

Maine Beaches Conference 12 July 2013 Concurrent Session Notes: Ecological Values

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A Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative was formed with goals to protect water supply sources and develop and maintain mutually beneficial partnerships, serve as a model for local, state & federal collaboration to accomplish shared watershed protection & restoration, engage citizen and public participation in the development of actions to sustain high quality of drinking water sources, work with stakeholder-generated plans to accomplish shared goals economically and efficiently, provide support, adopt science-based testing and management practices, recognize economic development, private property rights & responsibilities, adapt scientific information, data and maps, and develop indicators of success to evaluate the work of the Collaborative. See the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative Action Plan as a template.

Choices for our land and water should not be about just money. Values such as sunsets, or a grandchild going fishing, should be taken into consideration. To understand what people are willing to trade to protect water quality, we surveyed people about their choices for tradeoffs. For example, riparian buffers prevent pollution, erosion, flooding of homes/properties, protect habitat, and provide natural scenery. These are services you do not pay for. What would you be willing to pay or trade? Survey results should be analyzed by next year.

Tin Smith

Coastal habitat threats include storms, water contamination, bacteria. Storms cannot be predicted nor when they occur or their intensity. Bacteria and pollutants will continue to go into our estuaries. Climate change makes a whole new factor.

Small differences influence how we manage our yards (zoning decisions) and they do impact the landscape we live in, thus forming the ecosystem. Natural landscape is only way to filter and get clean water. Lots of coastal streams, very small and disperse into larger rivers. Not a lot of water to dilute pollutants. The economy of this state runs on clean water. Beaches drive our tourism, along with our rivers.

Five significant watersheds flow down into the town of Sanford. What we do in our community impacts beach water quality. This area is largely undeveloped. Lots of water runoff flows directly into river. See Headwaters – a Collaborative Conservation Plan for the Town of Sanford. June 2009.

Our design standards are very relaxed. We require designs to accommodate a 25-year flood, but we've had four 100 year floods so far. Change people's values and they can change anything: clean up after their pets, get involved in resource protection. But we need people to push for things, to build a relationship with their community and share ideas. It's up to us as individuals to make this happen. Landowners sometimes feel that something is important to them, but nobody else cares. Appreciate those large (and aging) landowners, and farmers. Let them know how useful their property is for clean water. We need to permanently protect property.

Laura Minich Zitske

There are three populations of piping plovers in the US/Canada. All three are in trouble. Piping plovers need big sandy beaches for survival. They arrive in April and the people arrive on the beaches in July. There are fewer than 50 nesting sites in Maine on about 20 different beaches. The population of plovers is growing in Maine. Mass & NY are having lots of problems. The young need to walk around at nesting areas to feed, find safety, etc. within hours of hatching. Parents do not defend the chicks. Nests are located next to the upper dunes in the upper beach area. Beach management for plovers is to leave the beach alone and maintain healthy beaches.

Least terns are more visible with noise and nesting sites. The least tern is not threatened in Maine. It is difficult to get the numbers of terns. There are two nesting sites in Maine. They are colonial nesters. The least tern has slowly increased in pairs to about 222 this summer.

These birds are not threatened because they are stupid. Both plovers and least terns are beach habitat specialists, and they are actually very well camouflaged. Beaches are tough places to make a living for wildlife with temperatures extremes, weather being dynamic and unpredictable (always changing). People have made beaches very challenging for them (crowding, habitat loss, jetties, riprap, development), and increase in predators (skunks, raccoons, fox, gulls).

What do we do? Monitor beaches and do outreach and education. We work with communities and coordinate between municipalities, volunteers, etc. Manage exclosures (a fence to keep predators out of the nesting area during the 28-day incubation period). Stake and twine fences keep foot traffic off dunes, protecting the habitat while allowing the dunes to grow and protect property and beaches. Beach management for people—hard seawalls, snow fences, raking or “cleaning” the beach—is not necessarily in our best interest. With minimal respect and management, plovers can nest and we can enjoy the beach.

Q. Can you explain why population is going down? User conflicts. Weather is getting warmer earlier and creating disturbance. Generally a lot more complicated. MA has so many more beaches, more birds, and communication is more challenging. It is not just one factor. Also in NY and MA, people are allowed to drive on the beach creating a big problem. Huge lobbying going on now against this practice.

Q. Do you have additional information for public to leave the beach as it is? No, we do not have a system or brochures available, but we should talk more about the benefits of leaving the beach alone.

Q. What is the broken wing display? The adult bird pretends to be injured and make a death sound to lure predators away from the nest and chicks.

Q. Why was there such a decline in population from 2005? We really don't know, but we think we used protection methods, which we later stopped, and the predators ate more chicks. More birds on the beach are more challenging to protect. Recovery goal is at least 80 pairs.