

CHAPTER 7: POTENTIAL FUTURE CHANGES

Despite the overall success of the collaborative initiatives investigated, both in terms of functioning as a group and in terms of completing projects and tasks, there is always room for improvement. Interviewees were asked to envision their efforts five years down the road, and discuss what structural and programmatic changes they would like to see. Although participants were not directly asked to offer suggestions as to ways around the challenges discussed in Chapter Six, the location of additional funding, an increased structural formality, and a clarification of a shared vision do address concerns over resources, structure, and vision, respectively. Additionally, increased land conservation, adding new members, an expansion of project types, and an expansion of the scale of activities were also cited as possible areas for improvement (Table 7).

Potential Future Changes

- Locating additional funding
- Creating new, more formal structures
- Clarifying shared vision
- Increasing land conservation
- Adding new members
- Expanding project types
- Expanding scale of activities

Table 7: Potential Future Changes

Locating additional funding

Given the challenge of scarce resources discussed above, the desire to locate additional funding was frequently mentioned as a critical future project for the group efforts. Primarily, this desire centered upon the need to progress from donated interests in land to having the ability to purchase key easements and properties. One Dune Alliance participant was primarily “interested in ways to fund the purchase of conservation easements.” Another hoped for “sheer capital for making acquisitions happen.” A Blufflands member had a specific geographic target area in mind, hoping to “try to attract funding to allow us to branch inwards from the Blufflands region along priority areas on tributaries and streams going in to the Mississippi.”

The only source for this type of funding mentioned was the federal government. “It would be nice to build capacity to the point that we could really address things like the farm bill to bring federal funding to the Blufflands,” one participant remarked. A Bay Area Open Space Council participant had another target source in mind, commenting that “we need to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, that should be everybody’s mission regardless of who they are.”

Creating new, more formal structures

Given the pros and cons of the current structural setup of many of the groups, the question was raised whether or not participants thought creating new, more formal structures would perhaps ease some of the dilemmas discussed. Responses varied from contingent support to disapproval.

The desire to add new, more formal structures was primarily contingent on the receipt and dispersal of increased future funding:

- “I recognize that if we are going to be going for federal dollars for acquisition, or million dollar endowments, we are going to have to formalize,” one Dune Alliance participant admitted. Another commented, “if there is money to be dispersed, and it comes from a big pot, and its not already designated, so that is needs to be divided, that’s where you would need a little structure.”
- A Blufflands Alliance member also mused that “maybe we could get a little more formalized as we find other funding sources, that would be great.”

Additional desires to formalize centered upon the idea of hiring partnership staff. One Blufflands participant felt that staff additions could work on “things we have never been truly successful at but that we would all like to do,” like bringing in federal funding. Additionally, hiring staff could help with the challenge of maintaining momentum. According to another Blufflands participant, “I think it’s helpful to have a coordinator. If you have somebody devoted to it, they can do more for the partnership, so I think the partnership would operate more effectively with the right coordinator.”

Another potential area for increased formality could be conflict resolution. According to Griffith, “the elements of successful collaboration include...an effective

problem solving method” (Griffith, 2001, p. 1). She talked about one effort she studied, in which the “partners have learned that while informal pathways can be used to identify problems, referral to a more formal forum for resolution is desirable” (Griffith, 2001, p. 40). It was not clear if any of the groups had conflict resolution procedures in place. This is most likely due to the fact that the groups are functioning well, and it doesn’t seem necessary. Group harmony doesn’t last forever, however, so perhaps sooner rather than later would be a good time to put such a procedure in place. As Gray notes, “conveners and negotiators frequently underestimate the critical role of process in ensuring successful collaboration...process issues must be discussed openly, and agreements should be sought on how the group will conduct itself” (Gray, 1989, p. 265).

Finally, other successful groups have been sure to include time and space for feedback and self evaluation (Griffith, 2001b). Asking the group to evaluate its performance can help members see areas that need new emphasis or change, leading to greater overall success.

Prior to any alterations of group structure, however, certain hurdles will have to be overcome. One participant worried, “I think if you try to make it more formal you make it more bureaucratic.” In addition to slowing the pace of the effort, adding formality raised the fear that a new, potential competitor could be created. “If the partnership was established too formally, for instance if it had a formal budget or a staff member, or if it was incorporated as a nonprofit organization,” one participant worried that “it would then, in effect, be competing with the groups that formed it.” The idea of formalizing one collaborative effort as a new 501c3 nonprofit organization was definitely not met with universal support; one participant commented that it should happen “only if absolutely necessary.”

Clarifying shared vision

Dennis, in her chapter in Endicott (1993), suggested that “land conservation systems with limited funding need to be proactive rather than reactive to crises. Organizations must articulate general land protection goals and then demonstrate how acquisition of particular parcels will contribute to those goals” (Dennis, 1993, p. 188). While not all of the case studies examined focused directly on acquisition, the general

concept still applies. What subjects, topics, or areas within their larger regions are priorities for the group? A few interviewees expressed a desire to set such priorities, but recognized the difficulty of making these choices. “I think the consensus is that we have to put some priorities on. I think that’s our next step, but it’s going to be the hardest, because everyone’s got different priorities,” commented one Northern Rockies participant. Nevertheless, another Northern Rockies member felt “we have to set priorities. Like any land trust work, you can’t do it all.” One Blufflands interviewee felt that becoming more proactive could be quite powerful:

Since it is so hard to actually work collaboratively, sometimes it is enough to say, well, we share some funding, and we can learn from each other, and that is enough; we don’t need to have more of a shared vision. I actually think it is more powerful to think of where we could be, and tap into more funding in the long run, by saying “this is what we are about, our goal is to ____.”

Increasing land conservation

Building on the challenge of delayed accomplishments discussed above, the goal of preserving more land in the future was mentioned by some participants. “Obviously we all want to conserve more land together as a group,” one Blufflands participant commented, when asked what changes they would like to see made down the road. Another Blufflands member agreed that “first we want to finish the identification of priority landscapes and then go about protecting those priority landscapes.” Similarly, a Dune Alliance interviewee commented, “I would like to see all the groups in the Dune Alliance completing transactions on coastal properties.” Perhaps once the initial issues of structuring the group, building capacity, and locating funding are resolved, additional land conservation will take place.

Adding new members

The “inclusion of all affected stakeholders” (Gray, 1989, p. 261) has been cited as an important element of successful collaborations by both the literature and participants alike. As such, the case study efforts, down the road, may find a need to reassess their composition, and perhaps will decide to add new members. What “personalities” are missing? For instance, will the groups without government participants find they need

them eventually? Will the absence of larger land conservation organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, create overlapping, competitive programs down the road? Will small, all-volunteer land trusts within the collaborations' boundaries that are not included be left behind? Will a lack of citizen participation create fears of conspiracy theories? While these are all perhaps extreme scenarios, it may be a good idea for groups to periodically reassess their composition to ensure that it adequately represents the variety of stakeholders concerned.

Expanding project types

Ideas for other project areas the collaborative efforts could begin to take on fell into two primary categories: land protection needs and outreach efforts. In the land protection arena, hopes were expressed that work would continue on the creation of both a collective easement defense fund and a region-wide stewardship fund. Additionally, one participant expressed a desire to see GIS mapping services extended to county-specific projects, and another hoped to see “true conservation planning for this particular area.” A final desire, discussed previously, was to have “money enough, without too many strings, to enable us to purchase development rights.”

A wide range of outreach needs was discussed.

- One participant felt landowner education was critical: “I would like to see a lot more landowner education, to have consistent education pieces that all of the land trusts would share. I would really like to see a completion of some concerted effort to really reach out.”
- Another interviewee targeted government participants for additional outreach, lamenting that his effort hasn't “done much work recently with the open space districts and the county and city parks departments, they have been focusing on the land trust side...so I would like to see more of a balance between those two.”
- Third, another member thought her group should continue its efforts “to increase the diversity of the environmental community, bringing up interns from various backgrounds that are going to be available to all of us.”
- This same participant also hoped to increase contact with the business community, commenting that “what I would like to see happen is some kind of

partnership with them [the business council], where we actually get business and corporate members.”

- A Northern Rockies participant thought, “one of the things that I really think should be addressed, because it’s a real issue, is media policy among the land trusts.”
- Finally, other intriguing ideas included creating “some sort of incubator fund and process for people who want to start for-profit companies in the conservation field” and “creating smaller teams to work on special projects and interests, such as coping with growth and development in ski resort areas.”

Although all of these ideas are valuable, they will need to be balanced with sentiments such as those expressed by the following group member: “I think it’s the right size and scope right now...[the larger group] shouldn’t get too far into trying to do projects and other more focused activities, it should leave those to all the other groups.” Where does the work of the individual trusts end, and the work of the larger group begin?

Expanding scale of activities

In addition to protecting more land, groups expressed a desire to conserve land across a broader scale. As discussed previously, interest was noted among Blufflands participants to begin working along tributaries of the Mississippi; similarly, a Dune Alliance participant expressed interest “in seeing what strategies emerge for protecting adjacent lands and buffer lands” to previously protected properties. One North Quabbin member thought “there is some interest in connecting the bands of protected lands up into New Hampshire and eventually connecting with Mt. Monadnock.” This goal was supported by another North Quabbin participant, who hoped “there will be some collaboration [with groups in New Hampshire], because we are trying to work at the landscape scale, as these corridors continue to get built, it’s the same ecological region.”