



CONSERVATION INITIATIVE RESULTS



Westchester, Putnam, and Dutchess Counties (NY) and Fairfield County (CT) share environmentally significant and climate resilient, cross-boundary natural resources and similar challenges to their permanent protection and stewardship. Without regional coordination, conservation efforts can be redundant and wasteful, and response time to development threats is often delayed. As a result, our most sensitive lands fall victim to irreversible development and habitat fragmentation. The Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership (H2H) fosters a proactive conservation community that has a unified message, governance and leadership, and uses science to inform coordinated conservation planning, habitat protection and land stewardship.

The Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership (H2H) is an interstate coalition of 50+ organizations and agencies whose members coordinate and collaborate to achieve their mission and goals in their shared regional landscape. H2H is governed by a steering committee and all-partner meetings. All major decisions are made at all-partner meetings through participatory processes and consensus building. H2H goals are implemented through ongoing and coordinated efforts of four working groups: Land Protection, Municipal Engagement, Landowner Outreach and Engagement, and Partner Training and Capacity-Building. For more information on our current activities, go to www.h2hrpc.org.

Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership



H2H Regional Landscape Map

Mission

The H2H partner network advances the pace and practice of regional land protection and stewardship from the Hudson to the Housatonic by collaborating across boundaries to enhance the connection between people and nature.

Vision

A landscape mosaic abundant in forests, farms, wildlands, and waterways of the Hudson to Housatonic Region enriches the quality of life for all who live, work and play here.



Goals

1. Increase the pace of land protection so that XX%* of our priority wildlife habitats, parks, trails, gardens, and farms are linked to others by 2060.
2. Create opportunities for municipalities and community groups to engage in land conservation and stewardship that furthers shared objectives.
3. Engage landowners to take stewardship and land protection actions.
4. Improve the knowledge and capacity of H2H members so they can achieve their shared mission.

** This percentage will be determined after we complete a strategic conservation mapping process.*

Hudson to Housatonic Conservation Initiative



This report provides a summary of the achievements, activities, and lessons learned between 2014 and 2016 of the H2H Conservation Initiative (H2HCI). It identifies challenges encountered in early outreach efforts, as well as opportunities to refine and strengthen our landowner engagement and strategic conservation approaches going forward. By taking stock of what we have accomplished together so far and reflecting on the insight gained throughout this process, we will be better positioned to act strategically in this next phase of the partnership.

This project was funded in part through a grant awarded by the U. S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry.

Accomplishments

H2H Partner Professional Development

- Created and offered an Engaging Family Forest Owners Strategy Workshop based on research of best strategies from across the region that was attended by 46 partners.
- Organized a workshop on Conservation in a Changing Climate attended by 45 H2H partners.
- Organized a workshop on landowner engagement strategies attended by 57 partners.

Mapping and Priority Identification

- Identified 13 cross-boundary focus areas. All spanned at least one municipal boundary, one spanned two counties, and three spanned the CT-NY border.
- Developed a co-occurrence mapping model using geographic information systems (GIS) to identify and map ~250 priority parcels per focus area.
- Developed a landowner database connected to the priority parcel map for each focal area.

Landowner Outreach and Engagement

- Developed tailored outreach strategies for each focus area and contacted over 10,000 households by direct mail, phone calls, or via neighborhood ambassadors.
- Hosted outreach events attended by 485 people.
- Facilitated 121 stewardship actions taken by landowners.

Land Protection

- Conducted 20 land conservation consultations.
- Protected 217 acres via fee acquisition and conservation easements.
- Additional 1000+ acres in play due to work done during conservation initiative.

Facilitated Collaboration across Political and Organizational Boundaries

- Identified and coordinated multiple partners in each of 13 focus areas to conceive of and implement work plans focused on engaging landowners.
- Transitioned from the H2H Conservation Initiative to the H2H Regional Conservation Partnership.

How did H2H Engage Landowners?

Outreach Type	Examples	Comments
Peer to Peer Events	Woods Forums http://www.masswoods.org/woods-forum	Can be highly successful when strong interpersonal relationships exist in community. Significantly lower turnout when relying on direct mail, with no follow up, to drive participation.
Workshops/Talks	Pollinator Symposium, Bees, Trees, and Butterflies, Meadow Lecture, Invasive Vines Workshop	Attendance varies widely depending on topic, but expert speakers draw broader turnout than some other modes of outreach.
Woods Walks	Guided tour of Levene conservation property	Generally well-attended and effective.
Native Plant Giveaways		High interest and engagement, but limited by funding. Follow up can be challenging.
Individual Consultations	Stewardship assessments, mini management plans, wildlife habitat consultations, wetland restoration, advising on land protection options	High impact but time and resource intensive suggests need to focus on highest priority prospects and parcels. Quality of engagement more important than quantity.
Stewardship Events/Hands-on Projects	Buffers for Beauty http://www.mianus.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Full-packet-4-25-16.pdf	Strategy seems particularly well-suited for engaging existing groups such as neighborhood or lake associations.
Trainings	I-Tree http://www.itreetools.org	Potentially promising model to build community knowledge and capacity.



Challenges & Opportunities

Working Across State Boundaries

Cross-boundary outreach represents a psychological barrier that leaves landowners reluctant to attend events across the border. Identifying and sharing tangible examples of how we have achieved more together as a partnership than as independently acting organizations should help to raise the profile of H2H and build a broad base of support for the Regional Conservation Partnership. Messaging should provide accessible footholds for conceptualizing the need for and benefits of landscape connectivity.

Cultivating Community Ambassadors

In several focus areas, more work could be done to identify and foster relationships with landowners who can act as ambassadors for H2H. Strong candidates may be local opinion leaders, active community members, or individuals who can speak to their own involvement in stewardship or land protection activities. Landowner ambassadors could substantially increase the capacity of all-volunteer land trusts to reach a broader audience

and leverage the momentum from successful events into sustained engagement. Developing connections with these key individuals before embarking on targeted outreach in priority parcels is time well spent.

Measuring Success

Many of the outreach strategies piloted in the H2H initiative entailed a substantial investment of staff time and resources. Partners or volunteers want to know that these efforts are worthwhile. The challenge going forward is to build on these preliminary efforts by targeting conservation and stewardship priorities with appropriate modes of outreach. As H2H develops and refines a repertoire of strategies tailored to this region, the partnership will be better equipped to allocate limited resources for highest impact.



Lessons Learned

1. Adapt materials and tools for our regional landscape. Models developed in areas with a more rural land base need translation for local context that includes suburban and urban communities.

2. Interpersonal relationships are still key to successful engagement in many communities. The events with the best turnout were the result of personal outreach and contact from organizers or trusted peer leaders. In several focus areas, Landowner Ambassadors acted as local champions of outreach efforts, helping to recruit participants, promote community buy-in for projects, and carry out follow-up activities. Direct mail alone rarely attracted the response sought by organizers, but time invested in follow-up phone calls yielded high return.

3. While it is essential to provide landowners with practical information based on sound science, this alone rarely prompts action. Effective outreach facilitates opportunities for landowners to express their concerns and values, and acknowledges the social and emotional components of decisions about conserving land.



4. To engage an entire neighborhood, collaborating with existing groups such as homeowner associations can result in high participation with less active recruitment from organizers, however seeking the necessary approval from these groups can take time.

5. Cultivating an engaged and informed community base for our work will require sustained contact. A single event or outreach effort is rarely enough to prompt action, so follow-up is important. It takes time to build and maintain relationships, and the full impact of these initial outreach efforts may not yet be visible.

What did the H2H Conservation Initiative teach us about collaboration?

Activities undertaken during the H2HCI demonstrated some of the benefits of working together and revealed some of the forms that this collaboration can take.

STRATEGIES

- Co-organization of events
- Sharing successful models and materials
- Exchange of expertise and knowledge
- Sharing staffing and other resources
- Larger pool of individuals to lead and support project initiatives

BENEFITS

- Cultivating capacity in new subject areas
- Strengthening relationships with new sectors and communities
- Developing future woodland ambassadors
- Introductions to new funders
- New prospects for land protection

Case Study

In the River Towns Focus Area, Saw Mill River Audubon (SMRA) and Westchester Land Trust (WLT) worked together to host a landowner forum followed by individual consultations. Both organizations benefitted from this collaboration, with WLT lending expertise in land protection and SMRA leveraging deep community ties to amplify event attendance and the reach of conservation and stewardship messages. In the process, SMRA gained new capacity, and WLT established relationships with landowners within the focus area, planting seeds for future land protection prospects. Outreach in this focus area has already led to a completed conservation easement.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION
VISIT WWW.H2HRCP.ORG**