

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PLANNING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP:

CHALLENGES, CHARACTERISTICS AND STRATEGIES IN CALIFORNIA

BY HEIDI HALL

Graduate student fellow, summer 2004
Sustainable Communities Leadership Program

Prepared for the California Department of Fish & Game,
Habitat Conservation Planning Branch
January 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
I. INTRODUCTION	5
LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP IN CONSERVATION PLANNING	5
<i>Why focus on local leadership?</i>	6
OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT	6
METHODOLOGY	7
II. COMMON CONCEPTS	8
COLLABORATIVE PLANNING PROCESSES	8
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT	8
<i>A local champion</i>	9
<i>Visible political support</i>	9
LOCAL RELEVANCE	9
<i>Different motivations to participate in conservation planning</i>	9
<i>Crisis?</i>	10
OUTREACH AND EDUCATION	10
III. LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES	11
CHALLENGES TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN CALIFORNIA	11
OTHER CHALLENGES THAT EMERGED IN THE CASE STUDIES	11
IV. KEY LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS FOR CONSERVATION PLANNING	14
STRONG PERSONAL MOTIVATION	14
<i>Elected officials</i>	14
<i>County and city staff</i>	15
<i>Stakeholder participants</i>	15
OTHER ATTRIBUTES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION PLANS	16
V. LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR CONSERVATION PLANNING	17
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT	17
<i>Cultivating leadership at multiple levels</i>	17
<i>Commitment of high-level political leaders</i>	18
LOCAL RELEVANCE	18
STRONG LEADERSHIP OF THE PROCESS	19
<i>Setting the stage for success</i>	19
<i>Working together</i>	21
<i>Building and sustaining momentum</i>	23
OUTREACH AND EDUCATION	25
<i>Reaching out to jurisdictions and interest groups</i>	25
<i>Community of practice</i>	25
<i>Public education</i>	26
VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING LOCAL LEADERSHIP	26
APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	28
APPENDIX 2: PHASES OF COLLABORATIVE PLANNING	31
APPENDIX 3: RESOURCES	32

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program emphasizes planning for whole ecosystem conservation. After a decade of the program, local government leadership is recognized as a critical component of a successful NCCP. Without such leadership, regional conservation plans can often falter in the planning phase or become stagnant and never get finalized. This report seeks to assess the approaches, techniques and characteristics of local government leadership that facilitate successful regional conservation plans, i.e., plans that are approved by local jurisdictions and accepted by all stakeholders, with consensus and momentum carrying forward into implementation.

Local government leadership refers to both public elected officials for a city and/or county, and city and/or county staff central to the daily management and coordination of complex conservation plans. The focus on local leadership recognizes that political support and strong leadership of the planning process is critical to development of an NCCP.

Common Concepts

Some common concepts emerged across the various cases that provide a foundation from which to discuss local leadership.

- *Collaborative planning processes* – the success of an NCCP depends in large part on the success of the process. In some jurisdictions, the collaborative approach instituted by the NCCP program is a new approach that therefore requires local capacity-building.
- *Political leadership and support* – there was general consensus that political leadership and support is critical to the success of a conservation planning process.
- *Locally-relevant incentive* – those plans that did not have a locally-based incentive to participate in the NCCP process often move along too slowly or become stagnant.
- *Outreach and public education* – an NCCP is largely a political campaign. As such, it requires constant outreach to multiple interests.

Leadership Challenges

Local governments currently face myriad challenges in California. Most significant is a deepening state budget crisis that makes it challenging to have the staff or resources to undertake long-term planning.

Some leadership challenges specific to the NCCP process emerged in the case studies. They include:

- Limited local capacity for collaborative planning processes
- Turnover of elected officials
- Developing effective stakeholder working groups
- Small but vocal and influential constituency that opposes the plan
- City/County interactions
- Lack of, or neutral, political support from elected officials
- How to “sell the message”

Key Leadership Characteristics for Conservation Planning

Due to the long, often shifting, timeframe of an NCCP process, there has to be a *strong personal motivation* to do what is needed to get the best plan developed, approved, funded and implemented. Elected officials articulated that a long-term vision for their county or city and a desire to enhance the local quality of life contributed greatly to their motivation to participate. Many local government staff expressed a strong belief in conservation and a process for better land use planning. There was a strong commitment to collaborative processes and a desire to foster legitimate public participation. Stakeholders often hoped to influence the negotiations and have some impact on the ultimate outcome.

Other attributes that contributed to successful plans included:

- “Centrist” political leaders
- Broad and varied political experience
- Skilled facilitator
- Problem-solvers

Leadership Strategies for Conservation Planning

How do leaders address some of these challenges? How do local leaders build support and momentum to bring the appropriate people together to develop creative and lasting solutions? These questions are at the very heart of a successful NCCP. In an effort to highlight the “how” and “why”, leaders and other participants interviewed were asked to reflect upon some of the successful and less successful strategies employed to develop specific NCCPs. Specific examples detailed in the body of the report further illustrate each of these leadership strategies, touched upon briefly below.

Cultivating leadership at multiple levels: Successful NCCPs showed that it took more than one person who was motivated to get a conservation plan developed, funded and approved. It took the vision and dedication of various people working together.

Local relevance: Elected officials especially expressed the need to have a solid reason for doing a conservation plan that people can understand locally. Leaders in several counties were able to use the NCCP process to address local concerns such as transportation infrastructure and natural areas preservation.

Strong leadership of the process emerged as an important factor.

- Several leaders highlighted the importance of starting with the right questions. Does the “political will” exist to undertake a conservation planning process? Are key interest groups on board and if not, what will it take to bring them to the table? What is the best strategy for success?
- Once the stage is set for success, how do you actually bring people together, explore the various interests that exist, and work towards an end goal? Relationship-building created the foundation for this phase. Other strategies interviewees identified focused on instituting regular communication with decision makers (such as a weekly phone call), using a consensus-based approach with stakeholder working groups, and managing the process by using planning tools such as a process map.

- Active support and participation from the local board of supervisors or the NCCP steering committee helped sustain the momentum to keep the process moving forward. Facilitating interest-based negotiations was an important strategy.

Outreach and education: Leaders highlighted the importance of outreach and public education to the overall process. Leaders stressed the need to continuously conduct outreach at a personal, face-to-face level in order to be effective. Engaging through dialogue was one key method for both leaders who facilitated the stakeholder group and for those who elicited political support or broader participation. This dialogue was important to explore interests and build relationships to carry the process forward.

Supporting Local Leadership

General recommendations for local government leaders include:

- **Build a community of practice** to share lessons learned, effective strategies for implementing and managing successful conservation planning processes, and how particular leaders deal with challenges that arise.
- **Build coalitions of support** in the initial phase of a regional conservation planning process. Reach out locally to see if the interest and political will exists.
- **Highlight incremental successes** along the way so that participants feel there are tangible benefits to the process.
- **Incorporate relationship-building and collaboration training** into the stakeholder working group meetings.

Recommendations for the Wildlife Agencies working in partnership with local government include:

- **Conduct an evaluation of every completed planning process** that includes discussions with political leaders, staff, stakeholders and relevant agency staff. What are some of the lessons that can be distilled? How were particular challenges resolved? What strategies were successful or less successful, and what could be done differently?
- **Develop a Local Leader Handbook** that speaks directly to local government leaders embarking on regional conservation planning processes. What are the goals and expectations? Tools and strategies? Questions to ask?
- **Engage in collaborative leadership development** through groups such as the Sierra Business Council or the Northern California Local Government Leadership Institute (CSU Chico).
- **Foster local political support** for an NCCP process by highlighting and developing the important role that a regional manager (DFG) or a field supervisor (FWS) can play.
- **Develop Outreach Guidelines** to assist local leaders conduct more effective outreach and public education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Regional conservation planning emerged as a policy idea in the early 1980s and has resulted in several state and federal programs that advocate a more comprehensive ecosystem approach to protecting habitat and wildlife. In the late 1980s, the Department of Fish and Game, the Resources Agency and the Department of the Interior developed the concept of the Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program, which was codified into state law in 1991 under Governor Pete Wilson. The NCCP program represented a significant shift in thinking, emphasizing planning for whole ecosystem conservation rather than relying on conservation of single species. This new approach strives to find a balance between conservation and human use of the land by planning for “appropriate and compatible development through a proactive locally driven collaborative approach”.¹

Since the program’s inception, NCCPs have been initiated throughout California and embrace a variety of landscapes. These include the highly developed San Diego region to the more rural Placer County in the Sierra Nevada foothills to the agricultural community of Yolo County in the Central Valley. Each NCCP has encountered its own particular challenges, in large part due to the regional nature of plans that cross local jurisdictional boundaries. The process itself is very complicated politically and each plan is embedded in its distinct local context. Through its work over the past decade, the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) has recognized the importance of local government leadership in order for the NCCP process to be successful. Without such leadership, regional conservation plans can often falter in the planning phase and become stagnant. This report seeks to assess the approaches, techniques and characteristics of local government leadership that facilitate successful regional conservation plans, i.e., plans that are approved by local jurisdictions, accepted by all stakeholders, and with consensus and momentum carrying forward to implementation.

Reflecting a long-standing commitment to learning from experience, DFG has sponsored several research projects to address key questions that have emerged from participating in NCCPs. They have partnered with the Sustainable Communities Leadership Program (www.eco.org) to sponsor graduate student summer fellows.² These research projects speak to a broad audience but aim to more deeply understand an issue from numerous angles, with an eye towards improving the NCCP process.

Local government leadership in conservation planning

Local government leadership refers to both public elected officials for a city and/or county, and city and/or county staff central to the daily management and coordination of conservation plans. This report recognizes there are many important and influential community leaders involved in nearly all conservation planning processes, whose participation and leadership are critical to assure a more representative and participatory process, and therefore, the best plan possible. This report however, focuses more directly on government leadership for several reasons. First,

¹ California Department of Fish and Game, “Natural Community Conservation Planning - The First Ten Years”, Outdoor California, May – June 2002, Vol. 63 No. 3.

² Other research reports by SCLP summer fellows can be accessed at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp/sclp.htm>

local government leaders may play a central role in initiating an NCCP and building and maintaining momentum and broad support for the plan. Political leadership is also essential to assure these plans are implemented once they have been developed and approved, and that there is adequate funding.

Why focus on local leadership?

The focus on local leadership recognizes that political support and strong leadership of the planning process is critical to development of an NCCP. An NCCP is a locally driven collaborative process, with the support and participation of the state and federal Wildlife Agencies³ as full partners. Ecosystem conservation is not something the state or federal governments can undertake by themselves. By partnering with local jurisdictions, the NCCP program strives to leverage local land use authority towards conservation, while providing local governments with flexibility in how they address wildlife and habitat issues. NCCPs are voluntary, so the program's success is predicated on a locally based motivation to participate and broad support and leadership driving the plan forward.

Strong local leadership also assures a plan that encompasses a vision about the role of habitat and natural areas conservation in a particular region. Local leaders are accountable to their constituents in a way that state and federal representatives are not. There are many ways to creatively apply the NCCP program and a local leader plays a critical role in devising a strategy that resonates locally and addresses issues of concern. This often includes initiating a general discussion around issues of growth and development, the value of preserving natural areas, what "quality of life" means to local residents, and how a particular jurisdiction will address long-range conservation planning.

Overview of this report

This report synthesizes the findings from research conducted on local government leadership in summer 2004, focusing on several NCCPs throughout California. This report attempts to explore common concepts while also recognizing the unique context within which local leaders operate. The information presented here is based primarily on interviews conducted with elected officials, city and county senior staff, and various stakeholder participants. It also incorporates the perspectives of experienced regional managers and field staff from DFG, and those working on local government leadership development (Northern California Local Government Leadership Institute at Chico State University and the Sierra Business Council's Leadership Seminar). It also utilizes current research on collaborative planning.

Section II presents common concepts that emerged from the various conservation plans analyzed. This provides a base from which to introduce some of the key issues about local government leadership that will be explored in greater detail throughout the report. Section III addresses some of the leadership challenges that emerged in the case studies in addition to more general challenges that local governments face in California. Section IV discusses key leadership characteristics that contributed to successful conservation plans and highlights the

³ Wildlife Agencies include the California Department of Fish and Game, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and NOAA Fisheries.

importance of strong personal motivation. Section V builds upon the previous sections to discuss strategies local leaders implemented at various stages throughout the planning process, from initiation and building the political will to managing the process and conducting effective outreach for the plan. This section explores both strategies that were successful and those that were less so in particular circumstances. The final section, Section VI, presents some ideas on how to better support local leadership, based on this research.

The audiences for this report include local jurisdictions participating in or considering participating in an NCCP process. This report also seeks to inform and advise DFG staff, and local and regional planners. DFG hopes the analysis and recommendations in this report will inform future conservation planning efforts and contribute to lessons learned about how to develop successful NCCPs.

Methodology

This was an interview-based research project; personal interviews with leaders and participants involved in NCCP processes were the primary method of collecting data on the role of local government leadership in conservation planning. During the research process, 38 interviews were conducted, ranging from 1-2 hours, averaging 1 1/2 hours in length. Interviews were conducted with DFG regional managers and field staff, those in local government leadership positions (elected officials, city and county senior planning staff), and key stakeholder participants. Research was structured around seven case studies, representing diverse regions of California and at various stages in the NCCP process. These included San Diego, Contra Costa, Yolo, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento and Merced counties.

Additional information on individual plans can be found on the NCCP program website (www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp).

Interviews were semi-structured, covering the following conversation areas (see Appendix 1 for a more detailed list of interview questions):

- Personal motivations to participate and how individuals first got involved in the NCCP process.
- Their role in the process and specific strategies leaders used to move it forward.
- Personal attributes of local leaders that contributed to a successful process.
- Leadership challenges and what could be done to better support local leadership and build capacity.

Due to the larger research questions about the role of local leadership that guided these interviews, the discussions tended to be reflective, focusing on the role and strategies of particular leaders, rather than complete assessments of particular conservation planning processes.

II. COMMON CONCEPTS

Some common concepts emerged across the various cases that provide a foundation from which to discuss local leadership. They are:

- Collaborative planning processes
- Political leadership and support
- Locally-relevant incentive
- Outreach and public education

Collaborative Planning Processes

Collaboration is a core tenant of the NCCP program. This general approach has emerged out of necessity to address increasingly complex and difficult problems that involve multiple issues or competing interests, particularly in natural resource management and land use planning. The success of an NCCP – a high-quality plan, buy-in from key stakeholders, momentum that carries into implementation – depends in large part on the success of the process. A successful NCCP process will have legitimacy, it will involve a broad group of people, and will be driven by strong local leadership. In some jurisdictions, the collaborative approach used by the NCCP program is a new approach. Initiating a collaborative process requires leaders to shift some of their attention from the content of an issue to its political dynamics or process challenges. The strategies and leadership attributes that contributed to a successful process are a large focus of this report, discussed in further detail in Sections IV and V.

One researcher has identified four critical requirements for collaborative processes.⁴

- *A constituency for change* reflects the perspectives, experiences and concerns of the broader community and has the collective credibility and influence to achieve real results.
- *Process expertise* helps stakeholder groups build agreement and a constituency for change.
- *Content experts* support the learning of the group by providing information and education needed to understand the issues.
- *Strong, facilitative leadership* promotes and safeguards the process by keeping stakeholders at the table, acknowledging small successes along the way, helping stakeholders negotiate difficult points, and enforcing group norms and rules. Leaders articulate the incentives for collaboration and provide the motivation and leadership to help people work together.

For further reference, Appendix 2 provides an overview of collaborative processes, including four phases and the tasks that must be considered in each phase.

Political leadership and support

There was general consensus that political leadership and support is critical to the success of a conservation planning process. This included political leadership at the local level, but also

⁴ David Chrislip, “The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook: A Guide for Citizens and Civic Leaders”. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2002, pp. 52-54.

political support from state and federal agency directors and elected representatives. This higher-level political support was important for communicating to local players that the NCCP program was a priority and backed up by time and resources.

A local champion

The importance of a local champion, someone in an influential position who championed the NCCP as something the region needed to do, varied across the different plans. In processes where there was a strong local champion, s/he played a major role in initiating the plan and building necessary political support and momentum to get the process moving. Rather than focus on the details of the NCCP, a champion built a broad base of support and momentum so that the process moved itself along and other participants were personally invested. In this role, a champion was more of a coalition-builder. Those who were identified as local champions by other interviewees were quick to point out key individuals on city and county staffs and on the stakeholder groups were critical to creating the plan details. Interviewees said the plans would not have happened without this broader base of support and leadership.

Visible political support

Clearly articulated and visible political support for an NCCP process was very compelling and played a significant role in some of the cases. For example, one board of supervisors that was unified in their support of an NCCP consistently voted unanimously to support preservation of natural areas and habitat conservation. This signified to local opposition that there was a strong political will to succeed. Similarly, a formal statement of support from a congressional representative was a strong motivator to bring people into the process in a few cases. Public support for the values embodied in an NCCP, such as the preservation of natural areas, habitat conservation, overall land use planning and ‘smarter’ growth, was also a strong motivator for public officials who were responsible for the needs of the broader public and who represented the public will.

Local relevance

There has to be a “solid reason” for doing an NCCP. The reasons given by interviewees varied widely, but those plans that did not have a locally-based incentive to participate in the NCCP process were often moving along much slower or had become stagnant. One strength of the NCCP program is that it can be adapted to local conditions and it can be part of a larger program or plan (such as a general plan update or a regional infrastructure plan). Leaders with a vision of what was possible to accomplish through an NCCP identified a clear need, mobilized others to participate, and lent their credibility to the process.

Different motivations to participate in conservation planning

Local governments, individuals and organizations often have different motivations to participate in the NCCP. An important role of local leadership was to bring these seemingly disparate motivations together to focus on a common goal. A leader would highlight how various interests could be served through the same process. In some cases, political leaders advocated a broader

discussion around quality of life and natural areas before initiating an NCCP, to articulate the need to address these issues. These discussions were also part of larger planning processes, through which open space needs and connections to transportation, growth and housing were highlighted.

Crisis?

The question arose of whether or not it was easier to create a plan in a timely manner if there was an overall sense of a crisis, since this often produced an impetus to collaborate. This was certainly the case in Riverside and San Diego, where development was at a standstill due to regulatory issues concerning endangered species, and this gridlock motivated stakeholders and politicians to work towards a solution. But in northern California this sense of crisis has not been as compelling. Those who live and work in rural counties did not feel they had these same pressures in a largely agricultural-based economy, particularly from the development community. There was also some concern that an NCCP would exacerbate the pace of urbanization. In one plan that struggled with a lack of political support for the NCCP process among both elected officials and interest groups (especially rural landowners), it was noted that there was a “limited selling point”. This referred to the fact that arguments focused on the local advantages of streamlining the permitting process through an NCCP did not sway a reluctant board of supervisors without a developer to also say “yes, I’ve run into these problems and we need a better solution.” Instead, rural landowners and environmentalists were both saying they did not like the NCCP process and were therefore opposed to the idea.

Building upon the idea of crisis being a motivator to collaborate, one leader discussed how s/he created a “sense of urgency” by articulating pressing needs and how the NCCP addressed some of these needs. Without some sense of urgency, most regional conservation plans will not progress, but a crisis can be a positive motivator when it is seen as an opportunity for a solution.

Outreach and education

As one NCCP leader simply stated, “this is really a political campaign.” As such, it requires constant outreach to multiple interests. Educating public officials about the NCCP program and collaborative processes is one element. More generally, when people do not understand something, they tend to have fears and worries. These can be addressed by education and outreach at a personal level.

A solid, long-term public relations campaign was acknowledged by several political leaders as an important component, but rarely was there adequate funding to undertake such a task. Funding for outreach was often not recognized as critical at the beginning of the planning process and was therefore not included in grant requests. For many participants, the critical role of outreach was clearer upon reflection after some experience in the planning process.

III. LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Challenges to local government in California

Local governments currently face myriad challenges in California. The state budget crisis is a major challenge, impacting the ability of local governments to provide adequate services. Many cities and counties are confronting budget deficits and have experienced hiring freezes or layoffs. There is a continued sense of operating in “crisis mode,” rather than proactive government action. Such a situation makes it more challenging to advocate the type of long-term planning and vision that is central to an NCCP.

In California, a significant portion of local general funds comes from sales tax revenue. In the past, this has encouraged the development of “big-box” retail that is commonly associated with sprawling suburban development.

Other challenges that emerged in the case studies

- Limited local capacity for collaborative planning processes
- Turnover of elected officials
- Developing effective stakeholder working groups
- Small but vocal and influential constituency that opposes the plan
- City/County interactions
- Lack of or neutral, political support from elected officials
- How to “sell the message”

Limited local capacity for complex collaborative processes

The complexity, long timeframe and multiple issues and interests involved in developing an NCCP require a process that is deliberate and well conceived. Beyond dedication, hard work, and the will to succeed, this type of planning requires strong local leadership with experience and an understanding of the key concepts of collaboration. Communities undertaking NCCPs throughout California have very different experiences with collaborative planning processes and the outreach, communication and relationship building that these entail. The ideas are not entirely new, as they are the bedrock for responsive planning and government, but the scale is something new. Focusing on a range of NCCPs for this project showed that collaborative processes, particularly large and multi-stakeholder processes, were actually quite new to many jurisdictions and therefore represented a challenge to staff trying to manage such a process.

Overall, few cities or counties had a clear idea how much staff time a successful NCCP process required, and therefore generally under-estimated this time. This raised the concern that “balls are getting dropped” since there were too few people at the center of the process. Generally there was less than one full time employee working on an NCCP at the county level, and this time was commonly split between at least two people.

Some counties got involved in an NCCP without fully understanding how much the planning process would cost and the amount of resources it would entail.

Turnover of elected officials

Turnover of elected officials is a challenge for several reasons. First, the learning curve of replacements can cause delays to the planning process as new participants get up to speed and understand the details. Second, such turnover can shift the political support for a plan. For example, a county supervisor that supported the plan loses re-election, steps down, or moves into a different public position (such as state government) and is replaced by someone who is not as supportive or who is critical of the plan. For county-led plans, a shift in the board of supervisors could therefore impact political support for the NCCP as a whole. This could mean split votes on a board of supervisors that had previously been unanimous. For plans that have a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) structure, or a steering committee that includes representatives from the county board of supervisors and various city councils, such turnover could have a similar impact if there is not broad support among the other parties to pick up the void. There is especially high turnover on city councils, since council members are often part-time and not paid (or receive only a small stipend).

Finally, one particularly savvy political leader was good at getting the funding needed for plans and projects that were a personal priority. Funding for the NCCP and related projects then relied on that particular leader. After this strong elected supporter left, the planning process that had been moving forward fairly effectively ran out of money and stalled.

Fostering effective stakeholder working groups

Effective stakeholder working groups were essential to get the broad involvement necessary to develop a high-quality and pragmatic conservation plan. Strong stakeholder groups facilitated political support from county supervisors, city council members and mayors by showing this process was legitimate and was addressing critical needs relevant to their constituencies. Leaders, including senior staff and working group chairs, expressed particular challenges in getting the groups to a point where everyone could effectively talk to each other. In one situation, extreme polarization had to be overcome when the group first formed, and it actually took two years for them to learn to talk to each other, "...to build trust and engage in dialogue to figure out how their interests could be addressed without sacrificing the interests of others..." (stakeholder participant). Those managing the process were also challenged to keep people motivated and engaged over the years it took to complete a plan.

Small but vocal and influential constituency that opposes the process

A small but vocal and influential constituency that opposed the NCCP was a challenge for several plans, but its impact on the process was different in each plan, largely due to the presence or lack of political support and strong facilitative leadership. In one process, a large landowner who was politically connected vocally opposed the NCCP and actively worked to derail the process (private lobbying with supervisors, city managers, council members, and state officials). The efforts of this individual and a small group of property rights advocates were countered by a county board of supervisors that unanimously supported the plan and felt it was critical for their particular county. In another situation, a small but vocal group of environmentalists who

opposed the planning process, and NCCPs more generally, were able to disrupt meetings and stall the process. Other stakeholders became disengaged when the meetings were not productive and the process lost its credibility. Strong facilitative leadership and visible political support play an important role in counter-balancing narrow but influential concerns.

Another process had a strong stakeholder group whose members had good working relationships and a history of coming together from various perspectives to discuss issues of land use. They were close to completing a plan but had some concerns that a particular interest group that does not like NCCPs and had not been participating in this process, had indicated they may sue to stop it from being implemented. The motivation of stakeholders who are participating in the planning process can be impacted if leadership does not address these issues.

City/County interactions

Regional conservation plans are particularly challenging since they cross jurisdictional boundaries. Cities and counties do not typically come together to plan collaboratively for growth and development and there is sometimes a history of mistrust and/or resentment between local cities and a county around funding and different views on development. City/county interactions pose special challenges to NCCP processes and were something most local leaders took into consideration. Most common was an ambivalence or neutrality on the part of some cities to be involved in the planning process (this was true with both county-led processes and those with a JPA that had strong support from some individual city councils). City councils generally are more narrowly focused on their jurisdiction and it can be hard for them to think politically beyond their edge and see larger, regional conservation as an asset to their community. A city, or any other group, can also opt out of the process during planning, which can be a “political tangle” for those trying to keep the process moving forward.

Lack of or neutral, political support from elected officials

The plans that were struggling often did not have political support to help move them forward, find adequate funding, or to motivate stakeholders toward a common goal. It is difficult, if not impossible, to create local political support if it does not exist. These plans were also more susceptible to interest group opposition derailing the process, as was discussed above. Neutral political support was also an issue. Even if no one opposed the plan and in theory the political body supports it, a lack of vocal and visible political support can leave the plan vulnerable.

Selling the message

Political leaders are particularly adept at making something like an NCCP locally relevant if they see a clear need. Leaders must communicate this need and sell the message over and over, to bring others on board and find points of motivation.

Communication is also a challenge for leadership within the Wildlife Agencies, who need to explain the process very clearly to city and county staff and elected officials, since those local leaders will be going forward to sell the message. Because an NCCP is such a complex process, it is challenging for leaders who may understand the intricacies of the process to make it

understandable to the lay person. Yet, this is essential, in order to get the broad public involvement and buy-in that is required for a successful plan.

IV. KEY LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS FOR CONSERVATION PLANNING

Some general characteristics were found to be important throughout these focal NCCP processes. Highlighted below and further discussed in the following section are characteristics that relate to particular leadership strategies. This is a selective representation of key characteristics that contributed to successful conservation planning processes, rather than a definitive list of leadership attributes.

Strong personal motivation

Due to the long, often shifting, time-frame of an NCCP process, there has to be a strong personal motivation to do what is needed to get the best plan developed, approved, funded and implemented. While motivations varied with every individual and personal experience, it was apparent that effective leaders possessed a strong and personal motivation to participate.

Elected officials

Overall, elected officials articulated that a long-term vision for their county or city and a desire to enhance the local quality of life contributed greatly to their motivation to participate. These officials were willing to expend the political capital necessary to succeed – utilizing personal contacts, meeting individually with key people, advocating for a tax to support a conservation plan (even if it is politically risky), and insisting that the conservation plan is a priority for the local political body. They often saw the NCCP as a unique opportunity to assure the future “environmental infrastructure” of their community and to have some control over how growth and development would happen in the region. In the words of one county supervisor, there is “one chance, right now” to accommodate population growth and “without this plan, there is no chance to manage growth and provide a [good] quality of life.”

A long-term vision is something elected officials and government leaders bring to the table. This vision drives the process forward and assures the bigger picture overcomes the daily challenges. In the words of one elected official, “It takes huge courage, strength and leadership to think about the future”. Several interviewees stated the need for “vision and guts” to see an NCCP through.

On a jurisdictional level, elected officials were also motivated to streamline the regulatory permitting process, which is a common justification presented to local government to underscore the benefits of an NCCP. It holds as a strong motivation if local frustrations with the project-by-project permitting process are high. This argument is further strengthened if officials are able to connect it with larger goals for the community such as infrastructure planning or preservation of natural areas. These are goals that resonate with the public and therefore make the NCCP more locally relevant and popular.

On a more personal level, committed elected officials were also strongly motivated by a passion for the outdoors, a belief in land use controls and well-planned growth, and a firm belief that such a conservation plan is necessary for the future sustainability of their community.

County and city staff

County and city staff have an essential role in this process as they are often at the center of daily conservation planning activities and provide strong leadership to keep the process moving forward and people engaged. As a generalization, local government staff in California cities and counties are overwhelmed by numerous responsibilities, and rural counties are often understaffed. Senior planners are generally charged by a political body – the county board of supervisors or a city mayor – to direct an NCCP process. Almost overwhelmingly, senior staff that managed successful NCCPs were highly motivated, dedicated and went above and beyond their job description to do whatever was needed to get plan tasks done. Many elected officials highlighted the efforts of these individuals as essential to getting a plan developed.

Many staff expressed a strong belief in conservation and a process for better land use planning. As they are mostly planners, senior staff understood the importance of a long-term vision and an infrastructure-based approach to land use planning and conservation. There was a strong commitment to collaborative processes from several staff, and a desire to foster legitimate public participation. The NCCP process provided an important opportunity to build consensus around conservation and land use issues, and some interviewees hoped such a process would assure better local land use decisions. One planner expressed a strong belief in regional solutions to many planning challenges, and the NCCP as one such opportunity. Another identified personal environmental values and felt this process was a chance to work on a regional environmental plan that addressed some of these values.

Stakeholder participants

Those stakeholders involved with the various working groups were motivated to actively participate for a broad range of reasons, both personal and professional. They often hoped to influence the negotiations, to have some impact on the ultimate outcome. This was true from a variety of perspectives – including those representing environmental concerns or the building industry, landowners, or farmers.

Key stakeholders generally recognized that there was a critical need for a solution, since they were not satisfied with the status quo, whether it was because habitat was being fragmented or the permitting process was too cumbersome. Several stakeholders felt this motivation translated into solution-oriented participants who contributed greatly to an effective stakeholder group. Some saw the NCCP as a necessary, although imperfect, solution since the “land use system is broken” in many parts of California and this is a way to “leverage local land use authority towards conservation.”

Several stakeholders also mentioned a strong sense of civic obligation. They sometimes had strong roots in the community, or some other personal attachment, and felt they “owed it, as

members of a community” to contribute. Several stakeholders were motivated by past community organizing experiences and mentioned how empowering it was to realize that you can influence government.

Other attributes that contributed to successful plans

- “Centrist” political leaders
- Broad and varied political experience
- Skilled facilitator
- Problem-solvers

“Centrist” political leaders

Those political leaders that considered themselves more moderate or centrist felt this was an important attribute that allowed them to build successful coalitions. They were able to bring a wide range of interests together and felt they were in a better position to negotiate among these interests. This does not however preclude a non-centrist leader from being effective at guiding a collaborative process or building necessary coalitions.

Broad and varied political experience

Personal and professional experiences of elected officials vary widely, and this is especially true in local government. Broad and varied political experience contributed positively to a leader’s capacity in several ways. First, they had a greater depth of policy experience; they knew what the policy needs were, knew the broader issues, and were able to think more creatively about solutions. Secondly, they had a larger network to tap into locally, but also in the state and federal political circles of Sacramento and Washington, D.C. Finally, such experience provided a visible track record that lent further credibility to their leadership.

A grounded understanding of how to work with local government played an important role in several ways. Knowledge about local government and relevant processes based on first-hand experience gave greater credibility to senior planners leading the day-to-day process. Alternatively, one stakeholder leader who had extensive community organizing experience and experience interacting with local government “finally understood that you could involve yourself with government and government responds if you do it the right way”. S/he made an effort to explain to other members of the working group what their participation meant and strategies for influencing local government.

Skilled facilitator

Facilitation skills were critical in many of these processes, even when the political support was strong. City and county planners often provided strong facilitation while other plans brought in outside expertise at critical points. Some specific attributes (facilitation strategies will be discussed in more detail in the following section) of good facilitators that emerged in the interviews were:

- Good listener who also responded and answered questions in a forthright way.

- “Honest recounter,” meaning someone who did not misrepresent things or go beyond what people actually said or agreed to.
- Generally likable, someone who fostered trust and did not create personality conflicts.
- Knew when to push forward and when to pause and reflect, constantly gauged group dynamics.
- Patience, or in the words of one participant, the “master of keeping his cool”.

Problem-solvers

A solution-oriented approach is central to any collaborative process. Local leaders played an important role in setting the tone of the NCCP process and motivating solution-oriented participants to become involved. Several leaders that were interviewed highlighted their willingness to talk through issues with their peers and work through differences on a personal level, to find common ground or a starting point for more substantive discussion. Creativity also emerged as an important attribute, resulting in innovative strategies and solutions to the complex challenges that were inherent in the NCCP process.

V. LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR CONSERVATION PLANNING

How do leaders address some of these challenges? How do local leaders build support and momentum to bring the appropriate people together to develop creative and lasting solutions? These questions are at the very heart of a successful NCCP. In an effort to highlight the “how” and “why”, leaders and other participants interviewed were asked to reflect upon some of the successful and less successful strategies employed to develop specific NCCPs. While some strategies were seemingly obvious to interviewees, and at first warranted no more than a passing sentence, they together provide insight into how some leaders addressed the opportunities and challenges of an NCCP.

Political Leadership and Support

“Political leadership is key to move the process forward...the nature of local government makes a huge difference, more than anything else.” - Stakeholder Participant

Cultivating leadership at multiple levels

Successful NCCPs showed that it took more than one person who was motivated to get a conservation plan developed, funded and approved. It took the vision and dedication of numerous people working together. Leadership of the stakeholder groups was important to achieve a level of consensus and keep the group focused, whether it came from an elected chairperson or planning staff. Stakeholder participants were often leaders within the community they represented and therefore had a large role to play in outreach and in assuring their community was on board with the final plan.

Strong leadership at multiple levels also lent credibility to the process from the perspective of the broader public and contributed to a sense of trust in the process. In one county, a veteran planning director had developed a level of trust over the years that resulted in an “institutionalization within the county that [the director] is trustworthy and his/her department is not going to do anything without the support of the board.” In other NCCPs, county supervisors expressed a sense of confidence in senior staff to manage the process and communicate with the board. This included communication about how things were going, but also the “ups and downs” of a particular strategy or action (the positive and negative potential outcomes of a decision) so that they could make more informed decisions. Non-governmental organizations may also play a role in fostering strong local leadership. For example:

- The Sierra Business Council (SBC) is a non-profit association promoting sustainability and economic vitality in the Sierra Nevada region in Northern California. SBC played an important role in one NCCP process, as a non-profit partner to the county, and was able to effectively expand outreach efforts and build local capacity. SBC put significant effort towards training stakeholder participants as collaborative leaders. The organization has a leadership seminar that teaches participants the fundamentals of collaboration and facilitative leadership. Leaders within the organization also participated in the initial conversations with the county to discuss natural areas preservation more broadly.

Commitment of high-level political leaders

Legislators and agency leaders in Sacramento and Washington D.C. provide local leaders needed political support at critical moments. Nearly every political leader interviewed discussed the importance of such high-level commitment whether it was in terms of securing funding, overcoming local opposition or simply through showing that the NCCP program was a priority (by committing time and resources). The most effective local political leaders deliberately cultivated this support, understanding it was necessary for the long-term viability of the NCCP. For some individuals, previous political experience was very useful since they had the “connectivity” they needed to assure this high-level support and that they had the attention of key people when they needed it.

Local Relevance

“Potential participants must have an incentive to invest the time and energy in a collaborative effort... Collaborative leaders tap into these differing motivations to overcome the obstacles to collaboration.”⁵

Elected officials especially expressed the need to have a solid reason for doing a conservation plan, something real that people can understand at the local level. Two specific examples illustrate how local relevance played out in very different contexts.

- Western Riverside County was able to connect conservation planning with regional concerns about infrastructure and transportation. Local leaders recognized that a

⁵ David Chrislip, “The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook: A Guide for Citizens and Civic Leaders,” Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2002, p. 49.

conservation plan was necessary for the county to receive the permits they would need to pursue large transportation infrastructure projects and therefore insisted these issues were dealt with simultaneously. Believing that an environmental or conservation plan would not have been as well received locally, the plan was pitched as “open space infrastructure”. Further, a local funding measure linked transportation and conservation funding, assuring not only adequate funding but also the participation of many cities that were interested in receiving transportation funding.

- Placer County has experienced rapid growth in recent years so the board of supervisors was under pressure from their constituencies to confront related issues, such as loss of open space and congestion. The Placer Legacy Program, an open space program created to implement the open space element of the general plan, was adopted by the board and later approved by voters. The NCCP is one element of this broader open space program and is supported by policy language in the general plan that advocates open space preservation. Such compatibility with the general plan, usually a challenge for other NCCPs, also makes it politically difficult to derail the conservation plan since it would require an amendment of the general plan, something politicians are unlikely to undertake.
- In another situation, it was very difficult to articulate a clear and locally relevant need to develop a conservation plan, so it never really got off the ground. Staff tried to sell the NCCP to a board of supervisors that generally saw few or no benefits from the process, particularly for rural landowners and ranchers who were their main constituency. Without a clear need, it was unlikely the political will would be there to provide the leadership and resources that are critical to success.

Strong Leadership of the Process

Identifying a clear need for collaborative planning was an important first step in the NCCP process, and strong leadership of the process was central throughout every phase of developing the conservation plan. Below are a few points that emerged in interviews with leaders from various NCCPs.

Setting the stage for success

Local leaders generally understood the local context they were working in and what it would take to pull off a major planning process, even if they had limited experience with the NCCP program and such a large, multi-stakeholder process. Reflecting on successful strategies, several leaders highlighted the importance of starting with the right questions. Does the political will exist to undertake a conservation planning process? Are key interest groups on board and if not, what will it take to bring them to the table? What is the best strategy for success?

Analyzing the context for collaboration

Each NCCP occurs within a distinct local context, and often plans occur within a shifting political context at the state and federal levels. This impacts how the planning process moves

forward, the effectiveness of particular strategies, funding, the ability to attract high-level political support, and future implementation. Leaders initiated conservation planning in different ways. An elected official often initiated a high-level meeting between key board members and staff from the state and federal wildlife agencies to start the process. Several other examples further illustrate this strategy.

- An elected official who believed there was a clear local need to develop a conservation plan first focused on building coalitions. This included feeling out environmental and building industry groups, to see if they would be willing to participate in a collaborative process and assuring there was active support from state and federal agencies. This was accomplished through informal discussions with key people, an initial mapping out of what such a process would look like, and finally, culminated in a memorandum of understanding signed by key decision-makers in the state and federal agencies. It was not until this point that the NCCP process was formally launched.
- In other situations, leadership facilitated the development of a set of principles and a vision statement that were to guide the planning process (distinct from the Planning Agreement required by DFG). This was eventually adopted by the county board of supervisors and was used as an outreach tool for cities, to assure a baseline understanding of what the process was going to accomplish. These principles were also used by stakeholder groups, to remind participants what they had agreed upon and to keep the process moving forward and people participating.
- Reflecting on a process that failed to get the momentum it needed, one local leader mentioned they “did not take all the dynamics into consideration at the beginning” and did not appreciate the “complicated dynamics”, including thinking through how to conduct effective political and landowner outreach. Local factions were able to pick away at the neutral political support of local leaders, and the lack of a clearly identified need at the local level eventually contributed to a process that failed. A DFG staff person involved with the process expressed the idea that the agency could have taken time to do more “warm up with the county” before the planning process was launched.

Identifying and convening stakeholders

Interviewees highlighted the importance of an effective stakeholder working group to an NCCP process. Strong stakeholder participation also maintains local political support for the NCCP process. Leadership plays a major role in assuring the working groups function, by both identifying relevant stakeholders and bringing the appropriate individuals together who are representative and motivated to work towards a solution. Those who managed successful planning processes were deliberate and strategic in how they assembled the stakeholder working group and invited key stakeholders to participate. In the words of one stakeholder, the working group was “chosen wisely to represent various interests, but to also move the process along”. Some specific strategies include:

- Already knowing who the main players are – nearly everyone interviewed had extensive experience in the region and had been involved in past planning processes.

- Focusing on reputable groups and then trying to involve individuals with credibility, who are able to speak for their group and effectively participate in dialogue.
- Understanding that relevant stakeholders include not only those who are affected by the plan, but also anyone who could derail the plan.
- Personally contacting each of these individuals.

In some instances, stakeholders were interested in participating and contacted the person directing the process. In other instances, leaders contacted organizations and asked them to participate to assure particular interests were represented. Assembling both a representative and functioning stakeholder group is a leadership challenge, as illustrated by the following examples.

- Some appointments to a working group were not interested more broadly in the process, rather they were developers or investors interested in a particular large project. They did not attend meetings or participate once their immediate concerns were addressed.
- A stakeholder group from a previous planning process was “rolled over” to the conservation planning process. The right people were not necessarily involved and they were not all committed to the NCCP process. As a result, many committee members never showed up. The group could not get a quorum, which limited them from making real decisions or from presenting a consensus on issues. Membership issues were not addressed until far into the process.
- The Sierra Business Council (SBC), whose local capacity-building efforts in the Sierra Nevada region were highlighted previously, also played an important role in identifying and reaching out to stakeholders. They identified stakeholders as both those who will be affected by the conservation process and those who can derail the process. The group also introduced “network mapping” to identify the local network of decision-makers and the intermediaries that could reach them.

Working together

Once the stage is set for success, how do you actually bring people together, explore the various interests that exist and work towards an end goal? Leadership plays a key role throughout every phase of a conservation planning process. Relationship-building is a central part of this role and creates the foundation for working together to develop a successful plan. According to the observation of one participant: “Because there were good relationships with the people at the table, we were able to make mistakes and learn...this was a learning process.” Trust and mutual respect were highlighted as important components of this relationship-building process. Other key strategies are highlighted below.

Communication with decision makers

Regular communication with decision-makers was crucial for a plan to move forward. Strong leaders recognized this and assured this communication was in place at the appropriate time, whether through phone calls, meetings, or monthly updates to the board of supervisors. Leaders

generally initiated such communication and expressed that these strategies emerged from recognizing a clear need. Successful strategies included:

- A weekly conference call among decision makers, including county supervisors, regulatory agencies (state and federal), policy-makers, and city executives (the group varied slightly by plan). In one situation, they also met face to face once a month when decisions needed to be made quickly. Having the decision-makers in one place on a regular basis assured that important issues could be dealt with quickly and that the right people were regularly communicating.
- Regional managers for the state and federal wildlife agencies can play an important leadership role at the local level. In one instance, a regional manager felt confident to reach agreements with local decision-makers since there was regular communication within the agency and s/he had general support in Sacramento. This support was also recognized at the local level, giving authority to such deal brokering.

Sustaining stakeholder working groups

Consensus was important to several working groups and strong, facilitative leadership assured this could happen. One group never actually took a vote and a local leader felt this was effective in building trust within the group, although it was also very time-consuming. Some strategies used to achieve consensus (also basic facilitation strategies) include:

- Keeping people on topic, e.g., letting people say their perspective yet keeping things on track and not letting it go off on a tangent.
- Fostering dialogue among participants to understand the interests represented at the table. Leaders who were focused on consensus would not move to a new topic until consensus was reached.
- Understanding the “theater of a public meeting”— having a goal for each meeting, meeting with staff to discuss the proposed agenda, oftentimes meeting informally beforehand with a core group to discuss what they wanted to accomplish.
- Assuring an issue comes up during a meeting if you know someone is concerned about a particular issue (through previous discussions or outreach). This assured the issue could be addressed or at least acknowledged by the larger group.
- Constantly gauging group dynamics, individually checking-in with participants – how are you feeling, how did that go, etc.?
- Establishing organizing principles for what the working group was trying to accomplish. For example, starting a committee meeting by agreeing on key principles that would keep the group focused throughout the discussion. This “kept people honest” and was a building block that reminded people what they had agreed upon in prior sessions.
- Displaying a legitimate commitment to a consensus process that assured people had a voice in shaping the plan. This included committing to a high degree of transparency, keeping the group engaged, and working towards an end goal. Many groups embraced an iterative approach to developing a plan, which allowed greater input from the working group and also gave the group something to work on throughout the process. It was a huge time commitment for stakeholders to participate so they must feel like their contributions are heard and given serious consideration.

Managing the process

It takes strong leadership, vision and experience to keep people focused over a long time period. Every process was distinct so effective strategies for managing the process varied. These strategies included:

- Developing a process map, so everyone was clear where they were within the process, where they were going, and when particular issues would arise. One elected official also insisted on a timeline and funding strategy for implementation from the outset, and “held people to it mercilessly!”
- Constantly communicating with elected officials and outreaching to key figures within local interest groups to take their pulse. If these individuals were not happy with the end product or did not understand it, things could unravel quickly.
- Conducting formal hearings to provide an opportunity to address the concerns of individual council members who would eventually have to approve the plan.

Examples to further illustrate these strategies:

- One leader understood, through years of working in local government, that many individual builders have political clout and relationships that go back for years. If they call their district or county supervisor and say things are “screwed up”, the process can “implode”. It was therefore important that the “temperature [was] constantly taken of key people who could influence the outcome.”
- Another plan enacted what was effectively a “paradigm shift” within the city bureaucracy to shift from a species-based approach to a habitat-based approach. At the local level, this impacted how community planners did land use planning since the status quo was to think of open space as what was left over, and now they were being told they must make conservation equal in importance to other uses and address open space and conservation land uses first. One leader dealt with resistance and resentment within the local planning bureaucracy by engaging in dialogue, explaining the reasoning behind the shift, and finally, pushing on and simply proceeding with what had to be done since s/he knew s/he had the support and directive from the political leadership.

Building and sustaining momentum

As this report illustrates, active support and participation from the local board of supervisors or JPA helps sustain the momentum to keep the process moving forward.

- Unanimous votes to support an NCCP by the board of supervisors emerged as an important issue during discussions with several local leaders. This meant constant communication among the board to assure everyone understood what was trying to be accomplished and to address any personal concerns a supervisor might have. In some instances, a leader delayed a vote, even though there would have been a majority, in order to try and address some lingering concerns and get a unanimous vote.

- One political leader highlighted what s/he called a “necessary political risk”, referring to great personal effort invested to promote a tax proposal in a majority Republican county that would fund the NCCP. When the proposal failed, s/he then focused on pushing for accountability from those political leaders who did not support the tax proposal since the conservation plan was in jeopardy without the funding measure. This strategy had some traction because voters the previous year had overwhelmingly approved the policy of preserving natural areas.

Negotiations

During NCCP development, complicated questions need to be addressed, such as “what will the conservation strategy be?” and “what are appropriate developer fees?” Leaders, particularly those involved directly with the stakeholder working group, expressed the need to explore *interests versus positions*.⁶ A facilitated process can help get interests on the table early so members of the working group understand each other. All these interests need to be considered as the group starts addressing some of the tough, yet critical questions. There was a concern expressed by several stakeholders interviewed that this process of exploring interests had not yet happened, despite the fact that, for example, one stakeholder group had been meeting for over two years. There was a worry that “pent up concerns” had not yet been voiced and that this could have an impact as the group begins to address some of the hardest issues that are still forthcoming.

Generally it seemed that key negotiations did not take place in large, public meetings.

- One leader negotiated with key stakeholders individually (side discussions, meetings, etc.). For example, s/he would ask an environmental representative where they stood on developer fees proposed by the industry and would then act as a go-between to move these negotiations along. The two parties could then come to a working group meeting with a starting point to begin a more productive discussion.
- Another leader realized many of the key negotiations could not happen in the larger working group. S/he formed a smaller negotiating subcommittee that included a core group of participants, agencies and the county. They were charged with the specific task of figuring out how the financial burden of the plan would be distributed.
- The use of what one interviewee termed “political interpretation” also played a role in the negotiation process. This was a nuanced strategy that built upon extensive experience working in the local government and referred to providing the stakeholder group some insight to the thinking of the board of supervisors (or city council or mayor) and the political context. For example, if a proposal was not even realistic, meaning something the board would discuss and consider, then s/he would let people know that up front. This helped target the discussion and avoided untimely tangents. Several stakeholder

⁶ For further discussion of interest-based negotiation and methods to achieve this, see Roger Fisher and William Ury, “Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In”, December 1991 (2nd edition), Penguin Books: New York.

participants expressed an appreciation for the ability of this individual to guide discussion without driving it or stifling particular voices.

Outreach and Education

Leaders highlighted the importance of outreach and public education to the overall NCCP process. They also expressed that there is often a lack of resources to accomplish this in the way they would like and feel it is necessary, despite the fact that outreach is required by the NCCP Act.

Reaching out to jurisdictions and interest groups

The process of identifying stakeholders and engaging them in the process was an important outreach component. Reaching out to other local jurisdictions whose support was necessary for final approval of the NCCP, such as city councils and city managers was also critical. Leaders who focused on outreach as an important strategy stressed the need to continuously engage in outreach at a personal, face-to-face level.

- One senior planner decided to never turn down an invitation to speak to local interest groups and/or to give a presentation about the NCCP process. This resulted in speaking at a property rights group's annual meeting and numerous coffees and lunches with skeptical individuals in an effort to make personal connections. As a result, a property rights advocate vouched for this planner and the NCCP process to other traditionally skeptical groups (such as the rancher's association and the Farm Bureau). This senior planner also met with city council members and city managers individually to assure they were aware that the process was going forward – “the idea is that they do not see this [the conservation plan] for the first time when it is up for a vote of approval.”
- One plan encountered a huge challenge when the county, who had led the process and had been united in its support all along, tried to get the relevant cities to approve the NCCP after the county board had adopted it. This was an enormous challenge to local leaders and potentially could have delayed implementation. Those interviewed highlighted the need for personal contact and accomplished it by attending city council meetings and tapping into personal relationships developed over the years with individual council members.

Community of practice

Leaders and others engaged in conservation planning processes can learn from the experiences of other planning efforts. Such networking and sharing builds a community of practice to support conservation planning in California. For example, the Northern California Regional Conservation Planning Partners, originally a six county working group formed to pursue secure funding for conservation planning, was identified as a useful forum among local leaders (currently this group includes the counties of Sacramento, Placer, Yolo, Contra Costa, Solano, and Santa Clara, with others likely to join). The group provides an opportunity to check-in with other local governments engaged in conservation planning to see what they are doing and discuss

strategies. It is an opportunity to talk to their peers to learn from others' experiences and problem solve. The group has discussed issues such as wetlands permitting since several regions are planning for wetlands concurrent with an NCCP. The group has also sponsored regional conservation planning workshops targeted at local government.

Public education

Several communities engaged in a broader public education effort before launching an NCCP. One county conducted a series of public forums on the issue in a talk show format with a general audience and members of the county board of supervisors. One supervisor acted as the MC and passed the microphone to anyone who had a comment.

A solid long-term public relations campaign is key, since the political piece is so critical. Very few plans actually realized this up front and lined up adequate funding to undertake such a campaign. Several participants mentioned that education has necessarily accompanied the planning process, largely within the stakeholder group.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING LOCAL LEADERSHIP

This section includes some recommendations to assist local leaders and wildlife agencies undertaking an NCCP.

General recommendations for local government leaders include:

- **Build a community of practice** to share lessons learned, effective strategies for implementing and managing successful conservation planning processes, and how particular leaders deal with challenges that arise. The Northern California Regional Conservation Planning Partners is one example of such a forum.
- **Build coalitions of support** in the initial phase of a regional conservation planning process. Reach out locally to see if the interest and political will exists. Foster political support for an NCCP process at higher political levels in Sacramento and Washington D.C.
- **Highlight incremental successes** along the way so that participants feel there are tangible benefits to the process. This will also strengthen a local leader's position as they can point out accomplishments.
- **Incorporate relationship building and collaboration training** into the stakeholder working group meetings. Developing these relationships and the ability to engage in authentic dialogue sets the foundation for the tough negotiations down the line.

Recommendations for the wildlife agencies working in partnership with local government include:

- **Conduct an evaluation of every completed planning process** that includes discussions with political leaders, staff, stakeholders and relevant agency staff. What are some of the

lessons that can be distilled? How were particular challenges resolved? What strategies were successful and less successful, and what could be done differently? The evaluation could be accomplished by partnering with a research center at a university to utilize the skills of faculty and graduate students in planning, policy or conservation biology. Or such an evaluation could be accomplished in partnership with a professional organization that specializes in collaborative processes and strategies.

- **Develop a Local Leader Handbook** that speaks directly to local government leaders embarking on regional conservation planning processes. What are the goals and expectations? Tools and strategies? Questions to ask?
- **Engage in collaborative leadership development** through groups such as the Sierra Business Council or the Northern California Local Government Leadership Institute (CSU Chico). Discuss how a particular curriculum could be tailored to address some leadership issues specific to conservation planning.
- **Foster local political support** for an NCCP process by highlighting and developing the important role that a regional manager (DFG) or a field supervisor (FWS) can play. While a show of support from Sacramento is important, a regional manager has a greater grasp of local issues and key players and personal relationships to build upon. Personal relationships with local government leaders will also enhance the effectiveness of regional managers in other aspects of their responsibilities.
- **Develop Outreach Guidelines** to help local leaders conduct more effective outreach and public education. What are some of the key things they need to consider? Strategies? Funding sources? As a starting point, build upon a DFG-sponsored graduate fellow research project that looked at how to improve public outreach (<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp/sclp.htm>).

The NCCP program is critical for natural areas preservation and habitat conservation. As a land use planning tool, it works best in partnership with long-term city and regional planning. Because of its adaptability and local impact, there is not ‘one way’ to develop an NCCP. Maintaining regular dialogue among peers undertaking NCCPs could therefore be supportive for leaders who are struggling with similar challenges. It is an opportunity to problem solve with a group of peers and build up from collective experience as local government leaders in California. A successful NCCP process will happen deliberately and it is a learning process for everyone involved. It is therefore critical to incorporate collaboration, facilitation, and leadership training as part of this process. This training and learning builds local capacity to assure the best plan possible and its successful implementation.

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

LEADER INTERVIEWS

1. Conservation planning: participation and motivation

How long have you been involved with the [specific NCCP]? How did you first get involved?

What has been your primary motivation to participate in this process? How has this changed over time? Will you continue to be involved once the plan is approved?

Probe to get a better sense of when things “clicked” and under what circumstances: if at first unsure or even lukewarm about supporting an NCCP, what specifically happened to change their mind or get their enthusiastic support (particular event, influential person, development project, loud constituency...)?

2. Leadership methods and strategies

As the [county supervisor/ planning director/ etc.], you have played an important role in this process. How do you see your role? Please discuss in greater detail.

How have you tried to move this process forward? Please provide specific examples:

(a) What have you done that has been successful?

(b) What have you tried that has been less successful?

(c) Based on what you know now and reflecting on this particular process, what would you have done differently?

Do you feel this process has been successful overall? Explain.

Who else has been critical in assuring there is political support for this process (within local government)? Who has played an important role at the county or city level in assuring the NCCP happens? Why were they important?

3. Relevant leadership attributes

What attributes do you think are most important, or necessary, for effective leadership during this process? Please provide examples or describe specific scenarios.

Probe as needed to address some key leadership traits:

Did you have to facilitate meetings? Was this something you were comfortable doing?

Do you think building relationships is an important part of the NCCP process, and if so, how have you addressed this? How did you motivate key participants/ groups?

4. Leadership challenges and priorities

What have been some of the leadership challenges in this process?

How can some of these leadership challenges be anticipated and planned for? What could be done to better support local government leadership and build capacity?

5. Conclusion

Any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share?

Are there any additional people you would suggest I speak with, in relation to this project?

Are you interested in seeing the final report? Is it OK to email you when it is finalized? You can expect to receive it sometime in the fall.

Is it OK to contact you with any follow-up questions or points of clarification?

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS (stakeholder group, steering committee, etc.)

1. Conservation planning: participation and motivation

How long have you been involved with this NCCP process? How did you first get involved?

What has been your primary motivation to participate in this process? How has this changed over time? Will you continue to be involved once the plan is approved?

2. Leadership methods and strategies

Who has been particularly effective within the local government to move this process forward? This could include elected officials (such as the Board of Supervisors, city council members, the mayor), or county planning staff, agency representatives, etc. How do you see their role? Feel free to identify more than one person, if relevant.

How have they provided leadership throughout the NCCP process? Please provide specific examples:

- (a) What have they done that you think was successful?
- (b) What have they done that you think was less successful?
- (c) Reflecting back on this process, what do you think they could have done differently?

3. Relevant leadership attributes

What key attributes that this leader(s) has do you feel were important during this process? Why were these so important? Please provide examples or describe specific scenarios.

Probe as needed to get at specifics – How did they set the tone, were they personable and able to bring people together and if so, what techniques/ approaches/ characteristics did they incorporate? Were they a good listener, how could you tell? Were they organized, did they play more of a coordinating role, or did they have to “sell” the idea of conservation planning and make it relevant to other participants?

4. Leadership challenges and priorities

What have been some of the leadership challenges in this process?

How can some of these leadership challenges be anticipated and planned for? What could be done to better support local government leadership and build capacity?

5. Conclusion

Any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share?

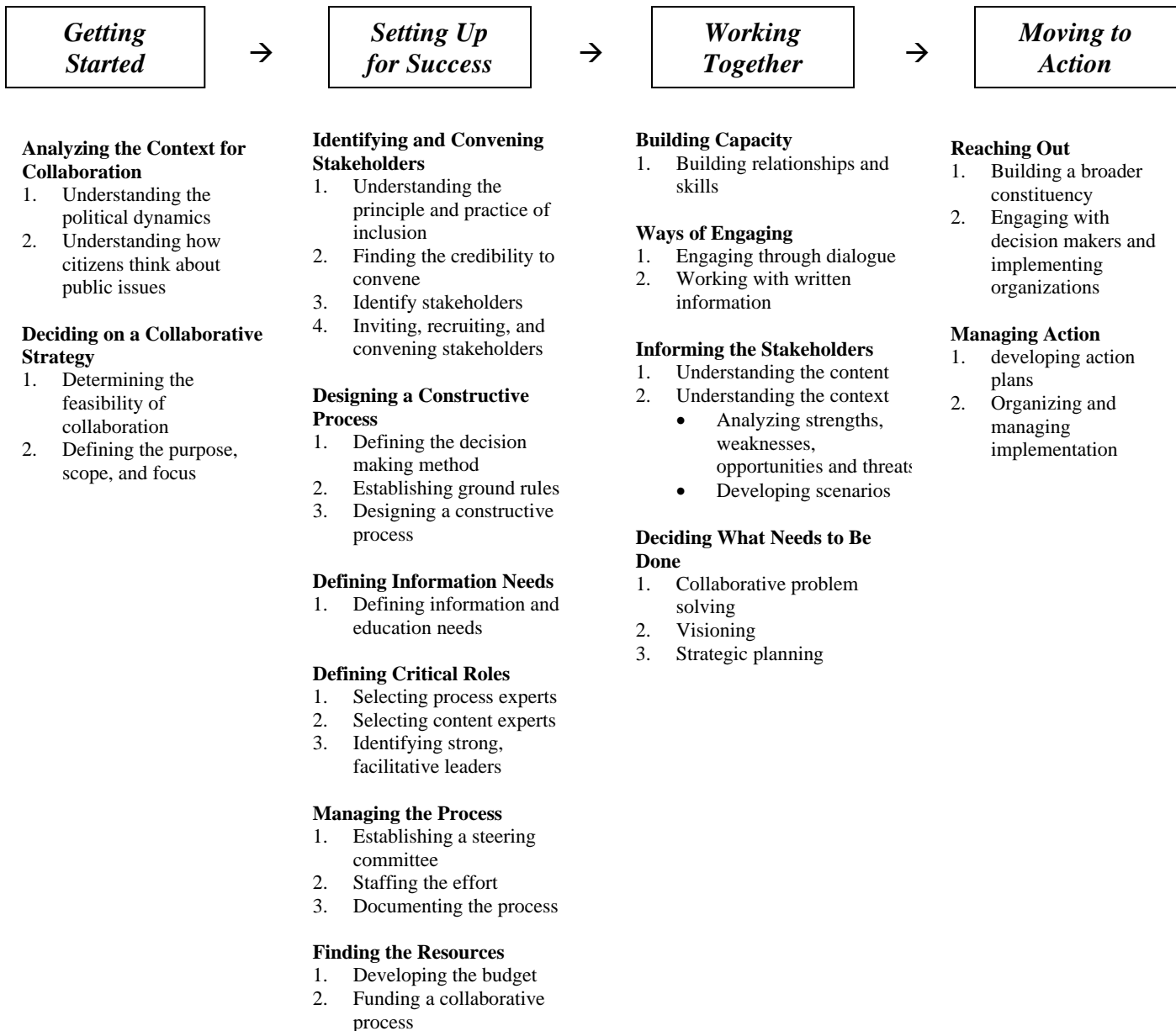
Are there any additional people you would suggest I speak with, in relation to this project?

Are you interested in seeing the final report? Is it OK to email you when it is finalized? You can expect to receive it sometime in the fall.

Is it OK to contact you with any follow-up questions or points of clarification?

Appendix 2: Phases of Collaborative Planning

A Guide to the Practices of Successful Collaboration:
Four phases of collaborative processes and associated tasks⁷



⁷ David Chrislip, "The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook: A Guide for Citizens and Civic Leaders," 2002, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, p. 54.

Appendix 3: Resources

Leadership development and training

Leadership Seminar, Sierra Business Council
www.sbcouncil.org/leadership.htm

Northern California Local Government Leadership Institute, CSU Chico
<http://rce.csuchico.edu/leader/index.asp>

Regional conservation planning

Natural Community Conservation Planning Program (California Department of Fish and Game)
www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp/index.html

Lessons From Collaboration, Department of Fish and Game
www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp/pubs/lessonslearned.pdf

Regional Conservation Planning in California: A Guide. 2004, Institute for Ecological Health
(www.instituteforecologicalhealth.org).