Real Life Writing Samples:

Using The Nature Conservancy’s Resilient and Connected Network to obtain funding, advocate for improved management of public lands, and communicate with the public

Handout for Session F03:  

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Example 1: Excerpt from grant application seeking funding for a parcel within the Resilient and Connected Network. Funder is familiar with the analysis.

In addition to its contributions to the water quality of Sunset Lake, the Boy Scout tract also supports terrestrial conservation targets, including three state-significant natural communities: Dry Oak Forest, Mesic Maple-Ash-Hickory-Oak Forest, and Hemlock Forest, all in excellent condition and moving towards old growth status. The tract also scores highly in the Conservancy’s Resilient Sites for Terrestrial Conservation in Eastern North America (Anderson et al, 2016a), with scores of Above Average and Far Above Average, suggesting that the site will continue to promote biodiversity in an uncertain climate future. These high scores are driven by equally high scores in Local Connectedness, a measure of habitat connectivity for a variety of ecological processes, and Landform Diversity, a measure of the geophysical diversity of the site.

The geographic context of the Boy Scout tract compliments an existing network of conservation lands and advances several landscape-scale conservation objectives in the region. These objectives include forest block conservation, securing connectivity for wide ranging mammals, and promoting resiliency to climate change. The tract directly abuts the Pond Woods Wildlife Management Area, a 2,273-acre, mostly contiguous protected area with few inholdings. This forested block, which includes the Boy Scout tract and the entirety of Pond Woods WMA, is described as a “highest priority” for conservation in VT DF&W’s Vermont Conservation Design. This block further serves as a critical anchor for a wildlife linkage between the Green Mountains and the Adirondacks identified by the Staying Connected Initiative. One crucial element of the strategy for protecting this linkage is ensuring the protection of the large habitat blocks that serve as stepping stones for wildlife traveling through the Champlain Valley. And lastly, the Boy Scout tract and the entirety of the surrounding Pond Woods WMA are fully contained in the Conservancy’s Prioritized Network of Resilient and Connected Lands (Anderson et al, 2016b). This analysis integrates site resilience, habitat permeability, and biodiversity to identify a network of lands that should sustain native biodiversity and support the continued rearrangement of species in response to climate change.
Example 2: Excerpt from oral testimony by Jon Binhammer, Protection Director for TNC Vermont, to a public funding agency that is unfamiliar with the analysis.

This week began with the dire news of the UN’s 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, predicting the extinction of over one million species from the Earth.

Today I am pleased to bring you The Nature Conservancy’s Glebe Mountain project which uses the best available science to help avert the extinction crisis in a part of southern Vermont. It was The Nature Conservancy’s science that lead to us select the forest block in which this tract lies as a priority landscape worthy of protection at the highest level, and that has been verified by our more recent North America-wide effort to identify the most resilient and connected landscapes with confirmed biodiversity. This effort identifies landforms that have the geo-physical characteristics, in other words, the landform and geology types, and areas of refugia from climatic shifts that will tend to be more resilient for species as climate change impacts the landscape. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department’s Vermont Conservation Design also identifies the Glebe Mountain forest block as a critical, high priority landscape for conservation.

Example 3: Excerpt from application for funding from organization familiar with analysis.

The Burnt Mountain tract is identified as a top tier site for climate resilience by the Conservancy (Anderson et al, 2016a and Anderson et al 2016b). It appears in the prioritized network of sites (Anderson et al, 2016b), meaning that is in the top 25% of resilient and connected sites in eastern North America. This analysis further describes the tract as a Climate Flow Zone with Confirmed Diversity. Here, connectivity models indicate an area that will support high levels of plant and animal movement in response to climate change. A portion of the tract is described as a Resilient Area that may be buffered from climate change because of its abundance of connected microsites that create climate options for species.

Example 4: Excerpt from a response to a proposed management changes at Camel’s Hump State Park, VT, that would increase activities with the potential to disturb wildlife in an area known to be important for habitat connectivity.

A recent analysis (2016) by The Nature Conservancy of all lands in the eastern United States, ranging from Florida to New Brunswick, identified Camel’s Hump and surrounding lands as a top tier site for climate resilience, describing it as land well suited to support the movement of species in response to climate change. In the network of sites identified in the TNC analysis, Camel’s Hump is a critical landscape connection that links extensive blocks of intact forest to the north and the south. Although Camel’s Hump State Park is surrounded by a constellation of other protected lands, no other lands in the area provide an equally robust connection. The strength of this ecological connection rests on more than just geographic location. The condition of the Camel’s Hump lands is of paramount importance. This, coupled with the fact that Camel’s Hump lies in the backyard of Vermont’s most rapidly developing areas, leads us to believe that a conservative approach to management that places a premium on ecological integrity is essential.
Example 5: Excerpt from response to updated management plan for the Silvio O Conte National Wildlife Refuge, Nulhegan Division.

Climate change should be more proactively addressed in the Plan. The first mention of climate change as a future challenge to management of the Division comes on pg. 25. Throughout the plan, climate change is mentioned as a ‘limiting factor’ to specific objectives (e.g. pg. 25), but references to climate adaptation and strategies for addressing these limiting factors are rare, disparate, and general (e.g. pg 75). This is a missed opportunity for the Division, as many of the management strategies (e.g. strategic wood additions, coarse woody debris retention, and certain silvicultural treatments) outlined in the plan are likely to facilitate climate adaptation through the creation of micro-site and microclimate diversity and bolstering habitats for climate-sensitive species.

It is also an important omission in an otherwise thoughtful Plan. We believe that more explicitly addressing climate change in the Plan is essential for the Division for several reasons:

- The Nulhegan Basin is a boreal landscape near the southern range of its distribution and therefore likely to be particularly sensitive to climate change. The rarity of this landscape feature compounds the problem for species that depend upon boreal habitats as few comparable habitats are available locally.
- Climate change and its related effects, such as the disruption of phenological synchrony, raise additional concerns for managers seeking to perpetuate species and natural communities. For example, one of the focal species in the Plan, Rusty Black Bird, is experiencing widespread population decline that is attributable in part to climate change, particularly at sites like the Nulhegan that are at the southern portions of its range (McClure et al 2012). Managing for this species strictly through a habitat lens and not considering impacts from future climate change may not yield the outcomes desired in the plan.
- A recent analysis (2016) by The Nature Conservancy of all lands in the eastern United States, ranging from Florida to New Brunswick, identified the Division and surrounding lands as a top tier site for climate resilience, describing it as land well suited to support the movement of species in response to climate alterations. This analysis integrates site resilience, habitat permeability, and biodiversity to identify a network of lands that represents a full suite of geophysical settings and has the spatial configuration and ecological connections to support the continued rearrangement of species in response to climate change. While the Conservancy primarily uses this dataset to guide land protection work, it also underscores the importance of climate-adaptation management in protected lands, like the Division, that are located in these critical geographies.

Example 6: Vision statement for conservation of a priority forest block shared with partners, using core concepts from the Resilient and Connected Network to describe desired outcomes.

The Glebe Mountain Matrix Block is a high-quality, largely intact-forest block that fully represents the matrix forests and attendant natural processes that characterize this region of the state. The block is
resilient, to the greatest extent possible, to climate change through the thoughtful management of public and private lands, and by building a network of protected lands that takes advantage of landscape features that promote climate resilience. Ideally this network will be contiguous with few, if any, fragmenting features, will capture features like river corridors and naturally occurring climate gradients (e.g. elevation) that will likely serve as conduits for long-term movement of species in response to climate change, and contain a diverse array of microsites and microclimates that provide climate options for species moving in the short-term. Across this network, management achieves a diverse but balanced array of objectives, including habitat, recreation, and resource extraction. A critical feature of this network is the intentional designation of areas managed with clear focus on biodiversity, ecological integrity, and natural process. These ‘natural areas’ are representative of the full range of geophysical settings and natural communities that exemplify the matrix block.

Example 7: Excerpt from grant application for project in the priority area described in Example 6 (above). Funder (Open Space Institute Resilient Landscapes Funds) is familiar with the analysis.

Acquisition and management of the TCF tract as a TNC Natural Area will bolster an existing network of conservation lands in the Glebe Mountain Matrix Conservation Area by increasing the protection footprint of the core reserve and adding landform diversity. Securing permanent protection for the 799-acre TCF tract will bring the total protected area to nearly 3,600 acres, most of which is contiguous and located in the core area defined in the Glebe Mountain Matrix Block Conservation Plan (TNC, 2006). Existing conservation lands are managed for flood control, forestry, and recreation, with only a small amount (~300 acres) currently managed with a primary emphasis on biodiversity. The TCF tract is directly adjacent to the largest of these areas—Hamilton Falls Natural Area, a 201-acre portion of Jamaica State Park that the Conservancy helped enlarge in 2015. The TCF tract also adds landscape diversity to the network of protected lands, which tend be lower in elevation and concentrated in the valley along the banks of the West River, potentially increasing the climate resilience of the protected core of the Glebe Mountain Matrix Block. The tract is fully contained in the Prioritized Network of Resilient and Connected Lands (Anderson et al, 2016) and described as a Climate Flow Zone with Confirmed Diversity.

Example 8: Press release for the above project, funded by Open Space Institute’s Resilient Landscapes Funds. Press release appears on following page.
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
Press Release

For Immediate Release
Media Contact: Eve Frankel 802.595.5000

800 Acres Conserved in Jamaica, Vermont, including Turkey Mountain

January 9, 2018, Jamaica: The Nature Conservancy is proud to announce the conservation of eight hundred acres abutting Jamaica State Park, which the Conservancy helped to establish in 1969. The recent acquisition, together with the existing Hamilton Falls Natural Area, protects over one thousand acres of contiguous forest, an unusual red oak-red spruce natural community, vernal pools, a portion of Turkey Mountain Brook, and the peak of Turkey Mountain.

“The Nature Conservancy has been safeguarding the natural heritage in this region for six decades. When we began it was to help protect the West River, Hamilton Falls, and create Jamaica State Park. Now we’re leveraging this work to stitch together a resilient and connected landscape to respond to a changing climate and building a future where both nature and people thrive,” said Heather Furman, Vermont state director.

The majority of the property consists of red oak northern hardwood forest which provides habitat for deer, turkey, black bear and bobcat. The wildlife diversity on the parcel is mirrored by the habitat diversity, with wetlands and vernal pools providing food for wildlife in the spring, black cherry, basswood and berries abundant with food in the summer, and oaks and beech offering food in the fall.

“Walking through this forest offers a glimpse into the rich Abenaki history and the wildlife resources that would have brought them to this place along the West River for food and shelter. Today, we can be stewards of this land and ensure that it is here for future generations,” said Jon Binhammer, director of land protection.

Turkey Mountain which is now a part of the Conservancy’s Upper West River Landscape Natural Area is considered by Nature Conservancy scientists to be a “natural stronghold” that is predicted to help plants, wildlife, and people withstand the growing impacts of climate change. Nature’s strongholds represent resilient landscapes that allow species to move as they adapt to changing temperatures. Land protection is a key strategy of the Nature Conservancy’s climate adaptation work.

The Turkey Mountain Project was supported by our members, Bafflin Foundation, and the Open Space Institute’s Resilient Landscapes Initiative, which is made possible with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The Resilient Landscapes Initiative seeks to build capacity of land trusts working to respond to climate change. The Nature Conservancy applauds OSI and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation for using cutting edge science to protect resilient landscapes.

The Nature Conservancy in Vermont is a leader in safeguarding the natural heritage of the Green Mountain State. We have helped conserve over 300,000 acres of land, 1,200 miles of shoreline, and we manage and maintain 55 natural areas that are open for hiking, fishing, skiing and hunting. The Vermont chapter is proud to be connecting land, water, and wildlife for over 55 years. To learn more and support our important work, please visit: www.nature.org/vermont