Adapting strategic land conservation as a climate adaptation strategy

Melissa Ocana, UMass Amherst Extension
National Adaptation Forum
April 25, 2019
Today

• Strategic land conservation
  – Climate adaptation co-benefits for human and natural communities

• Hear examples from the field

• Encourage partnerships with the land sector

• Support your work
Today

• What is a land trust and how are they adapting to climate change
  – Kelly Watkinson, Land Trust Alliance

• Scenic Hudson: a land trust advancing climate adaptation through conservation
  – Nava Tabak, Scenic Hudson

• Innovative strategies for municipal land conservation in a changing climate
  – Darci Schofield, Metropolitan Area Planning Council

• Closing & Discussion
Land conservation

• Acquisition
  – Prioritize where to protect land

• Stewardship
  – How manage or use the land
Land conservation

• Co-benefits for
  – Fish and Wildlife
  – Ecosystems
  – People

Photos: M. Jones, C. Banks
Conserving floodplains

• Reduce flooding during intense storms
• Increase water storage during drought
• Keep people out of harm’s way by not developing in flood prone areas
• Riparian corridors for wildlife
• Parks - green space and waterfront access
Conserving a salt marsh and migration

- Sea level rise
- Preserve vulnerable habitat and ecosystem
- Protecting surrounding land
- Buffer coastal communities
- Intervention and action needed to prevent them from drowning may require ownership
Joint mitigation-adaptation

Potential synergies and win-wins

Figure: Janowiak et al. 2017
Adapting strategic land conservation as a climate adaptation strategy

National Adaptation Forum
April 25, 2019
Resources

• Open Space Institute
  – openspaceinstitute.org/what/land-for-climate-protection

• Catalyst Grants
  – support land trusts integrating climate science into planning
This site is intended to offer basic to intermediate-level guidance about climate change and conservation responses to the U.S. conservation community. Not sure where to get started? Read the introduction to getting started, take a self-assessment, or search key terms.
Communications products

Open Space Institute & Land Trust Alliance

*How to Talk About Climate Change* Report (2018)

- Survey of 16 land trusts
- Climate communication workshop series
Collaboration with Mass ECAN climate communications expert work group to provide:

- **Climate communications recommendations** based on social science research in
  
  **Annotated list of references**
Recommendations for Communicating about Climate Change

Before considering any guidance on communication, remember that the first step to developing effective messaging on any topic is to identify who specifically you are trying to reach — the target audience — and what specifically you want them to do in response — the desired outcome.

Need help? Visit "Developing a Communications Product" for a bare-bones outline of the steps to developing a communication product to see where this guidance fits into the process.

Here are five research-based recommendations to help you communicate more effectively about climate change. To help show you what these recommendations look like in practice, we have linked to examples of products that do it well and provide additional communications product analysis for further insights. An collection of additional communications product examples is available here.

1. **Lead with politically neutral messages about conserving resources people already care about.**

   **Here’s why:** Most people don’t need to be talked into caring about majestic scenery, clean water, and healthy trees, no matter where they lie on the political spectrum. But even though climate change threatens universally valued natural assets, the term itself is inescapably polarizing because it is portrayed as an ideological issue. And since it is difficult for people without a scientific background to understand the science behind climate change, they rely on political leaders to validate or refute the findings. Rather than rallying us to work together at a time when unity matters most, the term climate change tends to pull us apart.

   Politics aside, many of the strategies promoted for climate mitigation, like carbon sequestration, or climate adaptation, like green infrastructure, require considerable explanation. Effective communication should focus on common ground issues, and mutually beneficial outcomes. If you root your messages in universal values and needs, you can make a more compelling case for adaptation actions intended to sustain the things we all care about in the face of changing environmental conditions, without specifying what’s driving those changes.

   **For example:** Protecting clean water for drinking, timber for building homes, and open space for recreation

   **Supporting evidence:** The research behind recommendation # 1

   **In practice:** Maine Coast Heritage Trust’s fundraising mailer Marshes for Tomorrow. Read the communications product analysis here.

2. **Find trusted spokespeople to deliver your messages.**

   **Here’s why:** It’s tempting to assume that opposition to or apathy about climate change is rooted in ignorance. That assumption leads science communicators to try to educate audiences by citing all the facts. In fact, research indicates that ideology, social identity, and trust have much greater influence on how people make sense of complex or controversial topics. That means an individual’s willingness to accept facts is incumbent upon his or her trust of, and respect for, the source of information. Ideally, you want to build this level of trust with your audiences, but that comes from repeated positive interactions over time. So if you are trying to initiate productive conversations about climate change with new audiences, find trusted scientific or natural resource experts in your community to offer evidence and testimonials.
Communications products

- Develop a land-trust specific *Inventory* of climate communication products
Communications products

- Select a set of exemplary products from the inventory to showcase with Accompanying text explaining why they work.

Product Analysis

How this product showcases the recommendations:

1. Leading with politically neutral messages about conserving resources people already care about.

In the first two sentences, this piece offers three compelling reasons why anyone should care about the fate of salt marshes: clean water, commercial fisheries, and coastal infrastructure. By opening with a message about things that are key to the economy and quality of life in Maine, the author primes the reader to care that sea-level rise is an increasing threat to these and other resources.
SAVING MARSHES TO SAVE THE COAST

Marshes keep coastal waters clean and provide critical habitat for rare plants, migratory birds, and a wide range of fish and shellfish—including the commercially important species our coastal communities depend upon. Over the next 100 years, global sea level is projected to rise between three and six feet, potentially destroying some of our most productive ecosystems and coastal infrastructure. In the worst case scenario, we may lose all of Maine’s existing marshland and wipe out highly vulnerable species.

By protecting critical uplands now we can help marshes migrate and lessen these negative impacts. You can help maintain healthy natural and human communities on our coast by supporting Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT) in its four-part plan to protect and care for priority marshes.
Closing thoughts

• Land conservation takes many forms
• Opportunities for co-benefits for people, wildlife, ecosystems responding to a changing climate
• Requires strong partnerships
Questions?
Melissa Ocana
Climate Adaptation Coordinator
UMass Extension
mocana@umass.edu
Sharing

• What are your local places that could benefit from using land conservation to advance climate adaptation?
• Who are your local partners?
• Examples from your work - partnerships with land sector for conservation
Sharing

• What are challenges of land conservation for adaptation that you’ve encountered?
• How/do you communicate the importance of land conservation for climate adaptation?
• Are there critical partners for this work who are not currently at the table?
• How do you measure and evaluate the impact of land conservation for climate adaptation?