources were either unwilling to share data, or significantly restricted data applications and sharing, despite assurances that they were to be used for planning purposes only, and in most cases would ultimately benefit resource users. Sensitive data sets that were accessed were typically buffered or shown at a broad enough scale to protect against threats to endangered species, historically significant sites, conserved lands without public access, and other interests. These restrictions in some cases limit the utility of data at finer, more localized scales.

Sensitivities of conservation prioritization

Sharing land conservation priorities was another area of concern for some stakeholders. Bringing previously developed land trust and/or municipal land conservation focus area information into this regional project needed to be handled in a sensitive and thoughtful way. The prospect of ‘rolling out’ focus areas to the general public raised concerns among some land trust participants, specifically related to a general reluctance to share existing land trust conservation priorities, citing past experience with private property concerns and sensitivities about creating ‘demand’ for land, thereby possibly increasing acquisition cost. On the flip side, other stakeholders expressed an experience that for many landowners, when they discover a property has been identified as having high conservation value, they respond positively and are more likely to express interest in land protection. In response, we decided that this initiative would not be parcel-based and would not identify or target particular parcels for conservation. This decision helped quell the anxieties of concerned land trusts. We decided that any parcel-level identification, maps or decisions would be made by individual land trusts.

Stakeholder participation

Care must be taken to ensure that a balance is kept in the representation and participation of the organizations represented in a collaborative project. Organizations and municipalities in the watershed range broadly in their staff and financial capacity, population, and consequently, in their available resources to embrace this effort. However, true consensus requires balanced representation and participation. Tailoring an approach that fit the unique needs of each community was sometimes necessary.

‘Grassroots approach’

There are significant cost implications, both financial and temporal, between starting a process like this from scratch – the ‘grassroots approach’ (slower, more buy in) vs. using an existing model (faster, but allowing for less flexibility and control, and in some cases, resulting in less ownership of final outcomes). Throughout this project there was an underlying and sometimes frustrating tension between whether to pre-define project outcomes or adapt as we went along. Generally, we continually adapted, which provided needed flexibility, but also confused stakeholders who were intermittently engaged. The ‘grassroots approach’ also forced us to spend a significant amount of time on defining a working process model, which led to burn out and frustration. Process is important, but not what attracts participants, so balancing process construction is key.

Pros and cons of a collaborative approach

The pace of our project was far slower than we envisioned early on, in part due to the insistence of project visionaries that we methodically construct a collaborative group from the bottom up. Although at times this approach has proven to be exhausting, it also paid off. Collaboration is time intensive, especially working with volunteers. Meshing the schedules of professionals and volunteers is a challenge. Coalition development inevitably takes a lot of time – to build relationships, trust, consensus and shared ownership for the process and its outcomes. Bringing on a facilitator to assist the coalition was key, but even with outstanding facilitation and dedicated/capable leadership, this type of work – inherently – is “one step forward/two steps back.”

Because this project was consensus driven, it was hard to specify future outcomes (even in grant proposals to EFN). While avoiding the temptation to dictate outcomes is important to the integrity of

the process, the lack of defined outcomes presents a challenge in that some stakeholders (potential new collaborators and unlikely partners) wanted to know what's going to result from the work of the PRWC before committing to the process. Managing this dynamic tension ("staying true to the process" versus "focusing on short-term wins") was key to maintaining momentum and the involvement of a wide array of stakeholders.

There is a tension around the need to pre-define project outcomes and the need to develop those outcomes collaboratively with stakeholders. The collaborative structure of this project, with a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from land trusts, non-governmental organizations, and municipalities, demonstrated evident strengths and weaknesses. Collaboration takes time. After a year of working on this project, we sat in a far better position to understand how to take full advantage of the strengths while avoiding or minimizing the weaknesses.

One of the most important insights gleaned from this learning process is that there is a strong need for one organization to serve in a leadership capacity within a collaborative structure. Although the Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition is the convening entity, PRWC itself does not have any staff. The need for leadership became particularly evident in the weeks leading up to, and following, the first full stakeholder event.

Dedicated staff was needed to be effective outside of committee meetings. To maintain momentum, it was critical to find a balance between building a solid foundation for the collaborative process and progressing toward project implementation. Establishing clear collaborative guidelines was important, however it was not what brought interested parties together, so achieving a balance between an effective process and visible progress on project goals was critical to maintaining high levels of engagement.

Between the 12 municipalities, 5 local land trusts, state agencies, NGOs, regional and/or national land trusts, as well as the numerous individuals working within each of these organizations, multiple continuums of knowledge, capacity, resources, populations, and collaborative experiences were represented by the diversity of stakeholders engaged in the project. Convening these individuals in a way that is perceived as safe, relaxed, and confidential provided continuous opportunities for shared learning about a broad range of concepts, from rural vs. urban vs. suburban issues in land conservation, to the nuts and bolts of collaboration, to lessons learned about private property concerns and sharing sensitive information.

A long term goal for this project was to strengthen relationships between land conservation leaders in the watershed, and this is clearly happening in a way that is hard to measure. In many cases, we are finding that these relationships, for example between long time land trust board members with neighboring service areas, have surprisingly never existed. Individuals express excitement for the opportunity to meet their peers across political or organizational boundaries. We learned from one other and established relationships at a natural pace. There are clearly opportunities to increase collaboration beyond the goals of this project, for instance to build stronger capacity across the conservation partner stakeholder group as a whole. Ideas about how to do so emerged in our discussions, and there are hints of the possibilities of regional collaboration, some of which are manifesting in new collaborative organizations such as the Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative.

We hope to be able to continue to provide a forum for nurturing and cultivating these opportunities as the Vision, Values & Priorities project transitions to implementation.

Limits of GIS

Maps are never perfect, and data sets are never complete. Without fail, at each stakeholder meeting, or otherwise, whenever maps were updated or revised, participants pointed to inaccuracies or incomplete data sets on the maps. Although this is impossible to avoid, we found that establishing expectations about GIS data, and setting boundaries for what would/would not be possible, was helpful. Ultimately, although it slowed overall progress and resulted in an over-emphasis on details, the Project Team tended to work to accommodate any stakeholder concerns related to the maps, so that they were as current as possible.

Not a 'plan'

Stakeholders were divided about whether this effort constituted a report – in other words, a summary of work and accomplishments - or a plan, with intentional strategies, action items, and responsible parties. Although some stakeholders chafed at calling the final product a plan, in fact it is a hybrid between a report of work, and a visual plan for prioritizing land conservation in the watershed. This compromise was partially needed due to a lack of funding resources to make a more formal transition into a strategic planning document. Similarly, a challenge was to work within the confines of the project objectives, which did not include establishing strategic recommendations for advancing conservation within priority areas. While the project calls for creating vision, values and priorities and completing a situation analysis, it does not call for action plan development.

Successes

There is now a land conservation plan for the lower Presumpscot River Watershed. Prior to this project, there had been only minimal land conservation planning at the regional level, looking at undeveloped shoreline immediately along the main stem of the river. Today, we have detailed information about high value habitat, working lands, and recreational values that are meaningful not just at the watershed scale, but perhaps more importantly, also meaningful at a localized scale – both in terms of subwatersheds/ tributaries, as well as municipalities and village areas.

Energy and interest in strategically protecting land in the watershed is being driven by local people, local values, local priorities, and in some cases, local data. In the past, conservation planning around the Presumpscot River was being driven by the federal government (through EPA efforts to focus land protection along the main stem), by the State (through the effective *Beginning With Habitat* program), and by piece-meal efforts by local land trusts.

Neighboring land trusts know each other, and are talking to each other, about how they can work together on specific land protection projects. Today, it is not just the land trust staff that are talking to each other and the towns, but board members and community members. This project has created a forum for that dialogue to be seeded and cultivated.

The project expanded the sense and knowledge of place – the lower Presumpscot River Watershed – particularly among stakeholders. Today, we have a vastly greater knowledge of the high value habitats,

important community assets, and conservation priorities. For example, for the first time we have a map showing all of the recreational trails in the region in one place, at a regional scale. This type of growth in knowledge allows for regional thinking and regional planning in a way that wasn't possible with fragmented data and maps.

We have not conducted any structured evaluation to measure changes in attitude, perception, or behavior that resulted from this project. Anecdotally, we have seen significant changes that lead us to believe that the effort has affected quality of place. Coming into this project, each land trust and municipality was very familiar with local conservation values, places that were special to communities, and hot-spots for local activities. This was reflected in the nature of our discussions at stakeholder meetings, which were focused often on specific places that were familiar to participants. As the initiative progressed, and we developed and stitched together multiple data sets from across the region, stakeholders began to look and think outside the boundaries of their own community or organization, to recognize important regional assets that are meaning for quality of place. Later in the process, we often saw this recognition reflected in conversations, which were truly focused on the watershed scale.

Ongoing challenges

An important challenge that remains a work in progress as the project is completed is making the transition from planning to implementation. Each land trust, to varying degrees, has its own priorities both in terms of geography and conservation values. While part of the value of this project lies in the exchange and expression of those values at a watershed scale, additional work will be needed to ensure the transition from planning to on-the-ground protection of high-value properties is meaningful. From a systems perspective, we envision the need to envision means of incentivizing implementation of project outcomes, and cultivating collaborative approaches to implementation of the conservation priorities.

Another challenge during the course of the project, which continues, is the constant change which occurs within the land trust community itself. Inevitably, participating organizations will experience turnover in board and staff leadership, and organizations themselves may evolve or dissolve over time.