

Summary 03/16/2011
7PM
Lower Connecticut River and Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange
CRERPA Office
455 Boston Post Road, Old Saybrook, CT

Attendees:

Gregg Mirando – Clinton Land Trust
Frank Byrne – Clinton Land Trust
Kristen Elliot Leas – Westbrook Land Conservation Trust
Cindy Sullivan – Haddam Land Trust
Gail Reynolds – Haddam Land Trust
Melvin Woody – Ct River Land Trust
Rob Cardeiro - LTA
Stanford Brainerd – Lynde Point Land Trust
Wini Olson – Essex Land Trust
Emery Gluck – Connecticut Division of Forestry
Keith Ross – New England Forest Foundation
Rob Cardeiro – Land Trust Alliance
Suzanne Haig – Deep River Land Trust
Moureen Heidtmann – East Hampton
Sara Keaney – Old Saybrook Land Trust
Christina Clayton – Old Lyme Land Trust
Matt Elgart – Lyme Land Conservation Trust
Melvin Woody – CT River Land Trust
David Brown – Middlesex Land Trust

For the March meeting the Lower Connecticut River and Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange (LTE) was visited by Keith Ross from the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) to speak about his New England Conservation Easement Aggregation Project, and Rob Cardeiro, the Northeast Field Representative for the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) to hear from the land trusts concerning how the LTA could help their individual organizations and what they hoped to get out of the LTE.

The New England Easement Aggregation Project's goal is to aggregate multiple conservation easement projects into one larger project to increase funding opportunities and to decrease the cost through shared services (like the cost of appraisals) to increase the pace of conservation across New England. The goal of the project is to protect 120,000 acres of forested land across New England over the next 5 years. To begin looking at the possibility of creating a project amongst the members of the LTE each land trust would begin by creating a list of possible properties and owners that they feel would be open to learning about the project. Each land trust would select their possible participant properties in regards to their own open space priorities as long as the property is primarily forested. At the end of this meeting summary is the document Keith supplied to the LTE during the meeting. In relation to the easement aggregation project discussion also turned to topics concerning the differences in land protection between northern and southern New England and to carbon trading.

Rob Cardeiro focused on explaining who and what the LTA is, and asked the individual land trust what they felt the LTA could do for them and what they hoped to get out of the LTE. Generally the land trusts had concerns regarding insurance issues and finding bridge funding for individual projects. They felt that the LTE could provide them with educational opportunities and increase regional stewardship efforts, and discussion did include how the land trust as a group might help each other in terms of shared services such database software sharing, insurance needs, and financing of individual projects.

Old business included the New England Cottontail Project, the Bat Conservation Project, and future funding for the LTE. It is still hoped that we will get a spring snow storm so that sampling can be done on project properties this year. Suzanne Haig primarily reported that we were happy Lyme Land Trust and Essex Land Trust had both held bat events and discussed with the group ideas for a regional bat monitoring program to be conducted much the same way organizationally as last summer's bat meeting. Information and posters designed by Moureen Heidtmann could be distributed throughout the region via libraries and written articles regarding the white nose syndrome, directions for building bat houses, and recording of bat sightings on forms obtained from DEP which could be collected and collated through CRERPA and sent to Jenny Dickson at DEP. The information could be placed on LTE member websites. The land trust members present agreed that they would like to sponsor and participate in the program. Funding for the LTE in the amount of \$2,400.00 was received for fiscal year 2010 – 2011 from the Eastern Ct RC&D.

New business concerned participation by the LTE member land trusts in Highstead's (a conservation nonprofit located in Redding, CT, <http://highsteadarboretum.org/>), Long Term Forest Monitoring Program. The group agreed that they would like to hear more concerning the project and Ed Faison, Forest Ecologist at Highstead will be one of the guests at the next LTE meeting. The group also asked that another topic for the next meeting should concern the amount and type of insurance land trust need to operate safely. The next meeting will be held May 18th, 2011, 7pm, CRERPA office.

**New England Forestry Foundation
New England Conservation Easement Aggregation Project
Prospectus for Land Trusts**

Project Goal: To aggregate many individual forest conservation easement projects into one larger project and thereby obtain increased funding and due diligence cost savings to accelerate forest conservation throughout New England. The overall goal of New England Forestry Foundation's (NEFF's) Conservation Easement Aggregation Project is to protect 120,000 acres of forested land over the next five years and to create a new funding source for forest conservation through federal climate change legislation.

Problems: New England forests, the green infrastructure providing clean air and clean water, are threatened by fragmentation and development. Investment funding is difficult to obtain for each of the individual forest projects that land trusts and landowners have identified as critical to protect.

Solutions: Working with land trusts across New England, the New England Forestry Foundation, through its Conservation Easement Aggregation Project, is inviting owners of forest lands to consider

selling conservation easements over all or portions of their forest land for up to 75% of the conservation easement's appraised value. By joining together with NEFF and their local land trust in Regional Coalitions bringing their many individual forest conservation easement projects into a large project, land trusts can promote a significant acceleration of forest conservation throughout New England. Not only will this bundling of projects produce economies of scale in due diligence and other project costs, but, most importantly, it will provide these many individual projects a greater potential to be funded by larger foundations and government agencies that would otherwise not consider them on an individual basis.

How the project works:

NEFF has identified 15 focus areas in New England based on existing coalitions among land trusts and other conservation organizations, ecological values, and opportunities for protection of forest lands. Within each of these areas, NEFF has contacted or will contact a land trust to host a meeting with other land trusts that operate in that area to discuss local interest in the "Aggregation" concept with the aim of forming Regional Coalitions.

When joining in a Regional Coalition through the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement with the other land trusts and NEFF, each land trust will develop a list of priority forest conservation projects where a landowner would consider selling a conservation easement at up to 75% of the appraised value, with the landowner donating the remaining 25% or more. The Regional Coalition as a whole develops a comprehensive list of these projects identifying the ecological as well as economic values and each land trust agrees to fundraise cooperatively with the other members of the Regional Coalition for the project as a whole. In order for a project to get on the final list, appraisals are completed by each of the land trusts and landowners and the land trusts sign an 18 or 24 month option to purchase the CE. In addition to the land trusts and NEFF fundraising together, NEFF as a Conservation Intermediary will apply for funding for all of the Regional Coalitions from larger foundations and state and federal agencies.

Currently, NEFF has initiated contact and/or met with land trusts in 9 of the 15 focus areas. The Western Mass Aggregation Project, a Regional Coalition made up of 7 land trusts, has secured options to purchase conservation easements at up to 75% of their value on 72 parcels, which total 10,344 acres and has raised over \$7 million of the projected \$20 million cost to complete the project.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are Conservation Easement Aggregation Project funds capped at 75% of the conservation easement value of the project?

Answer: By ensuring that a selling landowner is contributing at least 25% of the value of a conservation easement as a match, the funds provided for any specific project will be capped at 75% of the easement value. Having a significant participation by the landowner appeals to many granting foundations or agencies and ensures that the funds that are raised are maximized to increase the protection of more forested lands. In addition, it will take time for the projects to be completed and the 25% contribution allows for flexibility with the appraised values. Landowners willing to donate more than 25% of their CE value are strongly encouraged to do so.

2. Can fee simple projects be a part of the aggregation project or is it limited to the purchase of conservation easements?

Answer: While we recognize that there may be opportunities or a need for land trusts to purchase a fee simple interest in a property, the funds for the CEAP are dedicated to the purchase of conservation easements at a maximum of 75% of the CE value. If a land trust is purchasing a property fee simple, funds for the 75% CE value may be used toward that purchase with the CE applied to the land.

3. Where will the money come from for the project?

Answer: Funds will be raised from many different sources including private individuals, foundations, and local, state and federal agencies. Participating land trusts and NEFF will jointly be responsible for raising the necessary funds for the purchase of CEs. A major goal of the project is to utilize this large group of individual projects and partner with similar aggregation projects around the country to drive federal legislation focused on conserving private forest lands as a part of any climate change legislation.

4. Who is responsible for appraisal and due diligence costs?

Answer: The Regional Coalition led by NEFF is responsible for raising funds to cover any necessary appraisal and due diligence costs. The strength of the partnership is dependant upon the commitment of the individual partners.

5. What are the benefits of a group appraisal?

Answer: One of the benefits of aggregating many projects is the economy of scale that becomes available. Appraisals will be done on many similar properties within a region where the appraiser can draw on much of the same geographic, zoning, and comparable sales information to determine values. In addition, changes to individual appraisal documents can be accomplished at a lower cost.

6. Which properties are eligible?

Answer: Forested properties within the area where one of the partnering land trusts works which are identified as a priority resource to protect are eligible for the aggregation project. Properties do not need to be entirely forested and may have some open farmland as well, but the focus will be on protecting forests. There may be some developed areas on a property, but those areas will be excluded from the conservation easement.

7. What are the steps to include a project in the aggregation project?

Answer: After participating land trusts determine they want to participate in the program, they contact their targeted landowners to describe the aggregation project and determine the landowner's interest. If interested, the landowner agrees to having an appraisal completed on their land. Once the appraisal is completed and they are in agreement with the appraised value of that CE, the land trust and landowner sign an 18- or 24-month Option for the land trust to purchase the CE at 75% of the appraised value. Land trusts may add as many projects as they think are feasible. Each land trust will prioritize their list of projects and funding sequence will be based on those priorities, with each land trust taking a turn as funding is available. Each land trust's project priorities then become part of the Memorandum of Agreement each land trust signs with NEFF, which serves as the conservation intermediary.

8. How are criteria for project selection determined?

Answer: Each land trust determines the criteria by which to prioritize its projects on the list, though some Regional Coalitions may decide to determine region-wide criteria for all land trusts in that Regional Coalition to use. All projects are predominately forest protection based.

9. What are the maximum funds available for each project? Answer: At the moment there are no specific limits on the amount of funds for each project. However, we are thinking about funding up to \$1 million for any individual project as it comes up on the project list. Thereafter, a participating land trust may include another portion of a previous project on its priority list, so that when its turn to have a project funded arises again, it will use those funds to complete another portion of the previous project.

10. What is the timing mechanism for dispersal of funds from the aggregation project if not all funds are raised as options near expiration?

Answer: The objective is for all fundraising to be complete before funds are dispersed toward individual projects, but in the case that they are not complete, funds will be dispersed according to the agreed upon order of the project list. Options will be extended as needed, and fundraising will continue to complete those projects. However, if funding is received for a specific project, that project can proceed to closing.

11. Who negotiates, holds and monitors the conservation easements when finalized?

Answer: The land trust that has the relationship with the landowner and that brought the project into the aggregation project will hold and monitor the conservation easement. Fundraising for a monitoring fund will be a part of the project effort..

Please contact Keith Ross at 978-544-5767 or Alex Van Alen at 978-289-7667 for further information.