

Toward a National Framework for Landscape Conservation

A Concept Paper based on the
National Policy Dialogue on Landscape Conservation

May 29, 2009



Introduction

This working paper is designed to inform and invigorate efforts to create a national framework for landscape conservation. The innovative concepts presented here were generated during a national policy dialogue convened by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (Lincoln Institute) and The University of Montana's Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy (CNREP).

Before we begin, a brief note on language. This document focuses on large-scale landscapes. Several examples are referenced throughout the paper and the appendices. Occasionally we refer to regional landscapes as a synonym for large-scale landscapes. We also use the word landscapes to be inclusive of urban, rural, and working, as well as natural and cultural places.

We look forward to collaborating with diverse individuals and groups to further develop these and similar ideas.

Challenges and Opportunities

From towering mountains to deep-carved canyons, lush prairies to searing deserts. From "sea to shining sea," the landscapes of this continent have always been a source of life and livelihood, inspiration and strength to the people who have inhabited them. Beginning with the continent's first nations, the care of the earth and the attachment to well-loved places has over and over created a sense of home and hope. The generation that was stirred to action by last year's presidential election provides most recent demonstration that people from many walks of life want to preserve and protect the natural and cultural values of these landscapes, while providing jobs and creating resilient communities.

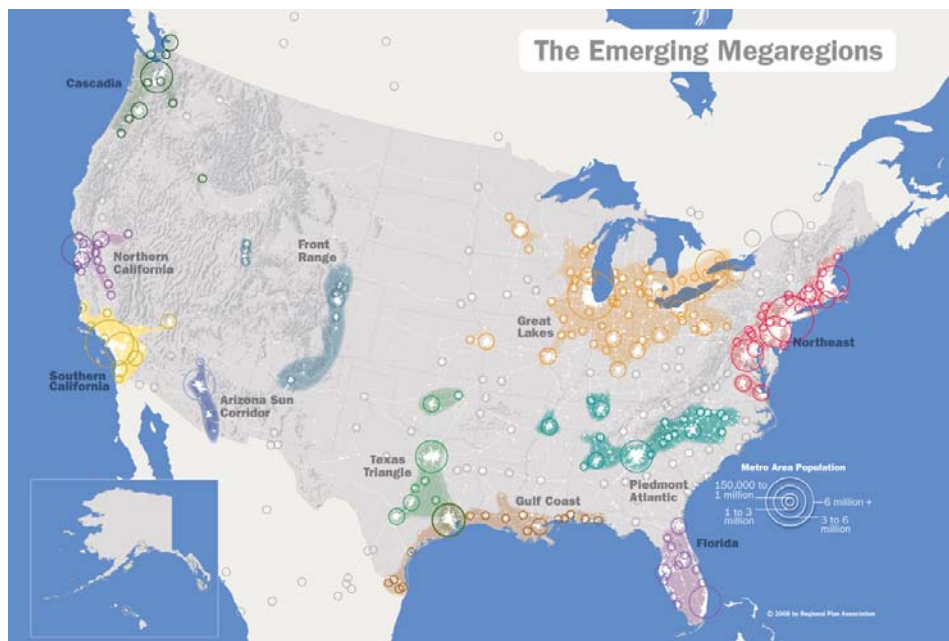


Blackstone River National Heritage Corridor

Throughout history, Americans have recognized the power of these landscapes and their related ecosystems. Being aware of the ever-evolving threats to these landscapes, we have periodically stepped up to protect them against our own greed and carelessness. The conservation movement of the late 19th and early 20th century created the public land system, reserving millions of acres from settlement. The creation and expansion of the National Park System, and later the Wilderness Act gave even stronger protection to some of the most magnificent of those landscapes. States and communities have also used a variety

of means to protect special places. And in the last couple decades, a great range of private efforts -- from conservation easements to land trusts and a variety of habitat enhancement organizations -- have helped to preserve treasured ecosystems.

We are now in a period of unprecedented challenges, which we can meet with equally unprecedented capabilities, if we fit them all together in the right way. These challenges, interrelated and exacerbating, can be summarized as such: (1) the world cannot afford to wait any longer to deal with the threat of climate change and increasingly frequent droughts; yet (2) we are in the throes of historic, worldwide economic dislocations that will make it difficult to mobilize the political will to address that global ecological threat. (3) Meanwhile, security and climate concerns make independence from imported fossil fuels a pressing priority, just when we must reduce our dependence even on domestic carbon fuels. (4) Open lands, including working landscapes, will be called on to provide more “ecosystem services” like clean water and secure habitat, while under ever greater development pressure from growing populations and the emerging megaregions.



These challenges must be addressed at various scales. Individuals, families, and communities all have roles to play, as do states and nations. Parts of these problems must be addressed at the global scale. Easily overlooked in this spatial spectrum is the regional or large-landscape scale, yet both the problems and their most promising solutions often converge at this scale. For example, almost all of the possible effects of climate change, from drought to vegetation to wildlife, operate at the regional or landscape scale. But it is also at this scale that some unusual capacities, long in gestation, are now waiting to be brought to bear not only on problems associated with climate change, but on the entire range of challenges that now confront us.

For the last few decades, Americans have been quietly developing a new form of problem-solving capacity. The old warriors of economic development and environmental protection, having battled each other to a standstill for decades, began to approach each other warily to see whether there was common ground. For instance, is it possible to protect key grizzly habitat while still keeping some sawmills operating? Might there be a way both to keep the salmon running while providing water for farms and families? While their interests may vary, these collaborative efforts are often motivated by a common commitment to sustaining communities and landscapes ... and by the realization that the existing legal and institutional mechanisms need to be supplemented with more responsive, homegrown public processes.

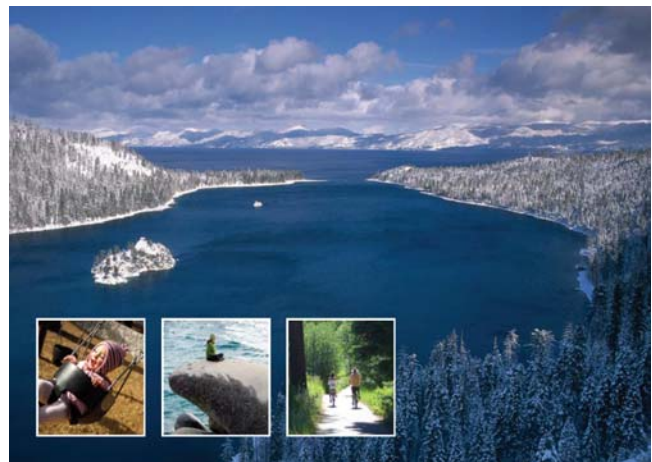
Now, with hundreds of these collaborative problem-solving experiences under their belts, Americans are discovering that common ground. (Appendices A and B provide an overview of the range of regional landscape initiatives over the past decades). From the Crown of the Continent to the Everglades, from the Sonoran Desert to the Blackstone River Valley, local people have developed the capacity to address many of the major challenges our country currently faces through place-based, collaborative initiatives. This deepening capacity for collaborative problem solving is thoroughly consistent with the Obama administration's commitment to making collaboration a key component of its governing style.

With the political will in place, and an increasing capacity to collaborate across boundaries at the regional scale, the time is right to create and support innovative structures and mechanisms to preserve and protect valued landscapes, provide vital ecosystem services, and create resilient communities.

A Path Forward

In response to these unprecedented challenges and opportunities, leaders from the public, private, and non-governmental sectors participated in a national policy dialogue on landscape conservation on April 16-17, 2009.

The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and CNREP convened the dialogue, which concluded with two basic recommendations:



Tahoe Regional Planning Agency

1. Create a national framework to restore, protect, and sustain the most valuable lands and waters in the United States; and
2. Create a national alliance to promote and support landscape conservation.

A list of participants is presented in Appendix D. Additional information is available at http://cnrep.org/projects/landscape_conservation.html



Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent

Toward a National Framework

1. What Is The Goal?

The overarching goal of a national framework for landscape conservation should be to encourage management of our water, land, and biological diversity on a regional basis while addressing critical issues such as economic vitality and community resilience. The long-term vision embraces an interconnected network of urban, rural, working, and natural landscapes -- which in turn are defined by distinct cultural values.

The proposed framework is intentionally cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral, rather than simply focused on federal agencies. It should be designed to facilitate and empower all elements of American society—government at all levels, tribal, business, nonprofit and scientific sectors—to explore, experiment, and advance resource stewardship through place-based, collaborative initiatives.

Within the federal government, the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Labor, and Transportation, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Council on Environmental Quality, should be involved given their respective duties and responsibilities for land, water, and communities (including jobs and infrastructure).

The initiative should cross the spectrum of landscapes - from urban and rural to working and natural. Likewise, a broad range of issues and concerns, including water, energy, timber, grazing, wildlife, recreation, protected areas, historic and cultural resources, infrastructure, and land use should be addressed. (Appendix C provides a partial list of current initiatives related to regional landscape conservation).

2. How Might These Goals Be Achieved?

Participants in the national policy dialogue believe that the most effective way to achieve regional landscape conservation is through voluntary, bottom-up approaches that meet national goals and standards. To this end, the participants suggest creating and supporting - through Congressional legislation or Executive Order - a national framework that would:

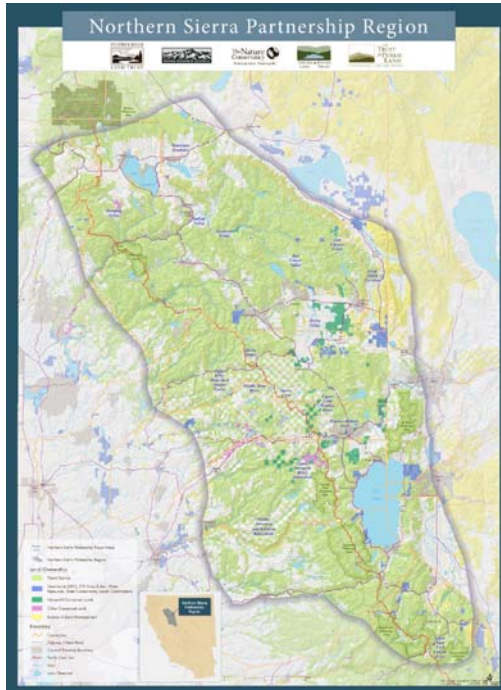
- Initiate a national competition to catalyze, select, and support the most promising large-scale landscape initiatives;
- Establish a diverse blue-ribbon commission to guide the selection, recognition, support, and monitoring of these regional initiatives;
- Encourage projects across a range of administrative and spatial scales that represent diverse ecosystems, land-tenure patterns (urban, rural, working, and natural), and innovative models of governance;
- Require cross-sector and cross-jurisdictional collaboration;
- Provide federal matching funding and other incentives to help support landscape initiatives and to encourage regional coalitions to participate in this national program;
- Authorize and encourage federal agencies to support these landscape efforts by actively seeking ways to achieve their objectives and to identify and remove regulatory or other obstacles to regional landscape plans;
- Require monitoring and evaluation of both process and outcomes;
- Continually monitor and invest in the enhancement of capacity; and
- Ensure broad dissemination of lessons learned.

A framework that supports voluntary, bottom-up initiatives promotes innovative local and/or regional approaches to large-scale landscape conservation. It recognizes that there is no single best approach to working at this spatial scale, and that success is based on harnessing the energy, synergy, and enthusiasm of citizens, agencies, tribes, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and communities within particular regions. The proposed framework acknowledges and builds on the success of "homegrown" regional initiatives.

To participate in the national competition, regions would complete a strategic assessment of their needs, interests, and objectives for developing, restoring, and protecting the landscape. They would also need to demonstrate their civic, political, and organizational capacity to work across boundaries - including a commitment of matching funds (or in-kind services) from local, state, and tribal governments; private businesses; non-government organizations; and the philanthropic community.

Once selected, regions would prepare a regional landscape strategy that defines measurable objectives and methods to address one or more of the following: (1) climate change (mitigation and adaptation); (2) energy independence; (3) community economic vitality; (4) water security and other ecosystem services; (5) ecological restoration; or (6) land protection (including critical wildlife corridors).

In return for their participation, regional coalitions would:



- Be eligible for federal matching grants that could be used in a flexible way to develop and implement landscape plans -- including convening and coordinating multiparty dialogues, ecosystem restoration, land acquisition, youth conservation programs, recreational access, and so on;
- Receive priority for other federal program investments such as Farm Bill landowner cost-share and reserve programs, environmental restoration funds, transportation improvement funds, and so on; and
- Increase coordination with federal agencies through something like a federal consistency clause (similar, for example, to the Coastal Zone Management Act).

To successfully implement this approach will require a federal matching grant program with additional funding coming through existing individual federal grant programs.

3. What This Is Not!

The proposed national framework is not a federal mandate, nor a proposal to consolidate federal agencies or their planning functions. It does not connote any new regulatory authority, duplicate existing initiatives, or promote one best way of undertaking the challenge of managing lands and water. Rather, it encourages a

distinctly entrepreneurial framework, emphasizing innovation, collaboration and flexibility among diverse sectors of society - genuine hallmarks of American history.

Building Capacity

To support large-scale landscape initiatives - and to help build the capacity of regions to work across boundaries -- the participants in the national policy dialogue recommend that the Lincoln Institute and CNREP convene a working group to create a sustainable way to:

- Promote and support large-scale landscape initiatives;
- Build the capacity of regions to work together at this spatial scale;
- Provide technical services to complete assessments, convene multiparty dialogues, articulate and assess future scenarios, monitor and evaluate progress (both process and outcomes), etc.;
- Facilitate learning across regional initiatives through workshops, conferences, publications, web sites, and so on; and
- Build a national constituency for landscape conservation.

The participants agreed that is important to build on existing frameworks, networks, and organizations to achieve this goal. They also identified two potential capacity-building models (recognizing that others may arise from this conversation):

1. **National Alliance** - The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) - which emerged in 1982 from a series of meetings convened by the Lincoln Institute -- is a national network of land trusts. It is a non-governmental organization that promotes voluntary land conservation and works with nonprofit land trusts by providing information, skills and resources that land trusts need to work effectively with landowners and communities. A similar alliance of organizations involved in regional landscape conservation, including universities, might enhance the capacity of regions in much the same way.
2. **National Foundation** - To promote and support the work of federal land and resource management agencies, Congress created the National Park Foundation (1967), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (1984), and National Forest Foundation (1991). Given the historic, crosscutting nature of the proposed national framework, there may be merit in exploring the idea of a regional landscape conservation foundation created by Congress.



Ecosystem Charter for the Great Lakes

The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and CNREP will convene a working group in fall 2009 to further develop these concepts in a way that complements the emerging national framework for landscape conservation.

Conclusion

Once again, this is a working proposal. We are excited about the opportunity to partner with other people and organizations to further develop these and other ideas.

If you have comments or suggestions, please contact:

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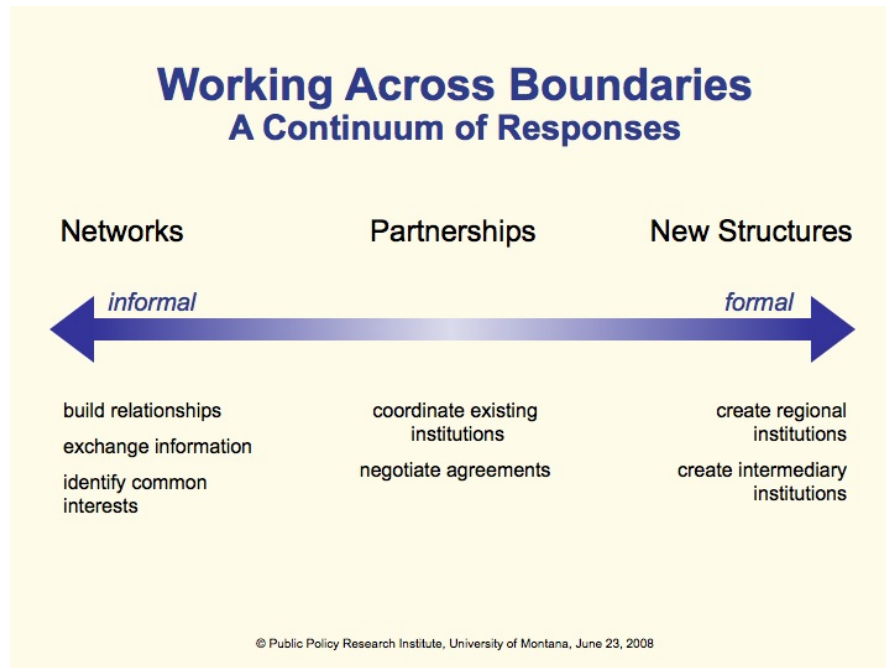
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Appendix A: Alternative Models of Landscape Conservation

According to the forthcoming book *Working Across Boundaries: People, Nature, and Regions* (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy 2009), there is no single model for regional, landscape conservation. Rather, there are a set of common principles that region's adapt to create homegrown structure and solutions. The diagram below illustrates the continuum of responses. The vignettes below illustrate these different approaches to regional, landscape conservation - moving from networks to partnerships to new structures.



Networks

Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent - The Crown is a remarkable landscape that covers approximately 16,000 square miles of land (about twice the size of Massachusetts). It has the highest non-coastal density of grizzly bears in North America, with plant communities ranging from old-growth cedar-hemlock forest to short-grass prairie. The Crown has a rich and diverse cultural heritage, including First Nations, ranchers, farmers, miners, foresters, hunters, anglers, and other recreationists. It includes two nations, multiple First Nations, two provinces, and one state, with more than 20 government agencies exercising some type of authority and management of the landscape. The region has received more special designations than any similar landscape, including the first International Peace Park, Biosphere Reserve, World Heritage Site, three national parks, five wilderness areas, two wild and scenic rivers, and habitat for six endangered species. In the face of this rich ecological, historical, cultural, and institutional landscape, the Crown is an ideal laboratory to understand the interplay of growth and development, climate change, and energy independence. Although there are numerous sub-regional efforts designed to address these issues, as well as a handful of Crown-wide initiatives, there was no single forum to facilitate communication and cooperation until the creation of the Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent. The Roundtable is very much work in progress, but represents a promising model of regional, landscape-scale conservation. For more information, go to <http://crownroundtable.org/>

Ecosystem Charter for the Great Lakes - The Ecosystem Charter for the Great Lake is a unique approach to landscape conservation or ecosystem management. It is a bi-national, multijurisdictional agreement designed to integrate existing laws, policies, and agreements to manage the transboundary water of the Great Lakes. It also provides a common voice for the basin. Completed in 1994, it presents a shared vision, along with a series of commonly held principles, findings and action items in an Ecosystem Charter, which is voluntary and non-binding. Any organization - public or private - may sign the Charter, which means that they agree to use the Charter as guidance in the development of work plans and priorities, and as a means to improve communication and coordination with others. Over 160 entities have signed the Charter. For more information, go to <http://www.glc.org/ecochart/>

Partnerships

Northern Sierra Nevada Partnership - The pioneering alliance dedicated to cooperative action that will conserve the lands and waters of the northern Sierra Nevada, and enhance its communities and local economies, for future generations. The founding partners -- Feather River Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Business Council, Truckee Donner Land Trust, and The Trust for Public Land - are working with private landowners, government agencies, and local communities to provide public benefits such as a high-quality water supply, world-class outdoor recreation, carbon sequestration, habitat for native fish and wildlife species, and a critical mass of working ranches and forests. The partnership also helps residents make the transition to sustainable economic activities that promote community well-being and help keep local towns and cities viable for the future. For more information, go to <http://www.northernsierrapartnership.org/>

Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor - Congress created this special park in 1986. It is designed to preserve the industrial history of the Blackstone River Valley. A sleepy farming and milling area in colonial days, the Blackstone River Valley was transformed into one of the nineteenth century's great industrial areas. With a 430-foot drop in elevation from Worcester, MA to Providence, RI, the river was an excellent place to locate business in the days before steam turned machinery. Water powered textile mills proliferated up and down the river. Mills grew into villages and those villages eventually grew into the cities and towns we know today. The Heritage Corridor includes sites in 24 cities and towns along the 46-mile run of the Blackstone River from Worcester to Providence. Unlike traditional national parks, the federal government does not own or manage the sites that make up the corridor. Instead, they work with local groups to coordinate the preservation and interpretation of these sites. Different areas along the river highlight different aspects of the valley's industrial history. For more information, go to <http://www.nps.gov/archive/blac/home.htm>

Regional Institutions

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency -- More than a hundred years ago, conservationists voiced concern about the impacts of tourism, ranching, and logging on the Lake Tahoe environment. Their idea to make Lake Tahoe a national forest or national park didn't gain wide support in Washington D.C., primarily because much of the land in the basin was already privately owned and had been developed or logged. Conservationists continued lobbying for environmental protection as logging and ranching waned, ski resorts expanded, and stateline casinos went high-rise. The debate came to a climax in the late 1960s after two decades of rapid growth. The governors and lawmakers in California and Nevada approved a bi-state compact that created a regional planning agency to oversee development at Lake Tahoe. In 1969, Congress ratified the agreement and created the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. For more information, go to <http://www.trpa.org/>

Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative - The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) is a joint Canada-US not-for-profit organization that seeks to preserve and maintain the wildlife, native plants, wilderness and natural processes of the region from Yellowstone National Park to the Yukon Territory. Established in 1997, Y2Y takes is widely recognized as one of the most ambitious large-scale landscape conservation initiatives. For more information, go to <http://www.y2y.net/>

Appendix B: The Spectrum of Landscape Conservation Initiatives

The following regional initiatives reflect the range of experiments at landscape-scale conservation. These and other efforts might further inform and invigorate the development of a national framework for landscape conservation.

Regional Land Use Planning

- Balcones Canyonlands Habitat Conservation Plan (1996)
- Sierra Business Council (1994)
- Long Island Pine Barrens Commission (1993)
- Cape Cod Commission (1990)
- Columbia River Gorge Commission (1986)
- New Jersey Pinelands Commission (1979)
- Adirondack Park Agency (1971)
- Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (1969)
- Palisades Interstate Park Commission (1900)

Public Land Ecosystem Management

- Highlands Conservation Plan Act (2004)
- Sierra Nevada Framework (2004)
- Yellowstone Business Partnership (2001)
- Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (1998)
- Northwest Forest Plan (1994)
- Interior Columbia River Basin Ecosystem Management Plan (1993)
- Malpai Borderlands (1991)
- Grand Canyon Trust (1985)
- Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (1964)

Watershed Governance

- Lower Colorado River Multispecies Conservation Program (2005)
- California Bay Delta Authority (2003)
- Platte River Cooperative Agreement (1997)
- Fraser Basin Council Charter for Sustainability (1997)
- South Florida Ecosystem Restoration (1996)
- Murray-Darling Basin Commission (Australia) (1987)
- Great Lakes Charter (Great Lakes Commission) (1985)
- Chesapeake Bay Commission (1980)
- Northwest Power and Conservation Council (1980)
- Columbia River Treaty (1964)
- Delaware River Basin Commission (1961)

**Appendix C:
A Partial List of Current Initiatives Related to Landscape Conservation**

National Landscape Conservation System

http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm_special_areas/NLCS.html

Executive Order 13508—Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration

May 12, 2009

National Parks Second Century Commission

<http://www.visionfortheparks.org/>

Conservation Study Institute

<http://www.nps.gov/csi/>

U.S. Forest Service Open Space Conservation Strategy

http://www.fs.fed.us/openspace/national_strategy.html

Alliance of National Heritage Areas

http://www.nationalheritageareas.com/index_1.php

Western Governors' Association, Wildlife Corridors Initiative

<http://www.westgov.org/wga/publicat/wildlife08.pdf>

Western Governors' Association, Western Renewable Energy Zones

<http://www.westgov.org/wga/initiatives/wrez/index.htm>

America 2050

<http://www.america2050.org/about.html>

Freedom to Roam Movement

<http://www.patagonia.com/web/us/patagonia.go?assetid=1865>

Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition

<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/rvcc>

Appendix D: List of Participants

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