



Natural Resources Work Group Meeting Notes

DATE	February 27, 2012
PURPOSE	Second Interim Meeting: discussion topics included values, issues, opportunities, and initial discussion of goals and objectives
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ATTENDEES	Jennifer Bauer, Bill Eaker, Judy Francis. Lang Hornthal, Anne Keller, Steve Macleod, Steve Duckett, Bob Gale, Michelle Pugliese , Valerie True, Tim Garrett, Paula Wyatt, Kristin Peppel, Erica Anderson

GroWNC Project Introduction

Identifying Values

Participants then paired up and discussed their values using these two questions: 1) *What is important to you about conserving and managing our natural resources sustainably?* ; and 2) *How does this relate to your involvement in the GroWNC project?* Major themes were teased to organize the ideas put forth and set the framework for future discussions.

- Diversity : biodiversity and health - humans, ecosystems, economy and all parts of our society
- Nature as a place for restoration
 - Sounds and silence; streams, birds, fish, animals.
- Sustainable Forestry and Agriculture
 - Farmland protection and profitability
 - Foodsheds and the local food movement
- Job growth and the ability to sustain that growth creatively
- Wise use of resources
- Intrinsic values in nature: wildlife, endangered plants and animals
- Outdoor recreation
- Landscape scale conservation / preservation
- Drinking water protection



Identifying Natural Resource Issues across the Region

We revisited the issues identified during our last meeting and expanded on themes. The key issues identified during both meetings have been compiled into the list below. Topics were grouped in an attempt to organize ideas and set the framework for future discussions.

Key issues identified include:

A. Lack of awareness of the relationship between human /community health and natural resources

- Need to focus public attention on why resources are important
- Deepening level of awareness and kinds of audiences that are reached
- Education needs to be mainstream

B. Lack of prioritization of natural resource protection and management in planning and funding decisions

- Resources are not adequately and clearly tied to jobs
- Need to identify costs of infrastructure, types of development, and how tax money is distributed, not just in terms of materials but true cost.

C. Negative environmental impacts on the landscape

- Steep slopes / erosion problems (example: logging because BMPs not being used)
- Storm water management
- Air quality issues - asthma rates in children
- Emissions
- Water treatment
- Potential impacts of climate change/global warming
- Loss of critical lands
- Loss of prime soils
- Heat sinks
- Road design and management (visual and surface); driveways; access roads
- Invasive species – threats to indigenous plants and animals
- Impacts of fuel extraction : mining and gas
- Old buildings with visual / environmental concerns that are in flood plain or can't be rehabilitated
- Agrarian land use – not just market driven
- Laypeople doing the work often don't know or follow regulations – need additional training/certification programs that reach them

D. Lack of understanding of how individual decisions impact the integrity of natural systems and their associated ecosystem services



- People don't understand that greening your home doesn't need to be expensive
- Lack of education – many myths and misunderstandings
- Disconnect that how people manage or develop their property does affect everyone (preserving scenic views and protecting private property rights; impacts to lands downstream, etc.)
- Need behavioral changes by general public – examples to show people the benefits

E. Politics and regulations inadvertently preventing smart growth and natural resources protection

- Zoning or government regulations prevent smart growth
- Politics can prevent simply gathering information
- Planning for 5 different counties each with differing needs (re: growth)
- Flexible regulations and education for those overseeing the rules

F. Lack of funding

- Funding (i.e., CWMTF, DENR, etc.)

G. Lack of Access to Resources

- Lack of widespread access to clean water, local foods, etc.

H. Lack of Leadership at the Local Level

- Lack of leadership for prioritizing key steps for vision
- Lack of local decision-making and leadership – when there is a void there, decisions are made elsewhere
- Need buy-in from those not typically at the table

Discussion about growth, and carrying capacity

Some people think we're big enough – have we reached agreement that we want to grow as a region? What is the relationship between consumption and the actual resources we have? Resources are finite and there are true limits that need to be adhered to. What is the region's carrying capacity? How does this "reality check" compare the wants and the needs of the region's communities? Water is certainly a limited resource that will have impacts on our communities. We need to look at the resources available to help us balance the needs of the region. Perhaps we can set minimum thresholds, benchmarks of parameters, BMPs, and offer tools.

Identifying Opportunities for Addressing Regional Issues



Opportunities were also revisited during the meeting. The key opportunities identified during both meetings have been compiled into the list below.

Key opportunities identified include:

A. Educate the public about natural resources by using non-traditional methods

- Get kids out in nature early so they develop a relationship with natural world
- Put information into the workplace (make it easily accessible so parents don't have to actively seek it out)
- Encourage parents and teachers to get kids into the woods
- Get everyone into the woods
- Get people not normally at the table and take them outside to show them places and natural resources – do this with elected officials and community leaders
- Develop an outreach campaign / PSA to connect people with local environmental issues
- Get to know the media! They are always looking for stories
- More hands-on learning opportunities
- Need to show how other people are affected (i.e., water quality downstream)

B. Work across sectors and geographies to educate, develop relationships and see the bigger picture

- Find cross-regional affinity groups (paddlers, hunters, mountain bikers, etc.) to present and educate about issues in a new way
- Connect/partner with other groups who value natural resources, even if it's for different reasons (i.e., Ducks Unlimited)
- Finding common ground across the region
- Counties identify their unique qualities (i.e., their "thing") and individual strengths to see how they fit together and strengthen the region.

C. Better articulate the interconnectivity between economic development and natural resource protection /management

- Better articulate economic opportunities around natural resource protection (i.e., restoration efforts in Pisgah NF and Grandfather Mountain)
- Tie natural resource conservation / sustainable practices to economic development
- Cradle to cradle businesses
- Promote and encourage a market-based approach to conservation

D. Encourage stewardship and involvement in natural resource protection and management

- Inform people of how they can help / participate and the kinds of opportunities that are available for land protection and management assistance
- Combine education and stewardship to help people have ownership over natural areas



E. Use key issues / needs as a focal point for natural resource education, protection, management efforts

- Focus efforts on current and future drinking water sources (see North Toe River Project)
- Tie educational events to other draws (i.e., water release on rivers that draw boaters – add in 30 minute educational piece on the front end)

F. Incentives and policy are both critical tools to be used in land and water conservation efforts

- Collect and distribute best practices, case studies, and existing models
- Increased incentives – have to have arguments to sway people with financial benefit
- Policy/regulations has a place in protecting and managing our environmental resources
- Cost-share programs
- Economic downturn gives an opportunity for discussion of regulations

G. Use existing data and modeling efforts to identify priority areas and areas of concern

- Use available landslide hazard mapping or fund additional mapping to identify areas where landslides may occur and areas where people need to be especially careful when they develop that land to reduce the chances of increased sedimentation into the areas waterways, and reduce the likelihood of the slope failing.
- Good time to purchase lands in important connecting corridors across the region (using corridors model in LLC project)

H. Green development as opportunity for education

- Develop training toolbox for realtors
 - ▶ EcoRealtors (in Buncombe County) as a good model to look at region-wide
 - ▶ Program under development with NC DENR and Mike Butram (Mountain Council for Accountable Development) – contact Judy Francis
- Surveyors and landscape architects also have contact with landowners – good conduits for education

Natural Resources Goals and Objectives

The goals discussion was framed using the key threads that emerged from the visioning exercise during the first interim meeting for the Natural Resources Workgroup. The group agreed that these threads could at least initially be used as goal statements, though there may be multiple goals within some of the threads. The group split up into 2 smaller groups to discuss them one at a time. Due to time constraints, we did not get through all 6 threads. Each thread and the associated goals and objectives are listed below. For a more detailed look at the specific elements of each thread, see the notes from the 02/13/12 meeting. Threads are listed numerically below with goals and objectives below them.



A. The region's farm and forest lands are managed sustainably, providing the basis for a healthy local food system, economic prosperity for landowners, and an intact cultural landscape.

Goal: The region has a strong vital farm community that provides 10% of local foods

Objectives:

1. Provide incentives to buy local and support farmers/businesses and paying premium for products
2. Provide incentives for landowners/farmers to help them make a living wage and sustainably manage their lands
3. Develop a one stop shop that provides business needs and services for the agricultural community
4. Examine GAP certification and see how it can be more accessible to small farmers
5. Support research that will assist the region's food production, value-added products, marketing, and branding to reach a 10% goal
6. Collaborate, but respect that farmer's often want confidentiality for their market share (many have a fear of losing their income potential and farms due to competition)
7. Match supply and demand – i.e. the
8. Improve value-added infrastructure such as manufacturing, processing, and distribution
9. Conduct feasibility studies and market analysis for infrastructure to determine the regional needs and what can be supported

Goal: The region will significantly decrease the rate in which it is losing farmland

Objectives:

1. There will be regional support and incentives for kids to stay on the land and for younger farmers to successfully purchase and manage agricultural lands.
2. Develop a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program for North Carolina.
3. Improve communication with landowners about business support, conservation options/funding, and production opportunities

B. Communities across the region are resilient and taking measures to prepare for natural hazards.

Group noted that we should refrain from using the term, climate change (because it raises too many red flags, and instead focus on resiliency).

Goal: Communities across the region are prepared, informed, and actively making decisions about growth that enhance their resiliency and allow them to prepare, adapt and respond to natural hazards.



Objectives:

1. Identify natural systems that are resilient to shifting weather patterns.
2. Take advantage of all of the information readily available about strategies for help communities become more resilient in the face of unforeseen events.
3. Develop local, county, and regional plans, which include a regional response /communications network that prepare communities for natural hazards.
4. Use money and resources that goes into repair and rebuilding after disasters for more preventive measures (i.e., the “no regrets approach”). Examples of this approach include: includes avoiding loss of life and property and good stewardship of the land; eliminating the potential of loss to the best of our abilities, educating landowners, planners, and others involved in land use planning about fire-dependent ecosystems in our region and the risks associated with building in these areas.
5. Educate residents, nurseries, landscape architects about the relationship between biodiversity and the resiliency Important to have full range of landscape linkages, ranging from migration corridors for wildlife, vertical linkages from canopy to land, and trees interspersed in impervious surfaces to reduce heat index
6. Develop incentives, subsidies, and regulations that encourage businesses to do this kind of work

C. The region’s natural areas are fully appreciated and sensitive ecological blocks of land are protected and managed to maintain and enhance the region’s biodiversity, water resources, and scenic viewsheds.

Goal: The region’s natural areas are fully appreciated and sensitive ecological blocks of land are protected and managed to maintain and enhance the region’s biodiversity, water resources, and scenic viewsheds.

Objectives:

1. Coordinate with land trusts to work with public and private landowners for land protection.
2. Insert priorities identified through GroWNC process into management planning processes underway for Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests (beginning soon), the management plan for the Blue Ridge Parkway (currently underway); and the USFS Restoration Task Force
3. Develop Advisory Boards related to land conservation for the 5 county region (expand the Buncombe County Land Conservation Advisory Board model)



4. Increase private landowners awareness of options and information available (i.e., county inventories, natural heritage areas/data) for stewarding their land.
5. Elevate the importance of Natural Heritage Areas and help communities to become more aware of their associated values and locations.
6. Broaden regional support for educators that educate landowners, especially for non-traditional groups – like tax advisors.
7. Initiate partnerships between schools/school systems and natural areas (local, county, state, federal parks, trails, etc.)/NGO groups to get kids outdoors and help them to develop relationships with place and engage in land stewardship opportunities. It was noted that community gardens can also be a great learning tool when students cannot leave school grounds.

D. Communities across the region are actively working to balance responsible growth and development with natural and cultural resource protection. Smart growth and responsible land use help to foster vibrant communities.

Goal 1: The region’s long term economic vibrancy is reframed in relation to its interdependency with natural and cultural resources

Objectives:

1. Provide education that links economic viability, diversity (economic and bio), and sustainability
2. Define sustainability benchmarks related to all levels of growth and development that can be implemented regionally and community-by –community
1. Maximize eco-tourism in the region by collaborating with chambers of commerce, entrepreneurs, non-profits, and landowners to create or expand potential networks

Goal 2: Foster entrepreneurship by having incubators across the region for natural resource-based industries

Goal 3: Reconcile policies and goals such that policies are helping to guide balanced growth and responsible land use.

Objective:

1. Assess policies that have the unintentional consequences of preventing “good development”.
2. The Region is an economic driver for zero impact companies that balance economic development, job growth, and natural resources conservation



- E. The region recognizes the importance of maintaining interconnectivity across the landscape through protecting and managing corridors for biodiversity, recreation, and vegetative buffers.**

Goal: The region recognizes the importance of maintaining interconnectivity across the landscape through protecting and managing corridors for biodiversity, recreation, and vegetative buffers.

Objectives:

1. Elevate and promote the Linking Lands regional green infrastructure network so it is recognized and used as a framework for identifying linkages between important natural areas in the region.
2. Better coordinate with land trusts in the region to work with public and private landowners for corridor protection and management.

- F. There is a collaborative spirit of working together across the region.**

(we didn't have time to discuss this in more detail)

Identified Working Group Chair Person

Steve Macleod was confirmed as the Chair Person for the group.