



Regional Plan of Conservation & Development focus session:

***Land Conservation & Outdoor Recreation
in Northwest Connecticut***

November 30, 2016

SUMMARY

Attended by: 27 representatives from NHCOCG towns, presenters, and NHCOCG staff

Panelists:

- Tim Abbott- HVA Regional Conservation & Greenprint Director
- Connie Manes- Greenprint Manager, Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative
- Dan Jerram- First Selectman, Town of New Hartford’s land acquisition fund
- Eric Hammerling- Executive Director, CT Forest and Park Association
- Dan Bolognani- Executive Director, Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area

Each panelist described the conservation/recreation projects they work on in NWCT and what the top priority strategies should be for NHCOCG to carry out or assist its 21 towns to carry out over the next 10 years to conserve priority land and increase outdoor recreation opportunities in NWCT.

Attendees were asked the 4 questions listed below. Also listed are the number and percent of attendees who “voted” for each strategy.

1. Which regional/collaborative strategies should we invest in carrying out?

| | Percent | Count |
|--|---------|-------|
| Develop an interactive online map showing the public access trails in the region. | 19.70% | 13 |
| Identify possibilities for greater trail connectivity within the 21-town region. | 21.21% | 14 |
| Actively promote trails/greenways and bike routes to attract visitors and inform residents. | 13.64% | 9 |
| Train and/or support cadre of volunteers (potentially a shared effort with various organizations) to be stewards for the trails. | 10.61% | 7 |

| | | |
|--|-------------|-----------|
| Convene a summit of like-minded individuals and organizations to examine existing trails/bikeways. | 6.06% | 4 |
| Urge ConnDOT to implement policies that encourage 'rails with trails'. | 15.15% | 10 |
| Engage a broad public audience including youth in learning about conservation. | 13.64% | 9 |
| Totals | 100% | 66 |

2. Which town-level strategies should we invest in carrying out?

| | Percent | Count |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| Assist towns in adopting and implementing "complete streets" policies | 15.38% | 8 |
| Map areas of highest conservation priority locally | 30.77% | 16 |
| Start/support a municipal land preservation fund | 17.31% | 9 |
| Start/support a municipal Open Space Preservation Commission | 13.46% | 7 |
| Pursue local important farmland soil designation process | 23.08% | 12 |
| Totals | 100% | 52 |

3. Which funding related strategies should we invest in pursuing?

| | Percent | Count |
|--|-------------|-----------|
| Look for ways to combine federal transportation funding and flood mitigation funding with environmental enhancements. | 61.54% | 16 |
| Consider a collaborative regional trails effort such as the Berkshire High Road initiative that could help raise profile and funds for all partners. | 38.46% | 10 |
| Totals | 100% | 26 |

4. What are the top three highest priority strategies that should be included in our NWCT Regional Plan of Conservation & Development? (top three listed below)

Map areas of highest conservation need locally, in partnerships involving land trusts and municipal commissions. GREENPRINT CAN HELP and COG can SUPPORT!! (12 votes)

Develop an interactive online map showing the public access hiking, walking, and multi-use trails in the NHCOG's 21-town region. (11 votes)

Identify possibilities for greater trail connectivity within the 21-town region, especially in areas where pedestrian and/or bike access could provide additional transportation options to residents between towns and to town center areas. (11 votes)

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Suggested Strategies for Regional Plan of Conservation & Development:

Tim Abbott- Regional Conservation & Greenprint Director

- Look for ways to combine federal transportation funding and flood mitigation funding with environmental enhancements such as culvert replacement for better fish passage, riparian buffers and conservation easements.
- Double down on farmland preservation, including local important farmland soil designation.
- Develop an integrated regional recreation plan, including but not limited to greenways, blueways, and green infrastructure to enhance local economies, and trail connectivity.

Eric Hammerling- Executive Director, CT Forest and Park Association

- Collect data and map existing trails on town, state, water company, and land trust properties.
- Provide online access to trail information/maps.
- Encourage connections between trails (with compatible uses) across various properties.
- Train and/or support cadre of volunteers (potentially a shared effort with various organizations) to be stewards for the trails.
- Consider a collaborative countywide trails effort such as the Berkshire High Road initiative that could help raise profile and funds for all partners.

Connie Manes- Greenprint Manager, Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative

- Map areas of highest conservation need locally, in partnerships involving land trusts and municipal commissions. GREENPRINT CAN HELP and COG can SUPPORT!!
- Expand conservation foci to incorporate considerations of the built environment.
- Explore strategies for conservation outside of traditional land protection tools.
- Engage a broad public audience including youth in learning about conservation and protected landscapes.

Rista Malanca- Naugatuck River Greenway and CT Greenways Council

- Look at connectivity between municipalities of both greenways and bike routes.
- Start promoting the trails/greenways and bike routes that we already have to attract visitors as well as inform residents.

Dan Bolognani – Executive Director, Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area

- Convene a ‘summit’ of like-minded individuals and organizations to examine existing trails / bikeways
- Develop strategies for integrating existing trail data into a region-wide map, identifying opportunities and weaknesses. Utilize the resulting data to promote the region’s trails & bikeways.
- Urge municipalities to adopt / fund a ‘complete streets’ policy so that in- and through-town cycling and walking is safer, more sensible.
- Urge ConnDOT to implement policies that encourage ‘rails with trails’ and other strategies that allow non-motorized use along state-owned (active) rail beds.
- Install signs for the entire Western New England Greenway (bikeway that connects Norwalk to Montreal), finalize the digital mapping, hire / encourage professional tour guides to lead occasional tours of the Greenway, document the economic impact of the WNEG, complete off-road trails where the WNEG uses higher volume roads, improve the WNEG web site to include information on bike friendly businesses, historic sites, lodging, restaurants, and other tourist information.

Dan Jerram- First Selectman, Town of New Hartford

- All Conservation efforts start with Education
- Land Preservation Fund projects are not the typical “Conservation” path
- Both the Developer and the Town can Benefit
- P&Z Commissioners decide what type of development is best for the community
- Fee in Lieu funding can be significant and lets the Town choose what land acquisition is the best fit for the community