

# ***Transferring Conservation Science in New Hampshire's Coastal Watershed: A Sustainability Plan***

## **Purpose and Intended Audience**

The purpose of this document is to summarize how work related to the NERRS Science Collaborative funded project “Transferring Conservation Science in New Hampshire's Coastal Watershed” can continue or be leveraged to advance coastal land protection in New Hampshire and Maine. This sustainability plan was created by and for project team members to evaluate science transfer activities that should continue, prioritize next steps, and consider ways the work can continue with and without additional funding. For additional details and background on the project, see:

[Link](#) to full proposal

[Link](#) to year-one progress reports

[Link](#) to project final report

## **What we did, what we learned, and what we think we should do next**

### **Needs Assessment**

*What we did:* The project's Outreach Team successfully developed and deployed an online needs assessment that was vetted with the project Advisory Committee and the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, and beta tested by a mix of conservation volunteers and professionals. Once the survey was launched, sixty-two respondents completed the needs assessment. The [Needs Assessment Report](#) summarizes the results of the assessment. In addition to the survey, a focus group of conservation funders was assembled to assess their needs to advance funding for coastal watershed land protection.

*What we learned:* The needs assessment effectively shaped the outreach strategy (website, introductory webinars, technical assistance) and was well worth the time and effort that went into it. Beta testing the survey first was useful and sharing the needs assessment results with the Advisory Committee and the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership helped keep partners engaged as the outreach plan was developed. One challenge was that respondents to the survey were not always familiar with the new Coastal Conservation Plan. This made it difficult for them to know how to answer questions about how they wanted to access the information or use the plan.

*What we should do next:*

- Develop a way to share and capture informal needs that are heard as outreach professionals work with communities moving forward. The Outreach Team does not feel that the formal Needs Assessment needs to be repeated in the next few years but going forward would like to catalogue the results of the formal Needs Assessment alongside ideas and needs that are captured as the outreach work continues in the watershed.

### **Website Development**

*What we did:* Brand identity, including project name and visual identity, was created by a contractor design team (ROCA Communications) and selected by the Outreach Team. The contractor led the website design and build, and many people on the Outreach Team contributed to organizing, writing, and reviewing content for the website. A beta website was developed and tested by over 10 beta testers from across a range of end users. The website was also reviewed with the Advisory Committee and Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership before being finalized: <https://connect-protect.org/>.

*What we learned:* Collecting content and photos from partners on the team and on the Advisory Committee helped build ownership in the site. The introductory webinars and technical assistance (see below) drove people to the website, but we have not yet incorporated other ways to attract people to the website into this project.

*What we should do next:*

- Develop a plan for addressing basic website maintenance with PREP, and use the hand off guide created by ROCA. Also revisit the Recommendations for Website Accessibility resource from ROCA.
- Continue to populate the success stories section of the website and add resources that are developed through the technical assistance projects, at least biannually.
- Review the website sign-up form and clarify the action steps that result from a sign-up.
- Update content that needs an annual refresh (e.g., lists of partners and funding sources).
- Continue to work with land protection and natural resource partners to make sure their websites have links to the Connect to Protect website and 2021 Plan.
- Create content that partners can share via social media posts or e-newsletters to drive people to the website, highlight the website in ongoing work with conservation partners, and promote the website through updates or blogs that highlight success stories in the future.
- Look at the analytics of the site and figure out what parts are most useful, which maps people are downloading, etc., at least biannually.

## **Maps**

*What we did:* The project team created 7 sub-watershed-based and 52 community maps to highlight conservation focus areas, agricultural resource areas, and existing public lands. These were created and posted as pdfs on the website. The website also provided instructions on how to view and access the data via the NH Coastal Viewer and NH Geodata Portal.

*What we learned:* Communities may need technical assistance to understand and use the maps that are on the website. Many towns/organizations wanted further customization of maps to combine the data with their own information and priorities.

*What we should do next:*

- Update community and watershed maps on the site as GRANIT information is updated.
- Help communities to update GRANIT public lands data for their town.
- See technical assistance section for additional ideas related to mapping.
- Share examples on the website of what towns have done with customizing maps.

## **Introductory Webinars**

*What we did:* The Outreach Team developed a slide [deck](#), a two-page fact [sheet](#), and a script for a webinar to introduce people to the coastal conservation plan, the website, and the maps that can be found on the website. Attendees included land trusts, municipalities, county conservation districts, watershed groups and funders. The webinar was offered three times, two webinars targeted municipal audiences and one was specifically for state and federal funders. Seventy-eight people attended. An [evaluation](#) report of the introductory webinars was also developed.

*What we learned:* The webinars were well received: 100% of participants reported gaining knowledge about the 2021 NH Coastal Watershed Conservation Plan; 93% learned about ways the Plan can be used; and 85% feel motivated to use the Plan in their work/community.

The online recording of the introductory webinar was useful to people who could not make the scheduled times or wanted to view it at a time that was more convenient to them. Having a script for the Outreach Team worked well to manage time and have consistent messaging. The slide deck and script were easily modified for specific audiences or venues – this helped us amplify our outreach (e.g., presenting at the NH Association of Conservation Districts meeting and the Lamprey River Advisory Committee, using the presentation/script in meetings for the technical assistance projects, etc.).

*What we should do next:*

- Continue pointing people to the recorded webinar.
- Offer the introductory webinar annually for two years to help bring in new communities or remind people of the resources and site. The Outreach Team noted that even though these were well attended, there are still several communities in the watershed that did not participate.
- If offered again, the team should consider points raised in the evaluation survey. Participants in the webinar noted that they would like to see a demonstration of how to view and access the spatial data in the Coastal Viewer as a part of the webinar and/or have other live demonstrations of how to access the maps (recorded, tour around the website). Additionally, incorporate examples of how the Plan is being used (e.g., from the technical assistance projects).
- Consider different ways and venues for doing the introductory webinar: virtually, at Saving Special Places, or at the NH Association of Conservation Commission meetings.
- For funders, create a shorter pre-recorded webinar that highlights what the plan is, where to find the information, and a little bit about the underlying data sources. A slightly expanded two-pager with an emphasis on the data may be helpful to grant review panels as well.

## **Technical Assistance**

*What we did:* After the introductory workshops, the Outreach Team emailed all participants and invited them to submit an application for technical assistance. Eight applications were received from communities and land trusts. Half-hour scoping calls were held with each applicant to refine what they wanted to achieve through the technical assistance project. Pairs of Outreach Team members collaborated to assist each community/group through 2 - 4 small group work sessions and/or visits to commissions/committees. During this first phase, projects varied in complexity and focus. Some examples include:

- Helping to develop a form / checklist to evaluate specific conservation opportunities. Support included: presenting and gathering input from the Conservation Commission, sharing examples from other towns, supporting a subcommittee as they drafted a new form (e.g., reviewing and providing feedback on drafts).
- Walking land trust staff through the available GIS data and discussing how to use and interpret the data for their own applications. Developed maps encompassing the geographic scope of the land trusts.
- Developing customized maps for a community to enable them to evaluate and promote conservation opportunities that met their specific priorities.
- Supporting a community to plan a public workshop focused on conservation priorities.

*What we learned:* Having two Outreach Team members per community/group worked well, as did the structured approach of having an application and a scoping call before digging in, and the flexibility to pull in other types of expertise and support depending on a community's interests and needs. Communities appreciated seeing examples from other towns and getting customized mapping support, and they were eager to use technical assistance meetings to educate and build support from other commission members. However, it is still difficult to plan for the amount of effort and time needed for technical assistance, because it is hard for the applicants to know exactly what they want or need. The word "coastal" does not resonate with inland communities. The Maine communities and land trusts were appreciative for the opportunity to participate and get connected to efforts in the watershed.

*What we should do next:*

- Continue technical assistance and work with additional communities in the watershed.
- Explore if and how the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership would like to partner with outreach professionals to link community priorities and with regional or state land protection groups through technical assistance.
- Conduct additional technical assistance around the agricultural resources information with different partners (like NRCS and County Conservation Districts) and with large landowners.
- Conduct additional technical assistance or webinars to walk people through how to get to and use the data layers in the Coastal Viewer.
- Customized maps and assistance creating maps are high priority technical assistance needs. Couple outreach professionals with mapping expertise to meet this need.
- Share best practices, examples, resources and lessons learned between the groups that received technical assistance (checklists, open space plans, subdivision regulations, etc.). These could be shared on the website as well.
- Maintain the contact lists that were started through the webinar and technical assistance work in this project and manage that contact list to provide updates, etc.
- Note that outreach related to this plan should customize messaging, being careful of when to use "coastal".
- Create a few "pathways" based on technical assistance type (e.g., developing a checklist, open space planning, etc.) to help focus projects and prepare outreach professionals.
- Offer additional technical assistance with in-state funders (i.e., grant review panel for LCHIP).

## **Project Teams**

*What we did:* The project had three active teams: an Advisory Committee, Management Team, and Outreach Team. The Management Team consisted of three people and assisted the Project Lead in assuring that all tasks and deliverables were completed, reporting to the funder, and advising on budget and contract issues. The Advisory Committee consisted of 10 people with an interest in land conservation or influence on land conservation in coastal NH including: land trust board members, land protection professionals, community representatives, and funders. The Advisory Committee provided input on the needs assessment, outreach plan, website and sustainability plan. The Outreach Team included outreach and extension professionals. This group led the Needs Assessment, Website Development and Technical Assistance work within this grant and provided content for the sustainability plan.

*What we learned:* Having a small Management Team that was focused on the timeline, deliverables, and budget was an efficient way to make sure the grant-funded project was well managed. The Advisory Committee provided useful, integrated feedback on the project throughout to ensure the relevancy of outreach products. The Outreach Team was effective in sharing work to develop and deliver content and to share resources, expertise, and knowledge about communities.

*What we should do next:*

- Facilitate a committed and organized team of partners to lead outreach efforts on a regular basis, implement priorities from this sustainability plan, and respond to requests for assistance from communities. Specifically, a community of practice that has a chance to share needs they have heard and resources they are using, co-lead technical assistance, and help maintain the website.
- Support outreach professionals to build capacity around this topic through partnerships or building expertise in conservation planning and land protection implementation.
- Reach out to new staff as they join organizations such as those involved in the Project Team and Advisory Committee to share the Coastal Plan information, Connect to Protect website, and ways to get involved.
- Create a stronger tie between outreach group and the organizations that are implementing land protection projects.

#### **Additional Reflections and Ideas for what to do next**

- Discuss ways to create an ongoing link between the outreach professionals and the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership.
- Bring the conservation plan into conversations that integrate decisions about housing, land use planning and food sustainability.
- Continue to collect information about barriers to implementing and stewarding land conservation projects to see if and how outreach professionals can assist.

### **Finding resources to implement continuing work**

Potential funding sources to continue outreach and technical assistance related to the Coastal Conservation Plan include: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Bipartisan Infrastructure Law capacity building funding through Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve or NH Coastal

Program, Great Bay 2030 Protect Priority Lands Focus Group, Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Partnership PREPA grants, Davis Conservation Fund, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), or Restore America’s Wildlife Act (if it is passed).

## Next Steps

The project team, Advisory Committee and funders were asked which ideas in this document should be considered the highest priority for immediate next steps.

<b>Next Steps</b>
<b>Website</b>
Develop plan for basic website maintenance: includes annual updates/refreshing content/analytics.
Review website sign in form and clarify how follow up will happen.
Make sure partner website are using the updated plan and pointing to Connect to Protect on their websites.
<b>Webinars and Technical Assistance</b>
Develop a way to share and capture informal needs as outreach professionals continue to work with towns.
Offer the introductory webinar on a regular basis.
Coordinate with the NH Association of Conservation Commissions to provide materials and recorded webinars to help “onboard” new coastal conservation commission members.
Share best practices, resources and lessons learned between communities (via workshop, webinar, website, etc.).
Create "pathways" for technical assistance to help focus projects and prepare outreach.
Explore if and how the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership can partner with outreach professionals consistently.
<b>Maps</b>
Help communities update GRANIT public lands data for their town.
Customize maps for high priority technical assistance needs.
<b>Outreach Committee</b>
Facilitate committed and organized team of partners to lead outreach efforts on a regular basis and reply to website inquiries.
Create stronger ties between outreach group and organizations that implement land protection projects.
Integrate conservation plan into decisions related to housing, land use planning and food security.

In addition to the activities listed above, there were “low hanging fruit” and/or ideas that are important to consider in the future that partners should consider.

<b>Additional Activities to Consider</b>
<b>Website</b>
Populate success stories on website.
Create content that partners can share via social media or e-newsletters to drive people to the site.
<b>Webinars and Technical Assistance</b>
Create shorter pre-recorded webinar for funders.
Conduct additional outreach around agricultural resources with appropriate partners.
Maintain contact lists that were started during this project.
<b>Maps</b>
Update community and watershed maps as GRANIT info is updated.
Conduct additional outreach specific to how to get and use the data layers and maps within the plan.
Share examples of how towns are using customized maps on the website.
<b>Outreach Committee</b>
Support outreach professionals in building capacity around the topic of land conservation.
Collect information about barriers to land protection (outside of mapping, technical assistance, science needs)