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Bear Paw Regional Greenway-Comte Property Easement

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Bear-Paw Regional Greenways

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**Bear-Paw Regional Greenways
Natural Resources Inventory Mapping and
Land Protection Assistance**

A Final Report to

The New Hampshire Estuaries Project

Submitted by

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Executive Summary

Bear-Paw Regional Greenways successfully completed the tasks as outlined in the grant application and award from the New Hampshire Estuaries Project as of August 31st, 2003 for the project titled: *Natural Resource Mapping and Land Protection Technical Assistance*.

The project included the completion of a series of Natural Resource Inventory maps that were produced using current statewide natural resource digital data. We worked with a consultant from the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests to produce a total of 40 different large format maps using geographic information systems. The maps produced included: aerial photos, water resource maps, significant wildlife habitat maps, natural resource co-occurrence maps, and tax map overlays. The maps were produced at both a regional scale that included all of the seven Bear-Paw towns, as well as maps in the series for each individual town. Bear-Paw received a full set of the regional maps and each of the seven member-towns received a full set of town-wide maps and one copy of the Regional Natural Resource Co-occurrence map. In addition to providing the towns with the large scale laminated map series, Bear-Paw provided each town with a CD containing all of the map data.

In addition to the mapping assistance that was provided through the grant, Bear-Paw used the funding to provide direct technical and transactional assistance to towns and landowners to complete land protection projects in the region. The funds were used to pay for services of a land protection consultant who was hired to draft conservation easement language, an attorney to review all documents and assist at closing, other fees and transaction costs related to the projects, and to cover the cost of some of the time that Bear-Paw's Executive Director spent on the land protection projects.

Introduction

Bear-Paw Regional Greenways sought the assistance of the New Hampshire Estuaries Program in the form of a grant for the *Natural Resource Mapping and Land Protection Technical Assistance Project* in order to fulfill in part our goal of building partnerships and regional capacity for land conservation within the coastal watershed and particularly within the Bear-Paw Region. Our target audiences for our work providing technical assistance and building partnerships were the seven member-towns within the region and landowners who were interested in protecting their lands through tools like conservation easements. Bear-Paw identified two areas of critical need that it could take steps to provide resources and assistance with the help of NHEP. The areas of need were

1. Regional Natural Resource and Co-occurrence Mapping and
2. Direct technical assistance and assistance with transaction costs to towns and landowners to facilitate the completion of land conservation easements.

NHEP's funding directly forwarded the above stated goals through this project over the past two years. The funds were used in two ways:

1. Bear-Paw used part of the grant to pay for a consultant to create a series of GIS Natural Resource Inventory maps for the region and each of the member towns. The maps were made in large format and delivered for free to each town. Now each town has a set that are being used among the town's representative bodies including Conservation Commissions, Planning and Zoning Boards, Boards of Selectmen, and Open Space Committees. The towns also received a copy of the digital data on a disc so that the maps can be reproduced locally if they have the capacity.
2. Bear-Paw used the remaining portion of the grant to pay for consultant costs directly related to the drafting and completing of land conservation easements. These costs included those for drafting easement language, attorney review, as well as transaction and closing costs such as title search. Some of the funds were also used to pay for time spent by the Bear-Paw Executive Director working directly on these land protection projects. In many cases, the conservation easement donations would not have been able to be completed if there had not been assistance through Bear-Paw and NHEP to cover transaction costs. In addition, this grant enabled Bear-Paw to strengthen our partnerships with our member towns and forge new ways to partner to protect land.

Project Goals and Objectives

Goals:

- To strengthen the ability of Bear-Paw Regional Greenways and build local capacity to permanently protect more land within the Coastal Watershed and the Bear-Paw Region.
- To build lasting partnerships with our member towns and provide the technical assistance and resources needed to refine our conservation

targets and priorities in the region and to work together to increase the number of priority acres protected within the region.

Objectives:

1. To develop natural resource inventory maps that will be used by towns and communities to help encourage the permanent protection of targeted lands with tools like conservation easements.
2. To provide land protection and technical assistance, as well as transactional support to towns and landowners in the Bear-Paw Region in order to facilitate the completion of land protection projects and ultimately permanently protect more acres of critical lands in the region.

Activities

1. Develop Maps

Bear-Paw contracted the services of Dave McGraw from the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests to do the GIS mapping work. The scope of work for the project was finalized over the first few months of the grant period. It involved several meetings with Dave, Bear-Paw's Executive Director and the volunteer mapping committee. We reviewed data sources, discussed project goals, how the maps were to be used, sources of data, as well as made contacts with each town to determine the availability of tax map data. The mapping project took more volunteer hours than anticipated because of the need to create some data sources. In particular, two of the Bear-Paw towns had to have their tax map data digitized for this project. Two of Bear-Paw's volunteers put in many hours to complete this important part of the project. In addition to the volunteer match time committed by Bear-Paw's ad hoc mapping committee, Dave McGraw from SPNHF put in many additional hours of work above the contracted hours. The result was a very high quality mapping product. The maps were introduced and distributed to each of the towns through our second annual Regional Conservation Roundtable. They have already been very valuable and used for local decision making by many town committees.

2. Meet with towns

In addition to our direct contact with the towns to collect tax map data for the project, the mapping project provided opportunities for Bear-Paw to meet with a variety of town committees and strengthen our partnerships with these representative bodies as well as residents within the communities. During the course of the grant, Bear-Paw organized the first two Regional Conservation Roundtables. The Roundtables have been a great success and we plan to host at least one annually on different topics of interest. The first two Roundtables were attended by representatives of each of the seven towns, including members of Bear-Paw, Town Conservation Commissions, Boards of Selectmen, Zoning and Planning Boards, Open Space Committees, and interested volunteers and community residents.

The first Roundtable focused on introducing the NRI mapping project, as well as discussion of how Bear-Paw could assist the towns in developing their local land conservation programs, efforts, priorities, and find funding to support efforts. We also used the Roundtable as a forum for towns to share their local experiences with each other and to encourage representatives from different committees and commissions within towns to work together to strengthen land use planning and growth management.

The second Roundtable focused on delivering the completed maps to each of the town Conservation Commissions and other representatives and providing guidance on how the maps could be used, interpreted and support land conservation efforts. The maps were very well received and several of the towns will be ordering additional copies. The maps have already been used by several of the towns to inform land use planning, growth management, and open space protection decisions. Each town also received a copy of the Regional Natural Resource Co-Occurrence Map so that they can see how their town's natural resource areas nest within the Bear-Paw Region.

In addition to the roundtables, Bear-Paw has been collaborating with several towns on land protection projects. The partnerships have focused on working directly with the town Conservation Commissions of Deerfield, Candia, and Nottingham for land protection projects that are underway. Each of these towns is committing funds from their Town Conservation Fund to pay for costs of the projects, including transaction costs and in one case to pay for a portion of the conservation easement's market value. Bear-Paw has provided direct project management and technical assistance to the projects. For example, Bear-Paw's staff and land protection committees meet and negotiate with the landowners, help to determine the conservation values to be protected and work with our consultant to draft the conservation easement language. Both Bear-Paw and the towns will have long-term interest and responsibility by co-holding the easements as primary and executory easement holders. These partnerships have been very successful in helping to make these projects happen. We anticipate that they will be models for future land trust – town cooperation throughout the region.

3. Provide Land Protection and Legal Expertise

Bear-Paw's Executive Director and representatives of its land protection committee worked under this grant to provide direct land protection and legal expertise to landowners and to towns. The grant enabled Bear-Paw to contract the services of two of the state's best land conservation experts for drafting easement language and forming legally sound and lasting agreements. Our work with the consultants also provided opportunities for all parties to participate in, contribute to, and learn from the easement process. At each stage of the conservation easement language development, Bear-Paw and the towns and landowners had an opportunity to review the language and provide input or ask questions.

4. Land Protection Outreach

Bear-Paw's collaboration with the towns, both through our partnerships on land protection projects and the mapping project, has provided great opportunities for land protection outreach in the region and has created fertile ground for land protection outreach into the future. In addition to their use at public meetings throughout the towns, (e.g., Conservation Commission, Board of Selectmen, and Planning Board meetings and hearings) the Bear-Paw NRI maps have been used to do outreach at several fun and educational events this summer and fall. In addition, the maps have been used on several occasions over the past months during meetings with landowners who have expressed interest in protecting their land. The maps have been critical for showing landowners as well as town decision-makers the natural resource values of individual properties and how these properties fit into the overall greenway plan.

In addition, during the course of the grant, Bear-Paw co-hosted two estate planning workshops targeting landowners in the region and worked with UNH Cooperative Extension to host a summer conservation workshop series for land conservation volunteers. The goal of that workshop was to increase their knowledge and understanding of conservation tools so that they can continue to improve their local outreach efforts.

Bear-Paw over the course of the grant hosted several fun events that were opportunities to continue to raise funds for and awareness about Bear-Paw's land protection programs. These included a Spring Vernal Pool Walk, Several Music Events, and an art exhibit. Bear-Paw continues to use our regular newsletter, website, and volunteer network to expand our land protection outreach.

Results and Discussion

The NHEP Grant funded project was a great success. Bear-Paw has been working to increase understanding in the region about how towns can collaborate with and take advantage of the skills and expertise of Bear-Paw to increase land protection locally and regionally. The mapping project and the ability to provide technical assistance and transactional assistance to towns and landowners to complete land protection projects were two concrete examples of how land trusts can help to support land conservation efforts locally and regionally. Each of Bear-Paw's member towns now has a full set of maps to help inform its local efforts as well as to help them to keep a regional focus. As we strengthen cooperation across the region, each land protection project in the region will be used as a model to help landowners and town decision makers understand how conservation easements are effective land conservation tools that provide long-term public benefits.

Conclusions

This project will help Bear-Paw and the towns to act more strategically and effectively to protect land in the region and the coastal watershed. As a result, more land will be permanently protected and limited resources, both funds and volunteer time, will be

harnessed more efficiently to protect the most important land resources that still remain in the region. Finally, this project has and will continue to help build land conservation capacity across the region by broadening understanding of Bear-Paw's mission and goals and helping the seven communities within the region to refine their own conservation strategies. The maps and the land protection projects will be effective tools for continuing to build Bear-Paw's membership and to attract funding for important projects from public and private funding sources.

Recommendations

Through this project and process, Bear-Paw has learned that one of the most critical needs in the region is for regular and in-depth outreach to the opinion leaders and town representatives in our seven communities. This outreach needs to be done at a broad level, not just targeting Conservation Commissions, but reaching all committees, especially Boards of Selectmen, town attorneys, and Planning and Zoning Boards.

This takes a significant amount of volunteer time and resources as well as strategic planning and thinking to be sure that the outreach to these groups is clear, concise and useful. Bear-Paw will continue to organize its Conservation Roundtables as one way to provide regular outreach to these decision makers. We are confident that the Bear-Paw maps and the land protection projects completed under this grant will help us to create other opportunities for information sharing, partnerships and learning.

Appendices

1. Bear-Paw Regional Greenways Natural Resource Inventory Maps
 - a. Aerial Photo with Tax Map Overlay
 - b. Water Resources Map
 - c. Significant Wildlife Habitat
 - d. Natural Resource Co-Occurrence Map

2. Foster's Daily Democrat: Article on Distribution of Bear-Paw Natural Resource Inventory Maps to seven Bear-Paw towns at the Regional Conservation Roundtable.