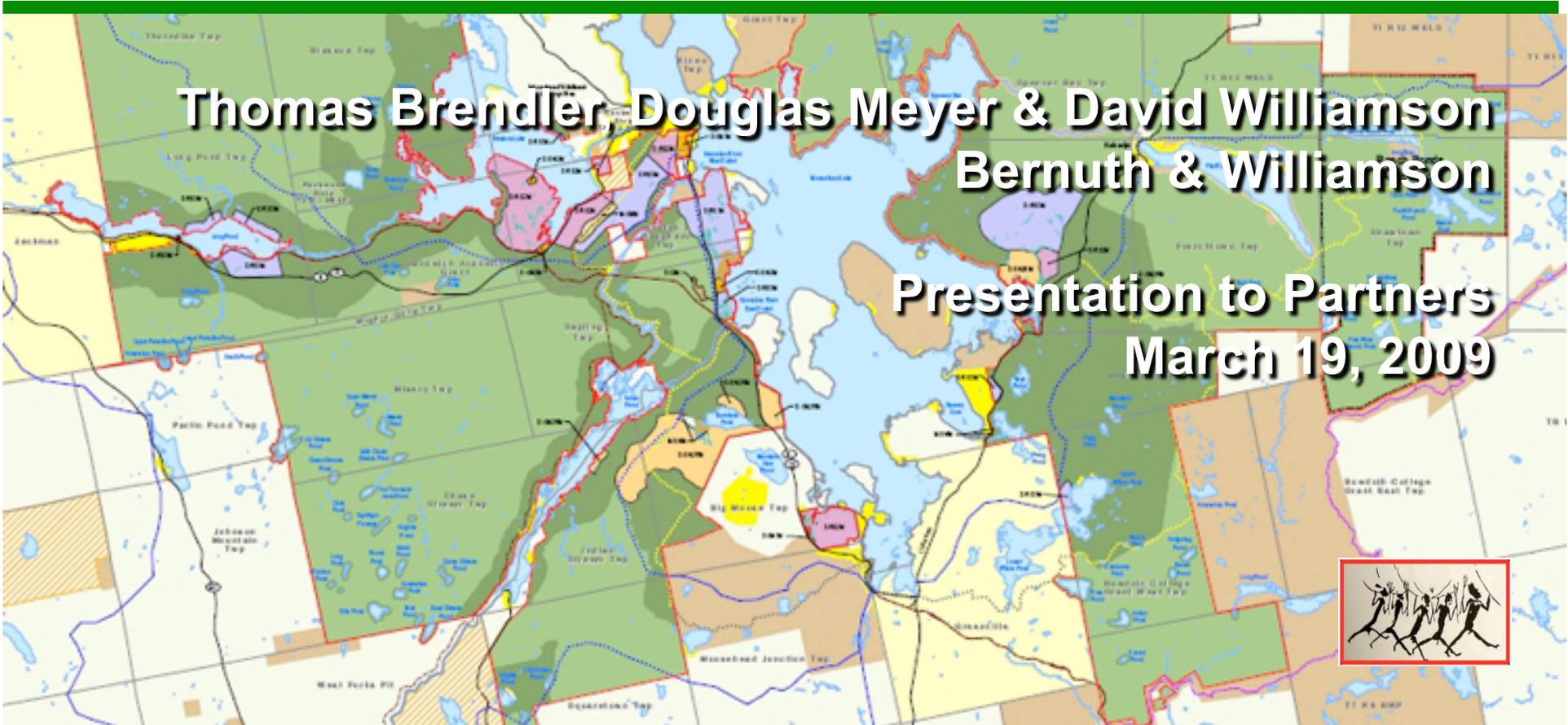




# Conservation and Planning Research Findings: DRAFT



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**Presentation to Partners  
March 19, 2009**





## Project goal:

“Design and implement a market research and communications strategy that will effectively motivate local decision makers to make pro-active, conservation-minded land use decisions.”

## Starting definition:

“Conservation planning is the development of biologically defensible plans (land use plans, open space plans, infrastructure plans, etc.) that maintain natural habitat in the amount, pattern, and quality safely above the threshold at which native species begin to decline precipitously.”



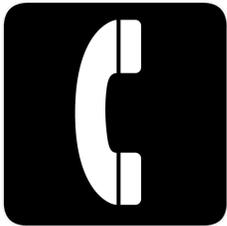


1. **Methodology**
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3. **Opportunities and Challenges**
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# 1. Methodology



## In-depth phone interviews (60)

- Distribution: NE (6) SE (15) MW (5) SW (2) W (19) Multi/Nat (13)
- Predominantly from a planning perspective (37, excl. academia)
- Secondly from a conservation biology perspective\* (16, excl. academia)



## Online survey (537 Responses\*)

- Distribution: NE (117) SE (116) MW (103) SW (57) W (124) Multi/Nat (20)
- Predominantly from a planning perspective (266 excl. academia/other)
- Secondly from a conservation biology perspective (155 excl. acad./other)
- 65% indicated that they are in area of moderate-high value and risk of loss
- 85 of the 537 responses were to an APA specific version of the survey, though the results for planners were consistent

## Biases and other considerations

- Likelihood of bias towards those more supportive of conservation
- No sig. difs. between segments other than conservationists vs. planners
- Emphasis in analysis given to in-depth interviews
- Results are representative, but not statistically significant
- Perception is reality



## 2. Interest in the Issue



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### **THE TIME IS RIGHT!**

#### ■ **High interest in habitat conservation among community planners**

*Note:* The respondents typically saw their own interest as slightly ahead of their organizations, and their organizations as slightly ahead of their communities

- “The professional planning industry is becoming a great deal more aware of conservation planning because it is realizing resources are limited.”- Q2R28 Planner
- “We look for opportunities to include (conservation) in plans, and have had some success in a politically pretty conservative county.” – Q2R8 Planner

#### ■ **...and that is expected to increase**

- “I have interacted with hundreds of planners. The profession is aware of conservation, and (interest is) on the rise.” - Q4R24 Planner
- The majority of interviewees, and 77% of survey respondents expect a “moderate” to “significant increase” in interest in conservation among planners in next three to five years.



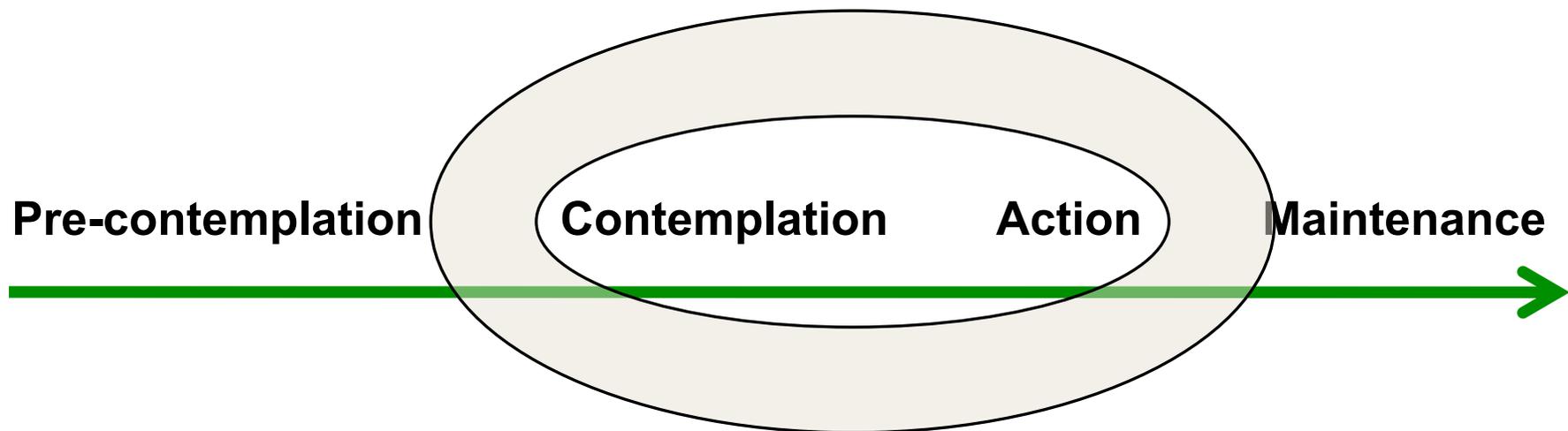
## 2. Interest in the issue

### ■ **Conservation is; however, but one consideration**

- “Wildlife habitat consistently rates at or next to the bottom, but we did get it added as one of things we look at in reviewing plans.”- Q2R14 Planner
- “It depends on what (our communities) want...right now there's a lot of interest, so it's a huge topic for us.” – Q2R4 Planner

### ■ **Planners are more interested in conservation, than conservationists are in “other” planners**

- Note:* Planners stressed that their profession is interdisciplinary, looking at an array of factors and goals, whereas conservationists were understandably focused on “their” issue
- Although nearly 100% of the conservationists expressed high interest in seeing their issue included in “other” plans, surprisingly few were developing consideration plans with consideration of how they would fit with those “other” plans
  - “Planners and biologists speak differently and at cross purposes.” – Q6/R15 NGO



***The planners were interested in the conservation of priority areas, and either contemplating how to better help protect them, and/or already taking some action to do so.***



# 3. Opportunities & Challenges



## 3A. Opportunities

### **THESE PLANNERS ALREADY WANT TO HELP**

#### ■ **The buzz is “green” & “sustainable”**

- “The issue here is sustainability. If you don't use the word sustainable three times per day, seems you are not a planner anymore.” –Q2R11 Planner
- In the survey, societal interest in going green (62%) was second only to regulatory requirements (68%) as a reason cited for interest in conservation.

#### ■ **Perception of good data\* and innovative tools**

- Only 2 of the 37 planners interviewed, and less than one fourth of the planners surveyed saw “lack of conservation data” as a significant problem.
- Interviewees stressed, and the survey results also suggested that the primary preference is for a large and diverse “toolbox” from which planners can choose what to use.
- “I'm sure there are tools I'm not even aware of and I've been here 20 years.” Q8R13 Planner

**(\*Perceived data quality and perceived data access are different issues)**



## 3A. Opportunities

### ■ Comprehensive plans

- “Having a comprehensive plan, and an alignment of the conservation and development interests early on (is critical).” Q5R29/37 Planner
- “It is almost a question that doesn't need to be asked because (the law here) requires rapidly growing counties and cities to prepare comprehensive plans” – Q2R18/37 Planner

### ■ Funds for direct conservation action

- 68% of all surveyed identified the funds going to acquisitions and easements as the most successful tool, and this thought carried through all groups
- “(The solution is) tough land use policy combined with land acquisition.” Q5R2 Planner

\*This is based only on comments made, as respondents were not asked for their ages.



## 3A. Opportunities

### ■ Other: Younger planners\*

- “There's a generational shift taking place... New hires seem to be more energetic about tackling larger planning issues. Some of the old guard got jaded.” - Q4R31 Planner
- “The young planners...are citing environmental concerns as the reason they are in this field.” – Q4R35 Planner

### ■ Economic downturn as possible eco-upturn

*Note:* Various interviewees commented on the way in which communities might be especially open to planning with development pressure lower, but not yet forgotten.

- “Before the economy starts heating up again is a good time to step up, participate in the process, and focus on the opportunities that exist.” Q8R24 Planner



## **WORKING WITHIN THE PLANNING PROCESS**

- **The process is political, and political will isn't often aligned with conservation concerns**
  - In the survey, “Competition between conservation and development interests (73%),” and “lack of political will (65%)” were by far the most commonly cited barriers.
  - “There is an eternal tension between the state with its mandates and the cities who prize local discretion and guard their autonomy.” Q6R19 Planner
  - “We've got a good city planning staff, but the governing body has traditionally ignored their recommendations.” Q8R5 Planner
- **Absent a requirement, conservation still seen as extra, not essential, even under “green”**
  - “You need to clarify that ‘green’ includes wildlife habitat.” Q13/R22 Planner
  - “There is political will for wildlife conservation only among a couple of our planning board members (who are hunters). It is about parks, open space and way of life.” Q6R12 Planner



## ■ Political will isn't always where it is needed most

*Note:* Perception is that rural areas with high conservation value, unless unusually affluent, are less likely to support any planning, let alone conservation planning.

- "While there is an interest in wildlife conservation at the rural level, there is a concern about costs and local control, especially with zoning regulations and enforcement." – Q6R18 Planner

## ■ Conservation seen as costly to the planning process and costly to local economies

- "It often costs more, and takes more coordination or effort." – Q6R12 Planner

- "The difficulty in quantifying the economic benefits of conservation. For example, protected land is often perceived as 'unused.' – Q7R15 Planner



## ■ Lack conservation experts willing to participate

- “There is a developer that wants to do a 1000 acre development...and if (the planners) are doing their job they should be aware of the conservation plans, the recommendations from NGOs, but they also have to turn this around in 20 days.” Q6R35 Planner
- “You almost as a planner feel you have to help the conservationists make their case.” Q8R12 Planner
- “Our ability to participate in these planning efforts often depends upon funding, and the ability for people to pay for our input.” – Q6/R2 NGO

**....even though their input typically would be welcomed!**



# 4. Messages & Messengers



## ■ Suggested approach

- Bring conservation concerns further into the established planning processes by helping already interested planners make the case for conservation directly, and through allies, to local decision makers

## ■ Suggested frame

- Conserving wildlife habitat (or perhaps better said, conserving “natural places”) *is* one of the essential elements of being “green” & “sustainable”

## ■ Suggested messages\*

- Others have done this successfully (a) applying new and innovative approaches (b) retaining local control, and (c) maximizing benefits to their communities while (d) minimizing costs to their economies (Best conveyed in locally relevant case studies)

\*Determining the best messages for decision makers is likely something to explore further in Phase II





## 4B. Messengers

### ■ State agencies and heritage programs

- Were not mentioned as frequently in the interviews but polled surprisingly well with planners and planning board members (E.g. Checked by 59% of planners surveyed)

### ■ Conservation NGOs

- Were frequently mentioned in interviews as trusted by planners (Also checked by 36% of planners surveyed), but would want to know more about carry-over to planning boards

### ■ Planning associations

- Most frequently referenced in the interviews, perhaps a reflection of a more national perspective, though only moderate support in the survey (32% and 22% respectively)

### ■ Combination perhaps the best overall

- 56% of the planners surveyed checked “combination of the above,” and interviews reflected a strong preference for a mix of conservation NGO and a planning association, perhaps also with a locally prominent university

Surprisingly little difference between the preferences of planners and planning board members surveyed

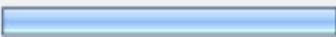
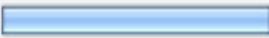
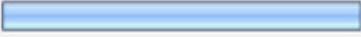
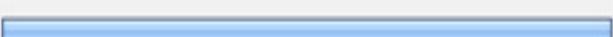
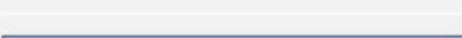
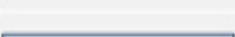


# 5. Communication Preferences



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“Just help us make the case...”

		Response Percent	Response Count
Talking points		49.2%	87
Charts and graphs		31.1%	55
Explanatory text		24.9%	44
Maps		47.5%	84
Photographs		33.3%	59
<b>Presentations/slides (E.g. For PowerPoint)</b>		<b>56.5%</b>	<b>100</b>
Printed publications		42.9%	76
White papers		21.5%	38

***The content of the information matters more than the format***



# 5. Communication Preferences

## For general information

- Presentations at conferences they already are attending (E.g. The conservation of natural areas an essential consideration when creating a “green and sustainable” community)
- Talking points, slides, case studies about the benefits of accounting for conservation in community planning, aimed at relaying to a policymaker / planning board audience

## For detailed information

- Searchable web site with aforementioned messaging tools and case studies (67%), combined with email alerts (43%) and “out of the ordinary” events, such as webinars
- Continuing education for planners, especially through already required avenues, like APA

## Ensure feedback loops

- Opportunities for exchanges between planners and conservationists

## No substitute for one-on-one contacts

- Explore opportunities for improving the participation of conservationists in local planning processes, the nitty gritty decisions (Stressed in interviews, less so in the survey)



## **5. Recommendations for this Project**



# 6. Recommendations

## Who and where?

- Those **planners** who already are looking to inform **planning decision makers** about the benefits of conserving the natural environment (Along with a parallel effort to reach **conservationists**, especially biologists, willing to learn and participate in the planning process
- Aimed at use in accepted **high priority / high threat conservation areas** (e.g. priority areas in state action plans) where conservation is not required, but likely to be considered in planning

## What and how?

**Messaging** – Develop and test communication tools intended to help these planners convey a) how conservation is a key part of being green and sustainable, and b) how including conservation in community plans can bring more benefits at less cost than might be expected

**Case studies** – How conservation has been included, and benefitted communities like theirs

**Connections** – To conservationists in their area who understand, and are willing and able to participate in the planning process

**Interactive web site** backed by a selection TBD of other outreach efforts, and, ideally, run with the participation of conservation and planning organizations alike

**Ensure feedback loops** – Any effort must be collaborative, with conservationists and planners working together, and allowing planners to provide feedback (The conservation community must avoid anything that seems like a single issue voter delivering another one way lecture!)



# 7. Remaining Questions



## Definitions:

- ...what are the essential elements, from a planning perspective, for a community to consider if it wants to be “green and sustainable”? What would be the qualities of a “LEED Community? How does conservation fit in that context?**
- ...what does “gold star” conservation success look like for a community planner? What would be the measures for that element of “green and sustainable”?**

## Other:

- ...focus on reaching planning boards directly?**
- ...invest in training conservationists about the planning process?**
- ...explore the possibility of changing norms at conservation organizations and agencies, allowing for more participation of their staffs in the planning process?**
- ...pursue opportunities to provide funding for the inclusion of conservation considerations in priority areas?**



# Conservation and Planning Research Findings

