

# HELPING SALMON FALLS LANDOWNERS PROTECT DRINKING WATER

*The Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative works with NRCS to protect drinking water*

## The Problem:

In light of projected development pressures on lands in the Salmon Falls River Watershed and the associated increases in nonpoint loading of nutrients and pollutants, one of the biggest challenges in the watershed is keeping forests productive and well-managed. Thus, the goal is to keep forest ownership desirable enough to reduce the risk of conversion to residential development. Some land owners are willing to work with local land conservation organizations, but others do not want restrictions, and they need financial and technical assistance to keep their lands productive.

## The Approach:

More than 80 stakeholders from Maine and New Hampshire collaborated to identify five priority action areas for the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative (SFWC), one of which is land conservation. SFWC's work with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in both states focuses on conservation of forested lands by helping to keep those lands productive. NRCS prioritized Conservation Programs in the watershed, specifically Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which includes funding of Forestry Conservation Activity Plans for private landowners, and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), with a focus on development of New England cottontail habitat.

NRCS offered to fund landowner outreach events, which were organized by conservation districts and local land conservation organizations. These evening meetings were held throughout the watershed in the fall of 2011 to inform private landowners about NRCS programs and other approaches to protecting watershed lands. The workshops provided visibility for NRCS programs and for announcing the availability of funds. In Maine, follow up workshops were held to help landowners apply for specific NRCS programs, and to learn more details about planning and implementing conservation practices. The success of this model is evidenced by the fact that, by spring of 2012, Maine's had received EQIP applications covering more than 4,500 acres of private forest lands.

## The Outcome:

During a joint meeting with the Maine and New Hampshire State Conservationists in January 2011, the SFWC members learned that state NRCS staff were interested in working on projects that would help meet their needs for engaging more landowners on a voluntary basis and also help to protect vulnerable drinking water sources. The meeting provided a chance for all parties to speak frankly about their missions and goals, what they needed from any potential project, and identify their program constraints. Finding common ground in the fact that source water protection and NRCS programs are both voluntary and incentive based programs was a very significant part of the discussion.

Getting the right people to the table is important: federal, state, and local interests all need to be represented, given a voice, and allowed to help shape any project. It is worth exploring potential collaborations even when it is not clear from the outset that collaboration is possible; eventually there may be a pleasant surprise. A collaborative learning model is useful. It is also important to develop an outreach plan with local/county level contacts to make gatherings of landowners successful.

## For More Information:

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## Key Collaborators

- Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance
- Berwick (Maine) Water Department
- City of Somersworth, New Hampshire
- County Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- EPA Region 1
- Granite State Rural Water Association
- Local Land Trusts
- Maine and New Hampshire State Drinking Water Programs
- Maine Rural Water Association
- Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership (PREP)
- South Berwick (Maine) Water District
- State Foresters
- SWOAM (Small Woodlot Owners Association of Maine)
- USDA NRCS State Programs
- US Forest Service
- Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve