



2017 NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATION FINANCE ROUNDTABLE

Harvard Center for the Environment

March 17, 2017

Meeting Summary

The 2017 New England Conservation Finance Roundtable was convened by Spencer Meyer, James Levitt, and David Foster on March 17th at the Harvard Center for the Environment in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The following is a summary of the meeting meant to provide some inspiration and structure for future W&W and Highstead activities.

Conservation finance is rapidly becoming one of the most exciting domains of innovative and strategic thinking and planning to address the conservation challenges and opportunities of our time. We believe the conservation funding mechanisms underway and being explored in New England hold tremendous potential to advance funding for the diverse land protection needs in this region, and will also serve as replicable models elsewhere.

The 2017 Conservation Finance Roundtable brought together over 40 influential regional and national thinkers in the fields of conservation and impact financing to exchange ideas and explore new strategies to confront a troubling upward trend in forest and farmland conversion to development in New England coupled with slowing rates of land protection.

The goal of this roundtable and subsequent activity was to capitalize on the region's conservation capacity and the evolving national conservation finance dialogue by focusing on developing strategies that will: (1) accelerate the protection of forest and water resources; (2) incentivize sustainable production of food and fiber, (3) mitigate impacts from climate change, and (4) improve public health and rural economies.

The overarching themes embraced by this gathering of thought leaders were presented in the form of case studies and pitches to develop or cultivate focused effort on new mechanisms for advancing land conservation, followed by reflection and group discussion. The four themes we explored are:

- Natural infrastructure investments
- New public finance programs
- Healthy communities, healthy people
- Working lands investments

An afternoon session in the form of a conservation *hackathon* offered an opportunity to build on discussion and brainstorm actionable ways to advance the most innovative and feasible options presented earlier.

With this roundtable as inspiration, Highstead and Harvard Forest will work with our partners in the Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative, the New England Forest Policy Group, the Regional Conservation Partnership Network and other organizations to develop a selection of robust strategies—focused on both public and private finance—that will inspire strong and resilient public support for land conservation. A 2017 Conservation Finance Roundtable report will be released this fall.

The 2017 Roundtable built on earlier work by regional conservation finance experts convened by the W&W Conservation Finance Group in 2010 and the influential Report of the Massachusetts Commission on Financing Forest Conservation released in 2012.

Emergent Themes from the Roundtable

1. Cultivate relationships and build coalitions before you need them.
2. Foster a culture of incubation, create a regional sandbox, and provide technical assistance.
3. Align conservation work centrally with society's goals. Reframe conservation as a solution to problems, rather than a luxury.
4. Coordinate action at the intersection of political, scientific, and conservation agendas.
5. Bring in partners from other fields. For example, build coalitions among conservation, arts, and cultural communities to pass tax policy. Work more closely with engineering community to build case for integrated green and gray infrastructure solutions.
6. Be a matchmaker: continue to stimulate new partnerships and facilitate the sharing of ideas among networks.
7. Create a hub for linking challenges with science-based solutions and provide mechanisms for implementation.
8. Tell good stories. Be a champion for the best ideas, most earnest partnerships, and biggest successes. It's through our partners' successes that the collective mission gains momentum.
9. Pick five big ideas and focus on them.