



10 Steps to Effective and Enduring Collaborative Conservation

An Overview for Regional Conservation Partnerships

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I. Overview

Regional Conservation Partnerships (RCPs) are generally informal networks of people representing private and public organizations, agencies, and other partners who collaborate over time to implement a shared conservation vision across town and sometime state or international boundaries. RCPs are established by individuals who seek to achieve greater conservation and stewardship objectives through coordination and teamwork than they could do on their own. Through collaboration of partners working with diverse skills and at different scales, RCPs are able to achieve enduring conservation that is both community-grounded and regionally significant. Although approaches vary, our research suggests there are often common steps that characterize RCP growth, and that RCPs can learn from each other on how to proceed along the path from an “Emerging” to “Maturing” to “Conserving” RCP.

EMERGING RCPs: *Convene Partners, Choose their Region, and Get Organized*

Partners meet and decide on their shared region and its boundaries. They choose a coordinator to convene and administer their meetings. They determine how they will make decisions as a partnership. Partners usually use this time to identify sources of funding for acquisitions, conservation planning, coordination, and programming. They draft the RCP’s mission, goals, and objectives. In doing this work, they often find they are more efficient when they create a steering committee, take meeting notes, and, in some cases, create working groups. They develop a website that lists (at least) partner organizations, goals, objectives, and a map of their region.

MATURING RCPs: *Increase their Capacity to Protect Land through Strategic Conservation Planning and Engaging Stakeholders as Potential Partners*

Partners in Maturing RCPs use geographic information systems (GIS) to collaboratively map, analyze and prioritize their region’s natural and cultural resources. They often designate focal areas to be championed by the RCP as a whole, and/or by specific RCP partners. Some RCPs develop a strategic action plan for implementing their regional conservation vision as laid out on a map. In this stage, RCPs also reach out and engage the individuals (e.g. landowners and foresters), groups (other environmental organizations), and agencies (municipal, state, and federal) that would most likely need to be involved in order for the RCP partners to achieve their short- and long-term objectives. Partners often obtain grant funding from foundations and state and federal agencies to augment in-house capacity to support these activities. They can also engage new partners to increase the capacity of their RCP. RCPs in this stage may advance activities (e.g. educational programs and trail projects) separate from any planning process in order to produce momentum and keep partners involved.

CONSERVING RCPs: *Collaborate to Raise Funds and Protect Land*

Conserving RCP partners often follow-up on their strategic conservation map and plans with a case statement to illustrate and communicate their large landscape conservation project to prospective donors or agencies. The case statement can take the form of a Forest Legacy application, a PowerPoint presentation, or a brochure, depending on the source of funding. Conserving RCP partners determine how to obtain funding and manage the activities and processes necessary to conserve land. Will they use private money or public (or a mix)? Which organization(s) will raise money? Will they coordinate their individual efforts under one shared vision, or work together in more collaborative ways? Usually the answers depend on a combination of factors and constraints, such as the capacity of partner organizations, which agency or group will hold the land or interest, and the landowners’ objectives. More and more RCP partners are considering using a capital campaign to raise private and public resources. Partners may run their own campaigns under one common vision, collaboratively with a shared development committee and coordinator, or use a hybrid approach.

II. Checklist

EMERGING RCPs: Convene, Define, & Organize Your RCP

Step 1: Convene and Define your RCP

- Convene the members of your RCP
 - Become the lead or host partner or choose another.
 - Choose partners to convene. Either invite all those in your area or select a sub-set.
 - Convene partners and run meetings well.
- Define your region's preliminary boundaries (knowing they may change)
 - Choose your region based on ecological or socio-political boundaries, host partner territory, funding sources, or a hybrid approach.
- Choose or hire your RCP's Coordinator (could be the initiator of the RCP). Answer:
 - Who does the coordinator work for?
 - What are the coordinator's functions and activities?

Step 2: Further Organize your RCP

- Continue to convene and build trust among partners.
 - Learn about and act on each other's activities, needs, and objectives.
 - *Use meeting time to regularly share updates and activities.*
 - *Use speakers to gauge where interests overlap.*
 - *Do something together, early on, to gain momentum.*
 - *Determine where funding will come from for coordination, programming, and acquisitions.*
- Draft your RCP's mission, goals, and objectives.
- Develop a steering committee and working groups as needed.
- Facilitate periodic communication between partners outside of meetings.
- Develop a website that includes (at a minimum) partners, mission, goals, and a map.
- Learn from peer and mentor RCPs (e.g. attend RCP Network Gatherings, trainings, and webinars).

MATURING RCPs: Increase Capacities by Planning and Mapping a Strategic Conservation Vision and Engaging Stakeholders as Potential Partners.

Step 3: Plan to Increase the Capacity of RCP Members as you Prepare to Conserve

- Plan ahead to build partner capacity through mapping, outreach, and education.
- Help partner organizations, including municipalities, obtain grants and/or work on open space plans.

- Align with your states' land trust service centers to bring specific resources to any land trusts in your partnership wanting to move toward accreditation.

Step 4: Plan and Map your Regional Strategic Conservation Vision

- Draft a clear description of your shared conservation vision to inform your RCP members.
- Using geographic information systems (GIS), collaboratively map, analyze, and prioritize your region's natural and cultural resources. Consider representing local and regional priorities.
 - Determine the sources for GIS information in your region.
 - Map, analyze and prioritize your region's natural and cultural resources.
 - Identify focus areas to champion (by the RCP as a whole or partners).

Step 5: Plan to Implement your Regional Conservation Activities

- Develop a strategic action plan for achieving your mapped regional conservation vision.
- Partners choose to work together on specific tasks.
- *Caution*: Plan your work, and work your plan, but don't wait too long before doing something...anything

Step 6: Engage Potential Partners Within Your RCP's Region

- Identify the people, organizations, and agencies that would help the RCP achieve its regional conservation vision and plan.
- Reach out to and engage other people and in peer-to-peer conservation education leading to their stewarding and protecting their land (e.g. individuals, families, and municipalities).

Step 7: Engage Potential Partners Outside Your RCP's Region

- Explore how your RCP's region compares to the priorities of state and federal government agencies and those of other conservation and charitable organizations.
- Engage in new activities that could add relevancy, funding, and capacity to your RCP and its members.
- Seek and work with allies in the RCP Network to further your partnership's mission and activities.

CONSERVING RCPs: Partners Collaborate to Raise Funds and Conserve Land.

Step 8: Promote your Shared Conservation Vision

- Draft a compelling case statement that illustrates and communicates your conservation vision to foundations, donors, landowners, and other organizations and agencies, and that can be used for your RCP's capital campaign.

Step 9: Raise Funds and Conserve Land as an RCP

- Choose the sources of funding for land conservation to pursue.
- Choose how to raise funds and conserve land as an RCP (i.e. what level of collaboration?).
- Document and evaluate your campaign and ongoing funding strategies.
- Celebrate your successes with press releases and other media.
- Repeat and reinvigorate Step nine activities as opportunities arise that align with your RCP's mission, vision, and plan.

Step 10: Manage Transitions

- Discuss changes in leadership, funding, priorities, and organization and make decisions about how the RCP should navigate them.
- Find new momentum and partners to move forward with subsequent conservation campaigns and consider supplemental activities (e.g., stewardship, smart growth) over time.