Frenchman Bay Partners pre-goal-session webinar minutes
Location: Davis Conference Room, Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory
Date and Time: October 31, 2012 1:00-2:30pm

In attendance: Emma Fox, Jane Disney, George Kidder, Fiona deKonig, Shannon White, Natalie Springuel, Charlie Wray, Chris Petersen, Bob Pulver, Bob DeForrest, Terry Towne

Calling in: Marcia Brown (from Foundations of Success), Jim Fisher, Antonio Blasi

1. **The meeting was called to order at 1:00pm.**

2. **Orientation to webinar format**

Jane opened the meeting with an introduction and a brief explanation about the viability assessment and then passed off the orientation to Marcia Brown, of Foundations of Success. Foundations of Success is an organization focused on helping conservation groups with monitoring evaluation and learning within the realm of biodiversity and conservation—Foundations of Success does not implement conservation strategies or planning, it just acts as support for other organizations.

After some brief technology troubleshooting, Marcia continued with an introduction of what a webinar is and how the format should work for the November 8th goal-session coming up. It is also important to note that the goals at this time are not to be focused on the human welfare target of marine livelihoods, but rather the four ecological targets: eelgrass, mudflats, subtidal benthic habitat, and diadromous fishes.

3. **Viability assessment PowerPoint presentation**

Viability assessment is an early part of the conservation planning process as described in the Open Standards for Conservation (www.miradi.org/openstandards). Viability assessments guide goal-setting, and the viability assessment step was skipped at the retreat in 2011. Viability assessment helps define the health for targets, incorporates the concept of resilience, and identifies what sustains the targets in good condition, how the target is doing now, and how the target should be in the future. Assessment is important to identify ecological requirements for healthy targets, current health, setting goals, developing monitoring plans. The steps of the viability assessment process are as follows: 1. Define indicators for the Key Ecological Attributes (described below) of each target identified, 2. Specify range of variation (poor, fair, good, very good), and 3. Define how the target is now. Key Ecological Attributes (KEAs) are a concept developed by the Nature Conservancy and described in the Open Standards—KEAs are aspects of the target that define a healthy target if present, or if not present would lead to the loss or extreme degradation over time. KEAs are defined by three categories: size, condition, and landscape context of the ecological target.

The example Marcia gave for the viability assessment was frigatebirds, a type of seabird. The category was size, the KEA was population size of frigatebirds, and the indicator was breeding pairs of frigates. Marcia introduced the idea of indicator status ratings and lead the group through the acceptable range of variation. There is a threshold between fair and good; good to very good is acceptable range of variation, while fair is outside the acceptable range of variation—indicators with a fair status require human intervention while indicators with poor rating border on extirpation. Marcia said that putting values into the indicator ratings is the hardest part. We don't have perfect data, so the initial indicator status ratings might just be guesses.

The KEA and indicator status rating information will go into the Miradi conservation action planning software as we go through the viability assessment process. The software allows us to tell the source for

the ratings, and provides spaces for the data/measurements from different years or areas. Miradi helps us make sense of the data and set goals according to the ranges that we've defined. We will write goals in a statement based on the viability assessment; goals should be easily measurable, achievable, and clearly phrased. A goal could be keeping the ecosystem or species at a certain level, especially if it is already considered healthy. The viability assessment process should not take months—it can always be addressed again in a future planning session. Additionally, the targets do not need a KEA for every aspect; the ideal is to create a small, manageable number of KEAs for each target, focusing on the attributes affected or impacted by humans

Marcia specified about goals: they should be directly associated with one or more conservation targets, phrased in terms of specific attributes, impact-oriented, represent the desired status of the conservation target long-term, time limited, achievable within a specific period of time, measurable, and specific. Most importantly, goals should be easily understandable. In the Miradi software, goals are shown in ovals, and hovering over the oval will show goal text. It is important to note that *goals are not threat reduction objectives.* Rather, goals describe actual threat reduction status of the conservation target.

4. **Questions and discussion**

The group discussed the challenge of bringing conservation goals to the community. Marcia advised that the Partners pick and choose which parts of the plan to share with the general public—they don't have to know the goals, necessarily. What they can use is the strategies and to know the threats to a resource, benefits of having a healthy resource, such as eelgrass. Marcia suggested that the Partners can communicate eelgrass goals in that eelgrass beds support commercially important species, such as mussels and flatfish.

Jane re-introduced everyone to the Miradi conceptual model, the work on Frenchman Bay that came out of the retreat last year. Jane suggested that the Partners base goal numbers on data the group finds during the week before the official goal-session. Where the group doesn't have enough data is where studies will need to be set up. The group may even decide to make studies part of the goals.

5. Preliminary viability assessment for eelgrass target

The group practiced the viability assessment process with the eelgrass conservation target to see how the format would work November 8th webinar. Marcia suggested that the Frenchman Bay Partners break down the goals by area or site in the watershed. There was some discussion between the Partners about the difference between key ecological attributes and threats, and how to phrase the KEAs so they don't sound like threats (sediment particle size and pH were examples). Total area, percent cover, and bed structure were suggested as eelgrass KEAs. There were 3174 total acres of eelgrass in 1996, but by 2008 there were only 1076 acres (a 66 percent loss). The beds at Hadley Point were called healthiest in Frenchman Bay, with high densities even after harvesting plants for restoration. Marcia clarified that economics-themed KEAs are more for the human welfare target of marine-based livelihoods, so they should be left out of the viability assessment discussion. Rather, the Partners can use economic data to help them communicate the ecological goals to community members.

6. **Next steps**

The group discussed what kinds of information might be missing for each of the ecological targets. Density and acreage data was needed for eelgrass, with accompanying GIS maps if possible. The group decided to contact Hannah Annis for the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) mudflat survey information, and to locate DMR trawl information.