Case Profile Series on
Land Trusts as Climate Change Solution Providers

Sebago Source Protection

Collaboration, Conservation & Co-Investment in a Drinking Water Supply

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CASE OVERVIEW FOR EDUCATORS

Topic: Protecting a Drinking Water Supply Through Collaboration and Co-Investment

Subtopics: Watershed Conservation, Forest Conservation, Drinking Water Protection, Collaboration, Partnership, Water Fund, Innovation, Sebago Clean Waters

Timeframe: 2017 to 2022

Primary Learning Goals: (1) Understand the development and application of a collaborative water fund model to enable watershed conservation to protect drinking water quality; (2) move through the evolution of the process that considers—in sequence—situation, challenge, proposed solutions, implementation, and results.

Secondary Learning Goals: (1) Develop insights into how conservation and environmental organizations and a water utility are working in partnership to develop a model to ensure new funding sources for watershed conservation to protect drinking water quality; and (2) gain baseline appreciation of the value of collaboration for land conservation.

Primary Audiences: (1) Land conservation practitioners; (2) water utilities; (3) landowners; (4) staff, directors, and supporters of NGOs; (5) funders; and (6) interested members of the general public.

Prerequisite Knowledge: General knowledge regarding land conservation and watershed protection.

Summary: The big conservation issues of our day require collaborations designed for unique systemic challenges, connecting people to the land and natural resources on which they rely. What natural resource do we rely on more than anything? Clean drinking water. This is the story of a watershed at risk, the people and organizations that came together to protect it, and the ways in which they are slowly but surely gaining support from both downstream and watershed communities to bring a holistic approach to fruition. This case study focuses on Sebago Clean Waters (SCW), a coalition combining the resources, expertise, and experience of t partner organizations that range from small local land trusts to a global conservation non-governmental organization (NGO), plus the region's primary water utility. Their shared goal is to increase the pace of forest conservation in the Sebago Lake watershed in order to protect the drinking water for about 200,000 people—about one in six Mainers—across 11 communities in the greater Portland area. In just five years, SCW has accomplished nearly a third of its goal, with 9,581 acres (3,877 hectares) conserved and nearly $10 million raised. The conserved area of the watershed has increased from approximately 11 percent to over 15 percent. SCW achieved this success by fostering collaboration, building capacity, gathering data to inform strategy, centering community, evolving messaging, and developing new funding mechanisms and relationships. The collaboration, which has greatly enhanced the pace and extent of conservation in the Sebago watershed, may be adapted to inform land conservation in communities around the globe, from other U.S. cities to Latin America and Asia.

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Executive Summary

The big conservation issues of our day require collaborations designed for unique systemic challenges, connecting people to the land and natural resources on which they rely. What natural resource do we rely on more than anything? Clean drinking water. This is the story of a watershed at risk, the people and organizations that came together to protect it, and the ways in which they are slowly but surely gaining support from both downstream and watershed communities to bring a holistic approach to fruition.

Sebago Lake is the water source for Portland Water District (PWD), Maine's largest water and wastewater utility, which serves about 200,000 people in the rapidly growing greater Portland urban and suburban area. Thanks to the forests that act as natural filters for the water flowing into the lake, PWD has a legal exemption from the filtration requirements set by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. The exemption allows PWD to avoid the typical filtration step and associated costs that almost all surface water suppliers employ. The threat of forest conversion in the watershed—and therefore risks to watershed health, drinking water quality, and loss of co-benefits—is significant, as the greater Portland area continues to expand westward toward the watershed. Reducing forest cover by as little as three percentage points, from the current 84 percent, could be enough to degrade water quality and place the filtration-avoidance waiver at risk.

Sebago Clean Waters (SCW) was formally created in 2017, ultimately combining the resources, expertise, and experience of 10 partner organizations—from small, local land trusts to a global conservation NGO, and a water utility, to increase the pace of forest conservation in the Sebago Lake watershed. SCW is working to protect water quality, mitigate climate change, support community well-being, and protect fish and wildlife habitat in the Sebago watershed through voluntary forestland conservation and other watershed protection measures. SCW aims to create opportunities to increase the pace and extent of conservation to avoid future water quality impairments, avoid increased infrastructure costs, and protect the watershed's many co-benefits. SCW established a shared goal to permanently conserve 25 percent of the watershed area in 15 years, which would require protecting 35,000 acres (14,000 hectares) between 2017-2032.

Figure 1: Logo of Sebago Clean Waters

In just five years, SCW (whose logo appears in Figure 1) has accomplished nearly a third of its goal. It has conserved 9,581 acres (3,877 hectares) and raised nearly $10 million. The conserved watershed area increased from approximately 11 percent to over 15 percent. SCW achieved this success by fostering collaboration, building capacity, gathering data to inform strategy, centering community, evolving messaging, and developing new funding mechanisms and relationships.

Many of the challenges the coalition faces are common to the conservation field. It had to work to secure ongoing general-operations funding, sustain a high level of support as its conserved areas grow, and grapple with staff turnover. Other challenges are more unique to the coalition. As a coalition embodied by multiple organizations, it has had to be attentive to maintaining core relationships while also expanding the partnership and finding a balance between organizations operating at various paces. What sets SCW apart, however, is the coalition's commitment to both conservation and collaboration; its reliance on trust and innovation in equal measure; and its clear vision

of the need to protect the Sebago watershed. The success of SCW's collaborative approach can serve as a model for other organizations looking to undertake large-scale watershed conservation to protect drinking water quality.

Introduction and Context

The big conservation issues of our day require collaborations designed for unique systemic challenges, connecting people to the land and natural resources on which they rely. What natural resource do we rely on more than anything? Clean drinking water. This is the story of a watershed at risk, the people and organizations that came together to protect it, and the ways in which they are slowly but surely gaining support from both downstream and watershed communities to bring a holistic approach to fruition.

Sebago Lake: A Rare Resource

Sebago Lake is Maine's deepest and second largest lake, located about 10 miles (16 kilometers) northwest of the city of Portland (Figure 2).[1] The lake covers about 30,000 acres (12,141 hectares) and is more than 300 feet (91 meters) deep at its deepest point. Since 1869, Sebago Lake has been the water source for Portland Water District (PWD).[2] PWD is Maine's largest water and wastewater utility, serving about 200,000 people—or one in six Mainers—across 11 communities in the rapidly growing greater Portland urban and suburban area. The lake is extraordinary due to both its extreme clarity and its capacity to hold over 100 years' worth of water at the current use rates (average 22 million gallons per day).

The watershed for Sebago Lake is located in the unceded territory of the Abenaki of western Maine and contains exceptional forests that sequester carbon and filter water. The landscape is abundant with critical wildlife habitat, awe-inspiring views and pristine lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. The watershed is 282,000 acres (115,000 hectares). About 48,000 acres (19,425 hectares) is open water. The remaining 234,000 acres (94,696 hectares) is land stretching across 20 municipalities. Of this land, approximately 84 percent is forest, 7 percent is developed, 4 percent is shrub/scrub, 3 percent is grassland/pasture, and crops and herbaceous wetlands account for 1 one of land cover each.[3] Most of the watershed's 25,000 residents get their water supplies from local wells and aquifers. Only small sections of three watershed towns receive water supplies directly from Sebago Lake.

Natural Water Filtration & Other Forest Co-Benefits

The mostly forested watershed that drains to Sebago Lake provides natural filtration and is a primary reason for the lake's clarity and purity. Thanks to these forests, PWD is one of only approximately 50 water utilities using surface water supplies nationwide (out of approximately 13,000) that have a legal exemption to federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) filtration requirements.[4] PWD has been awarded a waiver from filtration by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as mandated by the SDWA, every year since 1993 because the lake continually exceeds water quality standards. This exemption allows PWD to avoid the typical filtration step that almost all surface water suppliers employ. Natural filtration through the forested watershed is significantly less expensive than construction of a filtration plant, which, if needed, could cost upwards of $150 million. Treatment of a water supply that is pure due to natural filtration is also more efficient and cost-effective than trying to remove contaminants from a polluted water source.

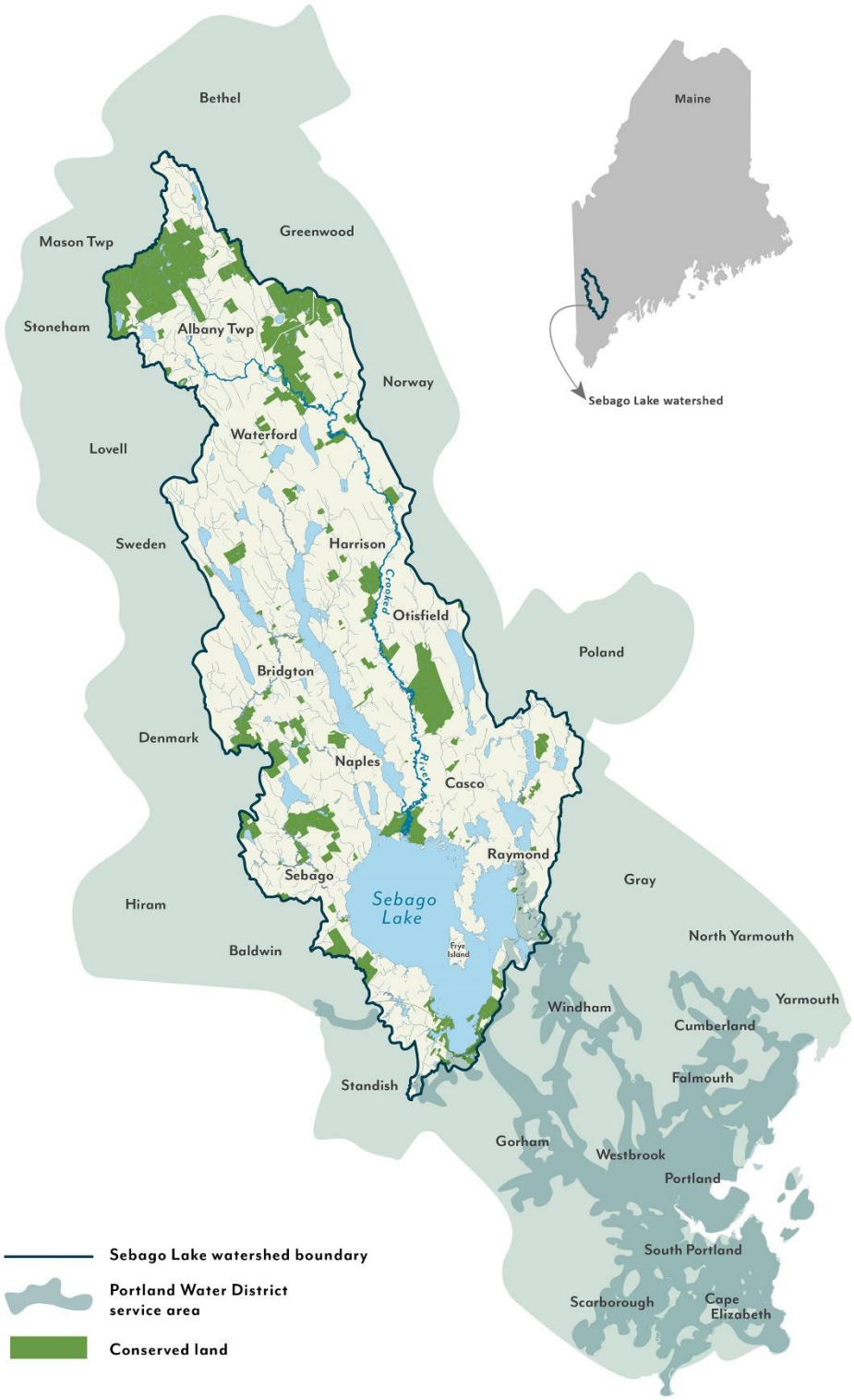


Figure 2: Map of Sebago Lake Watershed. (Map by Nicole Keating, Adirondack Research)

Beyond natural water filtration, the mostly private watershed forestlands are also critical to the region's economy and culture and are an important source of employment. Timber harvesting for the production of lumber, pulpwood, firewood, and other wood products has long been a major component of local economies. In addition, the forestlands provide recreation opportunities, preserve wildlife habitat, and mitigate climate change. An economic analysis by researchers at the University of Maine demonstrated the ecosystem services value of the watershed's forestlands.[5] Using a moderate ecosystem services valuation scenario, the authors found that forest products (i.e., sawlogs and pulpwood), water and air quality, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and climate change mitigation provide $90 million in benefits per year, or $615 per acre per year ($250 per hectare per year). The authors further estimated that every dollar invested in conserving these forests would yield $4.80 to $8.90 in environmental, health, and economic benefits, including the preservation of water quality.

Threats to Sebago Lake Watershed

The threat of forest conversion in the watershed—and therefore risks to watershed health, drinking water quality, and loss of co-benefits—is significant as the greater Portland urban and suburban area continues to expand westward into the watershed. In 2009, 2014, and again in 2022, the U.S. Forest Service ranked the Sebago watershed as one of the most vulnerable watersheds in the United States for the loss of private forestland.[6] Conversion and development of a relatively small percentage of watershed forestland to urban or suburban uses are predicted to lead to a significant degradation of water quality in Sebago Lake. Further, the actions and land use decisions of watershed landowners and municipalities determine the fate of water quality in their local water sources.

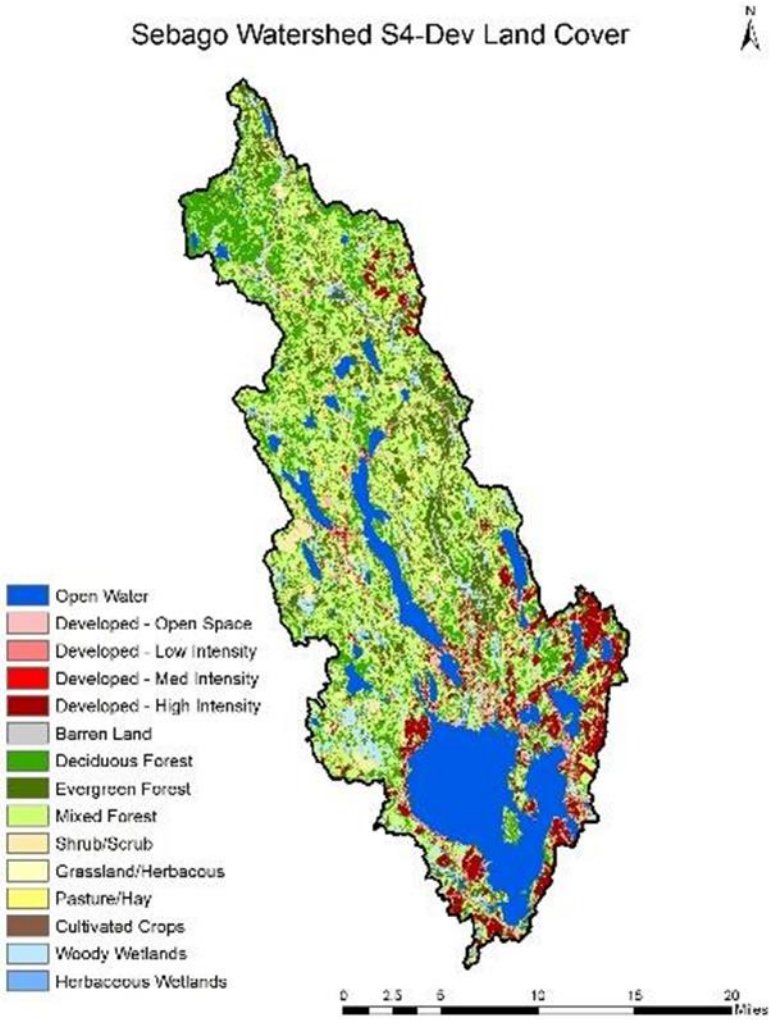


Figure 3: Scenario where forest cover is reduced from its current level of 84% to 76%. (Source: Daigneault and Strong. 2019).

The University of Maine study calculated that reducing the watershed forest cover from its current level of 84 percent down to 76-81 percent could lead to a noticeable increase in pollutants such as nitrogen and phosphorous. This could degrade water quality in Sebago Lake and other bodies of water within the watershed,

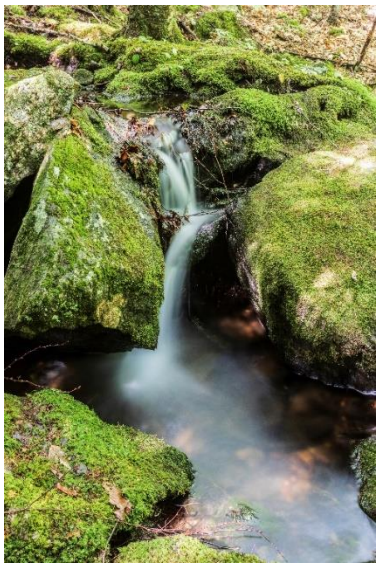
putting the filtration-avoidance waiver in jeopardy (Figure 3).[7] The study also found that a 10 percent reduction in the current forest cover could cause the entire Sebago Lake watershed to fall below state water quality standards. Protecting the filtration-avoidance waiver saves PWD and its customers an estimated $15 million per year in expected additional annual filtration plant costs.

Early Conservation Efforts

Beyond the large federal and state land acquisitions, such as the White Mountain National Forest and Sebago Lake State Park, land conservation in the watershed was historically ad hoc and modest relative to the size of the watershed. As of 2000, about 90 percent of the Sebago watershed land was in private ownership[8] and approximately 23,500 acres (9,500 hectares) were conserved, representing 10 percent of the land in the watershed. Lakes Environmental Association (LEA), a regional lake stewardship organization working in the upper Sebago Lake watershed was established in 1970 and began conserving land in 1971. A number of local land trusts with focus areas that overlap the watershed were established between 1985 and 1989, including Western Foothills Land Trust (WFLT), Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT), Mahoosuc Land Trust (MLT), and Greater Lovell Land Trust. By the 1990s, these organizations were actively conserving land both inside and out of the watershed, but their efforts were not coordinated or focused on water quality benefits. During this same time, PWD was focused on purchasing lakefront land where the most acute potential impact on water quality could occur—at the southern end of Sebago Lake near the water intakes.

Portland Water District Conservation Program

PWD recognized the importance of the watershed to the pristine Sebago Lake resource as well as the potential long-term costs of addressing lower water quality. While they understood the value of conserving more land in the watershed, PWD had not traditionally supported other entities to purchase fee ownership or easements. That all changed when, seeking new sources of land capital, LEA approached PWD with three different requests for financial support for the Holt Pond Preserve located in the watershed far from the intake zone. These uninvited requests were novel for PWD and would result in investment in land they would not own or manage. Following internal discussion about how this would support the Watershed Control Plan required by their filtration waiver, all three requests were approved. PWD approved funding requests for another watershed forestland project in 2006. These requests led PWD to adopt a Land Preservation Policy in 2007.[9]



PWD's formal adoption of the Land Preservation Policy increased the number and total amount of funding requests it received and included requests from WFLT and LELT. Between 2007 and 2012, the pace of watershed conservation was an average of 243 acres (100 hectares) per year. At this time, there was a growing recognition of the threat development posed to the watershed. In 2009, the U.S. Forest Service identified the watershed as having the greatest development pressure on private forests important for drinking water supply in the Northeast.[10] Simply put, the current rate of conservation was not fast enough to outpace the threat of forest conversion to the water supply. In 2013, PWD amended the previous policy, creating the Watershed Land Conservation Program.[11] PWD increased the available funding for watershed

conservation to provide up to 25 percent of the funding needed for projects that met its criteria. The role that PWD plays—providing funding to other land conservation entities—is rare since water utilities typically want to own and manage their own watershed lands. In 2018, this unconventional approach was rewarded when PWD received the coveted Espy Land Heritage Award from Maine Coast Heritage Trust for its major contributions to protecting Maine's forests, securing public access, and safeguarding naturally clean water. PWD was celebrated as the first awardee "outside the regular conservation community."[12]

Formation of Sebago Clean Waters

During the same period that PWD was increasing its watershed investments and local conservation groups were expanding their conservation activity, a few regional organizations, including Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP), the Highstead Foundation, and the Open Space Institute (OSI), and one global conservation entity, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), recognized the importance of the watershed and began to focus efforts there. In 2004, CBEP launched a Habitat Protection Fund to support land conservation in the Casco Bay watershed, which encompasses the Sebago Lake watershed. In 2013, OSI launched its Resilient Landscapes Initiative, which makes grants to bolster work in four focus areas that support wildlife in a changing climate. Its Northeast focus area encompasses the Sebago watershed.

The geographic interests of organizations began to align, and in 2015, TNC convened a group to begin developing a Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for the Crooked River, the largest tributary and the source of 40 percent of the inflow to the lake. The CAP effort was funded by the Sally Mead Hands Foundation and driven by the identification of significant ecological and other resources in the sub-watershed. CAP participants included representatives from local (WFLT, LELT, LEA, MLT), regional (CBEP), and national (OSI, TNC, and Trust for Public Land (TPL)) organizations as well as the water utility (PWD) and the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Yale students produced alternative conservation futures scenario models, and, together with TNC, presented threats, conservation targets, and strategies to the group. The CAP group met for two years and identified resource concerns, conservation strategies, and funding gaps. Its members ultimately decided to focus on land protection as the most effective way to address growing threats to the region's drinking water source, as well as many co-benefits, including wildlife and biodiversity, public health, recreation, clean air, and climate mitigation. The CAP effort recognized the connection between the Crooked River and lake's water quality but was focused only on the sub-watershed and did not yet embrace the Sebago Lake watershed as a whole.

In 2016, the Highstead Foundation recognized the overlapping geographic interests of the organizations and the potential to generate conservation funding with a Sebago Lake watershed-wide vision. The Sebago Lake watershed initiative came about as a result of a vision to pursue a relatively novel funding model where downstream beneficiaries invest in upstream protection of their water supply. The partners started

designing a larger strategy and campaign, which later became Sebago Clean Waters. From the beginning, the group realized there was a bigger vision for how to bring people together in support of the watershed. This would necessitate tackling the challenge of connecting downstream beneficiaries with the upstream producers of the clean water. This was an important framing that underpinned much of the strategy that ensued—from fundraising to communications to forming partnerships.

With the vision beginning to take shape, it was clear that outside funding was needed to move forward to strategy development and implementation. In the spring of 2016, staff from the Highstead Foundation, OSI, and TNC submitted a proposal to the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (USE) Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant program for seed funding to launch a broader watershed-focused coalition. The goal of the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant program is to "accelerate and expand the strategic protection of healthy, freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds."[13] The six-year partnership is funded by EPA and USE, each of which committed $3.75 million, and NRCS, which committed $3.5 million. The proposal was a finalist. It was not, however, awarded funding. The partners reached out to USE to determine how they could improve their proposal. The USE advised the partnership to be more ambitious in its request. The coalition took a step back to get re-grounded and hired a facilitator to lead the group in clarifying its mission and establishing working principles. The next year the coalition reapplied and was awarded a three-year, $350,000 grant. The funding was transformational, as it allowed SCW to hire its first dedicated staff.

The coalition was formally established in 2017, when seven groups combined their resources, expertise, and experience to increase the pace of conservation in the Sebago Lake watershed. SCW partners developed working principles to guide their collaboration, including an important commitment to seek new funding sources that would not otherwise be available to individual partners. This would avoid any competition with existing funding. The partners adopted a mission to protect water quality, community well-being, a vibrant economy, and fish and wildlife habitat in the Sebago watershed through voluntary forestland conservation.[14] Shortly thereafter, the group officially adopted the name Sebago Clean Waters which was intentionally plural in recognition of the value of all waterbodies in the watershed. SCW established a shared goal to permanently conserve 25 percent of the watershed area in 15 years, which would require protecting 35,000 more acres (14,000 hectares) by 2032. Later TPL, LEA, and MLT joined SCW in 2018, 2019, and 2020, respectively, to form the current 10-member coalition.

Work began to accelerate as coalition capacity expanded. TNC hired a community initiatives manager to support the partnership. Local land trust partners, LELT and WFLT, hired a shared conservation project manager to support conservation projects to increase the pace of land conservation through a capacity-building grant from an anonymous foundation. SCW hired its first staff members, a coordinator and a

water fund developer, both as half-time contractors, to lead the partnership and conduct due diligence on the water fund concept. These positions were supported by the successful 2018 USE grant, together with funding from an anonymous donor, PWD, TNC, and Highstead. SCW also allocated early funding to marketing efforts to develop a logo, brand, website, and other communications materials. An online mapping prioritization tool was also developed and launched. The dedicated capacity to coordinate the coalition, seek funding, and conduct outreach to communities and new partners—including businesses—led to a four-year period of continuous growth for SCW.

The Water Fund Model

The water fund concept developed by TNC was an important catalyst for the formation of SCW. Water funds are organizations that unite public, private, and civil society stakeholders around the common goal of increasing water security through nature-based solutions and sustainable watershed management (Figure 4).[15]

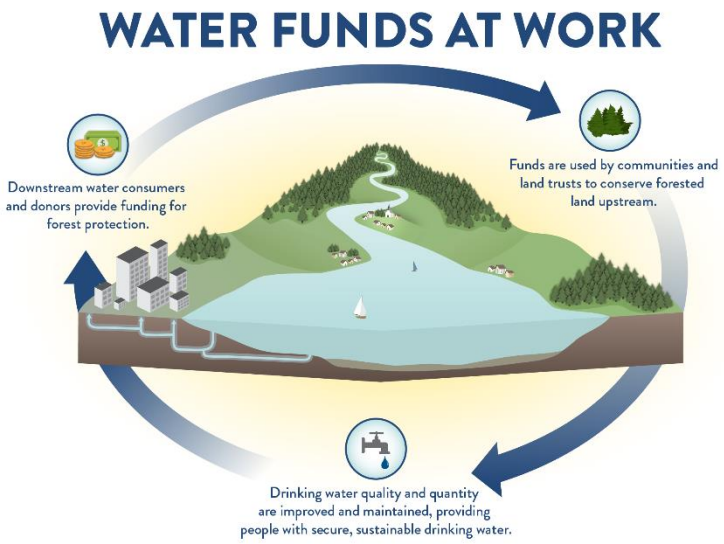


Figure 4: Graphic representing how water funds work. (Source: The Nature Conservancy)

In proposing the formation of the SCW coalition, the Highstead Foundation recognized that the Sebago Lake watershed has a significant population of downstream water consumers and businesses with the potential to invest in watershed conservation and help to increase the pace of conservation.

What sets SCW apart from traditional water funds is its focus on proactive resource protection rather than remediating a water supply. While it can be more challenging to articulate the urgency of land protection, it is easy for stakeholders to understand that protecting a healthy resource is easier and less costly than trying to mitigate the impacts of and restore one that is degraded.

Regional and International Water Fund Precedents

While SCW created a new and unique system in response to the distinct needs of the Sebago region, it drew on foundational knowledge from previous water fund initiatives to inform its work. A water fund is a flexible financial mechanism that unites diverse stakeholders around a common goal and funnels downstream resources into upstream conservation. The concept is quickly gaining popularity both domestically and abroad and is being tailored to the unique needs of various watersheds around the globe. A few notable examples include:

- Christina-Brandywine Revolving Water Fund: In an effort to restore a highly polluted drinking water source, several organizations partnered to leverage a Payment for Ecosystem Services construct and fund agricultural solutions to water degradation in Delaware and Pennsylvania,
- Rio Grande Water Fund: A proactive initiative to maintain and treat forests upstream of the Rio Grande that are at high risk for wildfire and, thus, threaten the quality of New Mexico's drinking water, and
- FONAG—*Fondo para la protección del Aqua* (the Fund for the Protection of Water): A private trust for watershed protection in Quito, Ecuador, spearheaded by TNC

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Brandywine-Christina watershed was so polluted that its creeks and streams were no longer fit for recreational use.[16] But the 565-square-mile watershed supplied drinking water to over half a million residents of Delaware and Pennsylvania. To address the crisis, TNC partnered with the University of Delaware's Water Resource Center and i2 Capital, a conservation finance firm, to establish an innovative, self-sustaining, financial tool to kickstart a clean water plan.

The Brandywine-Christina Revolving Water Fund was launched with grants from the William Penn Foundation and the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service; but the concept banked on a diverse stream of future investments that would enable the pool to be continuously used and replenished. A business plan for the project details the process.[17] Grants are distributed from the fund to enable conservation initiatives that provide the most benefits to water quality at the lowest cost and using sustainable methods. The grant recipients complete or initiate a conservation plan and report their project outcomes to the water fund staff. The ecological benefits of the project are then translated into pollution reduction units, which can be redeemed to generate revenue through a Payment for Ecosystem Services construct.

Currently, the project focuses on agricultural solutions, such as planting cover crops, keeping livestock out of water sources, and constructing riparian buffers, which are the most efficient way to reduce pollution in the region. The fund is still in its initial stages, so its long-term outcomes remain undetermined, but a pilot project that provided funding to Hutchinson Farm in Newark, Delaware was successful enough to warrant continued pursuit of the plan.

Further south, a different type of water fund has been initiated to proactively protect the Rio Grande, an important source of drinking water for New Mexican communities. As climate change progresses, the threat of wildfires in the forests surrounding the Rio Grande becomes increasingly severe.[18] In 2011, a devastating fire burned through 156,000 acres of New Mexico forests. Rainfall later washed ash and debris from the fire into the Rio Grande, turning the water black and making it undrinkable. Events such as this one spurred a multi-year partnership of more than 40 organizations and agencies to develop a plan to prevent wildfires and protect drinking water.

The goal of the fund is to increase the pace and scale of restoration in and around the watershed by tenfold. It will attract funding from government agencies, water users, and other stakeholders and divert those dollars into a 20-year management plan. If successful, it will treat and restore 600,000 acres of forest in the Rio Grande, Rio Chama, and tributary watersheds. The plan's economic potential is huge. The cost of treating an acre of dense forest in the region is about $700, whereas the impact of wildfire damage on that

same parcel can reach $2,150. In 2021, seven years into the initiative, the water fund had attracted $52.8 million, funded over 50 projects, and treated 148,905 acres.[19]

Outside the United States water funds utilize similar approaches to the protection of water supply quality and quantity. TNC has been involved in implementing this method of green infrastructure in Costa Rica, China, Kenya, Mexico, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Brazil, and Columbia.[20]

One notable example is the Fund for the Protection of Water (FONAG) in Quito, Ecuador. In 2000, TNC initiated a partnership with the municipality of Quito and Quito's water company to establish a private trust for water protection in Ecuador. In less than two decades, FONAG's initial endowment of $21,000 blossomed into a $18.7-million funding pool. Over this time, it has enabled the protection and restoration of over 40,000 hectares of forestland, identified additional land to prioritize for future protection, worked with hundreds of community members, and established a monitoring program to track and report project outcomes.

Given the potential for water fund models to be adapted based on regional needs and resources, and the initial success of early adopters, the concept is likely to spread and evolve in coming years. TNC alone has worked with over 600 partners across 13 countries in just 20 years to develop 43 water funds.[21] Another 35 are currently being developed.

Problem Statement

With only 10 percent of the Sebago Lake watershed protected from development, and the Greater Portland area growing in population and footprint, the watershed's impressive 84-percent forest cover and the exceptional purity of Sebago Lake were at risk.[22] As little as an 8 percent reduction in forestland could degrade water quality in the watershed, while a 10 percent reduction could result in the need for filtration.[23] The costs of constructing a water filtration plan would be substantial, estimated at $150 million.

SCW aims to increase the pace and extent of conservation to avoid future water quality impairments, avoid increased infrastructure costs, and to protect the watershed's many co-benefits.[24] As previously stated, the coalition established a shared goal of conserving 25 percent of the watershed, or 35,000 additional acres (14,000 hectares), within 15 years of its formation in 2017. A commitment to avoid additional competition for existing funding is central to the strong trust between partners and is part of the coalition's collaborative agreement. It aims, instead, to generate new funding opportunities that no one partner would be able to access alone.

Strategy and Implementation

SCW is employing the following key strategies to reach its goal:

- Foster collaboration
- Build capacity
- Gather data to inform strategy

- Center community
- Evolve messaging
- Develop new funding mechanisms and relationships

Foster Collaboration

SCW is not a stand-alone entity, but a coalition of 10 independent organizations working collaboratively toward shared goals.[25] SCW has created a novel and replicable governance structure and partnership agreement, called its Working Principles, with an eye to organizational sustainability and partner equity. The coalition comprises organizations working at different scales, with unique skills and goals, and varying capacities. Partners range in size from small, local land trusts with only a few staff members to global TNC. Each partner brings something different to the coalition and the partners support each other in various ways according to their particular niche. Some partners, like the Highstead Foundation and TNC, have provided funding to support the coalition. Others, such as PWD and OSI, have the experience and credibility to serve as fiscal sponsors for large federal grants and private-donor and foundation funding, respectively. The four local watershed partners have local knowledge, credibility, and relationships with watershed landowners and municipalities that the other partners lack. Both CBEP and PWD have connections with the downstream communities and TPL brings specialized experience in managing complex land transactions.

Each partner also requires different resources from the coalition to support conservation efforts across the watershed. Individual members' success in communications, building technical capacity, securing funding, and building public awareness are critical to the effort's overall success. By acting collaboratively, the coalition facilitates partner access to the support they need. According to Tamara Lee Pinard, the community initiatives manager for The Nature Conservancy in Maine, and a co-chair of SCW,

> The strength of Sebago Clean Waters is in the organizational diversity of the partners. Beyond the convergence of interests and missions, everyone is bringing something unique and vital to the effort. Given both the value each of the partners brings and relative sizes and strengths of the different organizations, we recognized early on the importance of identifying the key elements that each partner needs for success. It has been a critical part of our process to give those needs a voice and ensure they are accommodated. SCW has also continuously invested in the relationships among the individuals and organizations that make up its coalition. Several times a year, partners gather for recreational and social activities on watershed lands and waters. SCW also holds an annual retreat that provides time and space for members to build relationships and address complex topics that require focused discussions. A key to the success of the coalition is the recognition that each partner must balance their own organization's needs with those of SCW. For example, there is a shared belief that if any one organization tries to take more than its fair share of credit or funding the coalition will ultimately fail and bring all partners down.

This balancing of power has been key to navigating tension at several points within the coalition. In one example, a partner with the most capacity embarked on funder outreach that appeared to undermine the coalition's efforts. After careful conversation, that partner recognized the need to let SCW lead in that funder relationship.

In another example, an individual land-trust partner voiced its need, in local communities, to be the communications lead. By working through these situations, the partners have developed an increased understanding, respect, and trust for each other and recognize that it would be detrimental to undermine the coalition in order to further their own organizations. "The most valuable things we have as a coalition are our relationships with each other and among our organizations and, ultimately, the only thing we have in this partnership. They are critical to our success," reflected Karen Young, SCW's partnership director.

In 2020, SCW made a commitment to center equity in its work and began an equity-learning journey. The coalition has been actively exploring how the conservation movement—including the coalition itself—has been complicit in perpetuating injustice in the United States and in the land and water conservation sector. The coalition is engaged in learning about the history and present-day inequities within conservation organizations and has begun evaluating and evolving its internal culture. This internal focus on creating systems that ensure all partners have opportunities to provide input, feel safe speaking up, feel heard, have access to transparent information, and raise concerns about power imbalances, has further strengthened the relationships among partners.

SCW has only just begun this work and is committed to being part of positive and lasting change that will lead to more equitable, just, diverse, and inclusive networks and conservation processes and outcomes. For example, SCW partners have begun to explore ways to provide tribal access to watershed lands, plants, and other natural resources that are important for medicinal, craft, and ceremonial uses. MLT utilized model language developed by the Conservation Community Delegation for Wabanaki Engagement in the Crooked River Headwaters easement to address future tribal access and provide for the granting of harvest permits and cultural use agreements.

Build Capacity

SCW began as a handful of organizations that each sent a few staff members to meetings. The partnership had no formal budget or dedicated staff. The partners quickly realized that to achieve their collective goals, they needed funding and organizational structure. The seed investment from the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant, together with partner funding, allowed SCW to hire two long-term consultants as its first part-time staff members in 2018. The small staff fostered increased momentum, substantial organizational growth, and remarkable progress toward goals. With additional support from business partners like the IDEXX Foundation and other funders, including an anonymous foundation, SCW has since grown to two full-time and two part-time staff. "The Sebago Clean Waters partners used modest capacity support from the Healthy Watersheds Consortium grant program to take their work to a new level. Their capacity enhancements will pay dividends for years to come," said Peter Stangel, the chief operating officer for the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities.

In addition to building the core coalition's capacity, SCW member land trusts expressed the need to increase their capacity to manage an increased pace of land conservation. In one important example, SCW sought funding from an anonymous foundation to hire a shared conservation project manager. The manager would support conservation projects at both LELT and WFLT and provide GIS support to the coalition. This included building and maintaining a GIS-based tool to facilitate the evaluation of the water quality, biodiversity, and carbon resilience characteristics of properties. SCW also secured funding from the same foundation for due diligence activities. It covered legal costs, surveys, appraisals, and other related activities, thus catalyzing land conservation projects. The funding also allowed the coalition to hire a consultant to work with the land trusts to identify areas where they could collaborate for greater efficiency.

Gather Data to Inform Strategy

Throughout its history, SCW has relied on research to guide strategy and messaging.

State Revolving Fund Research

Highstead and USE commissioned a study on State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) programs in New England to determine their potential to support land conservation for water services.[26] The study found SRFs are underutilized and have great potential for watershed protection funding. These findings were used to enhance SCW's second—and first successful—Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant proposal. The

proposal was successful because the opportunity to generate new funding sources through the water fund model appealed to USE.

Stakeholder Interviews

TNC commissioned stakeholder interviews to determine the feasibility of establishing a water fund. The interviews were encouraging and were leveraged into a partnership program for businesses. Allagash Brewing Company, Maine's largest brewer, became the first SCW direct contributing business partner in November 2017 when it hosted a Black Friday fundraiser for SCW. Since then, SCW business support has grown to 10 businesses who contribute both direct funding and highly valuable marketing and communications support. For example, Foundation Brewing Company's special release of the Pale Blue Dot beer for Earth Day features the SCW logo on the can and proceeds are donated to SCW. John Bonney, co-owner of Foundation Brewing Company said, "Our water is amazing, and it comes from Sebago Lake. It is not only the most abundant and important ingredient in our beer, but the clean water of the lake is critical to the overall health of the greater Portland community. By partnering with Sebago Clean Waters, we in the brewing community hope to raise awareness of the importance of protecting our lakes, rivers, and streams. It is part of what makes Maine a special place."[27]

Watershed Study

The feedback from the stakeholder interviews led the coalition to undertake a watershed study to gain a better understanding of the business case. The purpose of a watershed study was to strengthen the economic and ecosystem science underpinnings for the water fund in collaboration with trusted academics (University of Maine), NGOs, and natural resource managers. The researchers were tasked with answering specific questions SCW was facing regarding the tipping point for development that was causing significant decreases in water quality, the costs and benefits of conservation, and opportunities for investment in watershed protection.[28] The results of the economic study have been used to successfully make the case to funders, business partners, and the general public. The finding that 76 percent of the watershed must remain forested to maintain water quality created a sense of urgency and helped to inform SCW's short- and long-term goals.

GIS Data

SCW has used available GIS data sets to develop an online GIS mapping tool that is used to direct land conservation efforts and prioritize landowner outreach. SCW also uses the mapping tool to assess the water quality and ecological value of individual parcels of land and direct funding from SCW for

conservation projects to parcels tied to water quality outcomes. The mapper uses the best-available watershed protection science to identify and prioritize lands at a parcel level that are most critical to long-term watershed health. The tool is an important component of a proactive strategy for watershed protection that includes identifying, prioritizing, and building relationships with landowners whose forested lands play the most critical role in water quality protection. With thousands of landowners and individual parcels in the watershed, the mapper is key to leveraging the best available science and existing relationships with landowners to develop a realistic land protection strategy.

Center Community

SCW aims to center community in its work—both the downstream water user communities and the watershed communities of people who live, work, and recreate there. SCW success to date has been made possible in part because the coalition member organizations are embedded in these communities. SCW organizations include several entities based in the watershed: three land trusts (LELT, WFLT and MLT) and one lake protection organization (LEA). Another coalition partner, PWD, is governed by a board that represents community members who depend on Sebago's clean water and directly serves drinking water users downstream.

SCW's work depends on engagement and support from the people who rely on the land for their livelihood and way of life. Each SCW-sponsored land protection project is conducted with landowners who voluntarily choose to conserve their land. This approach contrasts dramatically with the historical ways that some metropolitan areas, such as New York City and Boston, have conserved watershed forests for downstream users using eminent domain.

In addition to support from watershed communities, a number of downstream water users also strongly support SCW. The partnership not only receives funding along with visibility and enthusiastic support on social media from area breweries, among others. For two years, the employees of a national environmental consulting firm based in Portland, Woodard & Curran, have nominated and voted to provide a "Giving While Living" grant to SCW, reflecting their support for SCW's land protection efforts. SCW recognizes the need to expand this community engagement even further. It is particularly concerned with building connections to the watershed for all residents of the PWD service area, especially those who have been historically excluded from access to green spaces. SCW recognizes that the diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts it embarked on in 2020 will be critical to meeting the current needs of the community moving forward.

Evolve Messaging

The communication strategy for SCW has and will continue to change as the partners listen to and learn from the communities affected. Articulating a compelling case for support of SCW requires a two-prong communications strategy, because the communities in the watershed and the downstream communities receiving drinking water supplies benefit differently. Downstream communities benefit from high-quality drinking water, while watershed communities are more likely to garner the co-benefits of forestland conservation, such as recreational access, economic gain from the local forest products industry, increased climate resiliency, and continuation of the rural character in their communities.

SCW developed its initial business outreach materials based on the educated guess that the businesses using the most water would support forest conservation efforts to avoid higher water costs that might result if water quality in Sebago Lake declines to a point that a filtration plant is needed. After several meetings with the Greater Portland business community, SCW realized that, contrary to this assumption, large businesses are not very concerned about possible water rate increases because they are not spending much money on water. Businesses were more interested in the effects declining water quality would have on community health and well-being. In response, SCW pivoted its downstream messaging to focus on other benefits of its work. A few aspects of its work that businesses are most interested in engaging with include protecting the water source that is crucial for their products, encouraging a healthy outdoor lifestyle for their employees and communities, and seizing an opportunity to meet corporate sustainability goals. Upstream messaging focuses on opportunities for traditional access, such as hunting and fishing, on conserved lands; the economic benefits of forest jobs and tourism related to having clean waterways; and encouraging landowners to better manage their land for water quality.

SCW has learned to listen and adapt based on new information. The coalition continues its work to connect with and understand what is important to the communities it serves and plans to tailor its initiatives and messaging to better align with the values these communities hold.

Develop New Funding Mechanisms and Relationships

From the beginning, the partners were deliberate in their commitment to bring in new funding to ensure that SCW partners are not competing with each other. One of SCW's major accomplishments has been attracting funding that would not have been possible for any single organization. Focusing on additive funding and elevating partners' individual messaging alongside that of the coalition as a whole has been

important for trust building within the coalition. In this way, SCW has been able to raise capital and operating funds without cannibalizing the existing funds—or funding relationships—of individual partners.

At the outset, SCW believed that, to achieve its vision, it would need to create a dedicated water fund for Sebago Lake watershed conservation as a tool for encouraging and directing investment upstream. A water fund model allows donors to contribute directly to the conservation of watershed forests that naturally protect water quality in Sebago Lake. The coalition's original fundraising goal was to build a $15 million fund from both public and private sources.[29] SCW has since recognized a need for a comprehensive strategy that does not focus on building a single fund but on the opportunity to direct funding from multiple public and private streams into its conservation work.

SCW developed financial partnerships with 10 businesses, including multi-year funding commitments, co-marketing strategies, message amplification, and volunteer work. Some of these partnerships involve creative fundraising models, such as the one employed by MaineHealth. Each time one of MaineHealth's 26,000 employees signs up for the home solar program promoted by the sustainability office, SCW receives $100.

SCW found an unlikely ally in the Maine brewing industry. Since beer is 90 percent water, a clean water source is critical to the industry's livelihood. Allagash Brewing Company donates $0.10 per barrel of beer it brews to SCW and Lone Pine Brewing Company established a "1% for the Waters" program where 1 percent of proceeds from all craft seltzer sales go to SCW. Allagash Brewing Company founder, Rob Tod, said:

> Sebago Lake is one of 50 surface drinking water sources in the entire United States that doesn't require filtration. And the purity of that water is mostly due to the land around it. The watershed around Sebago Lake, with all of its trees and roots and tributaries, is essential for filtering the water that eventually makes its way into the lake, which eventually makes its way into the taps of one in six Mainers. So, we think it's essential that purpose-driven businesses like us that rely on the water—both for the beer that we brew and for the quality of life of our employees—are actively working to preserve that resource for future generations.

SCW successfully came together in 2020 to pursue a new type of federal award from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnerships Program (RCPP). The Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA) is grant-like, meaning project implementation is partner-led. SCW

secured an $8 million award, the second largest of ten inaugural AFA awards nationwide. This would not have been possible without the coalition. PWD served as the lead partner for the grant, bringing both significant federal grant management experience and a unique partnering opportunity for NRCS because the 2018 Farm Bill funding for the AFA directed 10 percent of funding to drinking water source protection. The timing of the RCPP-AFA opportunity was fortuitous, as it came during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when SCW did not feel comfortable soliciting struggling businesses. During this time, SCW also had extra capacity to pull together a significant proposal and undertake the ensuing 18-month negotiation process. The receipt of the RCPP-AFA represented another turning point for the SCW, as it highlighted the potential of public funding sources.

SCW is also developing and employing innovative conservation finance mechanisms to fund its work. The Highstead Foundation worked with Maine's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund to develop and expand a pilot approach that would pair low-interest, long-term gray infrastructure loans with a green infrastructure grant. The approach is also referred to as SRF sponsorship. PWD was the first to use the pilot when it financed the protection of the 1,400-acre Tiger Hill Community Forest in 2019. PWD also secured SRF funding for a second project —SCW's largest to date — the Crooked River Headwaters easement in 2021. Together these two projects leveraged $40,000 from the Maine State Drinking Water Program. Financing land conservation as natural infrastructure in the same way PWD finances gray infrastructure was a new concept that has proven an effective method of leveraging additional project funding.

SCW continues to innovate creative funding mechanisms. It is exploring the potential for business funding through the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) sustainable building certification process, whereby LEED credits could be gained for a building project in exchange for funding to support watershed conservation. Further, TNC is planning to establish a pilot aggregated carbon offset program based on recent success by TNC and its partners in Pennsylvania, Vermont, and elsewhere.

Results to Date

In its first five years, SCW continuously built momentum and progressed toward the coalition's ambitious goal of collectively conserving 35,000 more acres (14,000 hectares) between 2017 and 2032. Already, it has accomplished nearly a third of its goal, with 9,581 acres (3,877 hectares) conserved and nearly $10 million raised. SCW helped to increase the watershed's protected area from approximately 11 percent to over 15 percent.[30] In addition, it:

- Established and nurtured a strong coalition under a novel governance structure with an eye toward organizational sustainability, partner capacity, and equity.
- Developed mapping tools and an economic analysis of watershed conservation that allow SCW partners to be strategic in their conservation work.
- Gained national visibility and garnered significant attention in the news media, on social media, and at events such as the annual Land Trust Alliance Rally and Source Water Collaborative webinars.
- Created a compelling brand that has attracted significant new funding, including federal funding with the $8 million[31] RCPP-AFA award, developed financial and marketing partnerships with 10 businesses, secured a 15-year "resolution" commitment from PWD to invest up to $9 million of water rate payer revenue in the pursuit of protecting 25 percent of the Sebago Lake watershed, and supported PWD in structuring its first and second SRF loans to finance land protection.

Building on this track record, SCW is poised for substantial growth. SCW has a strong organizational foundation and plans to leverage significant federal funding to conserve thousands more acres of high priority forestland in the next five years. Using strategic conservation tools, the coalition is creating a lineup of forestland conservation and watershed protection projects. Bolstered by the growth in new funding relationships and mechanisms, it can implement projects that will have positive and lasting impacts both in the communities within the Sebago Lake watershed, where its conservation work is focused, and in the downstream communities that rely on the pure drinking water supplied by Sebago Lake.

Analysis and Implications

When SCW was formed, only about 10 percent of the watershed responsible for supplying drinking water to 200,000 Mainers was protected as intact forestland. Fortunately, there were and still are parcels of significant size and configuration that can be conserved for meaningful impact in the watershed. H handful of watershed landowners hold large, high-priority parcels and their willingness to participate in conservation is crucial to SCW's success. SCW partners understood that sharing a landscape-scale vision and raising significant funding up front would facilitate conversations with landowners and, hopefully, lead to voluntary conservation.

SCW had its most significant conservation success in 2021 when MLT closed on a 12,268-acre (4,856 hectare) easement, 7,515 acres (3,035 hectares) of which are in the Sebago Lake watershed. This project succeeded based on the culmination of several years of foundational work by the partnership. Through its

creation and communication of a landscape-scale vision for the watershed, SCW, in partnership with The Conservation Fund (TCF), was able to pique the interest of landowners in conserving a matrix of over 70 connected parcels of land in the upper Crooked River watershed. SCW successfully secured $5 million in funding for conservation easements as part of the $8 million NRCS RCPP-AFA award and the project was an excellent fit for the funding source. Another piece of the puzzle slid into place when PWD pledged to provide up to $9 million to support forestland protection in the Sebago Lake Watershed. Landowners, Mary McFadden and Larry Stifler, said:

> It was a pleasure to work with Sebago Clean Waters. Collaborations like this are an important way, perhaps the only way, to accomplish conservation on a landscape scale. Each partner brings a particular knowledge and expertise to the project, and this gives landowners confidence that the myriad details of complex projects like ours are properly handled. Our hope is to encourage other landowners to consider conservation options for their land, and we are hopeful that our project will continue Sebago Clean Water's momentum to accomplish their target of 35,000 acres conserved in this important watershed.

To create a strong coalition, SCW relied on a mix of partners. Not only did the missions, interests, and skills of the organizations need to align in the watershed, each organization also needed to recognize that everyone brought something unique and vital. This willingness to work together and appreciation that the partnership can accomplish more than any organization on its own is foundational to SCW. This includes the water utility. According to Paul Hunt, environmental services manager at Portland Water District, “some water utilities can be hesitant to work with partners, especially conservation organizations. But the Sebago Clean Waters experience has shown us that with the right partners, a water utility can accomplish far more of their source water protection goals and accomplish them faster than they can achieve on their own.”

Many of the challenges the coalition faces are common to the conservation field, including securing ongoing general operations funding, sustaining a high level of support as the amount of land in conservation grows, and coalition staff turnover. Others are unique to the coalition, such as maintaining core relationships while also expanding the partnership and finding a balance between organizations that operate at various paces. The coalition has had to be deliberate in deciding when and how to expand its membership. Several organizations have approached SWC, looking to join, but the coalition recognizes that a larger membership takes greater capacity to manage. Another point of tension has been the different pace of partners’ operations. For example, depending on the size and the type of the

organization, partners can have radically different decision-making structures that impact both the scale and speed at which they operate. SCW learned that, through open and honest discussion, specific tensions can be resolved. It recognizes that, as long as variation in organizational structures remains, ongoing conversations will likely be needed to avoid contention. Overall, while the challenges SCW faces are not unique, the ways in which the coalition approaches and solves challenges through trust and innovation, are.

Lessons Learned

SCW's story highlights several key lessons learned for watershed conservation:

- Stay with the drinking water source protection story; it makes a compelling conservation case
- Establish and maintain a strong foundation of partners
- Start small, be flexible, and build off successes
- Center community interests and concerns
- Innovation involves taking risks

Drinking Water Source Protection Makes a Compelling Conservation Case

Decades of polling have consistently shown that clean drinking water is a top priority for voters who support conservation.[32] SCW's real life experience supports these findings. The coalition was well versed in the "lead with clean drinking water'' mantra; however, it felt that an even more compelling message for large water user businesses would be about the avoidance of a potential water rate increase. It turned out that the businesses were much more interested in the effects of clean drinking water on community health and well-being than the cost of use. After realizing its misassumption, SCW pivoted its downstream messaging and shifted its focus to other benefits of its work. In another example, SCW was approached by Lone Pine Brew Co. which had the idea to establish a new "1% for the Waters" program to provide 1 percent of all proceeds from its new craft seltzer line to support SCW because it felt the mission was so compelling. On social media, in the business community, and in the broader community, SCW's experience is that protecting clean water through forest conservation is intuitive and widely supported because clean water is essential to life.

Establish and Maintain a Strong Foundation with Partners

From the beginning, SCW worked to build a foundation on which it could go far together, rather than focusing on specific transactions. Establishing a long-term partnership requires the former, but it is all too often the latter that drives conservation partnerships. Integral to this foundation are a mutually-agreed-upon partnership agreement, a strategy to secure funding to satisfy the needs of both the coalition and its individual partners, and recognition and accommodation of differing capacities among partners. It also requires the intangible elements of establishing relationships, building trust, and evaluating equity in how

the coalition functions. Time and time again, coalition members stressed that trust between the partners is paramount. "There is heart in the Sebago Clean Waters partnership. There is generosity, compassion, and appreciation for everyone," said Lee Dassler, executive director of Western Foothills Land Trust. "We love getting together and make opportunities to have fun quarterly. Having fun is important for relationship building, it creates trust and cohesion. It allows us to reenergize the partnership and tackle challenges together." The long-term nature of SCW's mission requires optimism, a learning attitude, and space for hard conversations. Trust is the bedrock of its ability to attain these goals.

Start Small, Be Flexible, and Build Off Success

SCW's story is one of small, gradual steps, building over time, and pivoting — perhaps multiple times — to incorporate learning along the way. The earliest coalition efforts started with a handful of organizations sending a few staff members to meetings. Over more than five years, it grew to four dedicated staff and 10 member organizations. PWD's role with its own conservation program and then with SCW grew through time in scale and scope to its $9-million watershed conservation pledge. "If I went to the board in 2000 and said we want to adopt this policy because we can see ourselves spending over $1 million in the next 15 years, the board would have said I was crazy," said Hunt. Instead, "Our goals each year were just the deals in front of us. We did not think about what it would mean if we continued to do another one and another one."[33]

SCW learned many lessons over that period and has had to take a step back and rethink its path based on the feedback. For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the spring of 2020 and sent the local economy into a recession, SCW paused its business outreach efforts because it did not feel it was appropriate to solicit struggling businesses for support. Instead, SCW pivoted to building its brand recognition through a digital marketing campaign that took advantage of a greatly expanded opportunity to reach community members online during the mandatory lockdown. SCW was able to be flexible and identify an opportunity to build on the early success it had with its brand during the challenge of a dramatically changed business development climate.

Center Community Interests and Concerns

From the beginning, SCW worked to center community, particularly downstream water users and the people who live, work, and recreate within the watershed. The coalition has been successful in the watershed in part because some partners are embedded in the affected communities. While groups outside the region can bring resources and expertise to enhance the work, it is critical not to impose a view of how things should be done on local communities. According to Gabe Perkins, the executive director of Inland Woods + Trails, "One of the reasons Sebago Clean Waters is successful is that it is reflective of the places and communities it is working in. There are small nonprofits working on the ground as well as large NGOs. It is important to bring all voices in, even the contrarians." That is not to say there have not been snafus along the way, but by centering community, the partners believe they will come out stronger. The key is to maintain a "listen first" mindset and be deliberately open to who should be leading and who should be supporting behind the scenes. Going forward, SCW recognizes the need to expand this community engagement with a focus on building connections with people who most depend on clean, affordable drinking water.

Innovation Involves Taking Risks

Conservation organizations are often unequipped to take risks, but by joining forces and distributing risk across partners with different needs, capacities, and strengths, a coalition can be more daring. SCW was born out of a desire to protect clean water for all and an understanding of the need to innovate. The group began with a handful of staff from a few organizations brainstorming how to get downstream users to pay for upstream conservation. "At its core, Sebago Clean Waters is about being innovative and broadening the partnership circle to generate new funding sources for large-scale watershed protection," says Karen Young, SCW partnership director. "The coalition has created a space and support for learning and testing new ideas and taking risks any one organization might not be willing to take on their own." This boldness had paid off by accelerating the pace and extent of conservation in the watershed and generating new funding that would not have been possible without the partnership.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Practitioners hoping to engage in watershed protection efforts should consider the following:

- Engage in collaboration
- Articulate messages that reflect community interests
- Develop new funding mechanisms and relationships

Engage in Collaboration

When undertaking cumulative large-scale conservation over a long time period, a collaboration can accomplish more in collaboration than any individual. "From the very beginning, we strived to design Sebago Clean Waters as a replicable model for other coalitions, regions, and water funds to learn from," says Spencer Meyer, former co-chair of SCW and senior conservationist at Highstead, currently director of science strategy at NCX, a climate mitigation company. "We focused on supporting each other as partners so we could benefit from long-term collaboration, take risks together, and ultimately achieve our conservation vision. The coalition adopted a learning attitude that allowed us to adapt and pivot, when necessary, but there was never a doubt that we could accomplish our vision. We trusted each other and knew we could figure out any challenges together." It is important to create the capacity for all partners to engage authentically. For example, a group should pay attention to how funding is distributed so all can participate. To build trust, invest in the people in the partnership; get to know them as people; go for a hike together. The trust between and respect for the partners will determine a coalition's success.

Articulate Messages That Reflect Community Interests

At the heart of SCW's success in conserving land and building a coalition was a clear goal and call to action: protect the pristine watershed that serves the greater Portland community. This has made it possible to galvanize the commitment of the coalition, the community, and partners alike. At first the coalition started with educated guesses about what was important to upstream and downstream

communities. Overtime, with a learning attitude and approach, the coalition refined its messaging by listening and retooling as it engaged gained a better understanding of what mattered to the people most affected. For example, it recently discovered that talking about a water fund was confusing to people and is in the process of adjusting both the approach and message.

Develop New Funding Mechanisms and Relationships

The need for conservation and operational funding is universal. While generating new funding is never easy, it is critical that partners are not competing with each other for resources. Doing so undermines trust, efficiency, and effectiveness. One of the benefits of a collaborative approach is the ability to secure funding that would not have been accessible to a single organization. For example, the RCPP-AFA grant and funding from businesses and foundations interested in the broader vision. SCW partners visit with prospective funders together and determine where funding should be directed. Meyer observes that:

> In an initiative like this, there is a big risk that you inadvertently divert existing funding away from the partners, but you can't operate for long if that happens and you erode trust. The key is to create an idea -- a vision -- so compelling, that it attracts its own funding. Sebago Clean Waters has created its own gravity and attracts funding above and beyond that of the individual partners.

Conclusion

Through innovative collaboration methods, SCW created a model for cohesive partnerships that allows related organizations to draw on each other's strengths, minimizes competition, and expands regional capacity for large-scale conservation projects. The system led to significant and measurable success in the coalition's missions to protect the Sebago watershed and can be used as a guide for other conservationists who aspire to achieve more by joining hands with peer organizations. The question that remains: can the model be adapted to effectively streamline future initiatives with unique partners, goals, resources, and challenges?

About the Author

Jessica Sargent has 20 years of experience in the parks and conservation field. She created Primrose Research Group to support public, community, and non-profit partners on a range of parks, trails, and land conservation research, planning, advocacy, and analysis efforts. Prior to founding Primrose Research Group, she was the Director of Conservation Economics at The Trust for Public Land. She established the Conservation Economics program to leverage economic research to create parks and trails, protect land, and enhance funding for special places in communities large and small. In that role, she oversaw more than 60 economic analyses across the country including reports for cities, states, or both in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.

Appendix 1: Study Group Questions

One of the several uses of this case profile is in an academic setting. Following are several questions that an instructor can pose to their study group to engage participants in the details of the narrative.

1. Is this a novel initiative? How have the coalition partners creatively addressed the challenges of large-scale watershed protection in communities mostly outside of the drinking water service area?

2. Is the solution profiled in this case measurably effective and strategically significant for the practice of land and biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation? Why and why not?

3. Is the solution emerging from this case transferable to other jurisdictions and will it endure?

4. Is this a large landscape solution that crosses sectors and political jurisdictions? Who are the key players from various sectors, essential to the success of this initiative? What are the key technologies and organizational methodologies?

5. If you were manager of Sebago Clean Waters, what would your priorities for action in the next year be? Over the next 10 years?

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