

## Locally Led Conservation Planning Forum, May 18<sup>th</sup> 2023 – Participant Notes & Group Sharing

Attendance - 35 participants, representing 10 organizations (DEC, CCNRCD, OCNRCD, NRCS, Seymour Lake Assoc, Averill Lake Assoc, Westmore Assoc, MWA, VAAFM, Greensboro Conservation Commission)

### **Breakout Session #1 - Small Group Discussion on the TBP & Water Quality: Feedback on Drafted Strategies**

After the Draft TBP presentation, we lead a focus exercise to get people engaged in understanding the process and facilitate them providing feedback on drafted strategies. Participants completed a worksheet with the questions (below) on their own and then we broke into three groups: Agriculture, Natural Resource Restoration, and Developed Lands to share out and identify themes.

*What TBP strategies are people excited about?*

- \*LWAPs & leading to implementation (multiple mentions)
- \*BMP's for high priority watersheds/monitoring (multiple mentions)
- \*Private roads & driveways (multiple mentions)
- \*Lake Wise & Stream Wise (multiple mentions)
  - Restoration – returning to “valued” natural processes
  - Residential private landowner brochure (outreach)
  - Buffers
  - Reclassification of lakes
  - Greeter Program – more funding
  - Basin-specific tools/process-based restoration
  - Wastewater division projects
  - Stormwater – small-scale projects & BMP awareness
  - Pilot program to develop and implement trapping and control

*Do you think the drafted strategies are the right priorities that will advance WQ reductions in your sector of interest? If not, do you have ideas of what will advance WQ reductions?*

- How to best evaluate progress
- Yes
- Yes for the most part, but shoreland projects are not super convincing
- Yes – can be more, working more with municipalities re: stormwater mgmt., state lands (FPR, F&W)
- More outreach for transparency and to educate communities

*What are the hurdles or gaps?*

- \* Funding/Resources – how to access money and getting it (multiple mentions)
- \* Development & enforcement - What are the existing laws? Accountability? (multiple mentions)

- Community engagement – not just landowner engagement
- Landowner participation & buy-in
- Keeping up with new development
- Education/lack of info
- Tracking
- Messaging that doesn't polarize
- Locations
- DEM
- Development/housing and planning boards
- Not having a P calculator limits tracking/transparency
- Invasive species management n lakeshores & riverbanks, promoting robust native buffer vegetation
- Concern that P reductions are accounted for based on modeling, not measurements

*Ideas to address the hurdles and gaps?*

\*Community outreach - More communications, work with small landowners it (multiple mentions)

\* Funding & grant application assistance it (multiple mentions)

- Rapid response funding to approach problems as seen on the ground
- Outreach to Planning Commissions and Development Review Boards; Housing Boards
- Designs
- Increased monitoring
- Develop a P calculator

*Additional thoughts:*

\*Lawn Wise (multiple mentions)

- Culverts leading to rain gardens, maintain dirt driveways, make parking lots near lakes not paved
- Encourage movement of box stores on 2; Memph to the "hole" and reclaim lakefront area
- Use VT Rural Community Development as a mechanism for team building in a community
- The role of the management of natural resources related to climate resilience, ie, sequestering carbon
- Invasive species
- Humans adapting & adjusting - Adjusting lifestyles so we have continuity of living space and natural settings
- Road foreman's
- Better management of state parks land
- Educational programming for property owners
- Basin tools that work at multiple scales
- Restoration of natural processes
- Holistic ecosystem approach to community planning
- Upland practices

- Investment in ag practices that inherently maintain or enhance water quality as a pilot of demo; promoting a new way of farming

### **Small Group Feedback on Strategies - Notes & Themes:**

#### *Agriculture-*

- Community outreach – outreach to landowners
- Community knowledge
- Complex applications
- Multiple grant ops; which ones to apply to?

\*Flowchart to determine best program to apply to/something interactive

- Reach out to town planning committees- who would it be?
- Excited to pilot projects/monitoring
- How to teach data analysis/interpretation to landowners
- Build new culture
- Avoid acronyms!

#### *Developed Lands-*

- Challenge – ongoing development
- Need reserve money for rapid response
- Education – Lots of landowners might want to do the right thing, but don't know
- Tech support for driveway project
- Planning/Zoning – better education/rules
- Municipal & State lands
- Riparian/terrestrial – invasive species
- Buffers on private lands
- Wastewater – tree nursery!

#### *Natural Resources-*

- Developing basin tools for phosphorus– model?
- Law Wise program; fertilizer use
- Restoring of natural /ecological processes
- Explaining P on an elementary level

### **Breakout Session #2 - One-on-One Discussion on TBP Community Engagement Needs**

Goal: Gather ideas on strategies for community engagement to meet WQ goals

*What strategies are needed and what would people be excited about?*

\* Demonstrations & workshops (multiple mentions) – for TSPS

- Cyanobacteria bloom demo to show people the consequences of reducing phosphorus
- Local open house at farms – pay farmers to do this
- Free beer and food!
- Good merch/marketing/commissioned art – good graphic design; BMP tote bags

- Welcome package for new property owners – with resources, regulations, etc
- Community get-togethers (educational ops and to elicit help)
- More events and volunteer ops – News & Brews, River Clean Ups
- Reaching out to underserved producers
- Outreach person being an actual member of the community (local ambassador), builds trust

*What are the hurdles or gaps?*

- “Us vs Them” relationship between town residents and lakeshore property owners. Ex, “Why should the land in the watershed be restricted if all those lake homes have large lawns?”
- Farm open houses - the work to organize; getting people to show up for demos/farm visits
- Location; reaching people where they are
- Follow-through with community
- Community connections
- Timing
- Funding for events and engagement strategies
- Delivery method?
- Having time for outreach (NRCS employee not allocated time for it)
- Disconnect between operators and conservationists
- People are busy
- Attendance
- Internet access/abilities (inequality issue), different social/cultural circles, government sentiments, financial, politicization of environmental issues

*Ideas to address the hurdles and gaps?*

\*Pay stipend to farmers to show up (multiple mentions)

- So many avenues of communication
- Capacity limitations
- Make ed and outreach a part of the process
- Town Clerk’s office
- Plant sales and other events
- Workplans can be used to host public forums
- Promote MCM/Northern Star as watershed ed tool
- More face-to-face interaction
- Listening to people’s frustrations, helps bridge the gap
- Making application process as easy as possible
- Targeted outreach by county
- Accessible locations, free childcare, multiple comms methods (know how the community gets the word out)

*Additional thoughts:*

- NEK Land Trust is a good idea
- Assistance to small farms with manure mgt that NRCS won't fund
- State is funding projects as examples to show best practices and share with local farm communities
- Art projects for new audience
- Communicate with local changemakers
- Prepped letter cards with info on topics for outreach/teachable moments
- Ambassadors
- Outreach at parks & stores
- Outreach is NOT a one-time thing; it needs to be a continuous process with updates, new info, and options
- Share success stories!
- Coordinated messaging across platforms; encourage different styles, methods & media
- Developing a "culture of conservation"
- A place to develop community
- Speakers Bureau, i.e., News & Brews event
- BMP's shared among neighbors
- Building trust
- Reach out to colleges; coordinate with their programs
- Interstate collaboration
- Water Quality partnerships
- Engage public
- Place for resources for funding available to all & to show interactions between agencies
- Tapping into Fish & Game, snowmobile clubs

### **Natural Resources Concerns – Group Generation of List**

- Incorporating perennial veg in ad, not just woody veg
  - Agroforestry – needs to be intentional, not just in forest
- "30 by 30" bill – how does this incorporate with work of conservation district and NRCS
- Need for Land Trusts – no land trust in NEK
  - Riparian Land Trust, Passumpsic Trust
  - Issue of not meeting Trust's criteria
  - ID bridging partners to address this gap
- Manure injection – how it is being assessed
  - Cooperative use of equipment – issue of using at same time
- Manure composting
- Biodiversity & species decline
- Need for integrated approach to WQ
  - More holistic approach, agencies working together rather than in separate pools
- Land productivity - soil health, WQ, crops and pasture productivity
  - Nutrient efficiency – incorporate with climate smart

## **Voting on Top Issues**

Ditch systems & gullies – 13

Agroforestry – 11

Monitoring & Assessment - 11

Small farm manure management – 8

Urban Ag – 5

Crop productivity/soil health – 3

## **Participants Worksheet Responses – Natural Resources**

*What do you love about your community? What is your vision for the future of your community as it relates to agriculture, food security, and the environment?*

- Affordable food, grown in a climate/environment friendly way that is affordable and accessible to the local community providing producers with a good stand of living.
- Love the natural beauty, the access to lakes, hiking trails, the farms, the people and animals
- I want to see human, animal, ecosystem and soil health as high as we can get it. I want to support approaches to ag or anything else that supports this goal.
- Thoughtful development that does not reduce access to, and quality of, natural resources
- The unique plant community, the surplus of ponds and rivers; the presence of farming!
- My vision for the future involves diverse and multi-disciplinary ag operations that holistically cooperate with the environment
- Lots of green, foliage, water sports, wetlands & wildlife
- I would like to see a sustainability goal attached to all land management practices and ag operations
- Collaboration of local orgs; amazing environmental resources, in good shape compared to other places in the country
- Future vision – greater equity, smaller farms, younger people
- I love the natural beauty and low-density population, and the “peace & love” people
- I love how hardworking and dedicated everyone is. I would love to see people working together more to build community knowledge and shared resources. There is a powerful independence to Vermonters, NEKers, that can come at the expense of ecosystem health.
- Passionate about the environment/sustainability in both energy and food production
- The beautiful variety of landscapes, forests & waters, continued community access
- Concerns about impacts of climate change
- People working together
- Keep the few farms remaining viable
- Resort community, Love local/seasonal folks interfacing and learning from each other; this hybrid community poses multiple challenges, however, re: cultural/financial priority disparities.

- Vision – protection/education. Encourage more ag activities, particularly developing alternative and year-round practices (Walipinis- underground greenhouse)
- Mixed-use lands and rural communities
- Diversity in landscape – ag, residential, conserved land

*What are the problems and emerging issues you see in your community related to the environment, agriculture, and conservation in general?*

\* Development (multiple responses) -development is too fast, haphazard, failing to preserve natural resource functions; encroachment on streambanks and wetlands

- Local food is often too expensive for local people
- Regulations made by legislators without regard to cost
- Loss of soil health
- Loss of biodiversity
- Poor human nutrition
- Too much tilled, no cover crop, corn
- Not enough care to protect water quality
- Huge infestations of phragmites
- I see a dividing community of a few very large farms who practice extractive ag, and use common resources (ie clean water) for their individual profit
- Climate impacts (multiple responses)- drought, flooding, heat, frost; shifting weather patterns
- Eco impacts: loss of small farms, growth of large farms
- Knowledge gaps: new tech, available funding, etc.
- Loss of farming areas and forests
- Making progress with mitigations and restorations
- Small farms failing and being subdivided
- Poor shoreland management practices
- Influx of folks who aren't necessarily educated about the environment, ag and conservation
- New threats, pollution to pests
- Spreading biosolids; potential water & land contamination
- Energy – demands and conversion to new energy systems

*What conservation/environmental issues are most pressing to you?*

\* Water quality (multiple responses)

\* Invasive species/plants (multiple answers) & climate-related invasives

\*Reducing phosphorus (multiple answers)

- The influence of the dump on Lake Memph

- PFAS
- Development
- Ag run off
- Climate change shifting the plant composition of our woods
- Loss of woodlands to development
- Dense, unthoughtful lakeshore development
- Habitat degradation
- Lack of capacity in environmental orgs to address issues
- Local water quality habitat
- Loss of local capacity
- Wetland decimation
- Holistic ecosystem health
- Food access
- Restoration
- Erosion; road erosion, ditches & gullies
- Overuse of land

*Why are these particular issues important to you and the community?*

- Environmental health
- We are a poorer community in VT
- Negative impacts on human and animal wellbeing; human connection to the natural world
- PFAS – hunting & fishing decreases, food security decreases
- I've seen poor development ruin what makes places great
- I love ecology and clean water and deeply fear living in a place where the environment becomes too toxic to sustain life
- Drive tourism and local quality of life
- Wetlands are important on so many levels
- Because land/water are connected; the health of one will impact everything around it
- I have seen what these problems can lead to elsewhere, it's important to work on them while manageable
- For the economy
- Preservation of WQ is good for future generations
- Human impact has rarely replaced or replenished, issues from direct intentional or unintentional damage
- Sedimentation
- Flood risk

*What brought this issue to your attention?*

- Seeing people walk down Rt 5 in a residential area with no sidewalks
- Learning about how different kinds of ag can cause many good things as opposed to having negative effects.
- Working in the field of conservation



- Seeing the minimal need to slow the problem now
- Obvious loss of trees in towns alone. Look at old postcards!
- Stream monitoring

*Who is working on these issues?*

- Local town counsel
- VLT is saturated
- Northwoods?
- DEC, TNC
- Me & my friends (Northwoods, MWA, OCNRCD)
- Homeowners, NRCS, District
- FOVLAP
- Westmore Assoc; trying to encourage a plan involving plantings

*Are there existing plans in place that take action on this particular issue?*

- Not sure
- TBP; many are part of the Basin 17 plan
- Yes some, and work is being done, but the rate of backsliding feels like it is outpacing positive action
- Some. More attention to headwaters wetlands
- Yes, but they need localized help
- LWAPs
- Not that I am aware of
- Many plans; some actions

*What solutions will help achieve the goals for your community?*

\*Public education (multiple responses); community workshops to increase knowledge and general awareness

- Empowering municipalities; town halls – frequent ed meetings
- Engaging farming community
- Unrestricted funds to conservation orgs
- More tech support for farm, road crews and landowners
- Work with the willing; support the innovative (ie, agroforestry)
- Increase investment now could minimize future costs
- Look to the future; current plans are repsonding to the past
- Trend to return to natural processes

*What conservation measures/practices/actions do you think would help the issue?*

\* Eradicating invasives (multiple responses)

- Conservation science informed, landscape scale management
- Riparian buffers
- AMP/BMP adherence and implementation
- Municipal and State land management held to higher standards

- Ditch ?, soil health practices, wetland restoration
- Agroforestry
- Wetland restoration and conservation
- Brush management, herbaceous treatment

*Where is it happening? (specific land use, geography, location)*

- Development is impacting land everywhere
- By lesser-known water channels
- On new farms
- Mostly on disturbed lands

*How do we bridge the gap between where we are now and where we want to be?*

- Figure out how to fund a land trust
- More people (staff)
- Rivers & lakeshores developed or in production
- Outreach & education- talking to landowners
- Unrestricted funding to conservation orgs
- TA for agroforestry practices with NRCS
- Use wood pellets as wide-reaching soil amendments
- More workshops
- Funding

*Is everyone in the community given a chance to participate in planning and addressing resource issues? If not, why? What are the barriers?*

- A barrier is awareness, inclusion
- No, missing those who work the land
- Yes but it is not feasible for everyone to attend and many people don't have any expertise or information enough to form opinions
- Stipends for attendance are a good idea
- Indigenous voices; anyone who views the world through a very different paradigm
- No, I'd say there are gaps in who feels comfortable/engaged, willing to show up. Vermont is a very white state but there should be more black/brown/indigenous folks engaged. Conservation is often a very white space.
- No. Boards (selectman?) can be pretty isolated and not particularly open minded
- No, some parts of the community underrepresented
- Planning barriers – timing/meetings, locations

### **Introductory Questions – Placed on Boards during mingling**

*What do you appreciate most about the Orleans County landscape?*

- Awesome lakes & great hikes
- Green, clean & pristine
- Ponds, lakes & wetlands

*What are your biggest worries related to natural resources for future generations?*

- Clean water free of AIS & free of PFAS, etc.
- Sustainable small farming
- Sedimentation in brooks
- CO2

*What do you see as the greatest opportunity to make a positive change on the landscape?*

- Involvement in lake associations and conservation orgs
- Education
- Community
- Common ground
- Lake Wise

*Where would you like to see more resources like technical and financial assistance, education, etc., be put to work?*

- Keep farms from polluting waters
- More watershed ed and management
- Community building around education