

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Stewardship Network: New England (The Network) is a new effort, based at the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, to connect, equip, and mobilize people and organizations in the care and study of lands and waters in our communities. This initiative was launched in summer 2013 with three years of funding from the U.S. Forest Service and the National Science Foundation EPSCoR program. We are adapting a successful model, begun in the Great Lakes region by The Stewardship Network, to meet the needs of our New England conservation partners and volunteers.

Stakeholder Meetings: Fall 2013

With funding from the NH Charitable Foundation, UNH Cooperative Extension hosted five regional stakeholder meetings in fall 2013, to assess local capacity and leadership and gauge enthusiasm and readiness to participate in regional collaborative groups around land and water stewardship. This engagement effort was designed to help guide where and how to start The Network.

Interest was strong, with 140 people representing 86 organizations attending the events. Overall, participants expressed support for The Network, interest in collaborating on stewardship, and a willingness to share expertise. The most common stewardship topics discussed were trails and associated infrastructure, land management, invasive plant control, and lake and river shoreland stewardship.

Relationships with volunteers are highly valued and many said The Network could help volunteers stay motivated by showing contribution to a broader stewardship effort ("collective impact"). Almost all reported a desire to recruit new, particularly younger, volunteers, and many expressed interest in connecting with schools. Many groups need help with identifying, recruiting, training, recognizing and retaining volunteers, and managing volunteer work days.

Many participants were intrigued with the idea of sharing tools, field crews, and other resources. However, organizing The Network around regional collaborations was not significantly important to the participants at this time. Participants saw an online hub as important to connecting volunteers, stewardship opportunities and training (including webinars, field days, and workshops) and would be willing to post events on The Network site. However, access to high speed internet can be a barrier especially in rural areas, and there appears to be limited utilization of available technologies such as social media.

Leadership was demonstrated in various ways at each engagement session. Most organizations expressed a commitment to participate in training, posting to the online hub, and working collaboratively. Some organizations are willing to provide office space and potentially staff support. Others may be able to take the lead or co-lead in regional collaborations.

Recommendations

The Network will focus on the following actions in 2014: create an online hub of volunteer trainings and opportunities; assist organizations with volunteer management; secure resources and tools that can be shared among multiple collaborative stewardship projects; create opportunities, such as conferences, breakfasts and other gatherings where volunteers and resource professionals can share expertise; establish an Advisory Committee that builds leadership capacity across the state and beyond; organize a pilot collaborative based on local demand in the Seacoast Region.

Download the full report: <http://extension.unh.edu/Volunteer/Stewardship-Network-New-England>