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NATURAL RESOURCES OUTREACH COALITION Coordination and Program Delivery

A Final Report to

The New Hampshire Estuaries Project

Submitted by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	4
3. METHODS	5
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	5
5. CONCLUSIONS	8
6. RECOMMENDATIIONS	8
APPENDICES	
A. Resource materials prepared	
B. Survey sent to previous NROC participants to assess educational needs	
C. Somersworth work plan	
D. Candia work plan	
E. Nottingham work plan	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary goal of the Natural Resources Outreach Coalition (NROC) program is to provide education and outreach to communities in the NH Coastal Watersheds that are dealing with the effects of growth, and looking for ways to conserve open spaces and natural resources. Program objectives to meet this goal include:

1. NROC and client communities determine natural resource concerns of the communities.
2. NROC and client communities gather community information about these concerns
3. NROC develops and client communities host community presentations about natural resource-based planning.
4. Communities receive follow up technical and educational assistance as requested.

In 2003, NROC worked with three new client communities, Somersworth, Candia and Nottingham to achieve the objectives outlined above. All three communities received NROC's *Dealing with Growth* educational presentation, customized for each community, followed by a series of follow-up meetings in each community to address issues raised in the presentation and community concerns about growth and natural resources.

NROC continued to work with four previous NROC communities. NROC presented two educational workshops on land conservation and facilitated a discussion session for Dover, at their request. The NROC team provided continued assistance to the three Squamscott communities, Exeter, Stratham and Newfields, with their implementation grant projects.

NROC worked with a total of seven communities during the funding period.

Our experiences with the NROC program led us to the following conclusions:

- a) All the program objectives stated above were met
- b) The NROC approach of an initial education presentation for all boards and the public, followed by a program of follow-up assistance over several months, has proven again to be an effective strategy to mobilize and motivate community leaders and volunteers to move forward and take action to protect priority land and water resources. The follow-up assistance and activities are key to the success of the NROC program in a community.
- c) Providing continued assistance to previous NROC communities has been valuable in helping those communities continue to forge ahead and develop a strong and informed base of public support for natural resource-based planning.
- d) Having funds available for community projects has helped to motivate community members to take action on issues they have prioritized, though the timing of funds availability need to be reconsidered to give communities more time to develop appropriate proposals.
- e) NROC continues to grow as an organization, with a good sense of team-play amongst its members. Subcommittees have formed to oversee development of a water resources educational unit, and educational programs for regulatory changes, and other issues as they arise.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Natural Resources Outreach Coalition (NROC) is a multi-organizational initiative providing technical and educational assistance to communities in New Hampshire's coastal watersheds dealing with the effects of growth. The NROC program offered to communities includes an initial educational public presentation, *Dealing with Growth*, followed by a series of follow-up meetings to help the community develop an action-oriented work plan, and provide the technical and educational assistance needed to help the community meet its goals.

NROC includes the following organizations:

- Rockingham County Conservation District
- NH Department of Environmental Services
- NH Office of Energy and Planning
- NH Coastal Program
- NH Estuaries Project
- NH Fish & Game Dept – Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
- Rockingham Planning Commission
- Strafford Planning Commission
- Center for Land Conservation Assistance
- UNH Cooperative Extension
- Jordan Institute – Minimum Impact Development Partnership

UNH Cooperative Extension provides staff support for NROC program coordination and delivery. This is accomplished through:

- Coordinating the educational and technical assistance resources of the state's major natural resource and planning organizations and agencies.
- Serving as a clearinghouse and referral agent for available resources for coastal watershed communities.
- Presenting education and technical assistance programs to communities, upon request, that emphasize both regulatory and voluntary tools for resource protection, and that illustrate the connections between natural resources, economy and quality of life.
- Helping community leaders to better understand their community's resources; threats to these resources; the actions necessary to sustain the resources; and then using this information as a basis for community planning and decision-making.

2. PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Natural Resource Outreach Coalition Community Assistance Program has the following goal and objectives:

Goal: The primary goal of the Natural Resources Outreach Coalition (NROC) is to provide technical assistance, education and outreach to communities in the NH Coastal Watersheds that are dealing with the effects of growth. This program helps communities sustain and protect natural resources and open space lands identified as critical to water quality, biodiversity and other resources identified by communities. NROC helps communities protect these resources through voluntary land conservation and land use planning and regulation.

Program objectives to meet this goal include:

1. Coordinate activities of participating NROC organizations and agencies to provide effective assistance to communities.
2. Continue to work with existing NROC client communities on community implementation projects, and other assistance as requested.
3. Work with three new client communities to determine natural resource concerns of the communities and gather community information about these concerns.
4. Develop, with community input, customized community presentations about natural resource-based planning.
5. Develop a program of follow-up technical and educational assistance to the needs of each of the three new client communities.

3. METHODS/ACTIVITIES

The work tasks to meet the above objectives included:

- Providing technical assistance to existing NROC client communities, through meetings, telephone, and e-mail.
- Developing three community project teams, comprised of NROC staff members, for the three 2003 client communities – Somersworth, Candia and Nottingham.
- Meeting with the three 2003 communities to discuss natural resources issues and concerns, and to prepare for the NROC *Dealing with Growth* presentation and follow-up activities.
- Updating the NROC presentation “Dealing with Growth” for 2003, and participating in revisions to customize the presentation for each community.
- Co-hosting the public presentation with the host community.
- Coordinating follow-up technical and educational assistance to each of the three communities over the following six months.
- Working with the communities to develop a one-year work plan, and identifying goals and priorities through facilitated discussion and brainstorming.
- Assisting the communities with implementing priorities identified in the work plan, and drafting proposals for implementation grant funding.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

OBJECTIVE 1: Coordinate activities of participating NROC organizations and agencies.

- Coordinated quarterly meetings of coalition members to select new client communities, review work with existing client communities, discuss revisions to the *Dealing with Growth* presentation, and review progress with the new 2003 communities. These meetings have proved to be a valuable forum for discussion and program improvements, foster a greater sense of team work among the NROC organizations, and have helped develop the most appropriate follow-up assistance.
- Revised the NROC 2004 application form, prepared a by-topic listing of NROC programs for follow-up assistance, and prepared new NROC materials for use by NROC program communities: Advertising Guidelines, Community Implementation Grant Guidelines, and a flowchart describing how the NROC program works (see Appendix A).
- Coordinated NROC marketing efforts to solicit applications from communities for the 2003 NROC program. This included developing marketing materials, coordinating the preparation of an Introductory NROC Presentation, presenting the Introductory Presentation, and serving as the point of contact for interested communities. The Introductory Presentation was given to five communities

who requested it (Seabrook, East Kingston, Candia, Somersworth, and Newington). It was found that applicants who had the Introductory Presentation prior to applying for NROC assistance submitted better prepared applications. It was consequently decided that all future program applicants should first view the Introductory Presentation prior to submitting an application.

- Received applications from seven communities for the 2003 NROC program. Communities selected for 2003 were Somersworth, Candia and Nottingham. The remaining communities (Newington, East Kingston, Sandown and Chester) were waitlisted for a 2004 program.
- Developed NROC staff teams for each of the 2003 communities. The teams for each community were responsible for Initial Planning, Customizing the *Dealing With Growth* Presentation, Presenting *Dealing With Growth*, and Follow-up Assistance.
- Coordinated and participated on the NROC Modules subcommittee. This group was charged with developing a list of appropriate educational modules that could be offered to NROC communities as part of follow up assistance. This follows the success of the development of an *Education and Outreach* module in 2002. A survey was mailed to all previous NROC community participants to establish which modules would be/have been of most assistance (Appendix B).

OBJECTIVE 2: Continue to work with existing NROC client communities on community implementation projects, and other assistance as requested.

- Maintained contact with the community representatives for the three Squamscott communities, Exeter, Stratham and Newfields (NROC 2002 participants), and tracked progress of their community implementation projects. Extension staff facilitated and oversaw preparation of the final reports for the community implementation projects undertaken by the three Squamscott communities.
- Continued to provide follow-up assistance to Dover (NROC-2001/2002 participant), as requested by the Dover Open Space Committee. Extension staff facilitated a program on February 13, 2003, that involved a viewing of the *Livable Landscapes* video (broadcast on NH Public TV in January) followed by a facilitated discussion of the issues raised and what this means for Dover. Extension staff also participated in two informal Land Conservation Options workshops for Dover landowners in April and May 2003. Continued access to NROC assistance by client communities after the initial 12 months of working with them has proved to be valuable in helping to sustain community efforts to conserve resources and balance the demands of growth with conservation needs.

OBJECTIVE 3: Work with three new client communities to determine natural resource concerns of the communities and gather community information about these concerns

- Coordinated preliminary NROC program planning meetings with Somersworth, Candia and Nottingham three months prior to the *Dealing with Growth* public presentations in each community. The purpose of these meetings was to solicit community input through facilitated discussion about natural resources issues and concerns for incorporation into the presentation.
- Followed up with the four communities waitlisted for a 2004 program. Two of these communities, Chester and East Kingston, were still interested in participating in a 2004 program. Chester (slated for a spring, 2004 program) is located in Southern NH Regional Planning Commission region, and East Kingston (slated for a summer, 2004 program) is in the Rockingham Planning Commission region. Application packets and publicity materials were sent to all communities in the Strafford Regional Planning Commission region to solicit a third community. Two communities, New Durham and Strafford applied for assistance. The NROC organizations selected Strafford for the Fall 2004 program, based on a more immediate need. New Durham, who also submitted a strong application, was selected for the Spring 2005 program.

OBJECTIVE 4: Develop, with community input, customized community presentations about natural resource-based planning.

- Coordinated efforts to customize the *Dealing with Growth* presentation for each of the three communities. Worked with the communities to collect local photographs and data for the presentations, and presented a draft presentation to representatives from the community boards for review and input.
- Coordinated the public *Dealing with Growth* presentations in each of the three communities. Presentations were held on the following dates:
 - Somersworth - June 25, 2003; attended by 30 people.
 - Candia - September 9, 2003; attended by 60 people.
 - Nottingham - October 9, 2003; attended by 48 people.

OBJECTIVE 5: Develop a program of follow-up technical and educational assistance to the needs of each of the three new client communities.

- Extension staff, together with other NROC staff, planned and participated in follow-up assistance to the three 2003 communities. Specific accomplishments for each of the three communities are described below:
- **Somersworth (see attached work plan in Appendix C):**

Seven follow-up meetings have been held with community members to date. A total of 15-20 people have been involved in these meetings. Following development of the one-year work plan and prioritizing of tasks, two action groups were identified: Water Quality Monitoring, and Open Space Protection. NROC staff members were assigned to work with each group, to help them each develop a focused program to address their needs. Two workshop sessions have been held to help the group identify Public Education and Outreach needs, to determine the target messages and audiences, and how best to deliver those messages. As a result of these follow-up activities, the action groups have accomplished the following:

 - Developed a list of GIS maps needed to accomplish water quality monitoring and natural resources inventory goals. This will be incorporated into a proposal for implementation grant funding.
 - Started to develop a water quality monitoring program. This will be the basis of a second proposal for implementation grant funding.
 - Started developing a public education and outreach program regarding the importance of natural resources and open space protection.
- **Candia (see attached work plan in Appendix D):**

Three follow-up meetings have been held with community members to date. A total of 15 -20 people have been involved in these meetings. Following development of the one-year work plan and prioritizing of tasks, two action groups were identified: Water Supply Issues, and Open Space Protection. NROC staff have held an initial planning meeting with the Water Supply group to help them identify goals and needs. A second meeting with this group is scheduled for January 2003. Extension staff met with the newly formed Open Space Committee to plan for a public outreach strategy to build support for passing a bond issue at the March 2004 meeting. Assistance has also been provided via e-mail and telephone discussions. As a result of these follow-up activities, the two action groups plan to:

 - Submit a proposal for implementation grant funding to conduct a study looking at present and future water supply issues in Candia.
 - Develop educational materials to develop support for bonding funds for land protection.
- **Nottingham (see attached work plan in Appendix E):**

- Two follow-up meetings have been held with community members to date. Twenty people have attended these meetings. The group identified Water Supply issues, Developing Regulations for Different Types of Subdivisions (major and minor) and Completing the Master Plan Update as priorities in the one-year work plan. Of these priorities, Water Supply issues was ranked as number one, and Nottingham-NROC participants decided to work on this priority first. NROC staff are planning a January meeting to bring in water supply specialists to help the group determine the most appropriate course of action to determine present and future water supply issues. Candia NROC participants will be invited to attend this meeting as well, since the two communities are dealing with similar water supply issues.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- a) All the program objectives stated above were met
- b) The NROC approach of an initial education presentation for all boards and the public, followed by a program of follow-up assistance over several months, has proven again to be a most effective strategy to mobilize and motivate community leaders and volunteers to move forward and take action to protect priority land and water resources. The follow-up assistance and activities are key to the success of the NROC program in a community.
- c) Providing continued assistance to previous NROC communities has been valuable in helping those communities continue to forge ahead and develop a strong and informed base of public support for natural resource-based planning.
- d) Having funds available for community projects has helped to motivate community members to take action on issues they have prioritized. However, the timing of fund availability needs to be reconsidered to give communities more time to develop appropriate proposals.
- e) NROC continues to grow as an organization, with a strong sense of team-work amongst its members. Subcommittees have formed to oversee development of a water resources educational unit, and educational programs for regulatory changes, and other issues as they arise.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Interest in land and water conservation in New Hampshire's coastal watersheds continues to be high, and we feel this will be sustained or increased as growth pressures in south-eastern New Hampshire continues to affect communities. Of the 42 coastal watershed communities, NROC has worked with nine communities to date. We therefore recommend that the NHEP continues to support community conservation efforts by providing continued support to NROC. The NROC member organizations are committed to assisting communities with natural resource-based planning, based on successes thus far. We recommend that funds continue to be made available to communities to enable them to implement prioritized actions, and make more rapid progress towards their conservation goals. We recommend that the timing of implementation fund availability be revised to give communities more time to develop appropriate proposals. The educational needs of previous NROC communities continue to evolve, requiring more advanced levels of education and training as they continue to move ahead with their natural resource conservation programs. The NROC team will need to continue to develop appropriate educational programs based on community needs.