

Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust Invites Lisbon to Join

By Justin Roshak

LISBON—In this globalized age, even small communities can find it valuable to unite in common cause. This week, Lisbon was officially invited to join in one such effort: the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust.

The Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust, or ACT, aims to join some seventeen towns in the Ammonoosuc River watershed and Connecticut River valley. Though funded through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Trust aims to organize locally-led initiatives to create private and municipal solutions to land conservation, species protection, and water quality. The rationale behind a multi-town effort is to move the discussion surrounding land and resources uses beyond town boundaries, and into the scope of the larger region. The theory goes that, since the watershed is one connected geological and ecological system, it makes sense to encourage joint decision-making by all stakeholders.

Rick Walling, an ACT conservation associate, made the official pitch to the commission. He described the Trust as an opportunity to connect with professional and academic organizations that can provide key services. Agreeing with one board member's observation that the Trust was a linkage of key players, he said, "Any time you can network successfully you can do so much more and everyone prospers from it."

Among the groups already participating in the Trust, he listed the Franconia, Sugar Hill, and Bath conservation commissions, as well as the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund, New Hampshire Fish and Game, and the Nature Conservancy.

Another component of the program, Mr. Walling said, was the opportunity for owners to collectively manage their properties, "So that the smaller landowners can get a larger scale." Working together, they can get discounts on projects such as water bars and other land-improvement and conservation investments.

Cooperative decision-making can also profit towns. Mr. Walling cited the Coolidge Forest-Jericho Mountain Park as a pioneer in multi-town land management. The Trust can help towns to formulate and implement conservation easements. He stressed the importance of engaging the individual stakeholders directly, saying, "We don't do just land conservation, we work with landowner."

At present, ACT is looking for Lisbon to agree to be a partner, and be willing to participate in a set of roles. In the first year, this would include identifying critical wetlands and wildlife areas, and begin to engage landowners in the process of developing conservation goals.

Mr. Walling has served on a number of commissions and board in Bath, and is an active member of the Ammonoosuc River Local River Advisory Commission and the Connecticut River Joint Commission. An anthropologist by training, he has worked extensively on the management of cultural resources across the academic, state, and private sectors. His work with ACT focuses on land conservation.

The Conservation Commission's members expressed interest in joining the program, with chairperson Robert Cook saying, "We can use all the help we can get." Member Betsy Stead emphasized the value of engaging young people in the conservation process, since they will use the land and its resources long into the future. Over half of New Hampshire's private forest land is owned by someone over 59.