

Biodiversity Conservation through Local Land Use Planning



*An Assessment of Needs and Opportunities in the New Jersey
Townships of Chester, Lebanon, and Washington*

METROPOLITAN CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

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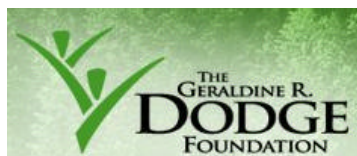
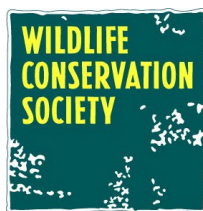
Biodiversity Conservation through Local Land Use Planning

*An Assessment of Needs and Opportunities in the New Jersey
Townships of Chester, Lebanon, and Washington*

by

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Introduction

The mission of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Metropolitan Conservation Alliance is to bridge the gulf between science and practice by developing innovative, locally-based strategies that tackle ecosystem loss and urban sprawl at the suburban/rural frontier in the tri-state New York metropolitan region. To that end, WCS/MCA has developed a multi-faceted approach—referred to as the “Biotic Corridor” approach—in which wildlife surveys are conducted in clusters of municipalities to determine where critical resources occur at a multi-town, landscape scale. Survey results become the baseline layer in the planning process and help to inform policy and land use decisions. Rather than using biological information to oppose development, it is used to guide development into more ecologically sensitive and sustainable directions. In this way, WCS/MCA seeks a balance between environmental and economic health. An example of this approach from New York towns of the Southern Wallkill Valley has been provided with this report (see WCS/MCA Technical Paper No. 8: Southern Wallkill Biodiversity Plan).

The Biotic Corridor approach has been developed, tested, and successfully applied in numerous clusters of townships throughout New York’s Hudson Valley and portions of Connecticut. New Jersey plays an integral role in the New York metropolitan region (in terms of biodiversity, land use, and a regional sense of place) and would likely benefit from the same techniques currently applied in New York and Connecticut. This project represents the first application of the Biotic Corridor approach within the state.

New Jersey, like New York and Connecticut, is a home rule state in which the majority of land use decision-making authority is delegated to local municipalities. However, initial efforts by WCS/MCA to initiate a Biotic Corridor project within the three neighboring townships of Chester, Lebanon, and Washington have revealed that the local land use decision-making process within New Jersey is somewhat more complex than in New York or Connecticut. Although New Jersey is a home rule state, diverse land use planning and natural resource conservation initiatives have been proposed (or are being implemented) by government agencies, conservation groups, and coalitions at a variety of scales. Although this undoubtedly reflects good intentions, it translates to a perplexing array of plans, stipulations, tools, and directives for municipal land use decision-makers. Therefore, WCS/MCA has prepared the following assessment of needs and opportunities for New Jersey townships (in particular, Chester, Lebanon, and Washington). This assessment is intended to serve as a foundation for adopting and adapting the Biotic Corridor approach for successful application in New Jersey townships.

Methods

The following sources of information were consulted and used to determine the current capacity and future needs for biodiversity-based land use planning within Chester, Lebanon, and Washington Townships. Opportunities to address these needs are based on the gathered information, in combination with tools and techniques developed by WCS/MCA in other portions of the New York tri-state metropolitan region. WCS/MCA sincerely thanks the organizations, agency personnel, and individuals who have generously contributed their time, opinions, and information toward this assessment.

Workshops

WCS/MCA facilitated two intermunicipal workshops with the townships of Chester, Lebanon, and Washington. In the first workshop, held on January 27, 2005 from 7:30 pm to 10:00 pm in Lebanon Township's Municipal Building, MCA Director Michael W. Klemens provided an overview of WCS/MCA's approach to biodiversity conservation through local land use planning. This was followed by a question and answer session to familiarize local land use decision-makers with the approach.

The second workshop was held from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm on March 19th, 2005 in Lebanon Township's Municipal Building. This all-day workshop was designed to be an interactive assessment of needs and opportunities for eco-appropriate land use planning within the three townships. WCS/MCA staff presented planning concepts and tools that have worked in other states. In addition, a module was provided on how these concepts and techniques have been applied within three neighboring towns in WCS/MCA's Eastern Westchester Biotic Corridor (EWBC). The module began with a presentation by Jim Nordgren, Supervisor of the Town of Lewisboro, New York, and a major advocate of scientifically-based land use planning within the EWBC. Supervisor Nordgren focused on the adoption of an Inter-Municipal Agreement (IMA) among these neighboring towns, and the steps they have taken to create an inter-municipal conservation overlay district based on this IMA. The presentation was followed by an open discussion.

The most important aspect of the March 19 workshop was its interactivity. Land use decision-makers from all three townships were able to voice their concerns, strategies, and thoughts regarding conservation and land use planning within their townships. This was accomplished via two facilitated discussion sessions and three "card exercises," in which attendees provided written answers to specific queries. See Appendix A for a workshop agenda, a list of facilitated discussion questions, and summaries of responses and input received from attendees.

Conferences

WCS/MCA staff attended and participated in two conferences relevant to the interface between conservation and land use planning, specific to New Jersey. These events have helped WCS/MCA to forge and strengthen relationships with key partners (including agency personnel, local land use practitioners, and conservation organizations) and to gather New Jersey-specific information regarding land use planning.

On October 15th, 2004, WCS/MCA staff attended the annual Environmental Congress of the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC). MCA's Director, Michael W. Klemens, co-presented with Eric Stiles of New Jersey Audubon in a workshop entitled "Biodiversity Conservation through Regional Planning." As co-sponsors of this conference, WCS/MCA also provided an information display board and literature, and engaged in conversations with conference attendees and participants. Dr. Michael Klemens will provide the keynote address at the next ANJEC Environmental Congress, scheduled for October 21, 2005.

WCS/MCA staff also attended the New Jersey Wildlife Summit, held at Duke Farms on April 6, 2005. Facilitated breakout discussion groups at this conference focused on topics highly relevant to our Needs and Opportunities Assessment, including: municipal land use planning, state and regional land use planning, and land use regulation, among others. Information gathered through participation at this conference has been very useful in determining, in general, the needs and resources of New Jersey municipalities in regards to biodiversity conservation. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection will soon be publicly releasing detailed notes, summaries, and conclusions from these discussion groups.

Meetings

In-person meetings were held with ANJEC and with NJ Audubon to develop partnerships and to determine WCS/MCA's niche within New Jersey. A very important collateral benefit of these meetings was the opportunity to discuss biodiversity and land use planning issues with our very knowledgeable New Jersey colleagues. Therefore, the meetings also served as information-gathering sessions. Out of these meetings, we've begun to establish strong ties with both organizations: NJ Audubon has expressed a strong interest in actively collaborating with us on our three-township Biotic Corridor initiative, and WCS/MCA continues to become more deeply involved with ANJEC activities (e.g., the Environmental Congress).

Conversations with key partners

WCS/MCA staff conducted telephone conversations regarding New Jersey municipal land use planning with numerous individuals, including staff of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's

Endangered and Nongame Species Program, ANJEC, NJ Audubon, the mayor of each of the three townships, and additional local land use decision-makers. Some of these people also serve on regional initiatives, such as the New Jersey Highlands Council. Through these conversations, we have been able to explore and ascertain where and how planning initiatives at various political and geographic scales interact, and the potential to cultivate further interactions. The personal perspectives and insights conveyed through these conversations, by local experts and practitioners, were invaluable in this assessment.

Results & Discussion

The “needs” portion of this assessment covers topics ranging from broad and conceptual to very specific. We have made every attempt to match “opportunities” to each “need” that are action-oriented and implementable. In some cases, these opportunities may be best addressed by WCS/MCA; in other cases, it might be more appropriate for partner organizations or individuals to take the lead. The needs and opportunities are not listed in order of priority.

Need 1: Vertical Integration

New Jersey is unique among northeastern states. It is a home-rule state, in which land use decisions are made at the municipal level; however, the state government exercises much more influence over those decisions than in other states of the region. This is evident in, for example, the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. In addition, New Jersey is a leader in innovative *regional* approaches to land use planning and conservation that span multiple townships (e.g., the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act). Such regional, broad-scale initiatives make sense ecologically, but they can only be effective if they are translated into a cohesive set of actions and directives that can be implemented at the local scale.

In some cases, directives from one scale (e.g., the State) that are seemingly in conflict must be sorted out and implemented at the local level. Although a Biotic Corridor project is not intended to change state-level policy, there is a distinct need to assist local decision-makers in navigating, interpreting, and applying conflicting directives and approaches.

The need to improve coordination and implementation among the various scales of land use authority, planning, and implementation was clearly expressed as a priority throughout this assessment—in conversations, workshops, and also in conferences.

Opportunity 1a: Coordinate with the Highlands Council to develop and disseminate municipal land use planning tools that can conserve natural resources. In addition to benefits for Chester, Lebanon, and

Washington Townships, these materials could be applied throughout the Highlands region.

Opportunity 1b: Facilitate better communication between the various scales (local, watershed, regional, state) through informative workshops, newsletters, or other media/venues.

Opportunity 1c: Strive to build municipal-scale implementation concerns and techniques directly into broad-scale planning initiatives.

Need 2: Geographic Integration

It is often said that wildlife (or other natural resources) do not respect township boundaries; perhaps more appropriately, it should be said that township boundaries occur at a scale that do not respect ecological processes. By knitting together the jurisdictions and land use authorities of neighboring communities, attempts to conserve resources through the local planning process will be decidedly more effective.

Geographic integration is a theme that is gaining recognition in New Jersey, as evidenced by the growing number of regional initiatives (e.g., watershed groups and state-mandated regional plans) and by the work of ANJEC in their 2004 Environmental Congress, which had the theme, “Beyond Home Rule: Protecting the Environment through Regional Planning.”

New Jersey is not in short supply of innovative, regionally-based thinking. But these plans can only be effective if municipalities, which ultimately wield land use authority, begin to work together. WCS/MCA experiences in other regions have revealed that regional initiatives can only be successful if the constituent towns identify with their neighbors in a mutual “sense of place,” and if the land use authority of individual communities is not ceded in the process (i.e., home rule is maintained, but strengthened through mutual planning). The latter point demonstrates an alternative to the “top-down” mandates of state government land use planning—an alternative that communities usually find more attractive and inspiring.

Opportunity 2a: Develop an outreach/education campaign to inform communities—and land use practitioners within those communities—of cooperating with their neighbors. Such efforts should be designed to be inspirational, rather than directive, and should foster a regional identity, or sense-of-place that can be shared with neighboring communities.

Opportunity 2b: Encourage the adoption of an Inter-Municipal Agreement among Chester, Lebanon, and Washington Townships. To maximize effectiveness, this agreement should facilitate intermunicipal planning on a variety of topics beyond just conservation and

biodiversity (including planning for transportation, affordable housing, etc.).

Opportunity 2c: Encourage and facilitate communication among neighboring communities. At the March 19 workshop, there was consensus among the attendees that the neighboring townships should communicate more effectively on current land use issues. It was suggested that this could be accomplished by publishing an intermunicipal newsletter, or by soliciting guest editorials and article contributions from neighboring communities, which could be incorporated into the newsletters of individual townships.

Need 3: Institutional Integration

Cooperation among the various institutions, agencies, and organizations that are concerned with New Jersey's future welfare is imperative. This cooperation could reduce redundant efforts among groups that have similar missions and strengthen those efforts through a coordinated approach. In addition, groups that seemingly have disparate missions could find that collaborative efforts are mutually beneficial. Through inclusiveness, we can build a stronger constituency, better able to achieve goals.

Opportunity 3a: Facilitate communications among the various institutions, agencies, and organizations in New Jersey. This can—and currently *is*—being accomplished through workshops and conferences that assemble representatives of all of these groups into one venue. Non-traditional partners (e.g., developers, farmers, the business community, faith-based organizations) can prove to be strong partners; exclusion of non-traditional partners can ultimately be counter-productive.

Need 4: Tools to integrate biodiversity into local land use planning

Concepts from scientific institutions and mandates from state government are of little use to municipal land use planners, unless they have been translated into specific, implementable procedures (i.e., land use planning tools), expressed in layman's terms. Unfortunately, such translations are infrequently provided.

Opportunity 4a: Identify existing biodiversity-based land use planning tools and disseminate to the townships. WCS/MCA has developed a Technical Paper Series that provides scientific and/or legal bases for conserving biodiversity through municipal planning processes. ANJEC has also developed a powerful suite of planning tools that are complementary to those of WCS/MCA.

Opportunity 4b: Develop further biodiversity-based land use planning tools. Although some tools are already available to townships, there is an urgent need for additional tools to address the increasing rate of sprawl. For example, many of the communities that WCS/MCA works with are in dire need of biodiversity assessment guidelines, which could be adopted by townships to stipulate how biodiversity surveys should be conducted in a reliable and scientific manner during the preparation of development proposals. Production of planning tools should be a collaborative effort among groups that can provide expertise in both conservation and land use law.

Need 5: Establish and demonstrate the benefits of conserving natural resources

The organizations, agencies, land use decision-makers, and others that gather together to discuss biodiversity-based land use planning are, in general, already convinced that conservation should be a major priority. But these groups and people are, unfortunately, not representative of the majority or the general public. There is a need—clearly expressed by our partners within the three townships—to develop convincing case statements for maintaining biodiversity and stemming the tide of sprawl. Long-term conservation goals can only be achieved through a sea change in how the public perceives the connection between land use decisions and environmental health.

Opportunity 5a: Conduct biodiversity-loss impact assessments. These could be created and used in much the same way that build-out scenarios are developed for communities to aid planners in envisioning the future, based on various development and zoning scenarios. For example, if New Jersey’s vernal pools can no longer support vernal pool-obligate amphibians, what impact would this have on mosquito populations, and would this increase the rate of mosquito-borne diseases? Some evidence along these lines has already been developed (e.g., prevalence of Lyme disease in small mammal populations of fragmented vs. unfragmented forests). Research in the field of resource economics has demonstrated the financial ramifications of environmental degradation. Development of these case statements would require extensive collaboration with universities and other research institutions.

Need 6: Develop a model that can be adopted, adapted, and applied within other clusters of NJ townships

One major limitation of a home rule system of land use authority is that any innovations in land use planning are isolated—geographically and politically—and tend to have a limited effect. This provides another case for the formation of intermunicipal councils. It also suggests that any lessons learned within individual townships or clusters

of townships should be made available to communities throughout New Jersey. Conservation and planning work within Chester, Lebanon, and Washington Townships should be viewed as a model-building opportunity. Citizens and land use practitioners of these communities have expressed the desire for a “roadmap,” to establish conservation and land use planning goals and to determine the steps that are needed to achieve those goals.

- Opportunity 6a:* Upon adaptation the Biotic Corridor approach of WCS/MCA to Chester, Lebanon, and Washington Townships, prepare a publication that contains techniques and lessons-learned, so that other New Jersey communities can adopt a similar approach.
- Opportunity 6b:* Hold a planning charrette/workshop for Chester, Lebanon, and Washington—attended by mayors, planning board members, environmental commission members, concerned citizens, partner conservation organizations, and others—to set goals and determine steps that should be taken to meet those goals. Prioritization of each element within this “roadmap” would increase the likelihood of success.
- Opportunity 6c:* The Landscape Project, a highly commendable initiative under development by NJDEP’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program, provides statewide land use planning guidelines that are based on ecological principles and real-world biological data. However, as with other statewide planning initiatives in a home rule state, there is difficulty in determining how these guidelines can be implemented at the municipal level. Through conversations with NJDEP/ENSP, we have determined that there may be opportunities to develop Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) at municipal or intermunicipal scales, which could provide this bridge between broad-scale planning and fine-scale implementation. If an HCP is developed for Chester, Lebanon, and Washington it should be made available, as a model, to other New Jersey communities.

Need 7: A resource base for the townships

Municipal land use decision-makers come from a variety of backgrounds, have differing levels of understanding of ecological and land use decision-making processes, generally volunteer their time, and often have full-time jobs outside of their roles within their communities. In addition, there is commonly a high turn-over rate for many elected positions at the local level. For all of these reasons, a reliable and long-term source of information, expertise, and training is needed. Without knowledge of the issues at stake, or the techniques to address those issues, local land use decision-makers are not equipped to provide ecologically viable solutions to sprawl.

Attendees of the March 19 workshop stressed the need for more than just biological data and emphasized the need for interpretation of those data, to facilitate application in the land use planning process. This would require sustained access to expertise, in both scientific and land use planning fields.

Opportunity 7a: Generate a clearinghouse of existing information, expertise, and training opportunities—offered by various organizations and agencies—that are available to municipalities. Likely source of expertise and training include: NJ Audubon, NJ DEP, WCS/MCA, New Jersey Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, New Jersey Conservation Foundation (particularly the Garden State Greenways project), ANJEC, NJ Future, and others. The organization or agency that maintains this clearinghouse should also actively seek to match these opportunities with the needs of individual communities.

Opportunity 7b: Develop further training opportunities. A desire for training opportunities and access to expertise was expressed by many, through conversations and within workshops. These training opportunities could be topical in nature. For example, WCS/MCA has developed a training program for local implementation of a land use planning tool designed to conserve vernal pools and vernal pool wildlife. This could readily be adapted to the landscapes of New Jersey communities.

Some communities, such as Chester Township, are approaching build-out. In such communities the best conservation opportunities may lie in improving management of publicly-owned lands; training programs by wildlife biologists, forest scientists, and other experts could help to maintain biodiversity on these lands. Educational materials could also be developed for private landowners, to retrofit lawns to provide natural habitats.

Opportunity 7c: Several sources have suggested that workshops and training should be conducted directly with planning boards, as an agenda item on regularly scheduled meetings. This would ensure that all planning board members hear the conservation message and procedures being proposed for their communities.

Opportunity 7d: Develop two educational video series—one to educate township decision-makers and another for school systems, to raise awareness of environmental health and the benefits of maintaining environmental integrity.

Need 8: Biodiversity inventories at a local scale

There is a need to incorporate biodiversity information—relevant to land use planning at a municipal scale—into township master plans. Each of our three partnering townships has conducted a natural resource inventory. Although these inventories were conducted at a scale appropriate for application in the local land use planning process, none of them focus sufficiently on the location and habitat requirements of wildlife species. Biodiversity information is available from the state. The New Jersey Natural Heritage Program tracks many state-listed species and NJ DEP’s forthcoming Landscape Map delineates habitat requirements of those species. However, these wildlife data were collected on a statewide scale; a finer resolution of data is needed to make eco-appropriate decisions at the municipal scale. In addition, there are numerous un-listed species—and entire guilds of species—that are declining as a result of sprawl, but these are not tracked in state-level datasets.

Biodiversity inventories were noted as a priority in the March 19, 2005 assessment workshop for Chester, Lebanon, and Washington. In particular, the workshop participants stressed the need for scientific information that can guide land use planning, and that is sufficiently reliable and credible to hold up in court.

Opportunity 8a: Conduct biodiversity surveys throughout the three townships. Surveys should be conducted on public lands (to inform the management of public lands), and on privately-owned lands (to inform the land use decision-making process). Examples of how biodiversity data can be collected and interpreted are provided in several publications of the WCS/MCA Technical Paper Series. Partners with experience in biodiversity inventories should be sought out to conduct and/or guide these survey efforts (e.g., NJ Audubon). Every effort should be made to seamlessly incorporate the results of such surveys into existing municipal plans and documents; i.e., the data should be viewed as complementary to existing planning efforts, rather than contradictory.

Opportunity 8b: Assemble existing biodiversity datasets (from Natural Heritage Program, NJ TNC, NJ Audubon, etc.) and integrate with new data.

Opportunity 8c: Facilitate conversations and/or charrettes with local naturalists and others to capture species distribution information that is not available in other datasets.

Need 9: Long-term funding sustainability

Maintaining regional-scale ecosystems and ecological processes through local land use planning is labor-intensive task that requires long-term partnerships between conservation organizations, government agencies, local land use practitioners, and many others. The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation has made a significant and generous contribution toward the foundation of these activities and partnerships. But for a project of this proportion to succeed, a diverse funding portfolio is needed.

Opportunity 9a: Seek funding from a diversity of private foundations, individuals, and government agencies.

Conclusion

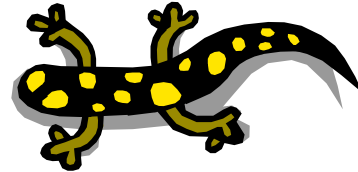
There appears to be a great deal of resolve within New Jersey to come to terms with the rapid pace of sprawl. Out of this resolve and enthusiasm, many coalitions and initiatives have sprung, in efforts to balance human population growth and consumption with the state's ecological integrity. WCS/MCA asserts that, if the needs and opportunities expressed above are addressed, local and intermunicipal land use planning efforts can contribute significantly to maintaining the beauty and ecological functionality of the New Jersey landscape.

Appendix A
Interactive Workshop: Agenda and Summary of Results

Biodiversity & Land Use Planning Workshop

**An Interactive Assessment of Land Use Practices and Eco-Appropriate Planning
in Chester, Lebanon and Washington Townships, New Jersey**

March 19, 2005



- 9:30 – 10:00 **Registration**
- 10:00 – 10:15 **Welcome & Review of Agenda**
- 10:15 – 10:55 **Planning with Nature**
Slide presentation and lecture by Michael W. Klemens, Ph.D.
- 10:55 – 11:00 **Card Exercise #1: Assembling the Alliance**
- 11:00 – 12:00 **Facilitated Discussion Groups – Session 1**
Topic: Biodiversity and Land Use Planning – Township Status and Trends
(Discussion in breakout groups & report back to plenary)
- 12:00 – 12:45 **Lunch**
- 12:45 – 1:05 **Foundations for Ecological Planning**
Nick Miller, WCS/MCA
- 1:05 – 1:10 **Card Exercise #2: Accumulating the Information**
- 1:10 – 1:30 **You Can Do It! – Integrating Biodiversity into Local Land Use Decision-Making**
Supervisor James Nordgren, Town of Lewisboro, New York
- 1:30 – 2:30 **Facilitated Discussion Groups – Session 2**
Topic: Options to Improve Eco-Appropriate Planning
(Discussion in breakout groups & report back to plenary)
- 2:30 – 2:35 **Card Exercise #3: Accomplishing the Goals**
- 2:35 – 3:00 **Wrap-up, Summary, and Q&A**



The Metropolitan Conservation Alliance (WCS/MCA) is very pleased for the opportunity to partner with the townships of Chester, Lebanon, and Washington to seek solutions for a sustainable balance between local economic growth and environmental protection. WCS/MCA, a program of the Bronx Zoo-based Wildlife Conservation Society, conserves wildlife and habitats in the tri-state New York metropolitan region. Rare species and healthy ecosystems abound within a mere 50 to 100 miles of Manhattan, but ever-expanding suburbs radiating outward from the city threaten these resources. WCS/MCA has developed a unique approach to conservation in this context of sprawl, one that bridges the gap between science and land use practice. We translate biological data and conservation concepts into planning tools, creating new land use planning strategies for local decision-makers. Our ultimate goal is to help safeguard our region's biodiversity while respecting the rights of the region's citizens to prosper.

Card Exercise No. 1: Assembling the Alliance

Workshop attendees were asked to provide their opinions about who should be involved with a multi-township conservation and land use planning initiative.

Organization: Musconetcong Watershed Association,
Contact: Bill Leavens, President, gofly@nac.net
Beth Barry

Organization: Chester Historical Society

Organization: Washington Township Historical Society

Organization: Upper Raritan Watershed Association
Contact: David Phifer

Organization: Chester Garden Club

Organization: Chester Township
Contacts: Ben Spinelli, Mayor
George Ritter, Planner
Curt Alstede, Farmer
Len Taylor, Historian

Organization: NJ DEP, Division of Fish & Wildlife
Contact: Head Ranger for Black River WMA

Organization: The Nature Conservancy, NJ Chapter

Organization: Spruce Run Initiative
Contact: Bob O'Neil, roneil@raritanbasin.org

Organization: Raritan-Highlands Compact
Contact: Bob O'Neil, roneil@raritanbasin.org

Organization: Washington Township Land Trust
Contact: Keith Hayes, President
Caryl Brackenridge, VP, 908-876-4478, caryl@eclipse.net

Organization: Historical Preservation Commission, Washington Township
Contact: Eileen Stokes

Organization: Zoning Board, Washington Township

Organization: Planning Board, Washington Township
Contact: Greg Jones, Chair, rgjones@mccpr.com

Organization: Morris County Soil Conservation District

Organization: Chester Township Board of Education

Organization: Alstede Farm

Organization: Chester Boy Scout & Girl Scout Troops

Organization: Chester Lions Club (and other service clubs)

Organization: Chester Police Department

Organization: Churches

Organization: Senior citizen groups

Organization: NJ Audubon Society

Contact: Don Freiday

Organization: Fire Department, Lebanon Township

Contact: Warren Gabriel, Fire Chief, 908-537-9543

Organization: Lebanon Township

Contacts: George Piazza, Mayor

Jay Weeks, Farmer & Town Councilman

Nora Pugliese, Organic Farmer

Doreen Bleck, Planning Board member & educator, 832-7459

Organization: Boro of Glen Gardner

Contact: Mayor

Organization: Mansfield Township

Contact: Mayor

Organization: Boro of Hampton

Contact: Mayor

Organization: NJ Water Authority

Contact: Dan Van Abs

Organization: South Branch Watershed Association

Contact: Don Einhorn

Organization: Lebanon Township Schools

Contact: Dawn Capello, Biology Teacher

Teri Bellows, Voorhees High School

Organization: Morris County Parks Commission

Individual: Adam Ambielli, Farmer & Businessman, Lebanon Township
Contact: 638-6200 (Work #)

Individual: Developer (builder, applicant) for Chandoah property, Hill Road, Lebanon Township
Contact: Gail Glashof, Lebanon Township Planning Board, 638-8523

Card Exercise No. 2: Accumulating the Information

Workshop participants were asked to list sources of data and information that would be appropriate for this project.

Needed information:

- ? Scientific studies (that will hold up in court)
- ? Biodiversity inventories (both local and regional)
- ? Biodiversity pathways

Available information:

- ? Environmental/natural resource inventories for each township
- ? Data/info from Spruce Run Initiative
- ? Data/info from government agencies (e.g., NJDEP, USGS)
- ? Data/info from South Branch Watershed Association
- ? Data/info from Upper Raritan Watershed Association (e.g., water quality surveys)
- ? Data/info from Musconetcong Watershed Association
- ? U.S. Forest Service Highlands Study Update (2002, available on web)
- ? NJ Fish and Wildlife Landscape Data (available on web)
- ? Raritan data (much available on web from NJ Water Supply Authority)
- ? Trout reproduction surveys (NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife)
- ? Breeding bird surveys (from NJ Audubon)
- ? State and/or County GIS maps (available on-line)
- ? Sensitive area maps included in “Environmental” sections of township master plans
- ? Data/info from County Soil Conservation Districts
- ? USDA river basin studies

Card Exercise No. 3: Accomplishing the Goals

Workshop participants were asked to provide their own personal and community visions for what this project could encompass, and the tools needed to reach those goals.

- ? Need to develop a “roadmap,” to determine what the goals are and the steps that we need to take to achieve those goals (suggested by a number of attendees)
- ? Conduct workshops on biodiversity-based management of private properties (gardens, etc.)
- ? Conduct workshops with Planning Boards
- ? Develop education materials on retro-fitting yards and lawns to provide biodiversity habitat
- ? Conduct biodiversity and critical habitat inventories (suggested by almost all of the attendees)
- ? Determine appropriate biodiversity pathways
- ? Make available information about reliable scientific studies for application to land use planning and decision-making
- ? Develop tools for land use planning
- ? Develop educational video series:
 - o One to educate township decision-makers
 - o Another for school systems, to raise awareness of environmental health and benefits
- ? Develop master plans that include biodiversity elements
- ? Conduct biodiversity impact assessments
- ? Prepare articles on biodiversity, etc., that can be published in township quarterly newsletters
- ? Townships should provide existing local data to WCS/MCA
- ? Conduct citizen biologist training
- ? Develop implementation strategies to gain township governmental support
- ? Quantify and make known the benefits of maintaining biodiversity

Facilitated Discussion Session 1: Biodiversity and Land Use Planning – Township Status & Trends

Q1 & Q2 Combined:

What are the most pressing issues in terms of land use, development, and the environment?

and

Are there obstacles to the integration of biodiversity and environmental issues into your community's land use planning efforts?

Water Quality and Quantity

- A driving force behind Chester's Master Plan
 - o No municipal water supplies; impacts on amount of developable land and density of development
 - o Water quality issues at Superfund landfill
- Water quality will also be an issue for Morris County
 - o Conservation fees (greater cost for greater usage)
- Spruce Run Initiative
 - o Group of towns addressing fragmentation, water quality, and water quantity issues
 - o Lebanon Township is in the headwaters
- Lebanon has conducted hydrologic studies
 - o Poor aquifer
 - o All residences on wells

Zoning/Land Use

- Large-lot zoning drives sprawl
 - o In Lebanon, average lot size is about 7.5 acres
 - o Lebanon is currently trying to link large-lot zoning to cluster development techniques
- Chester is approaching build-out, so zoning is less of an issue here
- Boroughs are in the middle of townships, resulting in an ecological "donut" effect

Education

- Lack of natural resource education programs for children

Management of Protected Open Space

- biggest issue for Chester Township is management of remaining open space
 - o remnants are about 70 to 240 acres
 - o the rest of the township is built out

Other issues

- Some local decision-makers within the townships react negatively to natural resource-based land use planning, and place obstacles in the way of such endeavors
- Residents/citizens of the townships are often uninformed and/or uninterested
 - o This translates to lack of interest in natural resource issues on boards and commissions
 - o Need to educate public, so that they can pressure municipal officials to transcend politics
- Perception of environmentalists as “tree hugging” radicals
- Land use decisions are driven by families with school-age children
 - o Everybody wants to build age-restricted housing
- Transitory nature of municipal governments
 - o There is a need for entities that can provide vision and action that transcends the short-term nature of municipal government
- Invasive species—in particular, those that are used in landscaping

Q3: What steps have already been taken in your community to address biodiversity and land use planning issues?

- In Lebanon Township, there are efforts to couple cluster development techniques with large-lot zoning
- Chester Township hosts a native plant sale, which supports more ecologically-based landscaping and raises awareness
- Nancy Lawler runs an education program in Hunterdon County
- The townships have mayors and planners that see the need for natural resource-based land use planning
- In Washington Township:
 - o There is an easement program for steep slopes and hedgerows
 - o Existing trails and greenways must be indicated on site plans and maps for review of development proposals
 - o There is an effort to make the review process predictable for developers, which minimizes conflict
 - o Over 3,000 acres have been preserved as farmland under a PDR program which began in the 1980s and 1990s (state-funded)
 - o Areas important for conservation are delineated in the Master Plan
 - o There is a tree preservation ordinance
 - o There will likely soon be a hillside and ridgeline ordinance (not yet adopted)
- Polls have helped with open space referenda in the past
- In a court decision, it was determined that the acreage of Critical Environmental Areas can be removed from calculations of subdivision yields

- At one time, a lot of land preservation was occurring by the County, DEP, and others
- In Chester Township:
 - o All new developments put conservation easements on sensitive areas
 - o PDR program is used creatively (the Township buys land, strips it of development rights, and re-sells property for use as farms)
 - o There is a deed restriction for all properties along the Rte 206 corridor (200 foot conservation easement along highway)
- The Upper Raritan group has done good work and is very important
 - o But, there is a general consensus that local ordinances will be more important

Facilitated Discussion Session 2: Options to Improve Eco-Appropriate Planning

Q1, Q2, and Q3 Combined:

What further steps do you feel should be taken in your community to improve land use planning efforts and conserve biodiversity?

and

How could obstacles to these goals be overcome?

and

What resources or information would be most useful to your community's land use decision-makers?

- Biodiversity inventories throughout the three townships
- Management of individual properties, public or private, in an ecologically-friendly manner
 - o E.g., Retrofitting yards/lawns with native vegetation and natural landscaping
- Developing a quarterly newsletter
 - o Could contain articles written by WCS/MCA and other conservation orgs
 - o An intermunicipal newsletter might be best, but would be difficult to coordinate and produce
 - o A web-based newsletter might provide the best solution
- Developing township-sponsored programs that encourage citizen involvement
 - o E.g., habitat restoration programs that residents can participate in
- Conduct a Biodiversity Impact Assessment
 - o Quantifying the benefits of biodiversity
 - o Weighing the costs of losing this biodiversity against the benefits of maintaining biodiversity

- Need to bring township planners into our future meetings & workshops
- Tie our efforts into those associated with the Highlands Act
 - o Work with the Highlands Council staff (which meets in Chester) to develop minimum standards ordinances. The tools developed for this project could have broader application in other NJ communities through requirements of the Highlands Act
 - o Note: A TDR program has begun through the Highlands Act. Six towns have already been established as receiving zones; there are no sending zones yet.
- Ensure that cluster developments are arranged in an ecologically meaningful pattern