



New England
Grassroots
Environment Fund

GRASSROOTS TREND REPORT: Land & Water

July 2018

Who owns the rights to the land and water?

*Which population can claim these? The indigenous? The colonizers? The forcibly brought here?
Immigrants? Refugees? How about the wealthy? The poor? Or perhaps it's those with power?*

Is it possible that the answer is all of the above?

BACKGROUND: LAND & WATER RIGHTS

Land

Land rights refer to the inalienable ability of individuals to freely obtain, utilize and possess land at their discretion, as long as their activities on the land do not impede on other individuals' rights (Adi, 2009). Land rights address the ownership of land, which provides security and increases human capabilities.

Globally, there has been an increased focus on land rights and land ownership, as they are pertinent to various aspects of development as it can be a critical source of capital, financial security, food, water, and resources (Wickeri & Kallhan, 2010). The United Nations (UN) Global Land Tool organization has found that rural landlessness is a strong predictor of poverty and hunger (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2009), and negatively impacts empowerment and the realization of human rights (UN Global Land Tool Network, 2010).

These should not be confused with access to land, which only allows individual use of the land in an economic sense. When a person only has access to land, they are in constant threat of expulsion depending on the choices of the landowner, which limits financial stability (Adi, 2009).

Unfortunately, neither access to land nor land ownership is determined in an equitable manner. Certain groups of individuals are consistently left out of land ownership provisions. The law may provide access to land, however cultural barriers and poverty traps limit minority groups' ability to own land (Hanstad, 2010). These groups must obtain adequate land rights that are both socially and legally recognized.

Land Legislation: Land law and zoning law is the regulation of the use and development of public and private real estate. Zoning is the most common form of land-use regulation, used by municipalities to control local property development, with the primary purpose of segregating - uses that are thought to be incompatible. In theory, it is supposed to prevent new developments from interfering with existing uses and/or to preserve the “character” of the community.

These laws have not gone without their fair share of criticism. Criticism has come from those that see restrictions as a violation of property rights and they have argued that zoning boards and city councils can too easily strip property owners of their right to unencumbered use of their land. In addition to this, zoning has also been said to promote social and economic segregation through exclusion.

The most prominent form of zoning implemented in the United States (U.S.) is single-use zoning, also known as Euclidean zoning. It has been charged with creating or contributing to a multitude of problems such urban sprawl, urban decay, environmental pollution, racial and socioeconomic segregation and an overall negative impact on the quality of life (Hall, 2006; Wilkerson & Jacobs, 2001). Jane Jacobs, a planning and community activist, extensively wrote about conventional zoning and how it often leads to the decay of municipal infrastructure and social capital and perpetuates brutal cycles of poverty and chronic under-funding in certain neighborhoods within New York City. Her work is largely credited with inspiring the New Urbanism movement and the increased body of literature concerned with uneven city development.

Land Use and Affordable Housing: Housing policy is traditionally thought of as social policy; however, it does intersect with land use policy because its effects are specific to place. The primary tool that local governments use to control land use is zoning, which is inherently exclusionary because it permits some uses and excludes others in designated places (Foy, 2012). Zoning may therefore be a vehicle for keeping affordable housing out of a municipality, using regulatory mechanisms that do not overtly exclude affordable housing but do so in fact by requiring certain lot sizes, certain building sizes, or other factors that render housing more expensive (Foy, 2012). This is routinely referred to as “exclusionary zoning” as it artificially maintains high housing costs through various land-use regulations such as maximum density requirements resulting in effectively excluding lower income, undesirable residents from a given community. The opposite of this would be “inclusionary zoning” which is a term used to describe rules that mandate affordable housing be interspersed with market-rate housing within a particular zoning classification (Foy, 2012).

Water

A water right is a legal entitlement authorizing water to be diverted from a specified source and put to beneficial, non-wasteful use. Water systems that are located in places with plentiful sources and few users are typically not complicated or contentious. The traditional interpretation of “water rights” refers to the utilization of water as an element supporting the basic human needs such as drinking or irrigation. However, it could also refer to the physical occupancy of waterways for purposes of travel, commerce and even recreational pursuits. Consequently, there exists a variation among and within countries.

Although water is one of the most abundant resources of the earth, only 3% is fresh water and is suitable for humans, plants and animals. Of this, nearly 2.5% is blocked in polar ice caps, glaciers and atmosphere, leaving about .5% of water accessible to human needs in the form of river water and groundwater (Gude, 2017). However, these water sources are decreasing at a faster rate than they can be replenished due to population growth, increasing living standards and changing climate.

Water scarcity is a global issue with approximately 60-70% of the global population living in areas with conditions of absolute water scarcity or severe water stress (Gude, 2017).

Water scarcity can be categorized as either economic or physical. Physical water scarcity refers to inadequate water resources to meet the present demands while economic water scarcity refers to a lack of mechanisms to acquire access to available water in the region. Many countries, including the United States (U.S.) are facing a physical water scarcity issue. It is estimated that by 2025, at least 40 U.S. states will experience some sort of water shortage.

Water quality is also an area of concern. Global estimates are that one in nine people uses drinking water from unimproved and unsafe sources. This results in a serious impact on human and ecosystem health. In the U.S. drinking water quality has generally been regarded as good. In 2016, over 90% of the nation’s community water systems were in compliance with all of the more than 90 EPA standards (Beauvais, 2016).

Water Legislation: Water resources law is the field of law dealing with the ownership, control, and use of water as a resource. Water rights can be based on four things; 1) water rights based on ownership of the land; 2) water rights based on previous use or prior appropriation; 3) community-based allocation of water; and 4) right to clean water.

In the U.S. there are complex legal systems for allocating water rights that vary by region. It is designed to provide a framework to resolve disputes and policy issues relating to water in multiple ways. However, as with the case of many laws and policies, water rights and access to clean water are not equitably applied.

In the U.S. we have several pieces of key water legislation that are of importance. The Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1972 is the primary federal law that governs water pollution. And similar to many of the laws that were passed during the 70s, the CWA was passed in response to the growing public awareness and concern about the adverse health impact of pollution. In general the objective of the CWA is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's water by preventing point¹ and nonpoint² pollution sources. Additionally, it provides assistance to publically owned treatments works for the improvement of wastewater treatment, and maintaining the integrity of wetlands. It is regarded as one the most influential modern environmental laws and over the last decades, several titles have been added to make the act more comprehensive.

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) of 1974 is the principal federal law whose objective is to ensure safe drinking water for the public. The EPA is required to set standards for drinking water quality and oversee all states, localities and water suppliers that implement the standards. The act applies to every public water system, however it does not cover private wells.

In the U.S. the EPA is tasked with ensuring the water quality of both surface and ground water. It has set federal Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for many pollutants such as lead and mercury, however many currently do not have any federal standards, such as perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and methyl tert-butyl ether (MTBE). However, some states have stepped up and set their own standards and/or banned certain pollutants.

BACKGROUND: COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

Land

Conservation Land Trusts: Traditionally land trusts have been thought of as entities that actively work to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land conservation easement acquisition or by its stewardship of such land or easements. The first conservation land trust, The Trustees of Reservations, was founded in 1891, however most have been formed within the last 25 years. There are land trusts operating in several countries and a few international land trusts like The Nature Conservancy. Currently, within the U.S. there are 1,363 land trusts operating within every state and to date they have conserved approximately 56 million acres, according to the most recent National Land Trust Census report.

¹ Point pollution source: any single identifiable source of pollution from which pollutants are discharged.

² Non-point pollution source: when the source of pollution cannot be traced back to one single source.

The traditional view of conservation land trusts was to preserve sensitive natural areas, farmland, rangeland, water sources, cultural resources, or notable landmarks without much input from the surrounding community, without much thought on how the community might benefit from the conserved land, and without much thought on how conserving land could address the many ailments that communities face.

In recent years, land trusts have been slowly making the transition from simply conserving land to discussing how conserving land could address societal ills and how the community can be included. The term applied to this “type” of conservation is Community Conservation.

According to Andrew Bowman, the president of the Land Trust Alliance, when compared to the 2010 census report, more land trusts are focusing intensely on local communities as they further their missions. “Land trusts are in a position to address many of society’s ills”, he said. “How do we stem a national health crisis and provide opportunities for people to exercise and recreate? Land is the answer. How do we secure local, healthy and sustainable food? Land is the answer. And land even has a role to play in mitigating climate change.”

Community Land Trusts (CLTs): Community land trusts are nonprofit, community-based organizations designed to ensure community stewardship of land. Although CLTs can be used for a multitude of reasons, the primary reason is to ensure long-term housing affordability. To accomplish this, the trust acquires land and maintains ownership of it permanently and then with the prospective homeowners it enters a long-term renewable lease instead of a traditional sale. When the homeowner sells, the family earns only a portion of the increased property value and the rest is kept by the trusts, ensuring the affordability for future low-to-moderate income families.

As in the case of the first urban CLT, the Community Land Cooperative of Cincinnati, which was created to prevent the displacement of low-income African American residents, a number of CLTs were formed in opposition to the plans and politics of municipal government. However, in other instances, CLTs have been formed in partnership with the local government as in the case of Burlington Community Land Trust (BCLT) and Lake Champlain Housing Development Cooperation (LCHDC), which were both formed in partnership with the city of Burlington, Vermont. The two organizations eventually merged, resulting in the formation of the largest CLT, the Champlain Housing Trust, in the United States. In 1989, a CLT subsidiary of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative was formed, and is credited as being one of the most significant city-CLT partnerships because it was granted the power of eminent domain by the City of Boston.

Although the number can vary depending on the source, it is estimated that there are at least 250 CLTs operating within the United States, with approximately 67 operating within the New England area. They play a critical role in building community wealth for several reasons:

- They provide low- and moderate- income people with the opportunity to build equity through homeownership and ensure these residents are not displaced due to land speculation and gentrification.
- They protect owners from downturns because people are not over extended.
- Typically, at least one-third of a land trust's board is composed of community residents, which allows for the possibility of direct, grassroots participation in decision-making and community control of local assets.
- Many CLTs are involved in a range of community-focused initiatives including homeownership education programs, commercial development projects, and community greening efforts (Community-Wealth.Org).

LAND & WATER RIGHTS IN NEW ENGLAND

Land Legislation in New England:

Land legislation throughout the New England area varies, however the one state's laws that were specifically mentioned throughout the preparation of this report was Vermont. And as such, Vermont's most prominent piece of land legislation will be explained.

Vermont

Vermont's Land Use and Development Act, Act 250, was passed in 1970 and was designed to mitigate the effects of development through an application process that addresses the environmental and community impacts of projects that exceed a threshold in size. The law created nine District Environmental Commissions to review large-scale development projects using 10 criteria that are designed to safeguard the environment, community life and aesthetic character of the state. Since its implementation, the law has been used by many community groups as a vehicle to impede or stop development; however, it has not come without controversy. The business industry has complained about the restrictions it places on development.

Recently, the Vermont legislature passed legislation that has established a study commission with the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations to improve the law "in light of current science and research and issues that have emerged during those 50 years, such as climate change." Changes that are being considered would lead to more development density

in designated areas and greater protection for natural resources outside of those areas. The hope is a law that is more effective and more widely supported by multiple stakeholders.

In regards to affordable housing and land use, exclusionary zoning is expressly prohibited in Vermont. The use of inclusionary zoning is optional; however, if employed there are statutory provisions that must be followed for certain typed of development. Burlington is one such city that has adopted inclusionary zoning laws.

Water Legislation in New England

As with every state in the Union, the New England states must adhere to the rules, regulations and standards that have been set forth in the CWA and SDWA. States are allowed to be more stringent the federal government, but they cannot be more lax.

Intersection of Environmental Justice and Land and Water

Land

Environmental justice goes to the core of traditional land use decisions: choosing sites for locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) (geographic equity); the process for deciding where to site these unwanted land uses, including the location and timing of public hearings (procedural equity); and sociological factors, including which groups hold the political power inherent in land use decisions (social equity) (Salkin, 2006). According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), environmental justice is defined as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. There are various other definitions, such as: the equitable distribution of environmental risks and benefits; fair and meaningful participation in environmental decision-making; recognition of community ways of life, local knowledge, and cultural difference; and the capability of communities and individuals to function and flourish in society (Schlosberg, 2007). In social sciences, an alternative meaning of the term “justice” is “the distribution of social goods.” (Schlosberg. 2002).

During the early 20th century when environmentalism first became popular, the focus was wilderness protection and wildlife preservation. In fact, many mainstream environmental organizations still reflect these early principles (Sandler, 2007). Numerous low-income minorities felt isolated or negatively impacted by the movement. It has been argued that the environmental movement was so concerned with cleaning and preserving nature that it ignored

the negative side-effects that doing so caused neighboring communities, namely less job growth (Sandler & Phaedra, 2007). Furthermore, the Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) movement has transferred LULUs from middle-class neighborhoods to poor communities with large minority populations resulting in a disproportionate number of vulnerable communities with fewer political opportunities being exposed to hazardous waste and toxins (Gerard, 1994). As a result, some minorities have viewed the environmental movement as elitist.

Many factors work in consort that result in communities being underserved, under-resourced, and overburden by pollution. The law, public health, waste management, and public involvement have been central to the conversation around environmental justice in the U.S., it may also be necessary to acknowledge that environmental justice is also a community planning issue. Zoning is one of the several techniques for controlling the use of land within a municipality. One researcher notes that “zoning tends to act as the gatekeeper in terms of where noxious uses can be legally site within a municipality, but the ramifications of zoning on environmental health and equity have been somewhat hidden (Salkin, 2006). Although perhaps beyond the scope of this report, it is critical to examine the context in which these decisions are made and their relationship to environmental justice issues.

Water

The U.S. has remarkable water systems, developed over two centuries of technological, institutional, and economic advances, however the benefits of those systems have not been felt equally across the regions, communities or populations (Vanderwarker, 2013). Water supply infrastructure in the U.S. ranges from large systems serving millions of people to private wells serving a single family (VanDerslice, 2011). It has been suggested through reports from several parts of the country that race and income has driven disparities in access to piped and /or potable water (VanDerslice, 2011). Unfortunately, not many scientific studies have been dedicated to examining this relationship. However, one doesn’t need to look further than the crisis in Flint, Michigan to realize that access to clean water is not equitable.

Inequities in access to safe, affordable water and the decision-making processes that guide water management and distribution have given rise to environmental justice efforts led by affected communities (Pacific Institute, 2014). Research documents disproportionate environmental burdens facing low-income communities and communities of color, ranging from concentrations of hazardous facilities to contaminated groundwater from agricultural activities (Vanderwarker, 2013).

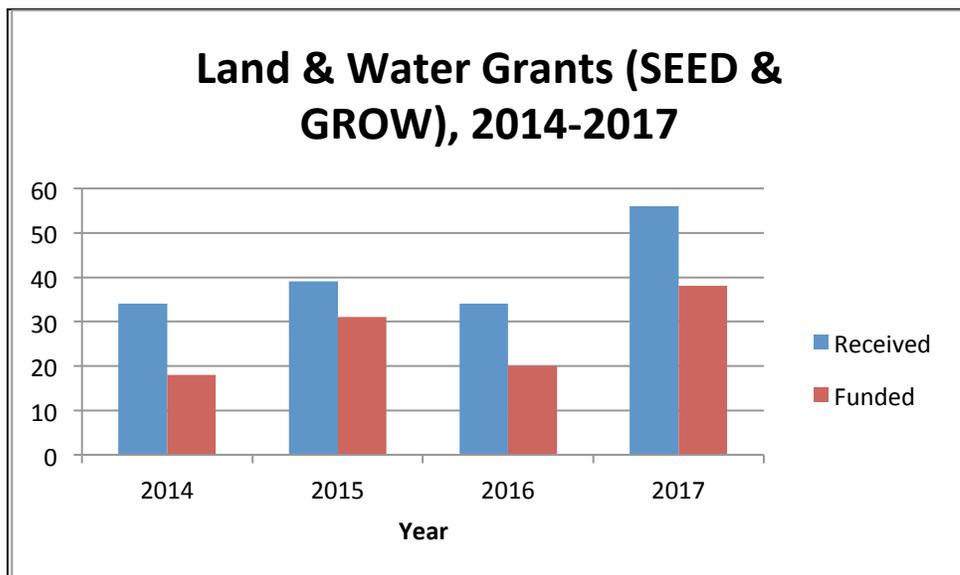
Furthermore, federal water policy has created a particular set of environmental justice issues because it has prioritized use of water for economic purposes, primarily through large-scale water developments, such as dams, irrigation, and flood control. Increased focus on technological or “engineering” solutions to water problems, has led to an emphasis on technological skills rather than on community voices and local consequences (Vanderwarker, 2013).

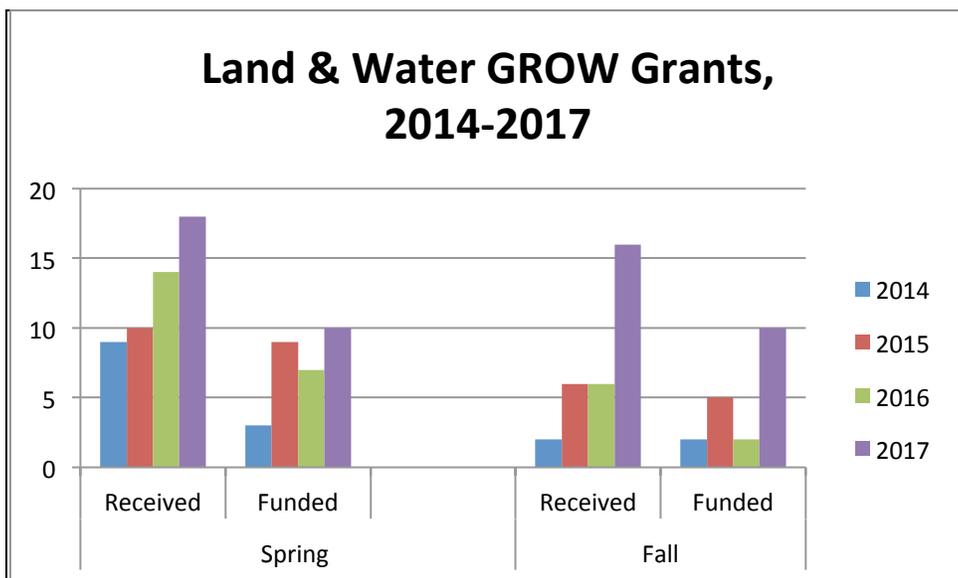
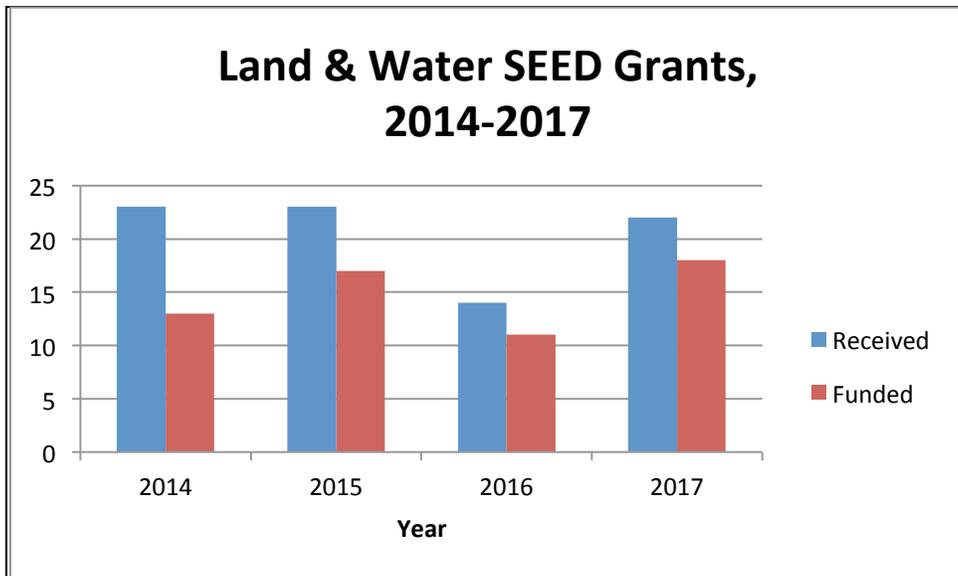
Land and Water Work at the Grassroots Fund

Land and Water is one of five core issues that we at the Grassroots Fund focus on. However, we understand that issues do not develop within a vacuum and therefore, they should not be addressed as such. To that end, we encourage projects that address multiple issues and those that seek to create co-benefits. Additionally, approaching issues through an environmental justice lens is a central tenant that we follow. We believe that not only should environmental issues be addressed but that it is imperative that they be addressed in such a way that seeks to create a just, sustainable, and equitable solution.

In 2014, we took a stark look at ourselves and the work that we do, and asked ourselves tough questions. We wanted to make sure that we were doing all that we could to best serve the community, based on their stated needs and desires. This process was and is multi-faceted and it is one that never ends. If just and sustainable change is what we seek, we must continually look within ourselves and ask the tough questions. This report is a part of that ongoing process.

Since 2014, we have seen a steady increase in the number of land and water grant applications that we receive, outside of a decrease in applications in 2016.





These trends do not indicate if grantees are in fact seeking co-benefits, or if they are implementing projects that view environmental issues through an environmental justice lens, however they do imply that land and water is increasingly being seen as an environmental issue that local grassroots organizations are addressing. And as such, that was one of the catalysts for the initiation of this report.

THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an analysis and evaluation of the current needs, barriers, and opportunities present within grassroots organizing around Land and Water issues throughout the New England area. A survey was developed in partnership with the Vermont Natural Resources Council, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, and the High Meadows Fund and sent out to the respective networks. Work within all six (6) New England states was represented. There were fifty survey responses. Additionally, interviews were conducted with both grasstops (1) and grassroots (5) organizations. In total, six (6) interviews were conducted.

FIGURE 1: THE RESPONDANTS

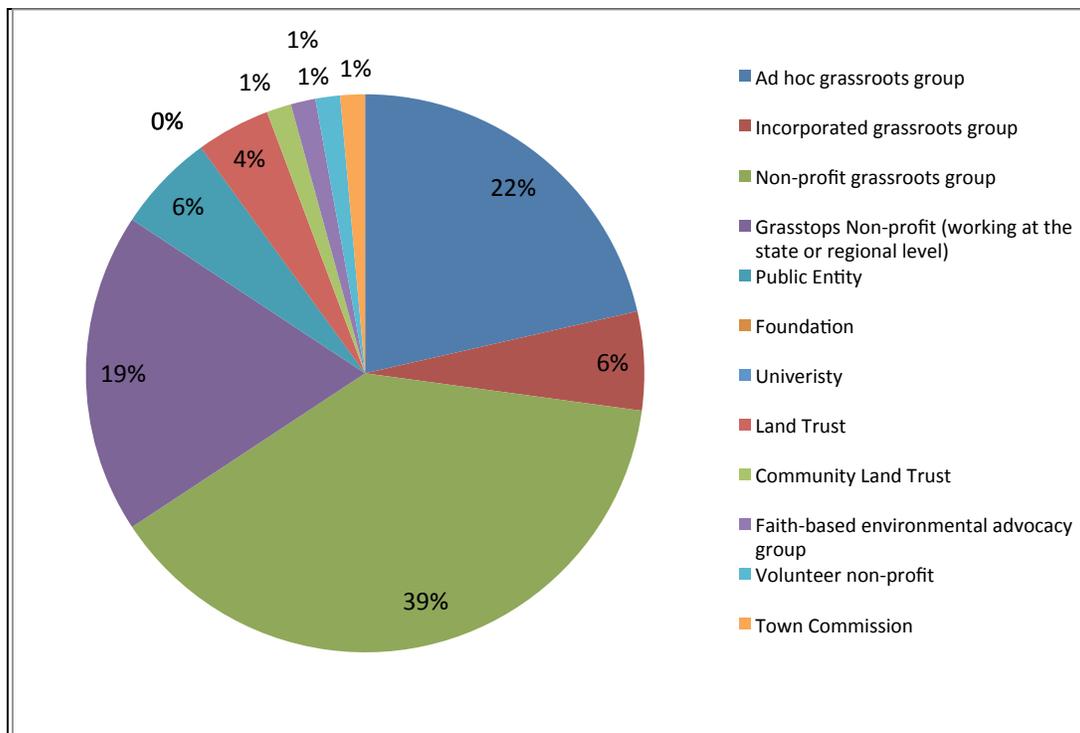
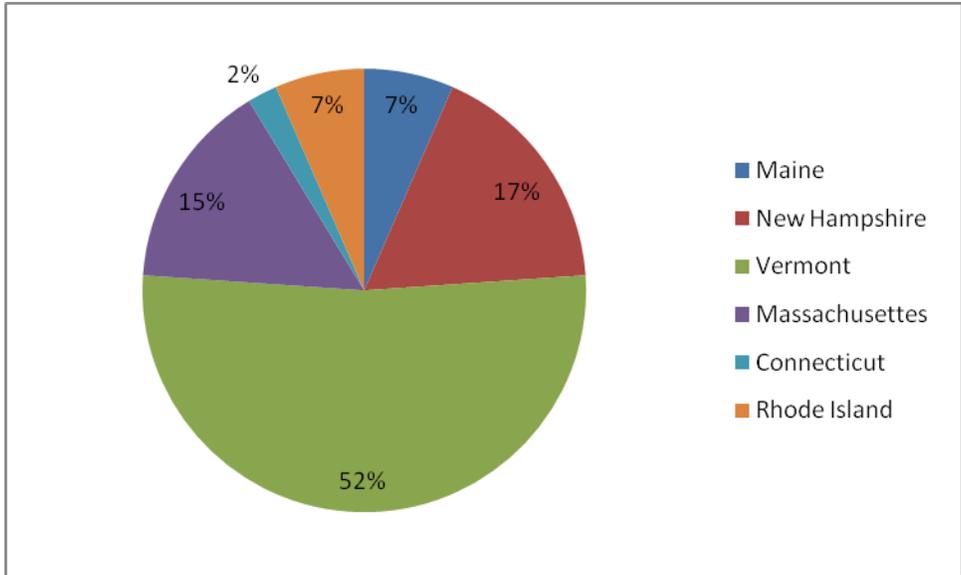


FIGURE2: REPRESENTED STATES

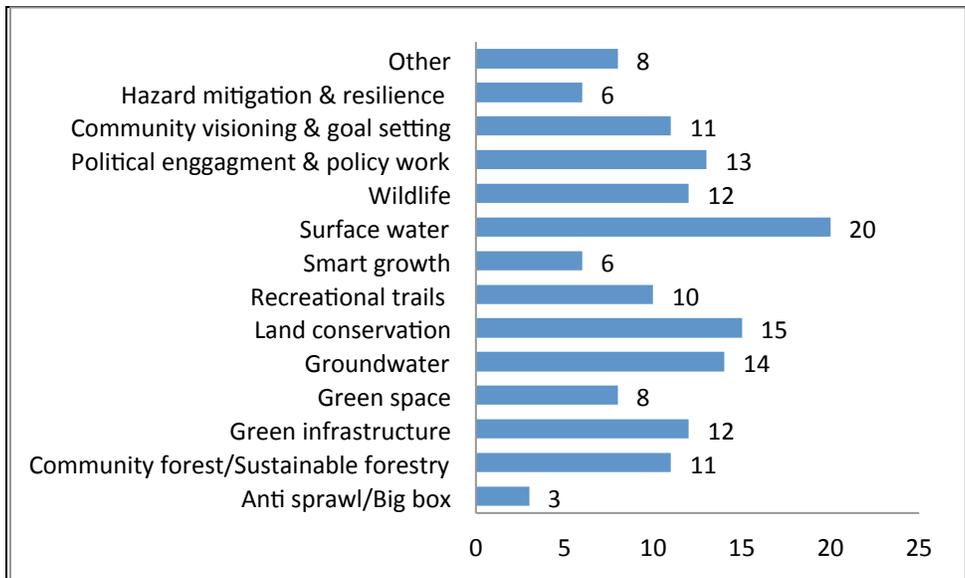


*Does not include responses from initial survey due to difference in question asked

PRESSING ISSUES & STRATEGIES

The most pressing issue identified among groups that work on land issues is land conservation, followed by land development. Groups that work on water issues identified surface and ground water contamination as the most pressing issues. All issues were overwhelmingly noted as issues that will be addressed in 2018.

FIGURE 3: 2018 PLANNED PROJECT TYPES



Land Conservation/Development: The Issue

The New England region of the U.S has a long history of significant shifts in land cover (Meyer et. al., 2014). There was widespread clearing of forests for agriculture, followed by farm abandonment and subsequent forest regrowth during the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, development pressures radiate not only from major population centers such as Boston and New York City, but also from growing regional service centers such as Burlington, Vermont and Portland, Maine. Resulting in increased tension between using land for human use and the growing recognition of the need for conservation to provide ecosystem services (Stein et. al., 20017; Meyer et. al., 2014).

New England has pioneered some notable land protection innovations, including the first land trust in the U.S. (The Trustees of Reservations in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts) and the first large-scale working forest conservation easement (Meyer et. al., 2014). Although the estimation varies depending on source, according the Land Trust Alliance, 8,536,644 million acres of land have been conserved and are protected from development throughout the New England area. Although this is significant, further development and encroachment, is a pressing issue that many grassroots organizations throughout the area are concerned about.

Until recently we seemed to treat land as a disposable commodity, to be used and then discarded, moving on to a new site (McBride, 1999). This attitude is termed “urban sprawl” which has been characterized by Vincent Scully as “that vast area in which most Americans now live, sprawled between the metropolitan center, which is emptying out, and the open countryside, which is rapidly being devoured” (McBride, 1999).

According to Charlie French of the University of New Hampshire’s Cooperative Extension’s community economic development specialist, “The fragmentation of natural lands and the conservation of farms and commercial forests to residential or commercial development often degrade natural resources, destroys wildlife habitat and alters New Hampshire’s unique social and physical characteristics.”

Any physical development is going to have some environmental impact, but that degree is dependent upon such factors as the category of use, the intensity of the development, and the physical characteristics of the site (McBride, 1999). Development can cause an increase in the water table due to increased surface runoff, increased soil erosion, stream sedimentation and disrupt the natural character of a site and its surroundings. Removal of vegetation may also expose a site and its surroundings to wind and sun from which they were previously protected (McBride, 1999). Additionally, this change in landscape can have an adverse impact on wildlife habitats.

Land Conservation/Development: The Strategy

The ultimate goal for those working within conservation is to prevent future developments that would result in the destruction of ecosystems, forestlands, destroy the “character” of the surrounding community or cause the disruption of wildlife habitats. Protecting land from future development has largely been done with the help of conservation land trusts. A conservation land trust in Vermont was able to purchase 593 acres, arrange a conservation easement, and then donate it back to the community where it could serve as a public conservation/recreation area. Additionally, another conservation group in Vermont was able to successfully prevent the development of a quarry that would have destroyed irreplaceable forestlands and disrupted wildlife habitats.

Other tactics that have been employed by several groups in order to impede land development include educating and mobilizing the community to become more involved in the democratic process by attending City Council and Zoning board meetings. Taking this a step further, some groups engage in the legal process to prevent the development of land. With the help of the Vermont Natural Resources Council, Conservation Law Foundation and Preservation Trust of Vermont, a local grassroots organization was able to successfully block and place into agricultural use, a 1.15 million square foot development that would have been placed within three (3) miles of a small town.

Surface and Ground Water: The Issue

Public water systems are unavailable in many parts of New England, including many rural areas. Instead, residents and small businesses get their drinking water by using private wells. Approximate 20% of the total population obtains water from their own private well. However, private wells are not regulated by the Safe Drinking Water Act, and recent studies have identified contamination of some private wells from MTBE, radon, and arsenic. One study in particular found that drinking water from wells might have contributed to the elevated risk of bladder cancer that has been observed in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont for over 50 years.

Recently, PFOAs have become a concern for the New England area. Residents that receive their water via public supply and those on private wells in both New Hampshire and Vermont have been exposed to the possible cancer-causing pollutant.

Surface and Ground Water: The Strategy

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Based on the responses, groups that are working on surface and ground water issues have primarily focused on collecting and/or disseminating information. For some groups it was found that many community residents were unaware of the possible contamination of their water source. Furthermore, local and state officials seemed to be unaware of the issue. Therefore, groups conducted surveys that were used to inform citizens. One responding group indicated that they actively monitor the water quality of two lakes.

Let's think **OUTSIDE** the **BOX**

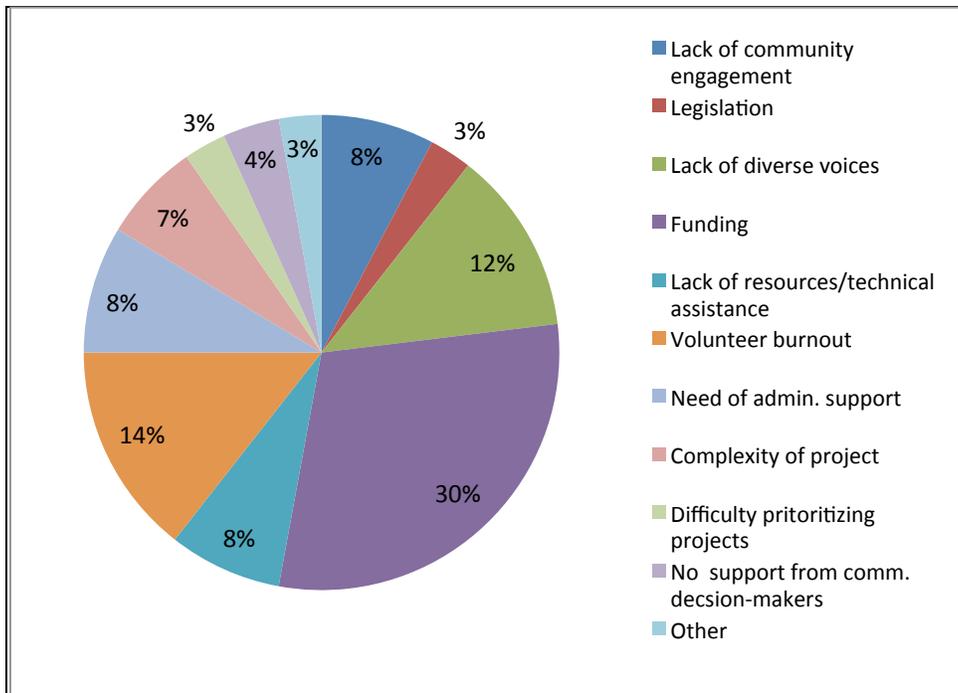
The Grassroots Fund seeks to support innovative projects and approaches to combating the various environmental issues that we, as a community, face. Several respondents noted other areas of land and water that should be addressed or tactics that should be utilized. These include:

- Marine habitat protection
- Smart placement of solar
- Innovative ways of farmland use
- Soil health and climate change
- Public art, energy, active transportation, community building
- Recognizing the rights of nature
- Educating youth to be citizen scientists

BARRIERS & NEEDS

Funding was overwhelming noted as one of the biggest barriers to grassroots organizing. Approximately 30% of groups responded with funding as their greatest barrier to grassroots organizing. This was followed by volunteer burnout (14%) and lack of diverse voices (12%).

FIGURE 3: GREATEST BARRIERS TO GRASSROOT ORGANIZING



*Combined “lack of community engagement” and “lack of public interest, awareness, and support”

*Combined “lack of diverse voices” and “difficulty reaching beyond our existing audience”

Groups are attempting to address these barriers via various tactics that include partnering and collaborating with other organizations, holding community meetings, and providing community education.

Increased funding would allow groups to hire more staff, provide adequate community support, training, outreach and support. Additionally, increased funding would allow groups to increase their collaborative efforts, volunteer recruitment and focus on creating co-benefits and capacity building.

COLLABORATIONS

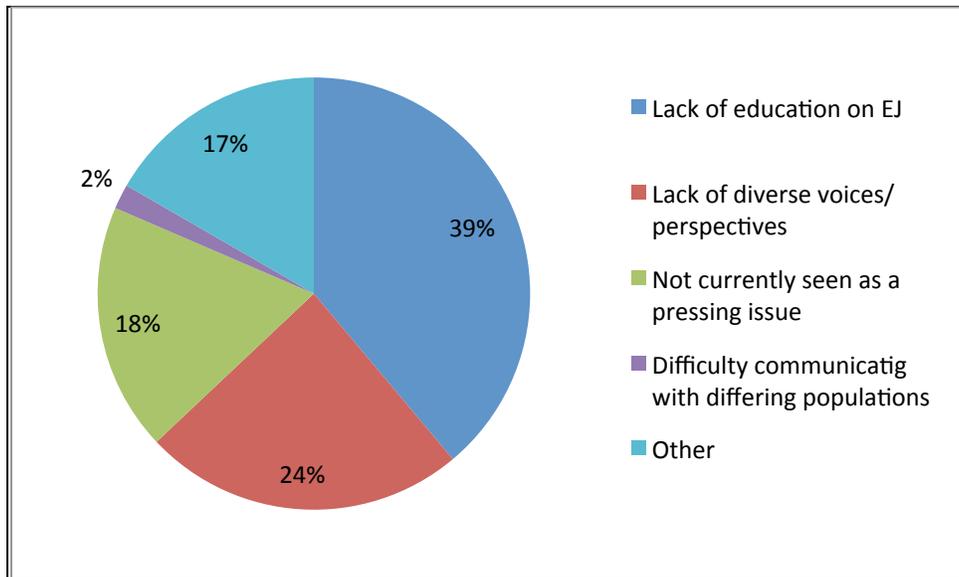
A majority of responding groups (86.7%) indicated that they collaborate with local groups that are working on similar issues and through these partnerships, the assistance they receive the most of falls under networking and information sharing. Through partnerships, responding groups would like to see more assistance with community organizing (30%), followed by financial (16.7%) and capacity building (16.7%) assistance. Time followed by funding was indicated as the greatest barrier to strengthening collaboration efforts.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The Grassroots Fund believes that in order to effect just and sustainable change, all issues must be examined through the lens of equity and justice. Approximately 55% of survey respondents indicated that the term environmental justice is either on their organizational website or that the definition resonates with them. Additionally, a majority (72.4%) indicated that environmental justice plays some measurable role in programmatic decision-making.

Lack of education on environmental issues was listed as the largest barrier to addressing issues through an environmental justice lens. This was followed by a lack of diverse voices and perspectives.

FIGURE 4: BARRIERS TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



Although a lack of diverse voices and perspectives is noted as the second largest barrier to addressing land and water issues through an environmental justice lens, a majority of responding groups (58.6%) indicated that they are not actively attempting to garner participation from traditionally under-represented and marginalized communities. The most often noted reason for this is lack of resources such as funding and time followed by difficulty establishing trust with these specific communities. It was also noted that currently, among groups, environmental justice is not seen as a pressing issue.

Through conversations with other advocates working within the field, it was noted that language and jargon are possible barriers. It was noted that words such as “environmentalist” or “environmentalism” could be exclusionary to marginalized communities. This is especially important because it is important to consider how the language that we use could be keeping the

most vulnerable populations among us from being included in the conversation, decisions and solutions to the gravest environmental concerns and hazards from the onset.

Increasing their presence in marginalized communities is one tactic that groups are using to aid in creating meaningful engagement.

OPPORTUNITIES

Groups were asked what they view as the greatest opportunity for land and water organizing. Responses were varied however multiple groups did touch on focusing efforts at the community and local levels. One group mentioned that the greatest opportunity lies within supporting and empowering communities to determine the change that is needed. A second group mentioned the opportunity that exists with local community rights-based ordinances because they can assert the right to clean air, water, and soil. Furthermore they can assert democratic decision-making authority at the local and regional levels.

Education was also cited as an area of opportunity. This could be accomplished by getting people out in nature and demonstrating how their actions can make a difference. Citizen-science was also noted as an avenue to increase education in a way that would directly engage the public.

Through interviews, community conservation was also noted as a growing opportunity. The objective of community conservation is to incorporate improvement of the lives of local people while conserving areas through the creation of national parks or wildlife refuges (Gezon, 1997). It is an approach to land conservation that begins with listening to many different voices within a community and then responding. Overall, community conservation uses the strengths of the land trust to meet the needs expressed by people in the community. Although there have been some notable successes, community conservation has often been ineffective because of inadequate resources and uneven implementation.

New England Community Conservation in Action

The following information was provided by the Land Trust Alliance.

Vermont: Local community members got together and decided that something needed to be done to address the problem of nearly 25,000 children at risk of hunger when school is out during the summer. Community members were able to provide the children fresh fruit and vegetables, bread and dairy products from purchases they made from local stores and local farms such as Blue Heron, which sat on leased land. When the land came up for sale, South

Hero Land Trust and Vermont Land Trust developed a plan that would allow the land to be purchased and conserved. The plan to conserve this piece of land had to also be approved by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, who after a presentation, recognized the good that this farm was doing in the community and decided to approve the conservation of the land, allowing for the continued good works.

Maine: The role of conservation was expanded when Kennebec Land Trust used the Curtis Homestead, property it had acquired, as a demonstration woodlot to educate students and the public about sustainable forestry. They further wondered how they could conserve land while at the same time revitalize local economies by growing the sustainable forest industry. This led to the creation of *Local Wood Works*, which is an initiative to grow markets for locally sourced wood. With this initiative the community is able to grow their wood product economy so their local businesses can access new markets, create jobs for people, and support entrepreneurship and innovation. Students are encouraged to think about the forest as their garden and to think about how it can sustainably be used to serve various purposes (hunting, hiking, skiing, other recreation). Workshops are held to demonstrate the various careers one could have in the forest industry.

RECOMMENDED ACTION & NEXT STEPS

The aim for us all should be to create a just, healthy, and sustainable environment for all people and species to enjoy. In order to accomplish this, it is imperative that we be effective and strategic with our grassroots organizing. Below are listed some recommended actions and next steps.

Organizing Efforts & Strengthening Collaborations

Responding groups indicated that they would like to deepen their connections with partner organizations. Time and funding were noted as the greatest barriers to accomplishing this. Therefore it is recommended that attention be given to building coalitions amongst groups working on land and water issues. One suggestion is giving attention to building a network of shared information. A network such as this, could aid in making the work of each individual group more efficient because it would allow them to see what has been done, what has worked and what other groups are currently working on. Additionally, it could make it easier for groups that are working on similar issues to connect.

Lack of funding was also cited as the greatest barrier to organizing efforts, followed by volunteer burnout. To aid in this it is recommended that attention be given to establishing alternative funding streams. These alternative funding streams should not be marketed as a “one-size-fits-all” and should instead be adaptable to the needs of the community. Grassroots groups should lead in this effort with the help and backing of larger grasstops organizations.

Environmental Justice

A majority of survey respondents indicated they are not actively working to garner increased participation from marginalized groups and the biggest barrier to this was said to be a lack of resources such as funding and time. Other notable barriers include difficulty establishing trust with marginalized groups, environmental justice not currently seen as a pressing issue, and difficulty reaching out to marginalized groups. Taking all of this into consideration it is recommended that:

Grasstops Organizations: Require or provide increased incentives for grantees to participate in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) trainings. These trainings can either be in-person or online. Furthermore, each grasstops organization should undergo annual DEI trainings as well, to ensure that they are living the values that they hope to see in their grantees.

Grassroots Organizations: Actively work to engage participation from marginalized populations. Partnering with organizations that are skilled in this area could help in accomplishing this. DEI trainings and opportunities should be sought out.

Both grasstops and grassroots organizations should work together to build and utilize language that is understandable, relatable and inclusionary.

The Grassroots Fund is committed to furthering partnerships and strengthening collaborations with both grassroots and grasstopsⁱ organizations and to driving more dollars, resources and support to grassroots organizing efforts. We ultimately want to build a strong collective that can achieve just and sustainable change at the community level.

The Grassroots Fund plans to produce an annual trend report to continue to illustrate the current state of Land and Water issues throughout the New England area.

ABOUT THE GRASSROOTS FUND

Grassroots Fund is dedicated to co-creating healthy and sustainable communities throughout New England. With a focus on those who have often been marginalized, Grassroots Fund empowers individuals, groups and organizations working across a broad range of environmental and social justice issues. By helping them identify, select and access the specific tools, resources and connections they need to challenge existing systems, they are able to develop lasting solutions to the complex problems affecting the places they live and the health of the people who live there. To learn more visit grassrootsfund.org.

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¹ Grasstop: Nonprofit working at the state or regional level