**Saco Watershed Collaborative**

Working Meeting at UNE

July 18th, 2018

1pm-330pm

**Attendees**

Andy Tolman, Retired Head of Maine Drinking Water Program, [andyinme@gmail.com](mailto:andyinme@gmail.com)

Bonnie Pothier, State Representative for Senator Angus King, [Bonita\_Pothier@king.senate.gov](mailto:Bonita_Pothier@king.senate.gov)

Brandon Pettit, City of Saco, [bpettit@sacomaine.org](mailto:bpettit@sacomaine.org)

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Dalyn Houser, Saco River Corridor Commission, [dalyn@srcc-maine.org](mailto:dalyn@srcc-maine.org)

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Robyn Saunders, Cumberland County S&W Conservation District, [rsaunders@cumberlandswcd.org](mailto:rsaunders@cumberlandswcd.org)

Sophia Scott, ME Drinking Water Program [Sophia.scott@maine.gov](mailto:Sophia.scott@maine.gov)

Wayne Munroe, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service [wayne.munroe@me.usda.gov](mailto:wayne.munroe@me.usda.gov)

**Agenda**

Welcome

* Recap of 2018 progress on the *Action Plan* and recommendations from the *Collaborative Assessment*
* Introductions: What is your role in implementing the Saco Watershed Collaborative Action Plan?

Speaking for your organization (or from your perspective) how does your work contribute to or benefit from the Action Strategies? Provide an update of your current priorities in the watershed. If the Action Strategies don’t capture your work, what is missing?

The Action Plan is available at:

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322634087_Saco_Watershed_Collaborative_Action_Plan>

Excerpt: “The activities of the Saco Watershed Collaborative are organized within four Action Strategies:

1. Engage and inspire governments, organizations and citizens to take action to sustain water in the Saco Watershed.
2. Protect water quality through pollution prevention and restoration of degraded waters in the Saco Watershed.
3. Support land conservation and stewardship to protect water quality in the Saco Watershed.
4. Promote and enforce Low Impact Development (LID) strategies, stormwater and wastewater best management practices (BMPs), and land use development that protects water.”

* How can we incorporate the recommendations of the *Collaborative Assessment* by University of Michigan into our work in the Saco Watershed? What role could your organization play?
  + <https://www.wellsreserve.org/writable/files/Possibilities-for-Collaboration-in-the-Saco-River-Watershed-An-Assessment-by-the-University-of-Michigan.pdf>
* Sustaining the Saco Watershed Collaborative: Discussion of options moving forward after December 2018  
    
  What are the ingredients of a sustainable Collaborative?  
    
  How can you contribute?  
    
  Grant opportunities?  
    
  Committees to focus on priorities
* Discovering the Stewardship Network of the Saco Watershed

August 14 Saco Estuary Boat Trip

September 14 Lovewell Pond paddle and the Saco River Recreation Council

October 12 US Forest Service White Mountains National Forest

* Adjourn 3:30 pm

**Update from Partners**

*Speaking for your organization (or from your perspective) how does your work contribute to or benefit from the Action Strategies? Provide an update of your current priorities in the watershed. If the Action Strategies don’t capture your work, what is missing?*

1. *Engage and inspire governments, organizations and citizens to take action to sustain water in the Saco Watershed.*
2. *Protect water quality through pollution prevention and restoration of degraded waters in the Saco Watershed.*
3. *Support land conservation and stewardship to protect water quality in the Saco Watershed.*
4. *Promote and enforce Low Impact Development (LID) strategies, stormwater and wastewater best management practices (BMPs), and land use development that protects water.”*

Dalyn Houser: Thinking about the action strategies, I believe that the Saco River Corridor Commission is involved in all of them, to some degree. In regard to action strategy one the Commission was set up in order to protect the water quality of the Saco, Ossipee and Little Ossipee Rivers as well as protect this very valuable resource from poorly planned development and overcrowding.

The Commission is made up of two representatives per town that the river runs through. We work to permit any development occurring within 500 feet of these rivers (and up to 1000 feet in the Floodplain). Through this effort we work with the local municipalities, their citizens and also organizations in order to ensure development is properly planned to protect the Saco River from degradation. Through this effort the towns work to comprehensively protect the entirety of the Saco River Corridor in Maine.

I go out on site to people’s proposed projects in order to ensure they use best management practices, low impact development techniques and to ensure the development is properly planned to prevent degradation to water quality and overcrowding.

Every interaction that I have with someone is an opportunity to educate community members about how they can protect this valuable resource. We also speak frequently with select boards in towns, code enforcement officers, and look to work together and regulate to the best degree possible for comprehensive protection of the river.

It’s a collective effort across the spectrum. We also work with nonprofits and other organizations, or anyone who is concerned or interested in the water quality of the river.

For the second action strategy, we utilize our “A-K Standards.” They address any degradation or pollution concerns that may occur from development of land along the river and work to regulate any uses that may cause such environmental pollution.

When it comes to stewardship, most people come in not knowing about low-impact development (LID) or best management practices (BMPs), the SRCC really tries to lead people more in that direction. It’s often successful. Then we also have a water quality monitoring program where we collect data from 35 sites, biweekly from June to September. We test for a lot of different things. We also take grab samples to look at E. Coli, alkalinity, nitrates and phosphorous during the summer. We definitely are looking into research opportunities. We have a volunteer program for the water quality testing. We have a few volunteers, but not many. Every standard and regulation that we use, is on the website of SRCC.

Marybeth Richardson: At the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), we cover more area than the Saco River Watershed (SRW), but we have a lot of programs in our bureaus that speak to a lot of these points. For the second point, Kristin Feindel is not here, but she has come to these meetings and she is with the division of watershed management. She can speak to the SRW, she has done a lot of work in the tributary streams. She can tell you a lot about the work that we are doing to improve the water quality overall. Kristin engages citizen volunteers. We also do watershed surveys. Kristin’s program engages a lot with local residents. We do assessments of surface water. Some of that happens in the SRW.

For strategy number three, we don’t have any specific programs, but we do have advocates because of our land permitting activities. We work with US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and maintain the Maine Natural Areas Conservation Fund through The Nature Conservancy (TNC). A lot of that work happens in the bioregion of the SRW. The money that is taken from developers in lieu of wetland mitigation programs are put towards these bioregions. We work with a lot of local land trusts, and that is the primary way that we support conservation in the watershed.

For strategy number four, several years ago, we did an overhaul of the Chapter 500 regulations. LID has been identified as a mechanism to meet our general standards for stormwater permits. There is an incentive built into the permitting process to incorporate LID and stormwater designs. When appropriate, we get applicants in there to create LID measures as close to the origin of source water as possible. Overall, we have other programs. We meet with folks in the SRW to help them figure out what to do with their hazardous substances, materials management people are involved, water bureau folks, code enforcement officers in the southern Maine area, and more. However, we are down a couple field staff right now.

The TNC Conservation Fund is administered by us and commissioners of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, US Army Corps of Engineers, and The Nature Conservancy. But, TNC is the main administrator of the fund.

As for Emergency Response Exercises, we just did one in Salmon Falls. But, there are points along the Saco River that are very vulnerable.

Robyn Saunders: Robyn Saunders: To build on Marybeth’s contributions, DEP has a wealth of resources (e.g., gravel road and BMP manuals) available. At the Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD), we work off DEP’s reference resources and prepare fact sheets to promote BMP implementation/installation and empower folks to not be intimidated by the regulations. CCSWCD is a non-regulatory agency and our mission is well-aligned with Strategy Three. We do a lot of social marketing (not to be confused with social media), where we encourage people to implement BMPs and take action, like through our YardScaping/healthy lawn care program, similar to Strategy Four. We support land and water stewardship by providing low cost technical assistance to landowners, lake associations and road associations. We have been known to have partners outside of our county like Old Orchard Beach, Biddeford and Saco. We also provide technical assistance in engineering. We have two or three engineers on staff and currently we are providing statewide support to NRCS’s State Engineer, Candy Gilpatrick. Our job is to meet with farmers and help design and install BMPs. We try to support municipal stewardship by meeting annually with town managers from each town in our county.

For Strategy one, government outreach is easy. We facilitate a 14-municipality interlocal stormwater working group (ISWG) that realizes some economy-of-scale benefits around municipal stormwater management requirements and programs. We have our meeting tomorrow (third Thursday of every other month), all are welcome to attend as we work together to accomplish regional goals. We recently have been working with other organizations, like the regional planning office (GPCOG). Together with Cumberland County Government, we created the Regional Clean Water Council. Town Managers from 14 municipalities get together and talk about clean water exclusively and what that means to their communities. We also engage/inspire citizens through social marketing, and we try to engage in behavior change, like the yard scaping program. We provide K-12 and adult education all over Cumberland County. We also work with citizens on trying to duplicate NH’s Snow-Pro program in ME, which provides limited liability to contractors in return for reduced sand and salt reduction.

For Strategy two, as part of that 14-municipal coalition (ISWG), the municipalities are required to control pollution that comes from publicly owned facilities and activities, so we work with them to establish regionally-consistent pollution prevention (P2) policies and procedure. Other P2 efforts include a conservation innovation grant (CIG) through USDA-NRCS to help farmers build sound practices and construct suitable chemical storage facilities at EQIP-eligible farms in Cumberland and York Counties. We are looking for two farms in our area (York and Cumberland Counties). If you have any suggestions, we’d love to have them and bring the farmers on board.

For Strategy four, CCSWCD provides development review services to several municipalities and many developers by commenting on design, BMPs selected/sited and more. CCSWCD has delegated review authority from DEP. We support DEP when they are backed up, engineering supports them. We have been developing regionally consistent water quality metrics, standards and policies,so local decision makers can positively impact water quality and resiliency in their communities. We are seeing that the DEP land-use management regulations and permitting are not enough to protect, let alone restore, watersheds on such a large scale, thus the large number of urban impaired streams in our heavily developed area. Together we are trying to make a difference and support the tides of change at the local level.

On a personal note, I live in Scarborough, which drains to Saco Bay. I’m on the planning board in my community and have become the voice for wetland preservation (flood control and water treatment) as our lands in town are developed and redeveloped. I am also on the Board of Friends of Scarborough Marsh, which drains to Saco Bay.

Responding to questions: Portland Water District is one of our founding members of the Regional Clean Water Council (14 municipal Town Managers). CCSWCD has ten full time staff right now. We have scientists, planners, engineers, educators, and finance managers.

Jessie Meeks: We are the primary agency that deals with source water protection in Maine. We regulate all of the public water systems in the state, from Dunkin Donuts to the Portland Water District. We have a team that goes out and makes sure that everyone is in compliance with regulations. We work with Maine Rural Water Association to implement wellhead and source water protection. We also work on emergent contaminants. We will be working on fluoride(?) compounds in the coming year. We work on the first three action strategy items. Land conservation is not something we can throw our weight behind but land stewardship, certainly. We encourage common sense land use practices.

Sophia Scott: The Saco Watershed on the Maine side, has over 300 public water systems. Ninety-four of which are community systems in the Saco Watershed. Maine Water Company is the only one who pulls directly from the river. Of that group, not all are eligible for our grant and loan programs. For profit systems for example, are not eligible.

Last year the Lake Arrowhead community acquired twenty-nine acres of land around their wellheads. We would really like it if people took advantage of those loans, but they are loans not grants.

Rick Knowlton: We are involved with three of the ninety-four community water systems in the watershed. These three systems serve about 50,000 people. We own the public water systems that serve Biddeford, Saco, Old Orchard Beach, the Pine Point area of Scarborough, Parsonsfield, Porter and Hiram and we operate the Fryeburg water system under contract with the owners. So our purpose is a consumptive use of the water resource for the benefit of these communities.

From my perspective, we don’t do enough of the four agenda items. Maine Water has been in Kezar Falls, Hiram, Porter and Parsonsfield, for over 50 years, but we have only been serving the Biddeford Saco area since 2013. - Through our work across the state, we know about the work that DEP, the DWP and CCSWCD do. We are hoping to connect to the other organizations at work in the Saco River watershed. As Kira said, drinking water gets isolated in conversation, but everything that happens in the watershed has a benefit or detriment to the drinking water. We didn’t see our org playing hard enough in the watershed. Our Biddeford Saco system customers fund a large part of the budget for the Saco River Corridor Commission, and we helped fund the SWC and we are proud to be a part of this group. I’m excited about all of the things that are happening for the benefit of the citizens in and around the watershed. It’s our job to find that balance between engagement, involvement and consumption.

Drinking water loves to start with clean water sources. Source protection is the most cost-effective method there is of meeting the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Saco is an amazing resource for the region. We want to do everything we reasonably can to keep it that way. I hope that we can touch governments and organizations and our customers. Land conservation is not always supported by the regulatory framework we work within, especially when you look at a watershed the size of the Saco River, that’s a huge space. So, you have to be strategic and focused. When we can support, we will. We would look to support the regulatory framework in terms of BMPs and LID.

Bonnie Pothier: Rick, Chris mentioned that you were one of the founding members of the Collaborative. Can you speak to what brought this group together, and what will sustain it?

Rick Knowlton: When we first arrived in the Biddeford Saco area, we met with community leaders and organizations trying to understand the history of the water utility and the needs of the communities. We met Chris and Pam here at UNE and offered to assist in their programs to educate students about drinking water. We learned of the work of UNE in the estuary and of the Wells Reserve, and the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative (SFWC). We met with Chris and others to ask how do we grab this interest and energy, and create some focus from it? We at least wanted everyone to hear about what everyone was doing in the watershed. The nature of a Collaborative is to network. We talked about how to pull this group together. Poland Spring stepped up as well. More than half of Poland Spring bottled water in Maine, about 70% I think, comes from sources in the Saco River Watershed. Their investment in the watershed, along with ours, makes it pretty easy to fund this activity, and to see if we can create enough of a focal point where we can share common interests, and self-sustain. Initially, it was about energy, exchange of knowledge, and involvement so that there was an awareness of what was happening. Maine Water Company will participate in the Collaborative for as long as the company stands. The question is, at what level and how do we balance that level with our other responsibilities? There is a baseline of “let’s get together” work, to network and communicate, but then there are projects to do. As far as funding those projects, I think the Collaborative will figure that out. But, there *is* a foundational level of support that we want to sustain.

Kira Jacobs: Chris has taught many of us about “values” over the years. My values are within Maine and New Hampshire. The context for my involvement is that I was one of the founders of the SFWC. We revolutionized the way that the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and EPA work together in the country. That is part of action strategy one for me. Engaging citizens is my weakness right now. I work with 4,000 water suppliers in the area. We just don’t have the resources to engage all of the citizens in each community that we work in. Part of what I need is to focus on what the needs are from the state of Maine and New Hampshire. I want to get Maine Drinking Water folks and NH Department of Environmental Services together. Part of my job is to straddle the two states and coordinate efforts with them. Maybe we can explore pollution prevention in Maine. There is a tiny grant program for communities in Maine. ME DEP is offering technical assistance right now, see this link for more details (<https://www3.epa.gov/region1/eco/uep/mtap.html>).

I would have to say that action strategy number three is my strength. Part of my role is to figure out how to affect policy at the national level so that we can get money to our states. There is some work with NRCS in addition to the work that Wayne Munroe does tirelessly. We have a colleague in Vermont with NRCS as well that we are talking with since Juan Hernandez is still in Puerto Rico helping out with efforts there. Across the New England region, there is a huge push for land conservation and it dovetails nicely with what we are doing.

Last week I went to a conference, called the One Water Summit. That is where they talk about how drinking water is culturally treated differently than here in the northeast region. We talk about waste water and stormwater as something to treat and get rid of, but in Minnesota at the conference, they talk about keeping all of it because it’s all that they have – One Water. It’s important that we have bylaws in place for our municipalities to enforce. Currently there is no funding from Congress that is for drinking water specifically.

Wayne Munroe: I’m the district conservationist for Cumberland and York County. It encompasses more than 1 million acres. Our primary mission is “helping people help the land.” We are very Natural Resource-centric, where landowners voluntarily participate with NRCS to help their land and install conservation practices. We have significant financial assistance resources to bring to private landowners at the landscape level through the Farm Bill program. The Farm Bill programs are highly environmentally driven. There is a ranking system and the ranking is determined by soil, water, air, plants, animals, human concerns, energy, pollinators, and more. This helps support sustainable food and fiber supplies while improving downstream water quality. The Farm Bill authorization is what fuels NRCS. Thanks to the US Senate that recently passed the Farm Bill, it should be voted on and finalized soon. The Senate kept the funding for many of the programs that we work with.

Our main investments are in the first three action strategies. Through the Farm Bill process, the state of Maine gets anywhere between $9 to $20 million dollars. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program “EQIP” offers financial assistance to purchase environmental benefits for private landowners willing to address on site natural resource concerns. As District Conservationist with NRCS, my job is to leverage as many of the Conservation Program dollars possible and assist landowners invest in priority Conservation Practices. We have in the SRW, a lot of EQIP contracts with Forestry resource concerns addressing healthy forestry management practices such as invasive treatment, wildlife habitat management and erosion control practices to improve water quality such as installing stream crossings. The before situation is Skidders pulling logs through streams, so we assist landowners to build bridges enabling safe transport of the logging equipment and logs without stream contact preventing sedimentation and protecting water quality. We do a lot of nutrient management that is farm specific. We assist commodity crop growers address erosion control, energy conservation and water conservation through irrigation system improvements. We install a lot of high tunnel systems for growers extending the growing season, enhancing food supply markets and sustaining crop production systems. We have about 1,600 farms in Cumberland and York County more than any other NRCS service area in Maine. We also service a large number of beginning farm producers who sell to restaurants, farm stands and public farm markets. It’s a factor of population and the vitality of the market base, also the farm size. These beginning farms are producing very well on between 5 and 20 acres. They are making it work, it’s intensive agriculture, but it works for them. A lot of these farmers are retired corporates from Wall Street and other urban areas who are looking to get away from the corporate scene and want to retreat into the rural areas.

We want to leverage and target more conservation dollars and get those dollars into the SRW. We could leverage more conservation practices treating the land in the watershed. It’s about how you can protect forests and farms to help protect drinking water quality.

Bonnie Pothier: The House and the Senate had a difference in the Farm Bill legislation. The Senate version was the one that protected the SNAP program for those who needed it, while the House version pulled that benefit. The 2018 Farm Bill is slated to have 10% of funds dedicated to the Clean Water Act efforts.

Sophia Scott: We have a couple of grant programs that have to do with action strategies two and three. We have a wellhead and source water protection grant. We can distribute to public water systems. As well as nonprofit community water systems. They are awarded up to $10,000 depending on the scope of the project. It’s a wide category as long as systems can demonstrate that their project will project wellhead and source water protection. The wellhead protection money usually runs out first. If there are any funds remaining for the source water protection, then we run the grant through the rest of the year. We also have a loan program. Historically, the larger systems have used it more extensively. We hope in the future that we could make these loans a bit more interesting or intriguing to systems from a financial standpoint. There are two water festivals in the state. The Southern Maine Children’s Water Festival in May, and the Northern Children’s State Water Festival, which happens every other year. Something I want to work on in the watershed is to disseminate watershed education materials like Wisconsin, where they distribute 300 watershed models to schools in the community. And in our most recent service edition newsletter, we have a little blurb about the SWC.

Andy Tolman: I used to be in the Drinking Water Program. I keep coming back to these meetings because I have had an interested in the Saco, it being the one big river for the state for drinking water. The Drinking Water Program a few years ago, did a threat assessment. I never saw the final report, but that might be a good anchor for pollution prevention activities.

The one piece that I am involved in, my wife’s relatives have hundreds of acres on Conway Lake. The new generation is taking over in our family, and they are trying to figure out what to do with the forested areas. I’d like to reach out to some land trusts, but the relatives want it to remain private land. They are doing a good job managing now, but that is something that I am interested in.

Mary Jane Dillingham: Rick covered the Maine Water Company’s perspective very well. Personally, engaging and inspiring people to recognize the areas along the river that need protection is important to me. Rick mentioned that the source water protection is the most important goal in keeping good water quality.

Partnering with other organizations and other work is what is good for us. Dennis Carrigan spoke about the river clean up that will be happening in September with the Saco River Recreational Council. Then there is the 4th Annual Saco River Trash Drive hosted by the Saco River Salmon Restoration Alliance on September 9th from 9am-4pm. I’m still learning about how big the watershed is and what we can do.

Bonnie Pothier: I’m here to learn. I’m here to be energized, engaged and to help assist in any way that I can. So far, what I’m hearing is how can the federal government support what you are doing, and how are we also getting in the way. It’s encouraging to me the collaborative efforts of this group of nonprofits, government agencies and private sector involvement on a macrolevel and looking at how you are all working together. It has been so helpful to me sitting in on meetings and tours. It also gives me the opportunity to have a direct connection to me. I’m available 24/7. I really hope that you take advantage of that, and I appreciate you all being here.

Kira Jacobs: At EPA, staff are not allowed to have direct contact with Congressional staff. Bonnie, it’s great to have you here at the meeting and field trips so that we can get to know you.

Bonnie Pothier: This is again, so valuable to our constituents as well. We can all breach that wall and it is beneficial to all of us in these meetings, where we meet and get to know each other one on one.

Kira Jacobs: With a new NRCS pilot project for source water protection, we are going to see if this can happen in the Saco Watershed.

Emily Roy: What I’m excited about is to better integrate your expertise in our outreach efforts at Saco and how we can support these efforts in stormwater management, waste water management and more. We partner with Maine Water Company for drinking water, we partner with Robyn Saunders on so many other things to help with conservation, and we work with each of you in this room in so many ways. I’d be happy to talk about emergency management planning as well.

Chris Feurt: We did pretty well on time. So, we will think about the agenda that we have with the remaining hour. I’ll start with a run through of the big picture from UNE’s picture of what we have done for the past year.

This gives you an idea. The funding that makes this possible is from Maine Water Company and Poland Spring. Our role is totally facilitated by these grants. That is what allows me a buy-out from a course for teaching so that I have time to do this. Emily’s position is 100% funded by the grants. Pam Morgan does the water quality work for the Saco Collaborative. The total of our salaries is less than 1% of the total grant.

The students from the University of Michigan created an environmental assessment that was independent. The grad students shared their results in January. In February, this report was finalized. That was when we also submitted the Healthy Watersheds Grants. We did not receive funding for that, but it did get us thinking about what we would put in a future grant.

March, was about presenting this Collaborative at the Maine Sustainability and Water Conference. The room was packed, and people were very interested in what we were doing. I was invited to Sweden to give two presentations about this partnership and the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative.

In April, we had our spring meeting and a tour of the River Bend Farm.

In May, the folks at Maine Water and Brookfield Energy gave a tour.

In June, we had a great tour in the Massabesic Experimental Forest.

Just last Friday was our tour with the Maine Natural Areas Program in the silver forest floodplain on the Saco River.

For our annual meeting, we are thinking of having it in December. Other things that are going on is that we will be analyzing water quality in the fall. We will be looking at ways to improve our story map Arc GIS resource. We have also been talking with Trout Unlimited. We have reached out to Maine Audubon, Saco River Recreational Council, Maine Stream Connectivity Working Group, TNC in Maine and New Hampshire, Poland Spring, SRCC, and UNE has done an archeological dig on the banks of the Saco River.

Thinking about the future, looking at the report that the University of Michigan students compiled we focused on values and recommendations for the watershed. Do we need a smaller working group for the last 5 months leading up to December? I’ll put an idea out and then get your reaction on how that might guide us into the future.

**Recommendations from Report: Values of the Saco River Watershed**

*Recommendation 1: Those interested in advancing collaboration within the Saco River watershed should use their shared aspirations as a stepping stone to discuss a common mission or vision statement that captures the future they would all like to see.*

Chris Feurt: Our existing plan does not have a mission or a vision statement. Do you think we need to craft an overarching vision and mission statement? Reactions?

Wayne Munroe: We don’t need to spend a lot of time on it. We need to push the existing message focus through a funnel and capture a nice mission statement for the existing plan. Let’s not reinvent the wheel, but we could use one similar to the SFWC.

Rick Knowlton: I know previously, it was more important to figure out what our focus was. But, there were a bunch of opinions on how to structure our focus. Moving forward, let’s focus on what we will do and not do first.

*Recommendation 2: Capitalize on shared values about the watershed as a stepping stone to collaboratively develop specific goals and objectives for the group. These goals and objectives should capture the major issues and aspirations in a manner that will be compelling to those who care about the Saco River Watershed and will encourage engagement in the collaborative.*

Chris Feurt: We developed the template for the action plan and turned it into how we will move forward. Do you think we are on track for that so far?

Wayne Munroe: We are good and pretty much there, but we need to be open to future values and discoveries that may evolve as we move forward.

Chris Feurt: We did get good feedback from Kirstin Feindel about natural habitats that were not emphasized in the original copy of the action plan.

Rick Knowlton: We are close, but when we published these in January, we have not done these four pages justice, in terms of the details. I would love to see a volunteer group really sit down with Emily and wordsmith this. There is a lot of information here.

Wayne Munroe: Chris and Emily did put out for a call for edits, but I don’t think they got a lot of input from all of our partners.

Rick Knowlton: That is the message that we are sending here – maybe we can get partners to participate based on what we agree to work on.

*Recommendation 3: Those interested in advancing collaboration in the Saco River Watershed should recognize the varied interested and concerns at stake and discuss which issues they want to tackle in the short-term and long-term.*

Chris Feurt: Now, we don’t want to put more on your plate unless you want to work on other projects. Do we enable partners who are interested in taking projects to get the funding to add a staff member to do that particular kind of work, or is that too much?

Mary Jane Dillingham: The reason I asked about citizen water projects, is that the volunteer river and lakes monitoring program is high quality and used by DEP a lot. There is baseline data to work from. I can foresee something like this happening for the Saco Collaborative where they monitor invasive species, weather monitoring, erosion control, etc. But it would provide a lot of eyes on the data. When looking at these action strategies, there is a lot of work here.

Chris Feurt: One recommendation we will get to, is what structure would support the kind of work that needs to get done. Is there a group of people that would like to work on creating the structure of the Collaborative? In this environmental assessment, there are recommendations of other collaborative models. Then we can present at the annual meeting.

In addition to the group that would wordsmith the plan, are there people who want to talk about the future of the plan and how that would work?

*Recommendation 4: Organizations and individuals who are interested in collaboration in the watershed should first have a conversation to explicitly discuss the varied purposes a collaborative might serve and which purposes(s) will best advance their interests and address their concerns.*

Kira Jacobs: I am a part of five collaboratives right now. Every single group that comes together in this way, for now is informal just because we needed to start conversation. It becomes more difficult when there is no backbone like Chris or Emily. It makes it more ad hoc, which isn’t good or bad, it is just where we are right now.

Robyn Saunders: I just took an educational course on Environmental Governance where it (structure/governance) can either be authoritative or constitutional. So my comment is based on that, as well as experience working with 14 town managers. Best to use KISS model: Keep It Simple, Stupid. Sometimes too complicated of a structure can slow you down, whereas if there is a light-weight structure, it helps to keep things simple and easy for people to follow, join and adapt.

Andy Tolman: I agree to keep it simple, and to have a central facilitator for the Collaborative. If there is no spider in the middle, then the web falls apart. Everyone has a lot of energy, but we are all pulled in different directions.

Rick Knowlton: And all of this planning and effort takes money. On our funding piece, I would love for people to not think of it as money coming from “Maine Water Company,” but thinking of it as the communities that we serve. The communities pay us and it’s their money that is going into this Collaborative. We are the middle man, but we feel strongly that this is a good use of our money for the long term. There is no other source of drinking water in this region like the Saco River.

Robyn Saunders: I’m thinking of marrying recommendations 3 and 4 with respect to where the Collaborative resides and who should be at the helm. Watershed boundaries do not follow municipal boundaries. But, organizations perhaps watershed-based organizations like the SRCC are for things like this maybe?

(Robyn and Dalyn are interested in chatting further)

Chris Feurt: When this grant ends in December, then I need to go back into a normal course load at UNE, which means I will have to step back from the Collaborative. But, Emily has already volunteered for that job. Emily is still looking to stay in this and possibly expand this project. And you need someone whose job it will be to do this full time.

Let’s look at the other recommendations. A lot of the recommendations may fall into place with the action plan now.

*Recommendation 5: Consider ways to structure the collaborative to ensure its broad credibility.*

*Recommendation 6: Consider ways to ensure its [Collaborative’s] transparency.*

Chris Feurt: The field trips may seem like they are just fun, but there is a lot of knowledge sharing and information gathering. There are issues that we are all dealing with and they are ways of getting out and seeing what is happening in the watershed, and how we can work on them together.

Robyn Saunders: Are we envisioning that the funding sources now, are here to stay?

Bonnie Pothier: I’m wondering if there is a way to expand the funding pool?

Kira Jacobs: I did a presentation at the NH Source Water Protection Conference with Tin Smith, who is the president of Great Works Regional Land Trust. He and I dove into funding sources. One thing I came up with was that there is a winery that gives 10% of their proceeds to the lake association in Meredith, NH. I called Emily a few weeks ago, and we talked about Cold River Vodka here in Maine, and how the Collaborative could connect with them and possible set something like that up.

Chris Feurt: And in thinking about these things, that’s why there needs to be someone full time that can reach out to these businesses and landowners.

Sophia Scott: We are trying to promote this idea to promote beer coasters that will be distributed to breweries if they want one.

Rick Knowlton: One thing Maine Water Company will continue to do, is provide the capacity to continue moving the Collaborative. The money comes from our customers that are paying, so it is going back into the communities and it is no different than how the Portland Water District works because they do the same thing.

Chris Feurt: There so many “rich” watersheds in the country that receive a lot of money for their conservation projects. We in the Saco Watershed. are the working-class watershed. People love this watershed.

Robyn Saunders: If you need someone to reach out to Poland Spring (absent from meeting/conversation), 70% of their water comes from the Saco Watershed, then I will be willing to do that.

Chris Feurt: To quickly wrap up the meeting today, the last two recommendations are:

*Recommendation 7: Consider ways to structure the collaborative in order to enable flexibility in participation.*

*Recommendation 8: Ensure that the process is structured in a way that will make a difference in the watershed, making it worthwhile for individuals and organizations to participate.*

Chris Feurt: We have two working ideas to hone in on. Anyone who is interested can email Emily or I and we will schedule two meetings in August.

People interested in forming the Subcommittees:

1) Honing in on Action Strategies: Robyn Saunders, Rick Knowlton and Dalyn Houser.

2) Sustainability and Structure of the Collaborative: Dalyn Houser, Rick Knowlton, Robyn Saunders, Andy Tolman, Chris Feurt, Mark Dubois?

Chris Feurt: Those were the main things I wanted to talk about at this meeting today. We may need to look at how the Collaborative will continue in the future.

Rick Knowlton: We should still continue looking to UNE to rely on their technical expertise and independence for this Collaborative.

Robyn Saunders: We should think about looking at two people for this job that you are talking about Chris, not just one position.

Rick Knowlton: There should almost be one person for every action strategy, up to four people.

Kira Jacobs: This is “where the river meets the road,” where we need to fund the collaborative partnerships and there is a lot of talk about how to form one, but no one wants to fund it.

Chris Feurt: We are planning our next group meeting sometime in September to get the maximum number of people.

Robyn Saunders: Would the subcommittees meet in August?

Chris Feurt: Probably, but we can talk about it with others who are interested. Again, please email myself or Emily if you would like to be a part of either of the two subcommittees.