

COASTAL CONNECTIONS



VOLUME 6, ISSUE 1

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOCUSED ON TOOLS FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2008

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Zach Ferdaña
Senior Marine Conservation
Planner, The Nature
Conservancy (TNC),
Seattle, Washington

Where you grew up: In Mill Valley, just outside San Francisco's Bay Area.

Job description: I work with geographic information systems (GIS) and decision-support systems, supporting teams that are doing site- and regional-scale marine conservation planning. I work within ecoregional boundaries and help TNC to partner across federal, state, and international jurisdictions.

Family: Wife, Diana, and sons, Ryder, age 3, and Shale, age 5.

Education: B.S. in environmental studies, Evergreen State College; Certificate in geographic information systems, University of Washington.

Most fulfilling, and most challenging, aspect of your job: Setting up information systems that characterize a region and then collaborating with partners on a decision-making framework, so that

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FOCUS

BIG-PICTURE COASTAL CONSERVATION PLANNING

Partnering with other organizations to accomplish strategic planning goals can augment your conservation impact.

Emerald-hued meadows glisten in the morning sun. Foamy ocean surf pounds craggy cliffs and unspoiled shoreline. Fish teem and spawn in crystal river streams. The achievements of coastal conservationists—laboring separately in agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private groups—are right before our eyes. But coastal professionals do much more than preserve lovely scenery—they uphold the biological life-support systems on which people and wildlife creatures depend.

And yet the coastal population continues to grow at an astonishing rate, outstripping the capacity of any single agency or organization to keep pace in protecting precious resources. What can be done?

Increasingly, organizations and agencies are finding success by combining their efforts through partnerships, with the aim of making the smartest, most comprehensive and cost-effective plans for coastal conservation.

High-quality strategic conservation planning reaps many rewards for partners:

- It leverages and integrates conservation funds, data, expertise, and other key resources.
- It builds the capacities of state and local agencies.
- It offers an opportunity for diverse partners to find common ground on issues such as wildlife habitat, recreation, water quality, and flood-protection improvements.
- It enables organizations with smaller-scale jurisdictions or service areas to see their accomplishments in the context of large-scale regional objectives.
- It encourages a broad swath of coastal stakeholders to network and strategize together, setting conservation priorities that cross localities, regions, and even states.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Services Center is active in strategic conservation partnerships across the nation. Efforts in Maine and California shed light on tactics that coastal professionals use to form strategic conservation partnerships and achieve impressive outcomes.

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together we can engage in conservation opportunities and react to a variety of threats.

Work-related accomplishment that makes you proud: Working with traditional and nontraditional partners to shift our perception of the marine environment—for instance, from the old perspective of conserving a single species to considering multiple objectives.

Personal accomplishment that makes you proud: Raising two boys who are going to take the world by storm!

The Nature Conservancy and NOAA Coastal Services Center are collaborating on several strategic conservation initiatives, and Zach Ferdaña is involved in two of these partnerships.

“Our global marine team [at TNC offices in Washington State, California, and New York] is collaborating with the Center on a project on Long Island in New York. We’re analyzing sea-level rise and coastal hazards as additional components of our conservation planning.

“We also have a budding collaboration with the Center and the Minerals Management Service (MMS). MMS has a framework for mapping federal activities. We’re exploring adding our regional information into that system so that MMS and others can access ecoregional information when making decisions about ocean uses. A common geospatial framework for nearshore and offshore environments could serve habitat conservation, coastal management, and energy needs,” he adds.

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Creating a Partnership Mission and Culture

The 70-partner Maine Coastal Protection Initiative (MCPI), a successful public-private venture to preserve the state’s coastal character, began four years ago with an intensive effort to define MCPI’s goals and operating structure.

“We worked for almost a year to create a framework document—not a concrete plan of action, but a framework—that emphasized what the partnership was all about,” says Jim Connors, a senior planner with the Maine State Planning Office. “It allowed us to set coastal conservation priorities and lay out our vision, goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes.”

The beauty of strategic conservation planning—and its complexity—lies in its capacity to unite even unlikely allies in a common conservation goal, one that would be unattainable otherwise. The odds for a successful outcome are greatly enhanced when the organizers of the initiative set guidelines for partner cooperation, such as those listed below:

- Be willing to downplay individual or agency goals in order to focus on “big-picture” conservation aims.
- Establish clear, ongoing channels of communication and provide many opportunities for input from all partners.
- Be ready to assist over the long haul and work through obstacles.
- Reassess the goals and progress on occasion.
- Be prepared to take on defined roles and responsibilities when needed.
- Acknowledge that the process of identifying common ground, and reaching decisions together, is an intrinsically valuable goal.

Establishing an Organizational Structure

“When you’re thinking about putting together a grand collaborative, one of your first challenges is figuring out who will be in the core group and who is not in the core group but part of the overall effort,” notes Connors.

The MCPI core group consisted of the four partners that brought the most significant resources to the table—the Maine State Planning Office, Land Trust Alliance, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and NOAA Coastal Services Center. “Of course, in choosing the core group, you need to communicate your decision in a way that is sensitive to the feelings of other partner organizations,” adds Connors.

The MCPI core group handled management duties but did not make conservation decisions. That responsibility was given to a diverse, 20-member steering committee composed of representatives from government agencies, land trusts and other conservation organizations, private industry, the working-waterfront sector, water-sports groups, and other stakeholders.

“We didn’t want anyone to get the impression that the four organizations in the core group were running everything, which is why we felt that giving decision-making power to the steering committee was very important,” says Connors.

The California Coastal Conservancy has chosen a similar organizational structure for its partnerships. One effort addresses the terrestrial, estuarine, and marine conservation activities in Humboldt Bay, which is located on the northern coast and is the state’s second largest estuary. The Center is aiding the conservancy with this partnership.

“One of our chief questions in establishing the Humboldt Bay partnership was, ‘How do we direct this diverse group of people and get them to speak with one voice?’” says Sheila Semans, a project manager for the conservancy. Like MCPI, the conservancy established a core group that provides support and information to the decision-making body, termed the advisory council.

The Humboldt Bay advisory council includes representatives from tribal governments, the recreational community, nonprofits, government agencies, commercial interests, and other stakeholders. “In accomplishing this work, we want input not just from biology and restoration partners, but from cultural and economic partners, too,” says Semans.

Every member of a collaborative effort brings important skills and perspectives to the table. Identifying, agreeing upon, and assigning responsibilities and expectations over the short term and long term are important parts of the collaborative process.

Enlisting Extra Help, When Necessary

Well-intentioned conservation partnerships can flounder without an on-the-ground staff member who is paid to carry out administrative and communication tasks. “For us, California Sea Grant functions in this capacity, because their staff members are good at communicating with all of the partners, speaking in a common vocabulary, and keeping issues moving forward,” says Semans.

When the decision-making group gets down to serious work, hiring a neutral, experienced facilitator who is well informed on the issues is money well spent.

“Because our decision-making body has people representing 20 different organizations, it takes time to reach consensus. We hired facilitators and told them, ‘Don’t let us digress, keep us on target, and make us make decisions!’” says Connors.

Conservation partners should make sure that the broad partner

group has had many opportunities to attend meetings, offer input, and keep up-to-date on developments. Document and make available the minutes of meetings, noting the ongoing effort and decisions made along the way.

Enjoying the Fruits of Collaboration

Partnering for strategic conservation planning has provided a host of benefits in Maine, where MCPI increased the capacity of land trusts, helped establish four geographic information system service centers, and worked as a group to determine the state’s coastal conservation priorities.

“Although our goals have been achieved, the members of the steering committee still stay in contact,” says Connors. “We truly enjoy the cross-fertilization of meeting and learning what one another are doing. Becoming familiar with the work of others, and sharing resources and knowledge, has been a great benefit to us.”

Strategic Conservation Planning Aids from the Center

A number of products and services can help you create effective conservation partnerships:

GIS Tools for Strategic Conservation Planning – This course teaches students how to apply geographic information system (GIS) tools to strategic conservation planning using a green-infrastructure approach. Adherents of this approach seek to identify and protect an interconnected network of natural areas and open spaces, conserving natural ecosystem functions and providing an array of benefits to people and wildlife. For more information, visit www.csc.noaa.gov/training/gis_tools.html.

Coastal Conservation Networking – The Nature Conservancy, the Land Trust Alliance, and the Center created this on-line resource to help coastal conservation groups accelerate collaborative and strategic efforts. Visit www.lta.org/resources/coastal/.

Collaborative and Strategic Coastal Conservation: Lessons Learned Document – This report, authored by Center personnel, describes lessons learned by the Maine Coast Protection Initiative in its effort to enhance collaborative activities among the state’s coastal conservation groups. Visit www.csc.noaa.gov/id/CSC_GIS_lessons_learned.pdf.

Coastal Connections is a publication of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center, produced for the coastal resource management community. Each issue of this free bimonthly newsletter focuses on a tool, information resource, or methodology of interest to the nation's coastal resource managers.

Please send us your questions and suggestions for future editions. To subscribe or contribute to the newsletter, contact our editors at

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NOAA/CSC/CC 08-6-1

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NEWS AND NOTES

Workshop on Climate Prediction Applications

The sixth annual Climate Prediction Applications Science Workshop will be held March 4 to 7, 2008, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The workshop brings together climate applications researchers, makers of climate products, and product users to share new developments. For more information, contact www.sercc.com/cpasw/.

NOAA Seeks Applicants for Hollings Undergraduate Scholarship

NOAA's Ernest F. Hollings Scholarship Program will provide approximately 100 college undergraduates up to \$29,050 each for their academic studies related to NOAA science, research, technology, policy, management, and education activities. The program also offers multidisciplinary summer internships. Applications will be accepted through February 8, 2008, and are available at www.oesd.noaa.gov/hollings_uspa/index.html.

Accolades

Terry Stevens, manager of the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) in Washington State, recently received the NERR System/National Estuarine Research Reserve Association Award. Stevens was honored for his role in founding the research reserve association and his success in building partnerships to support the Padilla Bay reserve.

Transitions

Kristen Fletcher is the new executive director of the Coastal States Organization. She was formerly the director of the Marine Affairs Institute and Rhode Island Sea Grant Legal Program... **William Hogarth**, previously assistant administrator for NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, has become interim dean for the College of Marine Science at the University of South Florida... The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary has promoted **Jennifer Adkins** to the position of executive director. She was previously the interim executive director... The Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management Program welcomes **Leslie-Ann McGee** as its new director. She previously managed the Essential Fish Habitat and Marine Protected Areas Program for the New England Fishery Management Council.

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