

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Utilizing the methods described below, this study aims to address the questions posed in Chapter One: why, and how, are land trusts working together on a landscape scale? What elements contribute to the success of these collaborative efforts, and which create obstacles and problems? Have the efforts, overall, been beneficial, or have the challenges and costs outweighed the gains?

A multi-step procedure was employed, beginning with the selection of five case studies according to developed criteria. Next, original data were gathered for each case study through interviews. An inductive analysis was performed, and finally conclusions were drawn. Each of these steps is described in detail below.

CASE STUDY SELECTION AND CRITERIA

Five case studies of land trust based collaborative initiatives were selected, according to the following criteria:

1. Initiatives were formed to enhance the capacity of non-profit land trusts in their land protection activities.
2. Initiatives involve more than two or three organizations.
3. Initiatives were formed based on a landscape-scale conservation need. Efforts formed based on political lines (state, county, or township lines, for example) were not included.
4. Communication between land trust partners working in the region is evident. (Efforts involving communication through a central hub, and not between partners, were not included).
5. Initiatives are not primarily government-driven, although government partners may be present.

6. Initiatives represent a diversity of experience in terms of group size, structure, geographic location, and member affiliation (some groups have all non-profit members, and some have government partners present as well).

A literature review, combined with personal investigation, resulted in the selection of the following five case studies (described in more detail in Chapter Three, *Summary of Case Studies*):

1. The Blufflands Alliance (MN, WI, IA, IL)

The Blufflands Alliance consists of four local land trusts and two statewide organizations working to protect the Blufflands along the Mississippi River.

2. The Bay Area Open Space Council (CA)

The Bay Area Open Space Council consists of over 150 public and private partners working in land conservation in the nine counties surrounding the San Francisco Bay.

3. The Michigan Dune Alliance (MI)

Five land trusts, The Nature Conservancy, and a small number of public agencies are working together to preserve the sand dunes along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan.

4. The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (MA)

Public and private partners are working together to preserve the ecological, cultural, and historic open space of the rural North Quabbin region in central Massachusetts.

5. The Northern Rockies Initiative (ID, MT, WY (U.S.) and BC, AB (Canada))

Over 20 local land trusts and national land conservation organizations with offices in the region are communicating regarding land preservation in the Rocky Mountains. The name of the collaboration, however, is only a 'working title'; participating groups are still in the process of agreeing upon an official name.

Many excellent examples of cooperative actions between land trusts were not included. For instance, the joint stewardship program established between the Vermont Land Trust

and some of the smaller land trusts operating with its service area only involves two or three organizations and does not really focus on an ecological scale. The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, although formed to promote the land conservation activities of non-profit land trusts on a larger scale, was formed based on political boundaries, as was the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts. The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, although focused on the greater Cape Cod region, is an independent organization formed as a “service bureau for its member land trusts” (Van Ryn et al, 1999, p.121). As such, it provides administrative and project support to area land trusts, but does not focus as much on providing a forum for interaction between its members. The five case studies selected, however, meet the established criteria, and thus qualify as “landscape scale conservation initiatives.”

DATA COLLECTION

Telephone and personal interviews were selected as the primary data collection methods. Prior to conducting interviews, however, key staff members were contacted in order to gather background information on the formation, structure, and accomplishments of each group. Brochures, newsletters, final grant reports, and web page documents were reviewed and compiled (see Chapter Three, *Summary of Case Studies*). Based on this information and the primary research questions posed in Chapter One, a list of interview questions was generated (see Appendix A: *Sample Interview Questions*). Primary areas of concern included:

- The benefits of participation in large-scale cooperative efforts. Questions included:
 - Why did your group originally join this effort?
 - Why do you continue to participate?
- The challenges of participation. Questions included:
 - What would you say has been the most significant challenge to working with this group?
 - Has maintaining group momentum been a problem?

- Do you feel the group has a shared vision?
- Reactions of the organization's constituents to participation. Questions included:
 - Do your members generally support your involvement?
 - Do you fear losing touch with your local support base?
 - Do you fear losing touch with your original mission?

A flexible format was selected to allow for investigation of topics raised by interviewees, as suggested by *The Elements of Interviewing* (Shiple and Wood, 1996).

Thirty-one executive directors (or key staff members if so referred) of the land trusts involved in the five chosen initiatives were interviewed, and twenty-four of these interviews were recorded and completely transcribed (the other seven were not recorded and thus were not transcribed). Interviews lasted from ten to ninety minutes, and averaged half an hour. Out of respect for the sensitive nature of some of the information discussed, as well as to encourage candor, anonymity was guaranteed. Thus, although extensive use of direct quotes is made in this report, participants are not identified beyond which initiative they represent.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Given the type of information sought, qualitative evaluation and research methods were selected. Rather than utilize “logical positivism, which uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical deductive generalizations,” a “phenomenological inquiry, using qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experience in context specific settings” (Patton, 1990, p.37) was chosen, as it was determined to better match the goals of the study. Another term for this type of inquiry is the *discovery of grounded theory* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

What does this type of inquiry entail? Rather than utilize a statistically random sample, case studies were deliberately selected for the lessons they could teach, a technique known as “purposeful sampling” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The direct quotes obtained from interviews served as the “raw data” for analysis (Patton, 1990, p.24), and

“theory” was generated “from the data” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. viii). All in all, the “purpose of the qualitative analysis is to identify and extrapolate lessons learned” (Patton, 1990, p. 425). These lessons learned are presented in Chapters 4-8, regarding the benefits and challenges of collaboration, the factors contributing to the success of collaborative efforts, and potential future directions for the groups. It must be noted that the order in which findings regarding these topic areas are discussed does not imply any hierarchy of importance.