

Collaborative Conservation: The Leading Edge in Land Protection

Highstead ~ May 22, 2012

REDDING, CT--Highstead, a conservation organization and nature preserve, proves that small groups can work together to affect big change. It is a leader of the Wildlands & Woodlands (W&W) Initiative, which seeks to preserve 70% of New England as forest over the next fifty years.

On June 2, Highstead hosted its annual open house, and Regional Conservationist, Bill Labich, presented a lecture on how organizations like Highstead play an increasingly important role in landscape-scale conservation. When small, locally-based conservation groups and individuals network to create a shared conservation vision, they are able to advance conservation on multiple scales. These networks are called regional conservation partnerships (RCPs).

“It’s important that New England conservation be firmly rooted in the needs of the local community,” Labich said. “Who better to identify those needs than members of that community?”

Labich said conservation today has to occur at multiple scales. For instance, community leaders work to put conservation easements on their woodlands (thereby saving traditional trails or fishing holes). While doing so, they simultaneously work with public and private partners to protect the larger habitat corridor or rivershed, perhaps with federal funds, state tax incentives, and private matching monies.

The collaborative efforts of RCPs will help make the Wildlands & Woodlands vision a reality. Labich said, “If land trusts and landowners come together to discuss ideas, share innovations and pool resources, they’ll be able to tackle larger, more connected conservation projects than any one group could handle on its own.”

Highstead itself is a member of an RCP group, the Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership (FCRCP). The FCRCP includes representatives from 10 towns: Ridgefield, Redding, Danbury, Bethel, Brookfield, Newtown, Monroe, Easton, Weston, and Wilton. This group is developing a mapped, regional conservation vision for the local area. In January, the town of Bethel used the FCRCP’s “greenway vision map” in its strategic decision to conserve 72 acres of land.

“In nature, all things are connected,” said Highstead Conservation Director Emily Bateson. “When we step back and look at a regional landscape instead of a single town’s, we see bigger opportunities to affect change.”

To download a copy of the Wildlands & Woodlands report, visit the www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org.

For more information on Highstead’s conservation activities, visit www.highstead.net.