

Minutes Conservation Action Planning Work Group
5/27/2010 1-3 pm

Present: Wendy Norden, Barbara Arter, George Kidder, Jane Disney
Excused: John Kelly, Brian Reilly, Noah Hodgetts, Lee Hudson

I. We introduced ourselves; Wendy used the call-in number.

II. Work Group Structure was discussed. Jane is acting as discussion leader and note taker, but as the group grows, we may need to appoint a chair and secretary. It is difficult for the person running the meeting to also take notes. A tape recorder may be helpful as we get started. We may decide to take the meetings “on-the-road” to stakeholders who have a key role to play in some aspect of conservation action planning (planning boards or selectmen of a town, for example). The group may need policies under which it is acting, but it is early to enact policies.

III. Conservation Action Planning: We looked at the “Overview of Basic Practices” from The Nature Conservancy document on Conservation Action Planning. **Step 1** involves identifying people involved in the project and **Step 2** involves defining the project scope. We discussed how the Scope might define who the people are who might be involved. Scope may have to be defined first.

Identifying People: Wendy discussed her work on the Richardson Bay Conservation Action Plan. There were about 10 people involved. They represented research, policy-making, non-profit, and community groups. They initially worked to identify a wide range of targets using a “broad brush” approach. They were able to hone in on targets and design specific projects involving specific action steps. Conservation Action planning can/should be an evolving process.

For some targets there may be little or no data. Conservation Action Plans should be updated year-to-year. There are some targets that no one in the local group can address... for example, fisheries operating under federal guidelines.

We discussed that if the people who would address issues surrounding a particular target or take on a particular action plan were not involved in identifying that target or creating that action plan, there may not be any ownership or buy-in to the plan or to the need for taking action.

Barbara has worked on other conservation plans and can provide some examples where not only are targets and actions identified, but the time frame, cost, and “who’s responsible” are also articulated.

The question was raised: what would be the objective of our plan? Are we interested in establishing the current “State of the Bay”? What is it that we are planning for?

Scope:

We discussed whether we should focus on upper Frenchman Bay, or take a planning process out to the whole bay. For logistical and resource reasons, we decided to stay focused in upper Frenchman Bay, with the understanding that what we create could serve as a model for the rest of the bay. Some objectives, like education, could easily translate to a wider area.

The question was again asked, what are we trying to achieve?

The point was made that fishermen are regulated. We are not. So we can think more empirically. Unless there is a regulatory part to our process, our efforts may not “hold any water”. It is important that we copy DMR on all of our work. Perhaps DMR can help to authenticate or validate our efforts.

A reference was made to the Seaweed Council which is working because harvesters are driving the work of the Council and because DMR is always in the loop. They have an open conversation with the DMR. They do not try to work outside the department. A new Alewife Association is forming that may be operating in a similar fashion to the Seaweed Council.

The question was raised “how far do we push our scope?” A lot of impacts on the bay come from activities on land. Do we want to include development in a plan? Some communities have storm water pollution prevention specialists who focus on the issue of nutrient enrichment and pollution of rivers, bays and harbors. Perhaps one outcome of a plan would be to have a shared specialist serving towns surrounding the bay.

There is reason for optimism that diverse groups will have an interest in pursuing a plan. Some stakeholders, such as those in the shellfish aquaculture industry, have great interest in clean water, for example.

Funding (or lack thereof) should not drive how we proceed. We are likely to find financial support for this work, if there are a lot of stakeholders who want to proceed with a plan. Support from The Nature Conservancy was discussed. There may be “CAP Coaches” available or limited support for a “Rapid CAP” process.

George pointed out that although our focus area here at MDIBL has been on eelgrass, our restoration research and the work of the Conservation Action Planning Work Group could have ripple effects. We may start with one target species that has overlap or relationship with other species and the necessity of applying a similar approach to the next species (for example, rockweed) will unveil itself.

We recognized that a lot of our recent efforts and our thinking about next steps have a lot in common with Bay Management work that has gone on in past years. We questioned

where the commitment to Bay Management at the state level has gone. Collectively, perhaps we need to advocate that the Marine Resources Committee and the DMR Commissioner put Bay Management “back on the table”. Advocacy could be one objective of a local Conservation Action Plan. Perhaps, rather than advocating for Bay Management, we start with advocating for Conservation Action Planning, asking that the DMR have one point person who can participate in the process with us (and others like us), or at least be our go-to person. If and when Bay Management becomes a state priority, Conservation Action Planning work could fit right into a larger bay plan.

Realizing that we need help from a broad constituency to define the scope of a conservation action plan for upper Frenchman Bay, we brainstormed people who should be invited to a next meeting, or at least stay “in the loop” with our process.

We will try to find point people in all of these groups, if we do not have them already.

Towns: Lamoine, Trenton, Bar Harbor, Hancock (Shellfish Committees, Planning Boards, Conservation Commissions etc.)

Other groups, land trusts: Frenchman Bay Conservancy

DMR: (Seth Barker, Pete Thayer, Linda Mercer, John Sowles, Rob Goodwin)

Bureau of Sea Run Fisheries and Habitat: (Joan Trial)

Hancock County Planning Office: (Tom Martin)

DEP: (Mark Whiting)

IF&W: (Greg Burr)

Maine State Planning Office (played a key role in Bay Management—Kathleen Leyden, Matt Nixon, Theresa Torrent-Ellis)

Seaweed Council:

Fishermen/Harvesters: Lee Hudson may identify some participants, Phil Corson and other fishermen from our 3-31-10 stakeholder meeting will be invited to participate.

Recreational Users: Kayak businesses/outfitters (David Legere, Aquaterra Adventures and others, Coastal Kayaking, National Park Kayaking Tours), BH Yacht Club

Nature Tour Guides: Diver Ed (Monat)

Communication needs to be personal, inviting the right person from each group. Jane is willing to make phone calls and follow up with invitations to participate in the process. If there is no interest, then a plan cannot go forward. Only with broad interest and participation can a Conservation Action Plan get off the ground and serve as a guide for future projects.

When we find the correct contact people, we can send a questionnaire or an e-mail asking: What do you feel are the most important habitats to focus on in Frenchman Bay? What are the key targets for the group to focus on? What should objectives be essential for an upper Frenchman Bay CAP?

We could list suggestions on a questionnaire:

Habitats: marsh, subtidal, intertidal

Targets: eelgrass, birds, mussels, softshell clam, finfish

Objectives: public support, education, advocacy, research and restoration

And/or we could ask in the body of an e-mail: Are you interested in participating in a Conservation Action Planning process? What do you think are the issues in upper Frenchman Bay? What level of involvement are you interested in? Please respond by ...

This way, individuals or groups that do not want to participate, might still feel that they contributed to the process and had their voices heard.

MDIBL web pages are close to completion for the stakeholder process and for the MDIBL eelgrass project. People will be able to check in and see what is going on. We will post minutes of meetings and updates on grants etc.

Perhaps we have some homework to do...What is going on in Casco Bay? Other bays? What is going on with the Gulf of Maine Restoration and Conservation Initiative?

Jane will send out minutes and follow up with groups listed.