

TOOLS FOR ENGAGING LANDOWNERS EFFECTIVELY

Case Study: Kennebec Woodlands Partnership

As a regional conservation partnership, the Kennebec Woodland Partnership brings together a wide variety of organizations working to grow a “culture of conservation” in Maine’s Kennebec County. The Partnership’s goal is to provide a range of tools and strategies to help landowners make informed decisions about their woodlands. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, the Partnership supports a range of actions and commitments that lead toward keeping forest as forest in Kennebec County.

Kennebec County surrounds Maine’s capitol city of Augusta, which, like many other areas in the country, is increasingly defined by the transition from a rural community to a more heavily populated urban area. Partners in the Kennebec Woodland Partnership have been doing great work with their own constituents but the Partnership aims to extend their reach to previously unengaged landowners. The partners strive to help landowners take a desired step toward forest conservation in their own backyard.

Kennebec Woodland Partnership used TELE’s six-step planning process to develop a communications and outreach plan, as follows:

Step 1: SET OBJECTIVES

Overall Goal of the Campaign

The Partnership is focused on encouraging action and moving landowners along a path of land stewardship, beginning with whatever actions are most accessible for them. The goal of KWP’s communications strategy is to provide information to landowners seeking to improve their forest management.

Desired Behaviors

The Partnership encourages unengaged landowners to access information and tools and landowners already doing management on their

woodlands to take further steps along the “Stewardship Storyline”. Specifically, the desired behaviors are to contact a Kennebec Woodland partner and visit the Kennebec Woodland Partnership website for more information. The Partnership determined that a fair portion of their target audience is not computer savvy. As a result, the main desired behavior the Partnership would like to see out of the campaign is for landowners to call a partner.

Communication Objective

Make landowners aware of the tools available to help them make informed decisions that lead to sound management of their woodland.

Step 2: DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

The Kennebec Woodland Partnership’s primary target audience is woodland owners in Kennebec County, Maine.

Step 3: PROFILE YOUR AUDIENCE

The Partnership found the data and information available on TELE helpful for thinking in a new way about their target audience. Their prime prospects include Woodland Retreat and Working the Land owners.

Step 4: CLARIFY THE MESSAGE

The Kennebec Woodland Partnership developed a message that highlights the values that each of these groups associate with their land. For the Woodland Retreat owners, KWP emphasizes management practices that provide privacy, recreation and wildlife habitat. For the Working the Land owner group, communication materials highlight timber harvests and the protection of forest health through soil and water quality.

“As a woodland owner, you value your forestland for many reasons. Recreation, privacy, solitude, wildlife habitat, timber harvesting, protection of soil and water quality, or any combination of these interests may be the driving force behind your decision to own land. The choices you make about your woodland based upon your management priorities will shape the future of your forest.”

Step 5: CHANNELS & MATERIALS

The Partnership chose the landowner booklet, *Your Woodland: A Resource Guide for Kennebec County Landowners*, as the focus of their communication strategy to showcase the wide range of tools available to landowners from the partners. The booklet is designed to drive interested landowners to the Partnership’s website. The booklet has been designed to present the variety of voices represented by the partner organizations in a manner that would appeal to Working the Land and Woodland Retreat landowners. Kennebec Country is a small community and the Partnership took advantage of this by highlighting individuals through pictures of and quotes from people their prime prospects would recognize.

The Kennebec Woodland Partnership has found that it is well worth the investment to work with a media consultant. The consultant has been instrumental in helping the Partnership craft their communications strategy. A consultant brings knowledge about choosing the right media outlets to disseminate messages consistently and effectively. These outlets can include websites, newspapers, radio, and paid advertisements. The mix will depend on which of their two prime prospects they intend to target with each method.

Step 6: EVALUATION

The booklet will be revised as the Partnership learns more about the needs and interests of their target audience. To help with this, the Partnership has distributed 1st edition copies to a select number of their own members to gather feedback for future editions. Booklets have also been distributed at Kennebec Woodland Days, a series of field days hosted by various partner organizations. Field days have been a fixture of many of the partner organizations as a way to attract landowners who may not take advantage of available tools throughout the year. Each partner’s field days are now being advertised as Kennebec Woodland Days with the hopes of increasing participation from a wider variety of landowners. Landowners that receive the booklet at a field day are asked to provide feedback on how to improve the resource.

The Partnership also made sure to evaluate their strategy during the booklet’s development stage. The draft title of the booklet included the word “sustaining”. This was heavily debated among the Partners with outside feedback from landowners and was changed to ensure that the title would speak to the interests and values of their prime prospects.

The Partnership has begun evaluating the success of their communications by tracking number of hits per page on the Kennebec Woodland Partnership website and the number of new participants in Kennebec Woodland Days events. Partners have not explicitly tracked the reasons for phone calls from landowners to determine possible connections between calls and communications efforts because of the difficulty of separating reasons for a particular call. The Partnership will also be gathering feedback through mail-in and online surveys as the 2nd edition of the booklet is distributed.