



Fundy Model Forest

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Report Title: Conservation Easement: A Tool to Perpetuate SFM, Wildlife Habitat and Landscape Management Values in the Pollett River Watershed

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“The Fundy Model Forest (FMF) is a partnership of 38 organizations that are promoting sustainable forest management practices in the Acadian Forest region.”

Atlantic Society of Fish and Wildlife Biologists
Canadian Institute of Forestry
Canadian Forest Service
City of Moncton
Conservation Council of New Brunswick
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Eel Ground First Nation
Elgin Eco Association
Elmhurst Outdoors
Environment Canada
Fawcett Lumber Company
Fundy Environmental Action Group
Fundy National Park
Greater Fundy Ecosystem Research Group
INFOR, Inc.
J.D. Irving, Limited
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Maritime College of Forest Technology
NB Department of the Environment and Local Government
NB Department of Natural Resources
NB Federation of Naturalists
New Brunswick Federation of Woodlot Owners
NB Premier's Round Table on the Environment & Economy
New Brunswick School District 2
New Brunswick School District 6
Nova Forest Alliance
Petitcodiac Sportsman's Club
Red Bank First Nation
Remsoft Inc.
Southern New Brunswick Wood Cooperative Limited
Sussex and District Chamber of Commerce
Sussex Fish and Game Association
Town of Sussex
Université de Moncton
University of NB, Fredericton - Faculty of Forestry
University of NB - Saint John Campus
Village of Petitcodiac
Washademoak Environmentalists



Final Report

Conservation Easements: A Tool to Perpetuate SFM, Wildlife
Habitats and landscape management Values in the Pollett River
Watershed

Submitted to

Fundy Model Forest
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Summary

The project generated a number of positive results, including the leverage to succeed in an application to Wildlife Trust Fund to extend funding for the project. There was a positive outreach effort directed at woodlot owners and the general public. Although there was not a very positive reaction to conservation agreements in general, the work was effective in looking critically at how to recognize, encourage and support woodlot management/conservation and stewardship. The project did result in contact with a family, that is very interested in moving forward to establish a conservation easement on their property.

Woodlot Owner and Local Public Outreach

The project proposal outlined a strategy to make contact with woodlot owners and other Pollett River publics, to make them aware of the New Brunswick Community Land Trust (NBCLT), and the use of Conservation Easements (CE) as a tool to ensure sustainable management on woodlots.

The public and woodlot owner contact began with the NBCLT Project Coordinator, making presentations to SNB woodlot owner Zone meetings in Sussex, Petitcodiac and Riverside-Albert. Woodlot owners that own land in Pollett Watershed were in attendance at each of these meetings and heard a presentation that reviewed the objectives of the NBCLT, the use and application of Conservation Easements and an outline of activity with Pollett River Watershed project. More than 200 woodlot owners, cumulatively, attended the three zone meetings. Regardless of other business, the NBCLT presentation drew attention and at each of the SNB meetings, specific questions were fielded about conservation easements and the project coordinator was approached individually by woodlot owners to discuss issues around CE.

NBCLT felt that raising awareness and showing interest in the greater Pollett River community would help build a positive relationship with the community. To this end, the project coordinator made a presentation on NBCLT/CE to the Elgin Eco Association and attended several outdoor events that the Association sponsored in Elgin. Again, these contacts provided the opportunity to dialogue with landowners and residents about conservation issues. Attendance at these community events and distribution of printed materials, also provided the opportunity for residents to become more familiar with NBCLT and vice versa, which helped make one on one contact a less uncomfortable event.

NBCLT staff made a general (NBCLT/CE) presentation to a Pollett River Watershed Project (woodlot owner) meeting, and attended another Pollett Project meeting that focused on Certification. Again these meetings provided the opportunity for general group dialogue and some one on one conversation with woodlot owners.

Media

As indicated in the proposal, NBCLT made an effort to get print media coverage for this project initiative. The project was included in articles in the NBCLT newsletter, the FMF Horizons newsletter and the Pollett River Watershed Newsletter #3. The newsletters were distributed through wide variety of means throughout the southeast New Brunswick.

The NBCLT attended with an information booth at the Westmorland County Fair held in August at Petitediac. All three newsletters were provided as take away information for the attending public. The Fair was a great opportunity to meet with a number of woodlot owners from Pollett Watershed and to dialogue about woodlot management and conservation issues. Attendance at the Fair brought NBCLT and the Pollett Watershed Project message to hundreds of area residents, the majority of whom are landowning families.

Direct Woodlot Owner Contact

One on one landowner contact was carried out with a short list of more than a dozen landowners provided by Pollett River Watershed Project. This list was made up of people directly involved in the project that have woodlot management plans that incorporate landscape values. Some landowners were contacted by telephone to arrange a one on one contact opportunity, others were met through contacts at meetings and events. Only a slight majority of these owners agreed to a personal visit to discuss conservation and woodlot management.

SNB Wood Co-op graciously supplied a complete woodlot owner list for the entire watershed. NBCLT staff also made contact with Peter deGraaff, who had worked for the Pollett Watershed Project and who was able to share insights into land ownership and stewardship ethics in the Pollett Watershed.

Results

This project virtually introduced the concept of conservation easements to the Pollett and surrounding communities. Because it was introducing a completely new concept to the community, there were a lot of questions, some distrust, testing for credibility, and defensive reaction from many contacts. There was a wide variety of reactions to the concept of placing conservation easement on property, mostly negative.

The project proposal outlined one on one woodlot owner interviews. The writer had vision that woodlot owners would for the most part, in general, welcome the opportunity to discuss woodlot/landscape management and conservation issues. NBCLT staff relied on his past experience with SNB Wood Co-op communications initiative and Working Woodlot Program organizational efforts, to envision woodlot owners interest in exploring issues around conservation and woodlot management. However in the case of conservation easements, engaging woodlot owners in one-on-one dialogue was not easily achieved. In fact in a lot of cases, even with personal credibility established through previous contacts, woodlot owners were adamant that they did not want to discuss conservation easements.

These rejections were not at all unpleasant or awkward. The woodlot owners simply did not see any value in conservation easements for themselves, and simply did not want to waste time talking about them.

One of their major issues of concern seemed to be that a CE would lower the value of the land if they decided to sell or were forced to sell. It was either insinuated, or directly stated, that they were not willing to give up their hard earned equity in their land to ensure that the good stewardship work (that they had been doing all along) would be continued. Many cited CE would restrict owner's opportunity to utilize the land for other uses.

The specific objective to attempt to establish a CE that would protect the Pollett River Gap Site, received an expression of no interest on behalf of the owners, after several attempts at contact.

Lessons Learned – Insights Gained

Project objectives included communicating conservation ethic along with the use of CE to perpetuate woodlot sustainable management. In hind sight, it was a presumptuous approach to take with a group of woodlot owners that have a substantial enough track record with management and conservation, that they were selected for the GFE/FMF Watershed Project in the first place.

The majority of woodlot owners involved in the Pollett Watershed Project did not need to hear about conservation ethic. Woodlot owners that have timber on their land, by default, obviously have a pretty good level of conservation ethic. Their neighbors with clear cuts and no timber lost the ethic, a least for a period of time.

A much better approach to promote a good conservation ethic would have been to recognize and reward for the conservation values they voluntarily contribute to society and the Pollett Watershed. Raising the profile of good conservation, and recognizing exemplary effort, would much better serve to celebrate the importance of, and serve to model for good conservation in the long term.

It could be considered an insult to conservation minded landowners, to suggest to them, that they should consider encumbering their land with a CE. These landowners come from land based community, where stewardship ethic has been passed from generations, often, along with the land. Landowners involved in Pollett Project, and SNB woodlot management programs have a proven track record of good stewardship. They (modestly) realize that they are doing pretty darn good job of stewardship/conservation, and contributing significantly to Landscape values. They also realize they are, in general, neither recognized or rewarded for their stewardship efforts. The bottom line is that their wood sells in the market, same as people with a poor stewardship ethic that practice unsustainable woodlot management. Why further marginalize themselves economically, or compromise their management choices with a CE?

Conclusion

Despite general lack of interest in CE in the Pollett Watershed, the project did result in one very positive contact. The landowner couple are retired, with grown family that have moved from the region. They have a deeply engrained woodlot and farm stewardship ethic and have indicated that they wish to establish a conservation easement on their woodlot and farmland (+200 acres).

The couple discussed the future of the family property with their children, who insisted that the property should remain as unit, and not be subdivided. Their general objective for the woodland is to restore Acadian forest species complex. NBCLT will continue to work with this couple to help them complete their CE.

Despite the general lack of interest in CE, the initial disappointment needs to be tempered with the understanding that this project was the initial introduction to the entire concept of conservation easements. This project needs to be looked at in the light of the first step toward establishing long term, formal conservation work in the Pollett Watershed. However the approach to simply invite people to donate a CE is not the best approach. A better strategy may be to reward and encourage landowners to continue their good conservation work, and help build some means to reward those good conservation efforts, and to further build on the established conservation ethic.

Outputs – Quantitative Indicators

Immediate Outcomes

Through SNB Zone Meetings, Westmorland County Fair, other local events and printed materials, hundreds of woodlot owners as well as many from the general public were exposed to information on NBCLT and Conservation Easements. The number of one on one contacts to discuss CE, both face to face and on telephone, was more than 50 individuals. There were less than a dozen referrals or references to people who might be interested in talking/learning about CE.

Intermediate Outcomes

There were at least 50 direct contacts and discussion with individual woodlot owners.

Final Outcomes

There was one quite positive indication of interest in developing a CE, and the initial steps toward developing it have been taken.