

*Looking Beyond the Agency:*  
The Influence of Stakeholder Engagement on the Perceived Success of the Maine, New  
Hampshire, and Vermont State Wildlife Action Plans

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Note: Due to the length of this report, if you are primarily interested in only one state, it is recommended that you read the introduction and then move on to that state's section

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**Introduction***Stakeholder Engagement and the State Wildlife Action Plans*

The state wildlife grant (SWG) program was created by the United States Congress in 2000 to provide funding to states for wildlife management focused on preventing species from becoming threatened or endangered. Each year over 60 million dollars is distributed through the grants to U.S. states, territories, and commonwealths.<sup>1</sup> In 2002, Congress required each of these entities to develop a state wildlife action plan (also known as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy) in order to remain eligible for the grants. These plans, which states were required to submit to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by October, 2005, were intended to address species of greatest conservation need, their habitats, their most significant threats, and appropriate actions towards their conservation.

While primary responsibility lay with the state wildlife agencies, Congress also required the engagement of other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the development of the plans. Congress set forth eight elements intended to guide the creation of the plans, two of which related to the engagement of such stakeholders. Element Seven required the coordination of plan development and implementation with relevant Federal, State, and local agencies and Indian tribes, while Element 8 called for broad public participation.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of engaging these partners was both to ensure that the plans represented conservation goals for the entire state and not just for the agencies, and also to increase the level of commitment and coordination around plan implementation.<sup>3</sup>

This study investigates the mechanisms used to engage non-governmental stakeholders in the development of the Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont plans. Specifically it looks at the factors that may have shaped how satisfied stakeholders were with these engagement processes and the extent to which this level of satisfaction has

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<sup>1</sup> Teaming with Wildlife, "State Wildlife Grants", [http://www.teaming.com/state\\_wildlife\\_grants.htm](http://www.teaming.com/state_wildlife_grants.htm) (accessed March 14, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> The Biodiversity Partnership, "Federal Requirement for States to Develop Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans," <http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/bioplanning/elements.shtml> (accessed March 14, 2008)

<sup>3</sup> The Biodiversity Partnership, "Federal Requirement for States to Develop Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans," <http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/bioplanning/elements.shtml> (accessed March 14, 2008)

shaped how the plans have affected these stakeholders and how involved they have been in implementation. These three states were selected due to the diversity of stakeholder engagement strategies they undertook, as well as the relative similarities of their development patterns, geography, and climate.<sup>45</sup> Massachusetts, which undertook significantly less stakeholder engagement than Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, was initially also included in this analysis, but was excluded due to a very low survey response rate.

The goal of this study is to provide insights and recommendations that may be of use to state agencies as they seek to engage stakeholders in the review of plans and the development of future iterations. States are required by congress to review their plans at intervals of no more than ten years, though a few, including Maine, have elected to undertake this process every five years.<sup>67</sup> Findings of this study are presented below, first in an overview section that provides analysis of data aggregated from all three states and then in separate sections for state-specific findings. Recommendations are included at the conclusion of each section.

### *Methods*

This study was undertaken to investigate a set of research questions addressing both the engagement of non-governmental stakeholders in the development of the plans and the impact of this engagement on plan implementation. These research questions are:

- How does stakeholder satisfaction with engagement differ between states which used different suites of engagement mechanisms?
- What factors influence satisfaction with engagement?
- How does satisfaction with engagement influence satisfaction with, and participation in, implementation?

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<sup>4</sup> Wallace, Ann Fowler, *A Scan of Smart Growth Issues in New England*, The Funder's Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, August 5, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Birdsall, Stephen S. and John Florin, *An Outline of American Geography: Regional Landscapes of the United States*, 1998, U.S.Info.State.Gov (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/geography/about.htm>, accessed March 14, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> The Biodiversity Partnership, "Federal Requirement for States to Develop Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans," <http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/bioplanning/elements.shtml> (accessed March 14, 2008)

<sup>7</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), "Maine's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy." (Augusta: ME: 2005). Chapter 8, page 7.

To address these questions, data were collected via a web-based survey from non-agency stakeholders in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

Preparation for development of the survey began with a review of the plans and with interviews of knowledgeable agency employees in the relevant states. These interviews addressed the process by which stakeholders were identified for engagement in plan development, whether any key stakeholders were missing from, or dominated, the process, and what aspects of the process they (the employee) would change in the future.

In developing the survey questions and format, existing evaluation tools for public engagement processes were consulted, particularly the Environmental Protection Agency's suite of public participation evaluation tools.<sup>8</sup> Survey tools used for academic evaluation of participant satisfaction in stakeholder engagement processes were also drawn from in this process.<sup>9</sup>

The final survey is composed of both open-ended and likert scale questions. Questions using a likert scale ask respondents to report their level of satisfaction with a particular process, or agreement with a

<b>The Likert Scale</b>	
<b>7</b>	= Strongly Agree / Very Satisfied
<b>6</b>	= Agree / Satisfied
<b>5</b>	= Somewhat Agree / Somewhat Satisfied
<b>4</b>	= Neutral
<b>3</b>	= Somewhat Disagree / Somewhat Dissatisfied
<b>2</b>	= Disagree / Dissatisfied
<b>1</b>	= Strongly Disagree / Very Dissatisfied

statement, by selecting from an array of ranked options. Satisfaction and agreement are ranked from 1 to 7 with 1 being very dissatisfied/strongly disagree, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very satisfied/strongly agree. An "I don't know" option was also included where appropriate. Surveys were tailored to each state's engagement mechanisms and plan terminology (e.g. whether the term state wildlife action plan or wildlife comprehensive strategy was used), and were pre-tested by at least one stakeholder in each state.

Surveys included sections devoted to the over-all engagement process, each specific mechanisms used by a particular state, and participation in, and satisfaction with,

<sup>8</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, Public Involvement: Feedback and Evaluation, <http://www.iap2.org/goto.cfm?page=http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement&returnto=displayassociationlinks.cfm> (accessed May 15, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> McKinney, Matthew, et al, "Community-based collaboration on federal lands and resources: An evaluation of participant satisfaction." (Cambridge, MA, Program on Negotiation, Harvard University: 2003).; Wagner, Cheryl & Maria Fernandez-Gimenez, "*Effects of Community-based Collaborative Group Characteristics on Social Capital*." (Colorado State University: 2007).

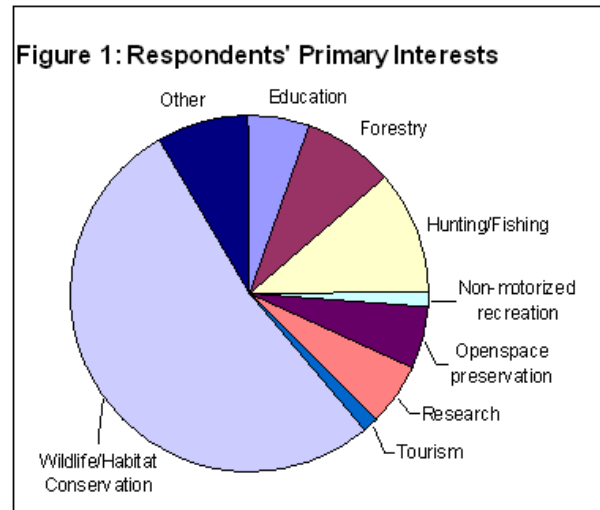
implementation. Respondents were asked to report their perceptions of factors that may have affected their satisfaction with the engagement process, including whether the timing of engagement was appropriate, whether stakeholders were able to influence the content and format of the plan, whether all key organizations were included in the process, and whether organizations or interests were overrepresented in the process. In addition, satisfaction with each mechanism used by a particular state (e.g. working groups, large summits, surveys, etc...) was surveyed, as were attitudes towards factors that may have influenced satisfaction with these mechanisms, such as agreement that meetings were well facilitated. Finally, satisfaction with the overall plan implementation process was surveyed, as was agreement that a respondent, or the organization they represented, was collaborating on projects outlined in the plan, had shifted funding or program priorities as a result of the plan, had forged new partnerships as a result of the plan, or had used the plan in some way (e.g. for a grant proposal).

Pools of potential survey respondents were developed through conversations with knowledgeable state employees. For Maine, a list was used of those who had either participated or been invited to participate in a stakeholder working group, which was the state's primary method of stakeholder engagement. For New Hampshire, a list was used of those who had attended the state's 112 person plan development wildlife summit. For Vermont, individuals were contacted from the agency's list of partners in the development of the plan, including those who had attended the state's large plan development meetings and those who had served on plan technical and development committees. Since only the Vermont list included contact information, research was conducted to find email addresses for individuals on the other two lists.

The surveys were opened for three weeks in the fall of 2007. Due to differences in the time taken to generate contact information and complete pilot testing the surveys were not run simultaneously. Potential respondents were sent an initial invitation explaining the goals of the project followed by reminders after one week and a day before the survey closed. In an effort to boost the response rate surveys were re-opened for an additional two weeks in February of 2008.

In total, 168 stakeholders in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont received email invitations to participate in the survey. Seventy-one individuals responded to at

least one survey question while 52 responded to enough questions to be useful for analysis. The overall “useful” response rate was thus 31 percent, with state-specific response rates of 32.4 percent for Maine and Vermont (11 and 33 individuals respectively) and 25 percent (8 individuals) for New Hampshire. Figure 1, at right, shows the distribution of the respondents by the primary interest they saw themselves representing in the process. It is also worth noting that 96.2 percent of respondents had previously commented on a wildlife agency plan, collaborated with their state’s wildlife agency on a project, or done both. The possibility significance of this high degree of past involvement is discussed below.



Analysis of the data was undertaken, and is presented, through the following three methods: linear regression, cross referencing pooled responses, and describing respondent attitudes through mean satisfaction/agreement levels and responses to open-ended questions. Linear regression was conducted in an attempt to locate associations between levels of respondent satisfaction with engagement mechanism and various factors that may have affected this satisfaction, as well as between satisfaction with stakeholder engagement and participation in, or satisfaction with, implementation.  $R^2$ , which represents the percent of variance in one set of likert scores accounted for by another, is used to describe how strongly two factors are associated. An  $R^2$  of 100 percent, for instance, indicates that the responses to one question perfectly predict the responses to another, while an  $R^2$  of 50 percent indicates that half of the variance in one set of responses is accounted for by another.

High  $R^2$  values should not be interpreted as necessarily indicating a causal relationship. For instance, a relatively high association found between agreement that the plan is an effective strategy and satisfaction with the engagement process does not necessarily indicate that the latter directly influences the former, since they may be associated through a third factor or the former may retrospectively affect attitudes about

the latter. Other limitations of this method of analysis can be found below under “limitations of methods.”

Association is also demonstrated by pooling all respondents who indicated any level of agreement/satisfaction or disagreement/dissatisfaction for a particular question and comparing responses to a second question between the two groups. For instance, average levels of satisfaction with the engagement process were compared between respondents who agreed that the timing of engagement was appropriate and those who disagreed with this statement. If a much higher percentage of one group is satisfied with stakeholder engagement, or has a higher average satisfaction level, this suggests that there is an association between the factors (e.g. 100 percent of those who agree that stakeholders influenced the content of the plan are satisfied with stakeholder engagement, while only 50 percent of those who disagreed are satisfied). Whenever this type of analysis is used, both average agreement/satisfaction and the percent of those disagreeing/dissatisfied and agreeing/satisfied are reported. It should be noted that some of the detail in the association is lost through the due to the pooling of responses. It is possible that 100 percent of those agreed to any degree with a particular statement are satisfied to some degree with stakeholder engagement, even while those who strongly agreed are uniformly “somewhat satisfied” and those who somewhat agreed are uniformly “very satisfied.” It is thus often the case that similar looking pooled comparisons have quite different R2 values, due to the differences in their more detailed agreement or satisfaction levels.

The strengths and weaknesses of each state’s engagement and implementation processes are also described using respondent’s comments to open ended questions (e.g. “five respondents commented on how well the meeting was facilitated”). The percent of respondents satisfied/agreeing or dissatisfied/disagreeing and their average satisfaction levels are also used (e.g. “75 percent of respondents agreed that the meeting was sufficiently advertised; their average agreement level with this statement was 5.2”). This is the most direct method used of understanding respondent attitudes towards the processes in which they participated.

#### *Limitations of Methods*

Perhaps the greatest limitation of the methods described above is the voluntary



nature of the survey. There is a significant likelihood that the opinions and perceptions of the stakeholders who chose to respond to the survey differ from those who did not.

Voluntary response-bias, as this is called, tends to bias results towards those who have strong opinions or are strongly motivated.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that there are a higher percentage of individuals who were very pleased, or very displeased, with the stakeholder engagement and implementation processes than would be found if all stakeholders who participated in plan development were surveyed or if a random sample was taken. It is also quite possible that stakeholders who responded are currently more actively engaged in projects related to the plan, which may have inflated the percentage of respondents reporting that they were involved in implementation in some way.

Given the non-random nature of the survey, the lack of response from the majority of those targeted is also a weakness of the survey method. This issue is compounded by the only partial completion of the survey by some respondents. In the most extreme example of this latter problem, only two individuals responded to questions regarding New Hampshire's small stakeholder meetings and web-based survey. This is probably an insufficient number of responses from which to generalize, although the opinions of these two individuals are reported.

An additional concern is the method of analysis used for the likert scale data collected through the survey. There is also some controversy over whether likert scale data should be interpreted as interval-level, rather than ordinal data, with the primary difference being that there is no assumption for ordinal data that the intervals between scores is approximately equivalent. Ordinal data cannot be summed and thus averages and many types of statistical analysis cannot be used. Analysis of likert scale data as an interval measure is quite common, however, and "many analysts feel that [doing this] has more advantages than disadvantages."<sup>11</sup> It is particularly common for likert scale data to be considered interval data when five or more categories are offered from which

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<sup>10</sup> De Veaux, Richard, Paul Velleman, and David Bock, *Stats: Data and Models*, Pearson Education, Inc (Boston, MA: 2005).

<sup>11</sup> McNabb, David E., *Research Methods for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods*, M.E. Sharpe, Amonk, New York: 2004, 161.

respondents may choose (e.g. very satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied etc...).<sup>12</sup> Seven categories are made use of in this study.

For similar reasons, the use of linear regression to analyze likert-data is not looked on entirely favorably by some in the field of statistics. However, it is “extremely common” for five category likert scales to be used in regression.<sup>13</sup> It is possible, however, that associations are either inflated or deflated due to the use of data that may not be perfectly interval.

Lastly, the first section of this study makes use of data that has been aggregated from all three states. Combining data across states is somewhat problematic given the unique nature of each state’s stakeholder engagement process. It is possible, for instance, that when reporting agreement with the statement “stakeholders had influence over the content of the plan” respondents from Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont are considering significantly different factors. Plan development processes that are equally responsive to stakeholder input might be judged differently by respondents if one agency has a long history of working closely with stakeholders and the other does not (e.g. the agency that has made improvements may receive higher marks). Despite this potential problem, data were aggregated in the interest of looking for signs of trends that transcend states. These results should simply be understood in light of this caveat.

### **Aggregate Findings and Overview of State Processes**

Data from all three states were aggregated in an attempt to tease out drivers of satisfaction and implementation involvement that may transcend particular states. The findings from this analysis are offered below, along with an overview of the engagement mechanisms used and comparisons of respondent satisfaction and participation levels across states. As noted above, the aggregated survey data suggest some interesting trends, but should be understood in the context of the significant differences between the states and their plan development and implementation processes. More detailed information about each state’s plan development and implementation processes is offered in the succeeding state-specific sections.

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<sup>12</sup> Garson, David, “Data Levels and Measurements: frequently asked questions,” North Carolina State University <http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/PA765/datalevl.htm#faq> (accessed March 13, 2008)

<sup>13</sup> Garson, David, “Multiple Regression” North Carolina State University, <http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/PA765/regress.htm> (accessed March 13, 2008)

*Overview of engagement mechanisms used in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont*

Table 1 (below) provides an overview of the stakeholder engagement mechanisms used by the three states examined in this study. In order to group the mechanisms into categories general labels for the mechanisms have been created. Thus, while New Hampshire and Vermont variously held conservation partner meetings, stakeholder forums, and stakeholder summits, all fall into the category of stakeholder summit.

The three most robust forms of engagement, all of which allowed stakeholders to work directly on at least a portion of the plans, are the contracting of sections of the plan to non-governmental stakeholders, the inclusion of non-governmental stakeholders on technical and development committees,

<b>Engagement Mechanism</b>	<b>Maine</b>	<b>New Hampshire</b>	<b>Vermont</b>
Contracting with non-governmental stakeholders		<b>X</b>	
Non-governmental stakeholders on technical and development committees			<b>X</b>
Working groups	<b>X</b>		
Stakeholder summits		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Small-scale stakeholder meetings		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Surveys		<b>X</b>	
Public comment and review periods	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>

and the formation of a stakeholder working group. A stakeholder working group is defined here as a group of non-agency representatives who are convened on multiple occasions with the purpose of completing set tasks related to plan development.

Significant numbers of stakeholders were engaged in the plan development processes through stakeholder summits and small-scale stakeholder meetings. The term stakeholder summit is defined here as a multi-session event, usually taking place over the course of a day, convened specifically to address plan development or implementation. These meetings were convened by the New Hampshire and Vermont agencies to collect feedback from a broad array of stakeholders on plan priorities, to enhance awareness of the plans, and to facilitate increased communication between stakeholders.<sup>14</sup> Small-scale stakeholder meetings were also held by both New Hampshire and Vermont, though in the

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<sup>14</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), "New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan,"(Concord, NH: 2005). Chapter 1, page 3; Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFW), "Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan." (Waterbury, VT: 2005). Chapter 3, page 6.

former state these tended to be sessions or discussions at relevant conferences and in the latter were generally held with individual stakeholder organizations.

Large numbers of stakeholders were also engaged in the process through review and comment periods and the New Hampshire agency’s web-based survey. These mechanisms had the potential to reach large numbers of stakeholders, but the extent to which they influenced the content and format of the plan somewhat uncertain.

Outreach efforts that are intended exclusively to educate stakeholders about the plan, such as newsletters or strictly informational presentations, are not considered here, though all three states undertook them.<sup>15</sup> Engagement mechanisms that were used to develop pre-existing programs incorporated into the plans, but which were carried out before plan development, are also not considered.

*Overall Drivers of Satisfaction*

As Table 2 indicates, the extent to which respondents were satisfied with stakeholder engagement and implementation, and agreed that their state’s plans were effective and well laid out, varied significantly between states. For these key statistics, New Hampshire uniformly had higher average agreement and satisfaction levels than the other two states considered here. For all states, respondents were generally less satisfied with the implementation process than with the stakeholder engagement process and the

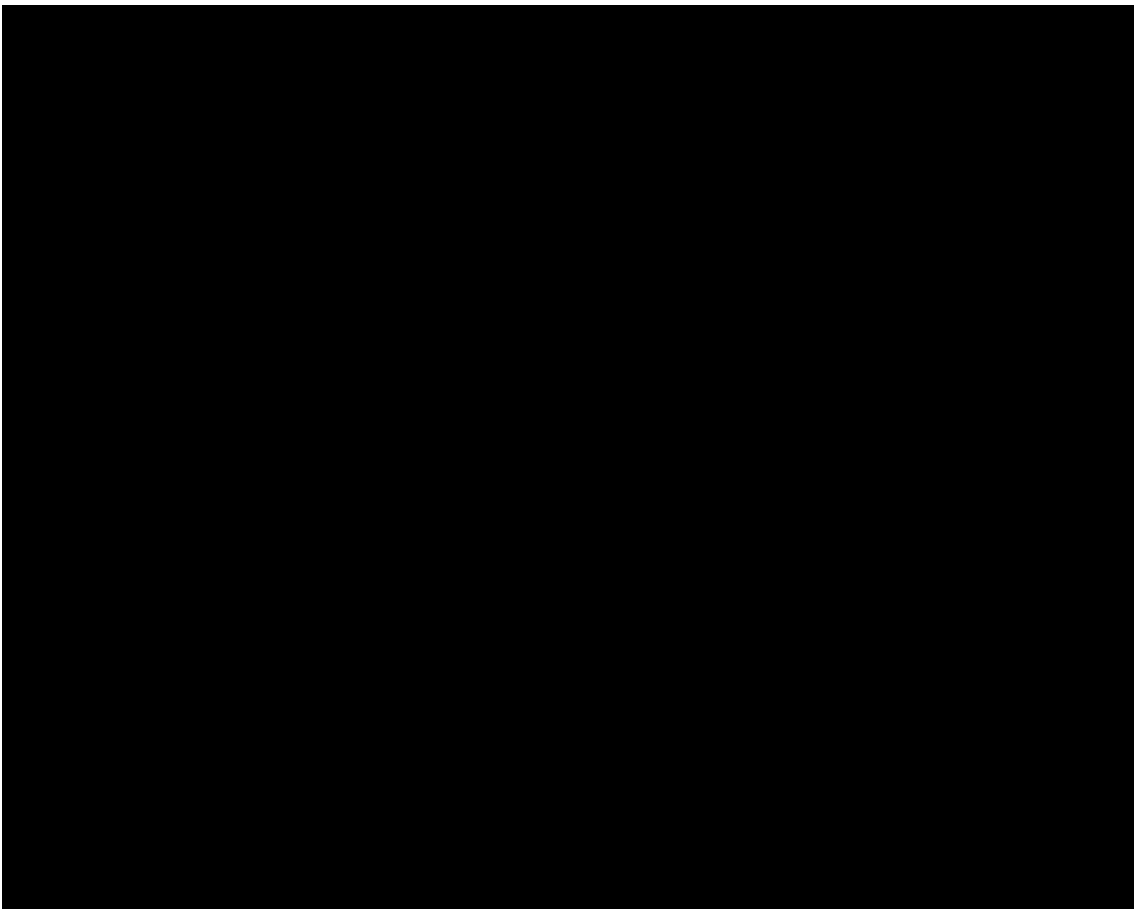
**Table 2: Comparison of Key Statistics Among States**  
(highest average levels have been bolded)

		Maine	New Hampshire	Vermont
Satisfaction with stakeholder engagement in plan development	Average satisfaction	4.46	<b>6</b>	5.31
	% Satisfied*	62.40%	88.80%	77.70%
	% Dissatisfied	30.80%	0%	8.60%
Agreement that plan is an effective wildlife conservation strategy	Average agreement	4.83	<b>5.86</b>	5
	% Agreed*	58.30%	75%	69.40%
	% Disagreed	16.70%	12.50%	22.20%
Agreement that plan is well laid out	Average agreement	4.5	<b>6.14</b>	4.4
	% Agreed*	66.70%	75%	63.90%
	% Disagreed	33.40%	0%	16.70%
Satisfaction with Implementation since 2005	Average satisfaction	3.5	<b>4.88</b>	4.21
	% Satisfied*	18.20%	63.50%	45.40%
	% Dissatisfied	45.50%	12.50%	30.30%
* Percentages may not sum to 100 percent due to neutral or "I don't know" responses				

<sup>15</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). Chapter 8, page 3; NHFG, Chapter 1, page 3; VFW, Chapter 3, page 6.

plan itself. With the exception of the responses regarding the implementation processes in Maine and New Hampshire, however, a majority of respondents agreed or were satisfied with the factors considered in Table 2.

For each question asked in the survey, data were aggregated to create a single pool of responses from all states. These data were then analyzed to see if associations emerged between satisfaction with stakeholder engagement across states and perceptions of various aspects of the engagement process (timing, diversity of stakeholders etc...). The percentages of respondents satisfied with engagement were compared between those agreeing and disagreeing with particular statements. Engagement satisfaction levels were also regressed against agreement levels to determine  $R^2$  values. These results are presented in Table 3. It is important to note that weak association does not indicate whether a particular factor influenced the experience and opinions of specific respondents, only that no consistent pattern could be discerned among all respondents.



The strongest apparent associations were found between engagement satisfaction and agreement that the timing of the engagement process was appropriate (e.g. that stakeholders were brought into the process at a sufficiently early stage), agreement that stakeholders were able to influence the content of the plan, and satisfaction with the component mechanisms of the stakeholder engagement process. It should be noted that only engagement mechanisms made use of in multiple states were considered here (others are examined in the state-specific sections).

As Table 3 reports, 93.9 percent of respondents who agreed that the timing of stakeholder engagement was appropriate were also satisfied with the engagement process, while 50 percent of those who disagreed with this statement were satisfied. This moderate association is supported by an  $R^2$  of 39.41 percent (suggesting that nearly 40 percent of the variation in satisfaction levels could be accounted for by variation in agreement levels). Similarly, 89.46 percent of respondents who agreed that stakeholders influenced the content of the plan were satisfied with the engagement process, while 50 percent of those who disagreed were satisfied. The  $R^2$  found for this association was 34.91 percent. While neither of these factors is perfectly associated with overall satisfaction (e.g. a significant percentage of those who did not believe stakeholders influenced the plan were still satisfied), it is not surprising that those who were satisfied with the process generally believed they had been brought in at an appropriate point and were given a chance to influence the outcome.

Moderate associations were also found between satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement process and satisfaction with the three engagement mechanism considered here. Eighty-nine point forty-seven percent of Vermont and New Hampshire respondents who were satisfied with the stakeholder summits were also satisfied with the overall stakeholder engagement process; none of those who were satisfied with the summits were dissatisfied overall. While 66.7 percent of those who were dissatisfied with the meetings were also satisfied with the overall process, 33.3 percent of this group was dissatisfied over all. A  $R^2$  of 35.97 percent was found when these satisfaction levels were regressed against each other. A very similar level of association was found between overall satisfaction and satisfaction with the Maine and New Hampshire comment and review periods. More dramatically, 100 percent of those who were satisfied with the small-scale

stakeholder meetings held in New Hampshire and Vermont were satisfied with the overall engagement process, while 100 percent of those who were dissatisfied with the meetings (only one respondent) were dissatisfied overall. The R<sup>2</sup> for this association remains relatively modest do to the fact that those who were generally most satisfied with the overall process were only moderately satisfied with the small-scale meetings.

*Overall observations about implementation*

As Table 4 indicates, 67.3 percent of all respondents agreed that they, or the organizations they represent, have collaborated with a state wildlife agency on one or more project outlined in the plan. The majority of respondents also reported that they have used the plan in some way (e.g. referenced it on a grant application). As noted above, this relatively high level of collaboration and use is impressive, but may also reflect a response bias in the survey.

	Maine		New Hampshire		Vermont		Total	
	# agreed	% agreed	# agreed	% agreed	# agreed	% agreed	# agreed	% of total agreed
Respondent, or represented organization, collaborates with agency on one or more project outline in plan	8	72.73%	4	50.00%	23	69.70%	35	67.3%
Respondent, or represented organization, shifted funding or program priorities as a result of the plan	2	18.18%	3	37.50%	11	33.40%	16	30.8%
Respondent, or represented organization, has formed new partnerships as a result of the plan	3	27.27%	4	50.00%	11	33.40%	18	34.6%
Respondent, or represented organization, has used the plan in some way	7	63.64%	4	50.00%	18	54.55%	29	55.8%

As Table 4 indicates, the plans have affected respondents in the three states to differing degrees. Maine, for instance, had the largest percentage of respondents agreeing that they had collaborated with the agency on plan related projects, but the smallest percentage reporting that they had shifted priorities as a result of the plan. New Hampshire, on the other hand, had by far the largest percentage of respondents who agreed that they had formed new partnerships because of the plan, but the smallest percentages of respondents who had collaborated with the agency on plan related projects

or who had used the plan in some way.

<b>Table 5: Association between satisfaction with stakeholder engagement and implementation</b>			
<b>Implementation factor</b>		<b>Respondents satisfied with engagement process</b>	<b>Respondents dissatisfied with engagement process</b>
Satisfaction with the plan implementation process since 2005	Average satisfaction	4.44	3.00
	Percent satisfied*	51.28%	16.67%
	Percent dissatisfied	25.64%	66.67%
	R <sup>2</sup> -	17.82%	
Respondent, or the organization represented, is working with the agency on one or more projects outline in the plan	Average agreement	5.5	4
	Percent agreed*	81.58%	42.86%
	Percent disagreed	15.79%	42.86%
	R <sup>2</sup> -	14.91%	
Respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted funding or program priorities as a result of the plan	Average agreement	3.87	2.43
	Percent agreed*	42.11%	0.00%
	Percent disagreed	39.47%	71.43%
	R <sup>2</sup> -	12.91%	
Respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted formed new partnerships as a result of the plan	Average agreement	4.18	3.29
	Percent agreed*	43.59%	14.29%
	Percent disagreed	33.33%	42.86%
	R <sup>2</sup> -	6.50%	
Respondent, or the organization represented, has used the plan in some way (e.g. referenced in a grant)	Average agreement	5.19	4
	Percent agreed*	70.27%	33.33%
	Percent disagreed	18.92%	16.67%
	R <sup>2</sup> -	12.02%	
* Percentages do not always add up to 100 % due to neutral and "I don't know" responses			
~ R <sup>2</sup> is the percent of variance in one set of satisfaction/agreement levels accounted for by another as found through linear regression			

Only very moderate associations were found between satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement processes and agreement with statements describing the impact of the plan on stakeholders. As Table 5 shows, compared with those who were dissatisfied, a higher percentage of those who were satisfied with stakeholder engagement were also satisfied with implementation and agreed that they had collaborated with the organization, shifted priorities and partnerships as a result of the plan, and used the plan in some way. In most cases, however, a significant percentage of those who were satisfied were also dissatisfied, in disagreement, or neutral on a particular topic. A significant percentage of those who were dissatisfied also agreed that they had collaborated with the agency and had used the plan in some way. As reported in Table 5, all R<sup>2</sup> values were also relatively modest.



***Overall Recommendations***

Recommendations in this section are directed at agency plan coordinators broadly and are intended to suggest factors relating to the development of the plans that should be given particular attention as drivers of overall satisfaction. These recommendations do not focus on specific aspects of the engagement or implementation processes that should be adjusted or maintained, as these are specific to the state. More detailed state-specific recommendations can be found at the conclusion of each of the three state sections below.

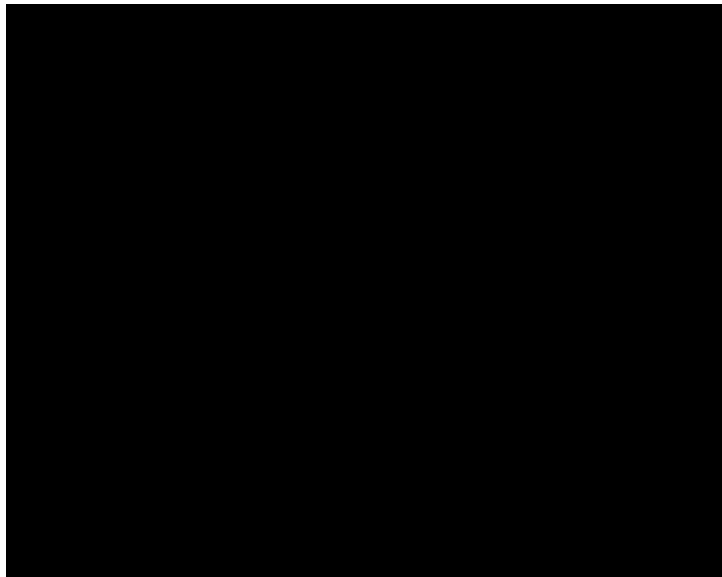
- Engage stakeholders early enough in the process that they have some influence over the direction of plan development. Attitude towards the timing of stakeholder engagement was associated with satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement process. Early involvement may also increase the extent to which stakeholders feel ownership of the plans and allow for an opportunity to build trust around contentious issues.
- Clearly explain how stakeholder input will be taken into account during plan development. Create opportunities for stakeholders to give substantive input on the content of the plan. Belief that stakeholders were able to influence the content of the plan was associated with satisfaction with the engagement process.
- Create well-organized opportunities for substantive input. Satisfaction with the three engagement mechanisms considered in this section was moderately associated with satisfaction with engagement.

**Maine***Overview*

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIF&W) engaged stakeholders in their plan development process through both a stakeholder working group and a public comment period, which are described in more detail below. As Table 6 reports, a majority of respondents were satisfied with the process by which stakeholders were engaged in plan development and agreed that the plan was both well laid out and an effective wildlife strategy. Average satisfaction or agreement for each of these elements falls between neutral and somewhat agree. Fewer respondents were satisfied with the

implementation process, with the average satisfaction level of 3.5, and 18.2 percent of respondents reporting satisfaction.

The agency has long-standing relationships with numerous non-agency partners within the state. These longstanding partners were invited to participate in the plan development process, though agency employees and stakeholders also brainstormed



potential new targets for engagement.<sup>16</sup> In general, respondents approved of the agency’s efforts to bring diverse stakeholders to the table, though the absence of a small set of key interests was noted by few respondents. Over 70 percent of respondents also agreed that stakeholders were able to influence the content of the plan, though a minority of reported feeling frustrated with the scope and robustness of engagement opportunities.

Maine respondents were on average less satisfied with plan implementation than those from either New Hampshire or Vermont, but a higher percentage of Maine respondents reported both having used the plan in some way and having collaborated with the agency on projects outlined in the plan. To some extent this collaboration level is accounted for by the participation of respondents in projects which pre-date the plan. Despite high collaboration levels, several respondents commented on their frustration with the limited way that stakeholders have been directly engaged in implementation.

As in other sections of this report, individual and average satisfaction and agreement levels are reported in terms of a likert scale (see likert scale at right). Average satisfaction and agreement

The Likert Scale	
7	= Strongly Agree / Very Satisfied
6	= Agree / Satisfied
5	= Somewhat Agree / Somewhat Satisfied
4	= Neutral
3	= Somewhat Disagree / Somewhat Dissatisfied
2	= Disagree / Dissatisfied
1	= Strongly Disagree / Very Dissatisfied

<sup>16</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, April 11, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

frequently fall in between the seven likert scale levels.

#### *Drivers of Satisfaction*

In order to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the stakeholder engagement process, as well as which of its components were most strongly associated with overall satisfaction, respondents were asked to report their agreement with a variety of statements describing different aspects of the process. As Table 8 indicates, very few of the factors considered appear strongly associated with respondent satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement process. The  $R^2$  are uniformly quite low (<10 percent), though in two cases the average satisfaction levels of those who agreed with a statement do substantially diverge from those who disagreed, indicating a general pattern of association.

It is important to emphasize that a lack of strong association does not indicate that factors did not significantly influence how specific respondents felt about the stakeholder engagement process. Indeed, based on comments and individual satisfaction/agreement levels, several factors influenced the attitudes of particular respondents. In most cases, there simply isn't a consistent pattern of association among all or most respondents (i.e. individuals who agreed with a certain statement didn't consistently express satisfaction with the overall process). As always, it is important to remember that even where patterns of association do appear, this does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the two factors.

Formal stakeholder engagement in the development of the Maine plan began approximately five months prior to the completion of the plan, with the first stakeholder working group meeting. The final working group meeting and the public comment period were held, respectively, three months and one month prior to plan completion. While three respondents submitted comments recommending the engagement of stakeholders earlier in the plan development process, the majority of respondents (63.7 percent) felt that the timing of engagement was appropriate (see Table 7). Holding this opinion did not, however, seem to significantly influence how a respondent felt about the overall engagement process. Those who agreed that timing was appropriate were only nominally more likely to be satisfied with the overall engagement process than were those who

disagreed (see Table 8 below), and the average overall satisfaction levels of the two groups were similar (4.57 and 4.33 respectively).

As Table 7 indicates, nearly 75 percent of respondents agreed that stakeholders were able to influence the content of the plan, with an average agreement level of 5. This suggests that most respondents felt, to at least some degree, that the MDIF&W utilized

the input gathered through the stakeholder engagement process. In tension with this, however, four respondents expressed frustration with what they perceived as the agency’s focus on gaining buy-in rather than significant input from stakeholders. One respondent felt that “stakeholders seemed to be there to rubber stamp the agency’s plan”<sup>17</sup> while another suggested that the agency “was just going through the motions and did not want input.”<sup>18</sup> This may, in part, stem from the fact that the Maine plan was understood by at least some agency employees as a validation of successful, pre-existing programs (most of which had been developed with stakeholder input), rather than as a catalyst for a significantly new approach.<sup>19</sup>

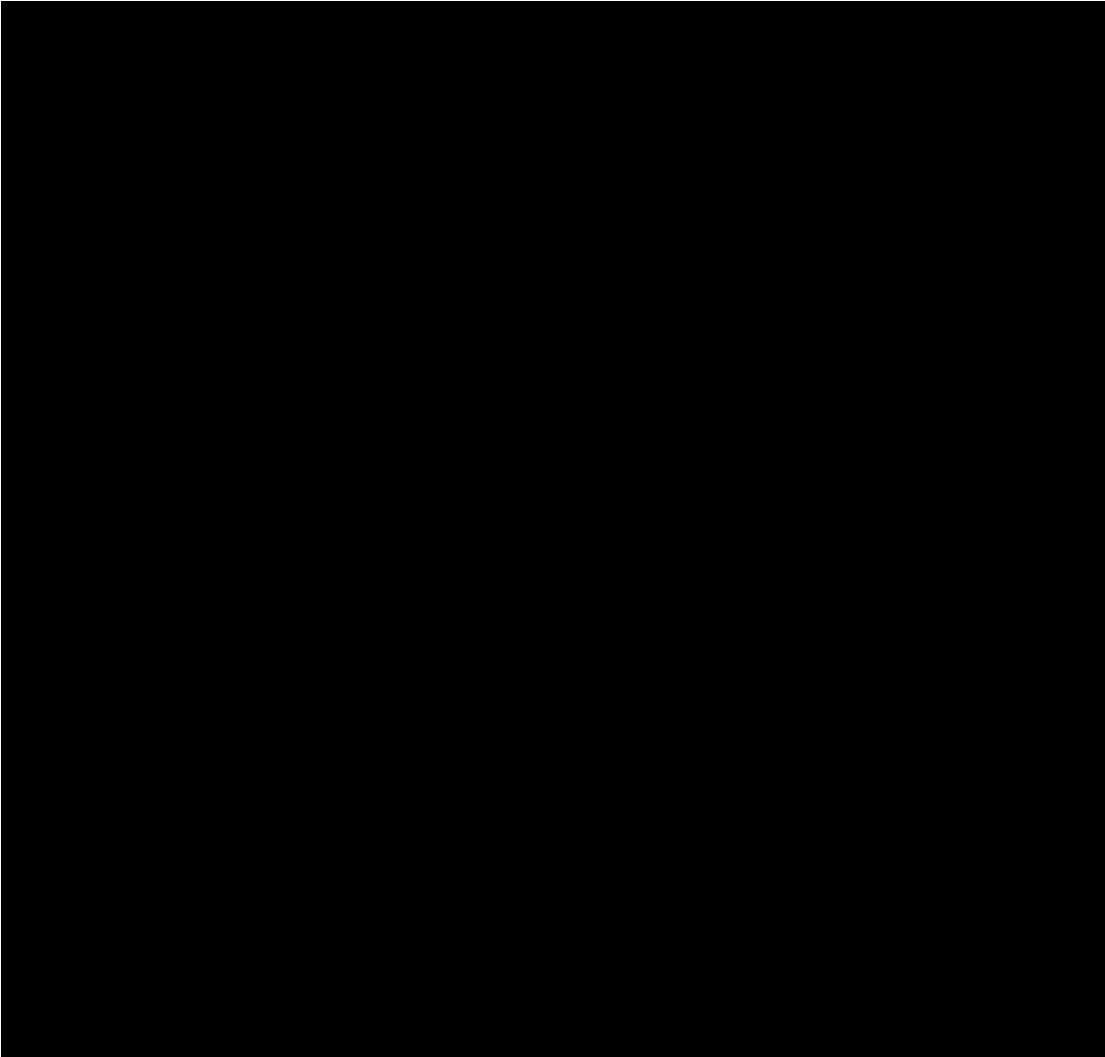
**Table 7: Maine Engagement Statistics**

<b>Engagement Mechanism</b>	<b>Average Agreement/ Satisfaction Level</b>	<b>Percent Agreed/ Satisfied*</b>	<b>Percent Disagreed/ Dissatisfied</b>
Satisfaction with the process by which non-agency stakeholders were engaged in plan development	4.46	62.40%	30.80%
Agreement that the timing of stakeholder input was appropriate	4.64	63.70%	27.30%
Agreement that the public and stakeholders were able to influence the content of the plan	5	74.80%	24.60%
Agreement that the public and stakeholders were able to influence the format of the plan	3.73	25.00%	50%
Agreement that key organizations or interest groups were missing from the stakeholder engagement process	3.64	41.70%	41.70%
Agreement that certain organizations or interest groups were overrepresented in the stakeholder engagement process.	2.82	0.00%	58.40%
* Percentages do not always add up to 100 % due to neutral and "I don't know" responses			

<sup>17</sup> Maine Survey Response # 13, November 11, 2007

<sup>18</sup> Maine Survey Response # 3, November 6, 2007

<sup>19</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Representative, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, April 11, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI



As with other factors considered here, agreement or disagreement that stakeholders were able to influence plan content did not seem to generally influence the overall satisfaction of respondents as a group. The average overall satisfaction level of those who agreed was only nominally higher than that of those who disagreed (4.56 and 4.33 respectively), with precisely 66.7 percent of both groups being satisfied with the overall engagement process. It may be that some stakeholders understood and accepted that they were only being asked for input on a certain set of issues and not, necessarily, on fundamental approaches to wildlife conservation. Indeed two out of the four respondents who expressed frustration with the limited influence of their input, nevertheless reported being somewhat satisfied with the engagement process.

While nearly two-thirds of respondents agreed that stakeholders were able to influence the content of the plan, only a quarter agreed that they were able to influence its

format. While this factor had, at 3.73, one of the lowest average levels of agreement for any aspect of the Maine process, respondents do not seem to have been particularly bothered by this lack of influence. Influence over format was not mentioned in any responses to open ended questions. Oddly enough, compared with those who agreed, a slightly higher percentage of those who disagreed with this statement were actually satisfied with the overall engagement process. It may be that stakeholders simply did not expect to have influence over the format of the plan, and so were not dismayed by its absence.

In general, respondents seemed to feel that the agency had done a commendable job in including an appropriate array of stakeholders in the plan development process. Six of the ten responses to the open ended question “what aspect of the stakeholder engagement process were you most satisfied with?” praised the outreach efforts of the agency and the inclusiveness of the process. “Excellent outreach efforts on the part of MDIF&W,”<sup>20</sup> and “good job of pulling together the appropriate stakeholders and seeking the input of people who were very knowledgeable,”<sup>21</sup> were typical comments. The average level of agreement that key organizations or interest groups were missing from the process was, at 3.64, on the disagree side of the likert scale.

Despite the above, 41.7 percent of respondents did feel that at least a few key groups were missing from the process. Three of the five respondents who specified missing parties noted the minimal presence of marine and coastal interests. This is supported by the fact that only one explicitly coastal NGO attended any working group meetings.<sup>22</sup> Two comments also mentioned the minimal involvement of the Maine’s Native American tribes, all of which were invited to attend working group meetings, but only one of which did.<sup>23</sup> Finally, one respondent noted the absence of forestry interests and Department of Transportation representatives, both of which he or she described as significantly influencing land-use in the state.

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<sup>20</sup> Maine Survey Response # 9, November 11, 2007

<sup>21</sup> Maine Survey Response # 4, November 7, 2007

<sup>22</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). 8-4

<sup>23</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). 8-4

Agreement or disagreement that key organizations were missing from the process did not seem to be clearly associated with overall engagement satisfaction. While a smaller percent of those who agreed that groups were missing were satisfied with the overall engagement process, the mean overall satisfaction level was actually higher for this group (indicating that individuals who were satisfied at all tended to be more satisfied). These mixed signals seem to indicate that this was not a highly influential factor for most individuals.

In contrast to both New Hampshire and Vermont, none of the respondents to the Maine survey felt that particular interests or organizations had been overrepresented in the engagement process. The average agreement level with the statement “certain organizations or interest groups were overrepresented in the stakeholder engagement process” was 2.82, affirming that perceived overrepresentation was apparently not a challenge for the Maine engagement process.

Satisfaction with the working group seemed to have the strongest association with overall satisfaction of any factor considered here, though even this association was only moderate. This is perhaps not surprising given that this was the primary means by which most respondents were engaged in plan development. Eighty-three point three percent of those who were satisfied with the stakeholder working group were also satisfied with the group, while only 40 percent of those who were dissatisfied with the working group were satisfied overall. The average overall satisfaction levels of the two groups were, respectively, 4.83 and 3.8, adding support to the apparent association. When regressed against overall satisfaction levels, satisfaction with this mechanism produced the highest  $R^2$  of any factor considered here. At 8.11 percent, however, it is still quite low, probably due to the presence of several respondents who were either dissatisfied overall but satisfied with the working group or dissatisfied with the working group but at least somewhat satisfied overall. A more detailed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this engagement mechanism is offered immediately below.

*Stakeholder working group*

The working group was convened for three six-hour meetings over the course of the

<b>Table 9: Maine Stakeholder Working Group</b>		
<b>Average Satisfaction Level</b>	<b>Percent Satisfied</b>	<b>Percent Dissatisfied</b>
4.26	54.60%	45.50%

plan development process.<sup>24</sup> Meetings were run by a facilitator unaffiliated with either the agency or any of the represented organizations.<sup>25</sup> Working group members were tasked with reviewing and providing feedback on the prioritization of species, the tables used to present information, the guidelines for funding allocation, and, to some extent, conservation actions.<sup>26</sup> Invitations for inclusion in the working group were sent to 64 fairly diverse groups of government and NGO stakeholders, though only about half attended one or more meeting.<sup>27</sup> Thirty individuals not employed by the Maine wildlife agency attended the first two meetings, though specific individuals attending varied.<sup>28</sup> Information was not available on attendance at the third meeting.

Stakeholder satisfaction with the working group was mixed, with 54.6 percent and 45.5 percent being respectively satisfied and dissatisfied with the mechanism. The average satisfaction level of 4.27 indicates some satisfaction, but is not substantially above a neutral level of 4. The aspects of the working group that may have influenced satisfaction levels are explored below.

Of the 11 individuals who responded to questions regarding the working group (all of whom had attended meetings), at least 81.8 percent agreed that they were given sufficient notice of the meetings, that sufficient and appropriate background materials were provided, that the meetings were well facilitated, and that participants were given sufficient opportunity to express their opinions. Each of these factors had an average level of agreement of over 5.4, with the statement “meetings were well facilitated” receiving an average level of agreement of 5.91, the highest recorded for this engagement mechanism. The three statements with the lowest average agreement levels were “you were given sufficient notice of the time and location of each working group meeting” (4.64), “the objective of each working group meeting was achieved” (4.45), and “input

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<sup>24</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). 8-4

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). Appendix 14

<sup>27</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). 8-3,8-4

<sup>28</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife, Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy Working Group Meeting #1 Attendees, agency document, March 28, 2005; Maine Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife, Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy Working Group Meeting #2 Attendees, agency document, April 27, 2005



gathered at the working group meetings influenced the format of the plan” (4.18); about a third of respondents disagreed with each statement.

There was a strong apparent association between agreement that meeting objectives were achieved and satisfaction with the working group. One hundred percent of the respondents who agreed that objectives were achieved were satisfied with the engagement mechanism, while 100 percent of those who disagreed were dissatisfied. Similarly, all of those who agreed that the working group influenced the format of the plan were satisfied, while only 25 percent of those who disagreed were. It is worth also noting that 100 percent of those who disagreed that “input gathered at the working group meetings influenced the content of the plan,” or that “meeting participants were asked for input on substantive issues” were dissatisfied with the working group. Respectively, 85.7 percent and 75 percent of those who agreed with these statements were satisfied with the working group.

Thirty-six point four percent of respondents agreed that key organizations or interests were absent from the working group, while an equal number disagreed with this statement. Respondents once again specified marine interests, forestry companies, and the Department of Transportation as desirable additions to the process. Seventy-five percent of those who did not feel that key organizations or interests were missing from the working group were satisfied with this engagement mechanism; those who did feel that groups were missing were equally split between satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

In conclusion, while the facilitation of meetings seems to have been generally well received, there was concern among some respondents about the extent and scope of partner influence. As noted above, these latter factors appear to be strongly associated with participant satisfaction (e.g. most of those who agree are satisfied and most of those who disagree are not), which may make them worthy of special attention if another set of working group meetings is convened.

#### *Comment and Review period*

For three and a half weeks starting in late July of 2007 the draft plan was posted on the MDIF&W website for review and comment.<sup>29</sup> While the comment period was

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<sup>29</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). 10-4

open to all members of the public, those who had participated in the working group were particularly encouraged to review the draft plan.<sup>30</sup>

Of the nine respondents who offered their perspective on this engagement mechanism, fifty-six percent of these respondents had reviewed the plan and submitted



comments, while the other 49 percent had only reviewed the plan. An additional two respondents, who did not answer questions related to this mechanism, had done neither. More than 75 percent of those who answered questions addressing the public comment period were satisfied with it as an engagement mechanism.

Most respondents felt that the public comment period was well run, though several had questions about the extent to which comments influenced the plan. Eighty-eight point nine percent of respondents agreed that the comment period was an appropriate length, that the draft plan was easy to access on the website, and that submitting comments on the plan was easy. Each of these statements had an average agreement level of 5.44. On the other hand, only 44.4 percent of respondents agreed that the comments received during this period influenced either the content of the plan or its format. Average agreement for both types of influence was 4.38.

Belief that comments influenced the content and format of the plan appears to be associated with satisfaction with the public comment period (respondents uniformly reported the same level of agreement for statements referring to content and format). One hundred percent of those who believed comments had influence over content and format were satisfied with this engagement mechanism, with an average satisfaction level of 5.75. On the other hand, those who did not believe comments had influence had an average satisfaction level of 3.5, with 50 percent dissatisfied with public comment period, and the other half reporting neutrality.

When asked to provide suggestions for future public comment periods, three of the five respondents to the question alluded to the size and density of the final document.

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<sup>30</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Representative, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, April 11, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

One respondent noted, the “document and supporting material was quite long and complex, potentially making it difficult for many to access, read, and absorb.” To address a similar concern, another respondent recommended providing a guide to the plan to make it easier to comment on a particular species or habitat type. Similarly, one respondent suggested posting sections of the plan for comment during the development process to allow for a multi-stage review process.

*Implementation and impact of the plan on stakeholders*

The sections above gave an overview of how stakeholders were engaged in the development of the Maine plan, what aspects of this engagement process respondents were most satisfied with, and which factors appeared most strongly associated with attitudes towards the overall engagement process. Attention is now turned to respondent satisfaction with plan implementation, as well as the impact this process has had on the organizations or interests they represent.

In the two years since the Maine plan was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, implementation has primarily taken the form of the continuation of the successful preexisting programs around which the plan was built.<sup>31</sup> Two of these programs (Beginning with Habitat and the Comprehensive Species Planning Process) have long histories of stakeholder engagement, which may partially explain why a higher percentage of Maine respondents report collaborating on plan projects than do those from New Hampshire or Vermont.<sup>32</sup> The MDIF&W also created an implementation team, made up of both stakeholders and agency employees, which was intended to convene periodically throughout the implementation process.<sup>33</sup> Partially due to factors beyond the agency’s control, the team has had only one meeting, which took place during May of 2007.<sup>34</sup> At this May meeting, participants worked on developing strategies to better communicate the key elements of the plan to stakeholders. They were also asked by the

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<sup>31</sup> Agency Employee. Telephone Interview with Lauren Pidot, April 11, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI;

<sup>32</sup> Representative of Large Maine NGO. Telephone Interview with Lauren Pidot, September 28, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI

<sup>33</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). 10-3; Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, September 27, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>34</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, (MDIFW), “Maine’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.” (Augusta: ME: 2005). 8-6

<sup>34</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife representative, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, April 11, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.; Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, September 27, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

agency to consider contributing funds towards the state’s match requirement for its annual SWG allocation.<sup>35</sup> Agencies are required to provide matching funds to access SWG monies; concern has been expressed that the MDIF&W may not be able to muster sufficient funds in the near future.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Vermont<sup>37</sup> and New Hampshire,<sup>38</sup> Maine has not distributed any portion of its SWG funds to non-agency partners in the past, though a proposal is now being considered to do this.<sup>39</sup>

Despite significant collaboration on pre-existing programs, several respondents reported frustration with the limited engagement of stakeholders since the publication of the plan, as well as with the relatively low level of change that has been associated with implementation. As reported in Table 11 only 18.2 percent of respondents were satisfied with implementation, while 45.5 percent were dissatisfied, for an average satisfaction level of 3.5. The remaining 35.3 percent of respondents were either neutral on the subject or selected “I don’t know.”

<b>Implementation factor</b>	<b>Average Agreement/ Satisfaction Level</b>	<b>Percent Agreed/ Satisfied*</b>	<b>Percent Disagreed/ Dissatisfied</b>
Satisfaction with the plan implementation process since 2005	3.5	18.20%	45.50%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, is working with the agency on projects outline in the plan	5	72.73%	18.20%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted funding or program priorities as a result of the plan	3.36	18.18%	54.60%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has formed new partnerships as a result of the plan	3.91	27.27%	36.40%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has used the plan in some way	4.73	63.64%	9.10%
* Percentages do not always add up to 100 % due to neutral and "I don't know" responses			

<sup>35</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, September 27, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife representative, written communication with Nicole Lewis, January 22, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>38</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 1, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>39</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, September 27, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

When asked to comment on the aspects of implementation they were most satisfied with, two respondents specified the well-respected Beginning with Habitat program. Others expressed approval for the inception of the implementation team and the increasing level of awareness of the plan in the Maine conservation community. When asked what they were least satisfied with, four respondents specified the limited engagement of stakeholders in the implementation process, while two were frustrated by the lack of change that had happened due to the plan. Three respondents also recommended that the state distribute SWG funds to non-agency partners in order to engage them in implementation and that they increase the transparency with which SWG allocation decisions are made.

Beyond their attitudes about the overall implementation process, most respondents are participating in plan implementation in some way. As reported in Table 11, 72.8 percent of respondents agreed that they were collaborating with the agency on one or more plan project, while 63.64 reported having used the plan in some way (for a grant application, etc...). These are both higher percentages than were reported for either New Hampshire or Vermont. Only 18 percent and 27.27 percent, however, had respectively shifted priorities or formed new partnerships due to the plan. When asked to specify how they have been affected by the plan or involved in its implementation, four respondents described their involvement as restricted to participation in various pre-existing projects. Two others, however, described new projects that have been influenced by the plan, one in collaboration with the Maine Department of Transportation and the other involving an NGO adopting the plan as a conservation planning document. One respondent also described referencing the plan in a grant proposal.

The critical question for this study is whether the varying levels of participation, impact, and satisfaction reported above are associated with the satisfaction of respondents with the stakeholder engagement processes. To start with, there is an interesting, if not particularly strong, inverse relationship between satisfaction with the implementation process and satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement process. As Table 12 shows, those who were satisfied with stakeholder engagement were, on average, slightly less satisfied with plan implementation than those who were dissatisfied with stakeholder

engagement. In addition, 57.5 percent of those who were satisfied with stakeholder engagement were dissatisfied with implementation, while only 25 percent of those who were dissatisfied with engagement felt this way about implementation. While this relationship is not particularly strong ( $R^2$  is 15.94 percent), it does suggest the possibility that, for at least some respondents, being happy with the stakeholder engagement may have built expectations that caused disappointment with implementation.

<b>Table 12: Association between implementation factors and satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement process</b>			
<b>Implementation factor</b>		<b>Respondents satisfied with engagement process*</b>	<b>Respondents dissatisfied with engagement process</b>
Satisfaction with the plan implementation process since 2005	Average satisfaction with implementation	3.43	3.67
	Percent satisfied	14.30%	25.00%
	Percent dissatisfied with implementation	57.50%	25.00%
	$R^2$	15.94% <sup>†</sup>	
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, is working with the agency on one or more projects outline in the plan	Average agreement	5.29	4.5
	Percent agreed*	85.70%	50.00%
	Percent disagreed	14.50%	25.00%
	$R^2$	28.94%	
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted funding or program priorities as a result of the plan	Average agreement	4	2.25
	Percent agreed*	28.60%	0.00%
	Percent disagreed	42.90%	75%
	$R^2$	43.69%	
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted formed new partnerships as a result of the plan	Average agreement	4.14	3.5
	Percent agreed*	42.90%	0.00%
	Percent disagreed	42.90%	25.00%
	$R^2$	8.07%	
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has used the plan in some way (e.g. referenced in a grant)	Average agreement	4.86	4.5
	Percent agreed*	71.50%	50%
	Percent disagreed	14.30%	0.00%
	$R^2$	4.45%	
*Due to neutral and "don't know" responses percentages do not always add up to 100%			
~ $R^2$ is the percent of variance in one set of satisfaction/agreement levels accounted for by another as determined through linear regression			
† relationship between factors is inverse			

It appears that there is some association between engagement satisfaction and shifted priorities and engagement satisfaction and collaboration on plan projects, though none was found for either the formation of new partnerships or the use of the plan. While most respondents disagreed that they, or the organizations they represent, had shifted project or funding priorities due to the plan, those who were satisfied with the

engagement process were significantly more likely to have shifted priorities than those who were not (in fact all of those who reported shifting priorities were satisfied with engagement). The  $R^2$  found through regressing satisfaction and shifted priorities (43.69 percent) was the highest seen for Maine respondents, suggesting that a positive experience in plan development influenced, but was certainly not sufficient to produce, changes in stakeholder priorities.

Collaboration on plan projects also appeared to be associated with engagement satisfaction, though to a lesser degree. The 72.7 percent of respondents who reported having collaborated on projects was composed of both individuals who were satisfied and dissatisfied with stakeholder engagement. However, a substantially higher percentage of those who were satisfied reported having collaborated compared to those who were dissatisfied (85.7 percent and 50 percent respectively).

There are, of course, numerous factors other than engagement in the development process that may influence how stakeholders are involved in, and affected by, plan implementation. These include, but are certainly not limited to, the usefulness of the plan as a guide to action, how engaged stakeholders were with the agency and with each other prior to the development of the plan, the availability of funding tied to plan priorities and actions, and the interest of an individual or organization in aligning its priorities with those of the state. These factors are only partially addressed here, though all would be worthy of further inquiry. The issue of new funding associated with the plan is addressed in a characterization of the development and implementation of plans in the Northeastern United States prepared in association with this study. This report can be found at [www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/swap](http://www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/swap).

The majority of respondents agreed that the plan was both “well laid out and easy to navigate” and an “effective wildlife conservation strategy for Maine” (see Table 6). There does not, however, appear to be a strong association between agreeing that the plan is effective and being satisfied with implementation. Indeed, a higher percentage of respondents who expressed neutrality on the subject of the plan’s effectiveness were satisfied with implementation, as compared to those who expressed agreement (33.3 percent and 16.7 percent respectively). There appear to be similarly weak relationships between agreement that the plan is effective and collaboration on plan projects, shifting

priorities as a result of the plan, and use of the plan. There does, however, seem to be some association between perceptions of effectiveness and the development of new partnerships. While the  $R^2$  is relatively low (16.07 percent), those who believe the plan is effective were more likely to agree that they have formed new partnerships than either those who expressed neutrality or disagreement.

While a relatively low  $R^2$  (12.62 percent) confirms the lack of strong association between agreement with plan effectiveness and satisfaction with implementation, it should be noted that none of those who disagreed that the plan was effective were satisfied with implementation (though 50 percent were neutral). One of these respondents connected his or her disagreement with dissatisfaction with implementation by describing the plan as having “no prioritization of actions,” and arguing that this makes it “essentially useless as a guiding document.”<sup>40</sup>

The effect of previous involvement with the agency on the extent to which respondents were involved in, and affected by, implementation was difficult to deduce in Maine (as it was in other states considered here). All but one of the Maine respondents had previously both collaborated with the agency on one or more project and submitted comments on one or more plans. The remaining individual had commented on a plan, but had never collaborated with the agency. This individual’s level of agreement with the statements that his or her organization had shifted priorities or developed new partnerships as a result of the plan were significantly higher than the average levels of agreement of the rest of the Maine respondents (6 compared to 3.1 and 6 compared to 3.7 respectively), though they were nearly identical for collaboration on plan projects and use of the plan. With only one respondent who had not previously collaborated with the agency it is difficult to make generalizations, but it is possible that those who had collaborated in the past had already aligned their priorities and formed partnerships prior to the development of the plan. Further investigation using random sampling of stakeholders would be useful to better understand the relationship between previous engagement and participation in implementation.

### *Recommendations*

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<sup>40</sup> Maine Survey Response #13, 11/20/07



Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are offered for the development of future iterations of the Maine plan and the implementation of the current plan.

Recommended actions are intended to maintain and enhance stakeholder satisfaction with the engagement process and boost support for implementation.

### **Stakeholder Engagement in Plan Development**

- Engage stakeholders earlier in the plan development process. While only three respondents suggested that stakeholder engagement should be initiated earlier, offering stakeholders the option of helping to develop the approach to plan development or review may boost acceptance of the process and ownership over the final plan.
- Continue to ensure that participant input, particularly as gathered from the working group, has an influence over revisions or new iterations of the plan. Make sure stakeholders understand how their input will be taken into account and what aspects of the plan it will shape (e.g. selection of SGCN and description of threats, but not, perhaps, fundamental approaches).
- Set realistic goals for working group meetings and ensure that these goals are met.
- Seek to more fully engage coastal and tribal interests in the plan development process, as well as the Department of Transportation and other agencies or organizations with significant influence over land-use.
- Develop a guide to the plan to facilitate review by those interested in commenting on only a subset of species or habitats (e.g. provide page references for threats and actions addressing birds, wetlands, specific mammal species etc...).

### **Implementation**

- Convene implementation team with increased frequency to more fully integrate stakeholders into the implementation process.
- If feasible, make a percent of SWG funds available to non-agency partners in order to enhance support for, and participation in, the implementation process.

This may also encourage stakeholder organizations to provide needed matching funds for SWG monies if the agency falls short.

## **New Hampshire**

### *Overview*

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHFG) employed four primary methods of engaging stakeholders in the plan development process. Each mechanism is described briefly here and in more detail below. First, a significant amount of SWG funding was allocated to contracting with stakeholders to develop and write portions of the plan.<sup>41</sup> Second, the agency convened two large stakeholder meetings during the development of the plan, with the purpose of gaining input on issue prioritization, strategies, actions, and the development of conservation tools.<sup>42</sup> Third, agency representatives held numerous smaller meetings with stakeholders around the state, primarily with the intent of informing the interested individuals about the plan and gathering input on the development of strategies.<sup>43</sup>

Lastly, the University of New Hampshire's Cooperative Extension worked with NHFG staff to develop and conduct a web-survey to assess public priorities on threats and conservation actions. This survey garnered 1,256 responses from interested New Hampshire residents.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike the Maine and Vermont agencies, NHFG did not make use of a public comment period.<sup>45</sup> While, like



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<sup>41</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 1, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>42</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), "New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan," (Concord, NH: 2005). 1-2 – 1-3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 1-4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 1-3.

Vermont, it did include non-governmental stakeholders on the plan communication team, they were not included on either the planning team or the core biologist team.<sup>46</sup> The mechanism of including stakeholders on development or technical committees is thus not addressed here. These teams did, however, include employees of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service, one of whom was engaged as the co-coordinator of the plan development process. The cooperative extension, however, is funded by state, federal, and county governments and is thus not considered a NGO.<sup>47</sup>

As Table 4 (in Aggregate Findings) indicated, of the states considered here New Hampshire had the highest average satisfaction and agreement levels for stakeholder engagement, plan effectiveness, plan layout and navigability, and plan implementation. Eighty-eight percent point eight percent of respondents were satisfied with the stakeholder engagement process, while none were dissatisfied (see Table 13). Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed that the plan was effective and well laid out, with 12.5 percent disagreeing with the former statement and no respondents disagreeing with the latter.

In comparison to the other two states, New Hampshire's average agreement level on the statement "the plan is well laid out and easy to navigate" is particularly notable (see Table 4). New Hampshire was the only one of the states to have contracted with an independent editor and designer for the plan, which may be responsible for its significantly higher average level.<sup>48</sup> While all of the satisfaction and agreement levels by New Hampshire respondents are relatively impressive, it should also be remembered that this state had the lowest response rate of those considered here (25 percent compared to 32.4 percent) and so may be the most vulnerable to bias (see "limitations of methodology" above).

Most respondents agreed that the engagement process was appropriately timed and that stakeholders were able to influence the content of the plan. There was, however, significantly less confidence that stakeholders were able to influence the format of the

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<sup>45</sup> Representative of NHFG, written correspondence with Lauren Pidot, November 20, 2007.

<sup>46</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), "New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan," (Concord, NH: 2005). Appendix F.

<sup>47</sup> Pike, John, "About Us," University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension <http://extension.unh.edu/AboutUs/AboutUs.htm> (Accessed March 20, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 1, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

plan. The majority of stakeholders did not feel that key organizations or interests were missing from the process, though many seemed unsure of whether any had been overrepresented in the process.

During the first two years after the plan was completed New Hampshire successfully met its scheduled goals for plan implementation. It has actively engaged stakeholders in implementation through a follow-up summit and an implementation team. It also directly contracts with stakeholders to work on aspects of plan implementation. While rating it less highly than the stakeholder engagement process, most respondents were quite satisfied with implementation. New Hampshire does, however, have the lowest percentage of respondents either collaborating with the agency on plan projects or using the plan.

As in other sections of this report, individual and average satisfaction and agreement levels are reported in terms of a likert scale (see likert scale at right). Average

<b>The Likert Scale</b>	
<b>7</b>	= Strongly Agree / Very Satisfied
<b>6</b>	= Agree / Satisfied
<b>5</b>	= Somewhat Agree / Somewhat Satisfied
<b>4</b>	= Neutral
<b>3</b>	= Somewhat Disagree / Somewhat Dissatisfied
<b>2</b>	= Disagree / Dissatisfied
<b>1</b>	= Strongly Disagree / Very Dissatisfied

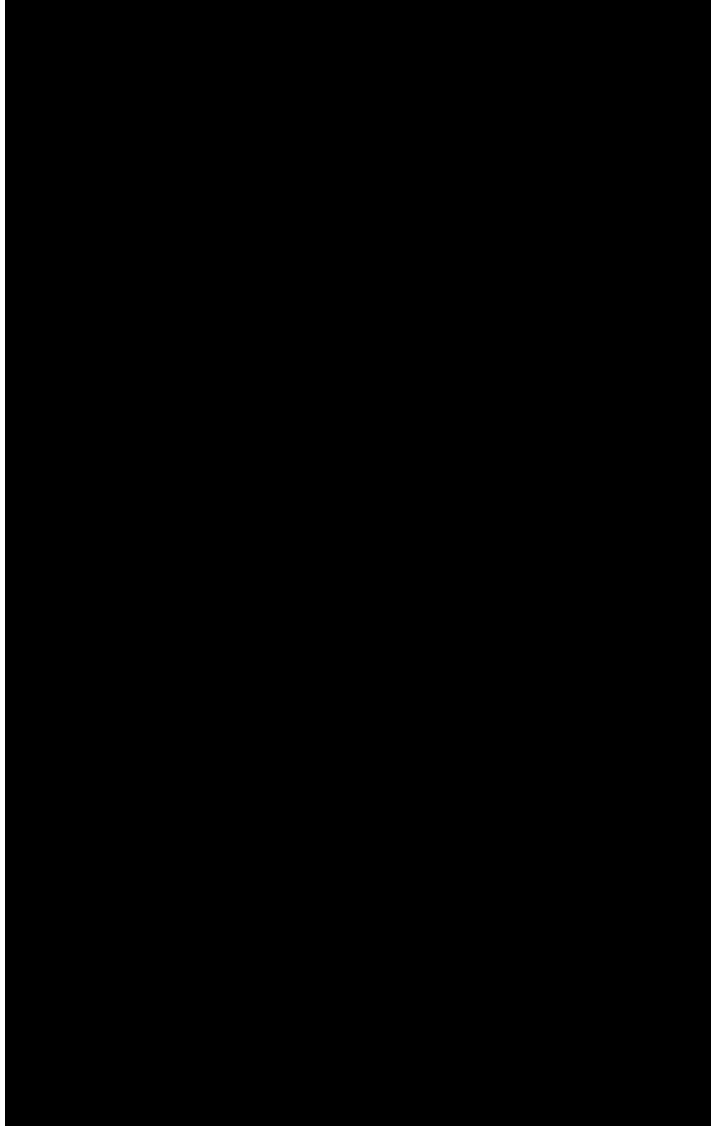
satisfaction and agreement frequently fall in between the seven likert scale levels.

#### *Drivers of Satisfaction*

In order to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the stakeholder engagement process, as well as which of its components were most associated with overall satisfaction, respondents were asked to report their agreement with a variety of statements describing different aspects of the process. Unlike Maine, several strong associations were apparent between average agreement levels and satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement process (see Table 15 below). However, the fact that no respondents were dissatisfied with the stakeholder engagement process makes presenting these associations, beyond simply reporting the  $R^2$ , somewhat difficult. Instead of comparing the levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction between respondents who agreed and disagreed with a particular statement, percentages of those who were satisfied and who expressed neutrality are compared. It should be noted that percentages of respondents who are satisfied, dissatisfied, agreed, or disagreed are all actually aggregations of three levels of each attitude (e.g. the percentage of respondents who were

satisfied with x statement is the combined percentage of those who selected somewhat satisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied).  $R^2$  values, on the other hand, capture all levels of gradation, though they are quite susceptible to outliers. As always, it is important to remember that even where patterns of association do appear, this does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the two factors.

Stakeholders were engaged in the development of the plan not only in a variety of ways, but also at a variety of times. Respectively, the first Wildlife Summit, survey, and Wildlife Conservation Strategy Forum took place 18 months, one year, and five months prior to the completion of the plan.<sup>49</sup> Small stakeholder meetings took place throughout the process, while stakeholders contracted to complete portions of the plan were engaged, by necessity, early in the process.<sup>50</sup> As reported in Table 14, Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed that the timing of stakeholder engagement was appropriate, with the remaining 25 percent selecting “I don’t know.” The timing of engagement was not mentioned in open ended question responses.



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<sup>49</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), "New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan," (Concord, NH: 2005). 1-1

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

All individuals who agreed that the timing of engagement was appropriate were also satisfied with the engagement process. Of the two individuals who selected “I don’t know” on the subject of timing, one was neutral on the overall engagement process while the other was “very satisfied.” The  $R^2$  found by regressing agreement on this subject and overall satisfaction was quite low, as those who selected a particular agreement level (somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) did not uniformly select the corresponding satisfaction level (somewhat satisfied, satisfied, very satisfied).

The ability of stakeholders to influence the content of the plan did not seem to be an issue of concern to the majority of respondents. Seventy-five percent agreed that “stakeholders were able to influence the content of the plan,” while 12.5 percent reported neutrality on this statement and 12.5 percent selected “I don’t know.” Two responses to an open ended question alluded to the issue of stakeholder influence over the plan. First, one respondent reported that the aspect of stakeholder engagement he or she was most satisfied with was the “feeling that it was truly a dialogue.”<sup>51</sup> This indicates that, at least as perceived by this individual, the process involved more than the agency informing or looking for buy-in from stakeholders. Another respondent, however, recommended that the agency “include my opinion,” as a way to improve the stakeholder engagement process.<sup>52</sup> This would seem to suggest misgivings about how engagement was conducted, though the individual was “neutral” on the overall engagement process.

All individuals who agreed that stakeholders were able to influence plan content were also satisfied with the overall engagement process. The 12.5 percent of respondents who were neutral on this topic were also satisfied with the overall process, while the individual who selected “I don’t know” was neutral on the topic. Because selected levels of satisfaction and agreement did tend to match up for these two factors (e.g. those who were more in agreement tended to also be more satisfied), the  $R^2$  was quite high (78.13 percent).

The majority of respondents believed that an appropriate diversity of stakeholders was engaged in the plan development process, though 28.6 percent felt that certain groups or interests were missing. However, only Plymouth State University was

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<sup>51</sup> New Hampshire Survey Response # 4, November 20, 2007

<sup>52</sup> New Hampshire Survey Response # 2, November 19, 2007

specifically identified as missing from the process. On the other hand, four respondents commented approvingly on the inclusiveness of the stakeholder engagement process, complementing the agency on its “proactive outreach to a broad sweep of stakeholders.”<sup>53</sup>

A quarter of respondents felt that certain organizations or interests were actually to overrepresented in the process, while 12.5 percent disagreed. The Nature Conservancy, New Hampshire Audubon, and the University of New Hampshire were described as the most significant plan development partners by a number of participants,<sup>54</sup> though only New Hampshire Audubon was singled out by a survey respondent as “overrepresented.” In an interview, a representative of another NGO also described the Nature Conservancy as having played a “mighty role” in plan development, though it was not suggested that this was inappropriate.<sup>55</sup> As one survey respondent argued, “some organizations were much more engaged in the process” but he or she wouldn’t “characterize this as ‘overrepresented’.” It may be this type of ambivalence towards this term that caused 62.5 percent of respondents to select “neutral” or “I don’t know” in response to the statement “certain interests or organizations were overrepresented in the stakeholder engagement process.”

When regressed against satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement process, both agreement that organizations and interests were missing and agreement that they were overrepresented were found to have exceptionally high  $R^2$ . In both cases just over 90 percent of the variation in respondents satisfaction levels could be accounted for by their levels of agreement or disagreement with these statements. Those who agreed with these statements selected neutrality or a lower gradient of satisfaction than those who disagreed. It should be noted, however, that “I don’t know” responses are not included in regressions. This accounted for 14.3 percent of responses to the statement addressing missing organizations and 50 percent of responses to the statement addressing

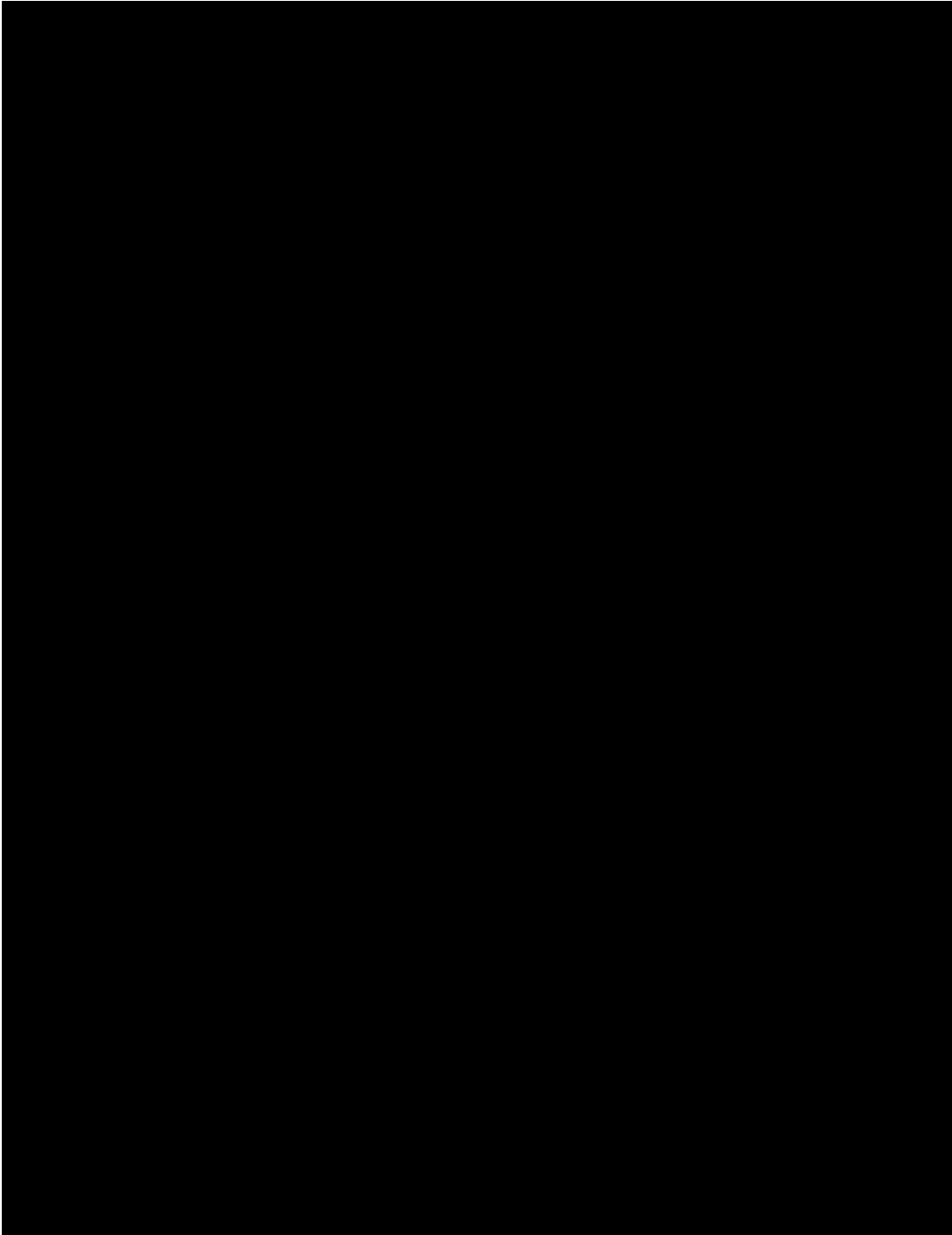
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<sup>53</sup> New Hampshire Survey Response # 5, November 20, 2007

<sup>54</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, April 16, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.; New Hampshire Conservation NGO representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 10, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.; New Hampshire Conservation NGO representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 10, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>55</sup> New Hampshire Conservation NGO representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 10, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

overrepresentation. Thus, while these associations appear high, they do not include the perspectives of all respondents.



While no question in this survey directly touches on the topic, in response to an open ended question two respondents described feeling that updates to stakeholders during the development process were insufficient. One went on to specifically

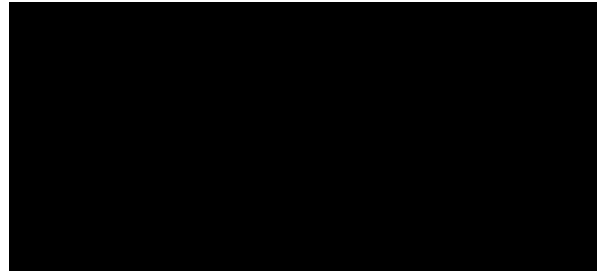


recommend that interim reports of the core biological committee be posted on-line in the future to allow stakeholders to keep apprised of this aspect of the process.

The association between satisfaction with specific mechanisms of stakeholder engagement and satisfaction with the overall engagement process was, in some cases, quite difficult to tease out. For reasons explained below, very few responses were provided on both the use of small stakeholder meetings and surveys, making it difficult to get a strong sense of association. For both large stakeholder meetings and contracting with stakeholders, however, it does appear that those who were generally more satisfied with the specific mechanism were also more satisfied with the overall process. When regressed with overall satisfaction, satisfaction with both mechanisms was found to have  $R^2$  of 50 percent or more (see Table 15). A more detailed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this engagement mechanism is offered immediately below.

*Contracting of sections of the plan to stakeholders*

NHFG allocated more than \$500,000 of SWG funding to contract with experts from NGOs, agencies, and academic institutions.<sup>56</sup> Partners that prepared part or all of various sections of the plan include



universities, federal agencies, state agencies other than NHFG, and non-governmental organizations.<sup>57</sup> They specifically included, among others, the University of New Hampshire, New Hampshire Audubon, and The Nature Conservancy, all of which were identified by an agency employee as NHFG's most significant partners in plan development.<sup>58</sup>

To ensure well informed answers, respondents were normally asked only to respond to questions relating to specific engagement mechanisms in which they had participated. Since a limited number of groups received contracts to produce parts of the

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<sup>56</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 1, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>57</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), "New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan," (Concord, NH: 2005). 1-1.

<sup>58</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 1, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI

plan, however, questions related to contracting were directed to the full range of respondents in the hopes of boosting the response rate. Seven individuals responded to questions in this section of the survey, but only one had actually been under contract to develop part of the plan.

Seventy-one point five percent of respondents were satisfied with contracting as a stakeholder engagement mechanism, while none were dissatisfied. The remaining 28.6 percent of respondents reported feeling neutral on the subject. The one respondent who had been contracted to work on the plan felt strongly that this was a positive way to engage stakeholders, arguing “not only did [contracting with stakeholders] result in a stronger document through use of the full range of available expertise in the state, it also promoted buy-in to the plan by these same partners.”<sup>59</sup> No other respondents offered comments on this engagement mechanism.

Respondents were asked to report their agreement level with five statements describing the fairness, credibility, and effectiveness of the contracting process. The majority of respondents agreed that stakeholders receiving contracts represented an appropriate array of interests and that those under contract had access to appropriate science-based information. No more than 14.3 percent of respondents disagreed with any statement about this process, though forty-two point nine percent reported not knowing either whether the process by which contracts were distributed was fair and transparent or whether contracting had a positive influence on plan content. While nearly half of respondents did not know whether contracting had a positive influence on plan content, at 5.5 this statement received the second highest average agreement level (“I don’t know” responses do not influence average agreement levels). The highest average agreement level (6) was found for the statement regarding access to appropriate science-based information. The two lowest average agreement levels were found for the statements “the process by which stakeholders were contracted to develop or write aspects of the plan was fair and transparent” (4.75) and “contracting with stakeholders positively influenced the format of the plan” (5).

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<sup>59</sup>New Hampshire Survey Response # 10, December 6, 2007

There were limited associations that could be teased out between levels of agreement on aspects of contracting and satisfaction with this mechanism. Regardless of selecting disagree, agree, neutral, or I don't know on any particular question most respondents were satisfied with the contracting process. Of the two individuals who reported neutral satisfaction levels, one selected "I don't know" for each statement, while the other reported not knowing whether contracts were distributed in a fair and transparent way or whether contracting had a positive influence on plan comment, but agreed with all other statements. Despite disagreeing with four out of the five statements (and being neutral on the fifth), one respondent was satisfied with the contracting as an engagement mechanism.

*Stakeholder Summits*

In March of 2004, NHFG convened a Wildlife Summit intended to increase public awareness of the plan development process and engage stakeholders in the prioritization of conservation issues and the development of actions and strategies. One hundred and twelve individuals representing a wide range of NGOs and agencies attended the Summit.<sup>60</sup> A year later the agency invited Summit attendees to return for a Wildlife Conservation Strategy Forum. Twenty-four individuals accepted the invitation and spent a day offering input on strategies, actions, and conservation tools.<sup>61</sup>

**Table 17: New Hampshire stakeholder**

Average Satisfaction Level	Percent Satisfied*	Percent Dissatisfied
5	60.00%	20.00%
*Due to neutral and "I don't know" responses percentages do not always add up to 100%		

Of the five individuals who responded to this section, 60 percent were satisfied with these two events, while 20 percent were dissatisfied. Respondents generally felt that these summits were well organized and that they offered genuine opportunities to provide input on substantive issues. There was concern among some respondents, however, that notification of the meetings was not sent out early enough, that insufficient updates were provided between the meetings, and that certain interests or organizations were missing or overrepresented at the summits. It should be noted that a significant percentage of respondents (between 40 and 60 percent) selected "I don't know" in response to four

<sup>60</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), "New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan,"(Concord, NH: 2005). 1-3

<sup>61</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), "New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan,"(Concord, NH: 2005). 1-4

statements addressing the influence of the summits and the absence or overrepresentation of interests and organizations.

Sixty percent of respondents agreed that the objective of each large stakeholder meeting was clear, that these objectives were met, that participants were asked for input on substantive issues, that participants were given opportunities to have their opinions heard, and that the events were well facilitated. No respondents disagreed with any of these statements, or in fact most of the statements included in this section. On only three statements did any percentage of respondents express disagreement: sufficient notice was given of the time and location of each meeting, participants were kept up-to-date between meetings, and sufficient background materials were provided for each meeting.

The highest average agreement levels were found for the statements “input gathered at the two events influenced the content of the plan” (6), “events were well facilitated” (5.75), “participants were asked for input on substantive issues” (5.75), and “the objective of each event was clear” (5.75). The two lowest average agreement levels were found for the statements “between the two events you were kept up-to-date on plan development” (4.5) and “you were given sufficient notice of the time and location of the Summit and the Forum” (3.75). Only 20 percent of respondents agreed with the latter statement, while 40 percent disagreed.

Forty percent of respondents also agreed that key interests had been missing from the meetings and that certain interests had been overrepresented, while the remaining 60 percent reported not knowing whether these statements were true. This could imply either a lack of knowledge about the full range of interests present at the meetings, the first of which was fairly large, or ambivalence about interests being entirely missing or truly “overrepresented” rather than just actively involved. Respondents did not specify any particular groups or interests as missing from the meetings. New Hampshire Audubon was described by one respondent as overrepresented, though this individual noted that the organization is legitimately a major player in habitat conservation.

There were limited associations that could be teased out of responses to this section of the survey. The 20 percent of respondents who disagreed with the three statements noted above were satisfied with the summits as an engagement mechanism, indicating that this periodic disagreement did not strongly shape their attitudes towards

the meetings. However, those respondents who were dissatisfied with the summits were neutral on every statement except those that related to whether interests were missing or overrepresented. To both of these statements affirmative answers were giving, suggesting that, for this portion of the respondents, perceived shortcomings in the make-up of the participants were responsible for dissatisfaction with the meetings. The 20 percent of respondents who indicated that they felt neutral about the meeting responded with “I don’t know” to every statement, suggesting either that they either did not recall the details of the meetings or that they were fatigued with the survey.

*Small-scale stakeholder meetings*

In addition to the Wildlife Summit and the Wildlife Conservation Strategy Forum, NGFH and University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension employees held smaller or shorter meetings

<b>Table 18: New Hampshire small-scale stakeholder meetings</b>		
<b>Average Satisfaction Level</b>	<b>Percent Satisfied*</b>	<b>Percent Dissatisfied</b>
4.33	33.30%	0.00%
*Due to neutral and "I don't know" responses percentages do not always add up to 100%		

with groups of stakeholders throughout the state. Between October 21, 2003 and July 26, 2007, approximately 50 of these events were held, most taking place at relevant conferences, workshops, or meetings.<sup>62</sup> These meetings were sometimes used to recruit potential contributors for the plan or to solicit in put on specific issues, but were often primarily focused on increasing awareness of the plan.<sup>63</sup> According to NGFH, over 1000 individuals were reached through these meetings.<sup>64</sup>

The response rate for questions related to stakeholder meetings was quite low, with only two respondents offering responses. Findings presented here should thus be understood in light of this very limited response rate (teasing out associations was not attempted). The low response rate was probably due to both the placement of the relevant section near the end of the survey and the small number of respondents who reported having participated in these meetings. It is also likely that attending these meetings was a gateway to further engagement rather the primary engagement mechanism for most respondents. A third respondent to these questions was excluded because he or she had

<sup>62</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), "New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan,"(Concord, NH: 2005). Appendix J

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*

not participated in the agency survey and selected “I don’t know” in response to every question.

The two respondents were split in their assessment of the small-scale stakeholder meetings, with one feeling “somewhat satisfied” with the process and the other reporting neutrality. They agreed that meeting participants were given the opportunity to express their opinions, but were otherwise differed in their reactions to statements describing the mechanism. The individual who was somewhat satisfied disagreed that the small-scale stakeholder meetings were adequately advertised, and that sufficient background materials were provided to participants, but agreed that the meetings were well facilitated and that input gathered at the meetings influenced the content and the format of the plan. In contrast, the individual who reported feeling neutral towards this mechanism agreed that the meetings were well advertised and that sufficient background materials were provided. This respondent did not disagree with any of the statements, but was neutral on the issue of whether participants were asked for input on substantive issues. In addition, the respondent commented that he or she couldn’t remember the details of the meeting, which presumably led to the selection of “I don’t know” in response to whether meetings were well facilitated and whether input from the meeting influenced the content and format of the plan.

Given how few responses were received to these questions, and the lack of uniformity among the answers that were submitted, it is difficult to make generalizations about the small-scale stakeholder meetings. It appears that the meetings (or at least those attended by these respondents) did provide a forum for participants to express their opinions. There was some concern, however, over whether the meetings were sufficiently advertised and whether sufficient background materials were provided.

*Surveys*

In 2004, the NHFG conducted a web-based survey to gather information on public priorities for wildlife conservation. This information was used in the development of conservation strategies for the

<b>Average Satisfaction Level</b>	<b>Percent Satisfied*</b>	<b>Percent Dissatisfied</b>
6.5	100.00%	0.00%
*Due to neutral and "I don't know" responses percentages do not always add up to 100%		

plan.<sup>65</sup> A link to the survey was posted on the agency website and announcements were made on New Hampshire Public Radio, at relevant conferences and meetings, and via a mailing sent to nearly half a million utility customers.<sup>66</sup> One thousand two hundred and fifty-six New Hampshire residents completed the survey.<sup>67</sup>

NHFG also made use of responses gathered through a random survey of residents of each of 13 Northeastern states conducted in 2003 by an independent consulting firm. This telephone survey was designed to assess public opinion related to “fish and wildlife management issues, and agency reputation and credibility.”<sup>68</sup> For this study, however, respondents were not asked to answer questions about this latter survey, since it was neither New Hampshire-specific nor run by the NHFG.

As was the case for small-scale stakeholder meetings, the response rate for questions related to the use of surveys was quite low, with only two respondents offering responses. As before, findings should thus be understood in light of this very limited response rate (teasing out associations was not attempted). The low response rate was probably due to both the placement of the relevant section at the end of the survey and to the relatively small number of respondents who had taken the agency’s survey. A third respondent to these questions was excluded because he or she had not participated in the agency survey and selected “I don’t know” in response to every question.

As reported in Table 19, both respondents were satisfied with the web-based survey as an engagement mechanism, though one was “very satisfied” while the other reported being simply “satisfied.” One of these respondents reported that the “opportunity to take the web-survey,” was the aspect of the overall stakeholder engagement process that he or she was most satisfied with.<sup>69</sup>

Other than the slight divergence in their levels of satisfaction with the mechanism, the two respondents were identical and enthusiastic in their agreement with statements describing the survey. They both strongly agreed that the survey was sufficiently

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<sup>65</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game Department Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program (NHFG), “New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan,” (Concord, NH: 2005). 1-3

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*

<sup>68</sup> Responsive Management, “Public Opinion on Fish and Wildlife Management Issues and the Reputation and Credibility of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in the Northeast United States: Regional Report.” [Harrisonburg, VA: 2004]. I

<sup>69</sup> Maine Survey Response # 9, November 30, 2007

advertised, easy to use, and covered an appropriate range of substantive issues. Both, however, reported not knowing whether survey responses had influenced the content of the plan. While this uncertainty did not seem to impact these respondents' satisfaction with the survey, the agency may wish to more clearly explain how the survey responses will be used if they choose to make use of this mechanism in the future.

*Implementation and impact of the plan on stakeholders*

In April of 2006, stakeholders who had participated in plan development were invited to attend a Wildlife Summit II. The purpose of this summit was to gather stakeholder input on the prioritization of implementation activities.<sup>70</sup> Agency employees used input collected at the Summit, as well as considerations related to feasibility, to prioritize implementation strategies for both NHFG and partner organizations.<sup>71</sup> NHFG also set up an implementation committee composed of agency biologists and non-agency partners who have been given SWG contracts for implementation-related work.<sup>72</sup> SWG money has been used to fund positions at partner organizations to carry out implementation tasks. These positions have generally been an outgrowth of work done on the development of the plan.<sup>73</sup>

<b>Implementation factor</b>	<b>Average Agreement/ Satisfaction Level</b>	<b>Percent Agreed/ Satisfied*</b>	<b>Percent Disagreed/ Dissatisfied</b>
Satisfaction with the plan implementation process since 2005	4.88	62.50%	12.50%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, is working with the agency on one or more projects outline in the	4.13	50.00%	37.50%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted funding or program priorities as a result of the plan	3.63	37.50%	50.00%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted formed new partnerships as a result of the plan	4	50.00%	25.00%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has used the plan in some way (e.g. referenced in a grant)	4.5	50.00%	37.50%
*Due to neutral and "don't know" responses percentages do not always add up to 100%			

<sup>70</sup> French, Charlie and Covell, Darrell, "Wildlife Summit II Report," New Hampshire Fish and Game and University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension (Concord, NH: 2006).

<sup>71</sup> Kanter, John. 31 July 2006. "Prioritization: What's next for New Hampshire: Seventy-two strategies, 123 species and \$600,000." State Wildlife Action Plans One Year Later Meeting. PowerPoint Presentation.

<sup>72</sup> New Hampshire Conservation NGO representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 10, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.



As Table 20 (below) indicates, the majority of respondents are fairly satisfied with plan implementation, though somewhat less satisfied than they were with the engagement of stakeholders in plan development. While having the largest percentage of respondents who were satisfied with implementation among the three states examined, New Hampshire had the lowest percentage of respondents who reported either having collaborated on plan projects or having used the plan (though both were still 50 percent or more). It did, however, have the largest percentage reporting that they had formed partnerships as a result of the plan.

Respondents were generally pleased with the usefulness of the plan, though there was some concern over outreach about opportunities for engagement in implementation, the engagement of local interests, and the institution of a competitive grant process for distribution of SWG funds. When asked to describe the aspects of plan implementation with which they were most satisfied, three out of the five respondents to the question described the plan's usefulness as a tool to focus and guide conservation actions across New Hampshire. One respondent noted "the plan is now a key tool in the weighing of conservation funding use at the state and federal level, and towns are using the information in some of their planning work."<sup>74</sup> Another argued that "getting information together in a central document" has given "conservation efforts in New Hampshire a clear focus,"<sup>75</sup> while the third stated that the plan has informed land and easement acquisition. A fourth respondent expressed approval of the additional prioritization of implementation and actions that the agency has conducted since the plan was completed.

When asked to describe the aspects of implementation with which they were least satisfied, respondents offered a more diverse array of comments. First, while the agency is using SWG money to contract out positions and work related to the implementation of the plan, one respondent expressed frustration that a competitive grant process for SWG money had not yet been set up. According to the respondent, agency representatives have mentioned such a process as a possibility, but it has not yet been put into place. Another respondent expressed concern that more effort has not been made to engage local

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<sup>73</sup> New Hampshire Fish and Game representative, Telephone interview with Michelle Aldridge, October 1, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>74</sup> New Hampshire Survey Response # 5, November 20, 2007

<sup>75</sup> New Hampshire Survey Response # 9, November 30, 2007

decision-makers in the implementation process, though noted that this was probably due to limited agency funding. More broadly, another respondent suggested that awareness about opportunities to participate in implementation was not as wide spread as it could be. A final respondent expressed frustration that the plan has yet to be fully implemented, though given that this survey was administered only two years after the plan was completed the fact that implementation is still in progress is perhaps not surprising.

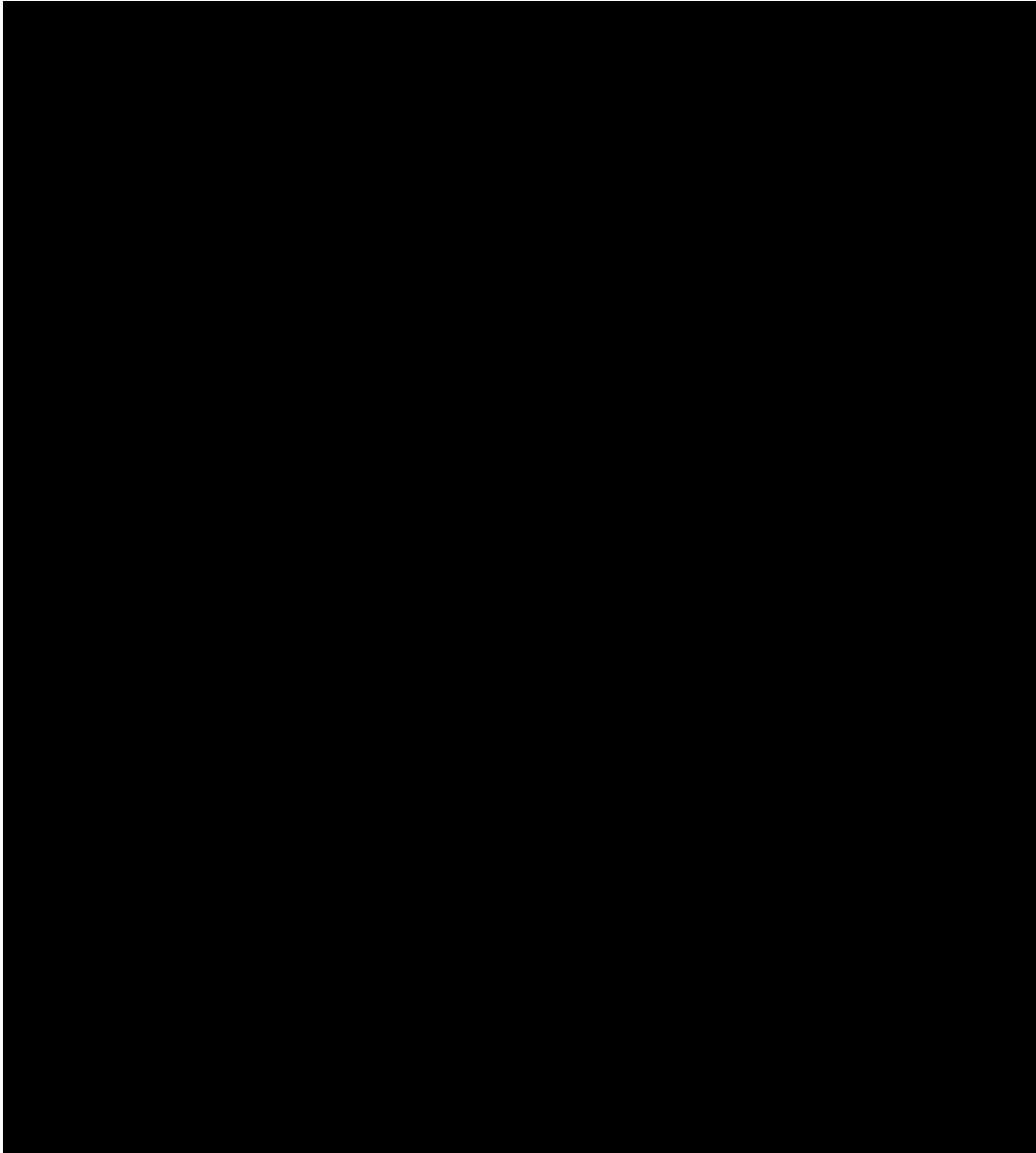
Beyond their attitudes about implementation, half of respondents are participating in this process in some way. As Table 20 indicates, 50 percent agreed that they, or the organizations they represent, are collaborating with the agency on one or more projects outlined in the plan, have formed new partnerships as a result of the plan, and have used the plan in some way. Thirty-seven point five percent reported that the organizations they represent have changed their funding or project priorities as a result of the plan, a higher percentage than had agreed with this statement among either Maine or Vermont respondents.

Three respondents specified how they have been involved in the implementation process. One reported that part of his or her salary comes from SWG money and that he or she meets with the implementation team approximately once per month. Another described his or her organization as being funded by SWG funds to conduct implementation work, including land acquisition and conservation planning. The final respondent reported that his or her organization has used the plan to develop conservation classifications for the Connecticut River.

The extent to which respondents were satisfied with the stakeholder engagement process does appear to be associated with implementation satisfaction and, to a lesser degree, with their use of the plan. Once again, the fact that no New Hampshire respondents were dissatisfied with stakeholder engagement offered a challenge for clearly presenting these associations. This challenge was further compounded by the fact that the one individual who felt neutral about the stakeholder engagement process selected “I don’t know” in response to each of the four questions addressing the impact of plan implementation. Despite the remaining respondents having all expressed satisfaction with the engagement process, the  $R^2$  found for both implementation satisfaction and agreement that the respondent had used the plan were relatively high. It should be remembered that

$R^2$  values capture the full range of satisfaction and agreement gradients (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree...) and how they are associated (e.g. are those who are only somewhat satisfied also only somewhat in agreement, etc...).

Regressing engagement satisfaction against implementation satisfaction levels produced an  $R^2$  of 50 percent (see Table 21). This suggests that the degree to which respondents were satisfied with engagement was a reasonable, though not perfect, predictor of how satisfied they were with implementation. The 25 percent  $R^2$  found by regressing engagement satisfaction against agreement that respondents had used the plan in some way suggests that having a very positive experience with plan development may



be somewhat associated with using the plan to a greater degree.  $R^2$  values for collaboration on plan projects, forming partnerships as a result of the plan, and changing priorities as a result of the plan were all less than 10 percent. These low values imply that the degree of engagement satisfaction was not a good predictor of whether respondents were engaged with implementation in these ways.

As was pointed out in the section addressing the Maine plan, there are numerous factors other than satisfaction with the stakeholder engagement process that may influence how stakeholders are involved in, and affected by, plan implementation. These include, but are certainly not limited to, the usefulness of the plan as a guide to action, how engaged stakeholders were with the agency and with each other prior to the development of the plan, the availability of funding tied to plan priorities and actions, and the interest of an individual or organization in aligning its priorities with those of the state. These factors are only partially addressed here, though all would be worthy of further inquiry. The issue of new funding associated with the plan is addressed in a characterization of the development and implementation of plans in the Northeastern United States prepared in association with this study. This report can be found at [www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/swap](http://www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/swap).

As indicated in Table 13 (above), 75 percent of respondents agreed both that the plan is an effective wildlife conservation strategy and that it is well laid out. While 12.5 percent disagreed with the former statement, none disagreed with the latter. There seems to be a strong association between agreement with these statements and satisfaction with plan implementation. One hundred percent of those who agreed that the plan was effective were satisfied with implementation, while the twelve percent of respondents who disagreed with this statement were also dissatisfied with plan implementation. An  $R^2$  of 73.68 confirms that this apparent association was relatively consistent throughout the gradients of satisfaction and agreement. Similarly, all those who agreed that the plan was well laid out were satisfied with plan implementation, while the 12.5 percent who were neutral on this question also reported neutrality on implementation. A somewhat lower  $R^2$  of 50.7 indicates a slightly weaker association when gradation is taken into account.

As with Maine and Vermont an attempt was made to assess the impact on participation in plan implementation of previous engagement with the agency. It was,

once again, difficult to make interesting generalizations due to the distribution of the respondents. Four respondents had both collaborated with the agency and commented on agency plans in the past, while two had only collaborated, and two had done neither. However, one of the respondents who had only commented and one of the respondents who had done neither selected neutral for all of the questions addressing the impact of the plan and participation in implementation. This left only one individual in each category to compare to the four who had both collaborated and commented in the past. It did not seem meaningful to attempt to generalize from these two individuals to others who might have previously participated in similar ways. Further investigation using random sampling of stakeholders would be useful to better understand the relationship between previous engagement and participation in implementation.

#### *Recommendations*

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are offered for the development of future iterations of the Maine plan and the implementation of the current plan.

Recommended actions are directed at the lead agency and are intended to maintain and enhance stakeholder satisfaction with the engagement process and boost support for implementation.

#### **Stakeholder Engagement in Plan Development**

- Provide stakeholders with more updates on the progress of plan development, including, if feasible, the posting of interim reports from the core biological committee.
- Send out earlier notification of the time and locations of large stakeholder meetings.
- Increase outreach on the process by which stakeholders are selected for contracts.
- Increase outreach on the ways in which input collected at stakeholder meetings and through web-based surveys influences the plan.

#### **Implementation**

- To the extent possible, increase engagement of local decision-makers in plan implementation.
- While contracting with stakeholders through SWG funds seems to have yielded good results, consider making a portion of the funds available through a complete grant program. This may increase the number of organizations involved in using and implementation the plan.

- Continue to hold wildlife summits to gather stakeholder input on implementation and increase awareness of the process.

## Vermont

### Overview

The Vermont wildlife action plan steering committee, which was composed of Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD) program directors and the plan coordinator, was responsible for brainstorming an initial list of organizations that might be included as conservation partners in the plan development process. As organizations were invited to become conservation partners they were also asked to add missing organizations to the invitation list.<sup>76</sup> Most engagement mechanisms were directed at the approximately 70 organizations which eventually became conservation partners. Conservation partner status was open to all interested organizations.<sup>77</sup>

The VFWD engaged stakeholders in the development of their plan through four primary mechanisms. First, they actively engaged non-agency experts on the majority of committees organized to develop the plan, including six species teams, the conservation strategy review team, and the integration team.<sup>78</sup> Second, VFWD held two summits (which they called “partner meetings”) to engage stakeholders in discussion of the best approaches to both the development and implementation of the plan.<sup>79</sup> Third, VFWD employees held forty meetings with individual conservation partners throughout the

<sup>76</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife representative, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, October 4, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>77</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFW), “Vermont’s Wildlife Action Plan.” (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 3-3.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 3-4

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 3-8

state. Lastly, the agency organized a two stage comment period, with a longer period restricted to conservation partners and a later, shorter one open to the general public. The plan was also reviewed by members of two standing citizens' committees, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board and Endangered Species Committee, though this mechanism was not addressed for this study.

As Table 22 indicates, Vermont respondents' average agreement and satisfaction levels for stakeholder engagement, plan effectiveness, and plan implementation were somewhat lower than those of New Hampshire respondents and somewhat higher than those of Maine respondents. However, Vermont and Maine were nearly identical in their average agreement that the plan was well-laid out and easy to navigate, with New Hampshire's plan garnering a significantly higher average level of agreement on this topic. Seventy-seven point two percent of Vermont respondents were satisfied with stakeholder engagement in the plan development process, while 69.3 percent agreed that the plan is an effective wildlife conservation strategy, and 63.9 percent agreed that it is well laid out. Slightly less than half, however, were satisfied with plan implementation.

In Vermont, unlike in Maine and New Hampshire, tension between organizations engaged in the process was a significant theme in respondent comments. This manifested both in responses to open-ended questions and the relatively large percent of respondents who agreed that certain interests were overrepresented in the plan development process. While the agency was praised by many respondents for its engagement of broad interests, it was also criticized by several for indiscriminately engaging organizations in the process and, by a few others, for focusing too much attention on those interested in game species.

Despite the tension referred to above, it is worth noting that this feeling did not by any means extend to all members of any particular interest group. Only two of the thirteen respondents (or 15.39 percent) who described themselves as representing hunting and fishing or forestry organizations expressed frustration with what they perceived as a bias against their interests, and only one was actually dissatisfied with the process. Similarly, five of the twenty-three respondents (21.7 percent) who described themselves as representing primarily wildlife or habitat conservation interests commented on what they perceived as a bias towards those representing game species.

As in other sections of this report, individual and average satisfaction and agreement levels are reported in terms of a likert scale (figure x). Average respondent levels frequently fall between the levels included in this figure.

Figure 1: The Likert Scale	
7	= Strongly Agree / Very Satisfied
6	= Agree / Satisfied
5	= Somewhat Agree / Somewhat Satisfied
4	= Neutral
3	= Somewhat Disagree / Somewhat Dissatisfied
2	= Disagree / Dissatisfied
1	= Strongly Disagree / Strongly Dissatisfied

#### *Drivers of Satisfaction*

In order to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the stakeholder engagement process, as well as which of its components were most associated with overall satisfaction, respondents were asked to report their agreement with a variety of statements describing the process. In identifying relatively strong associations  $R^2$  values are reported, as are comparisons of average satisfaction levels and percent of satisfied respondents between those who agreed and disagreed with particular statements. It should be noted that percentages of respondents who are satisfied or dissatisfied and who agreed or disagreed are all actually aggregations of three levels of each attitude (e.g. the percentage of respondents who agreed with x statement is the combined percentage of those who somewhat agreed, agreed, and strongly agreed).  $R^2$  values, on the other hand, capture all levels of gradation, though they are quite susceptible to outliers. As always, it is important to remember that even where patterns of association do appear, this does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the two factors.

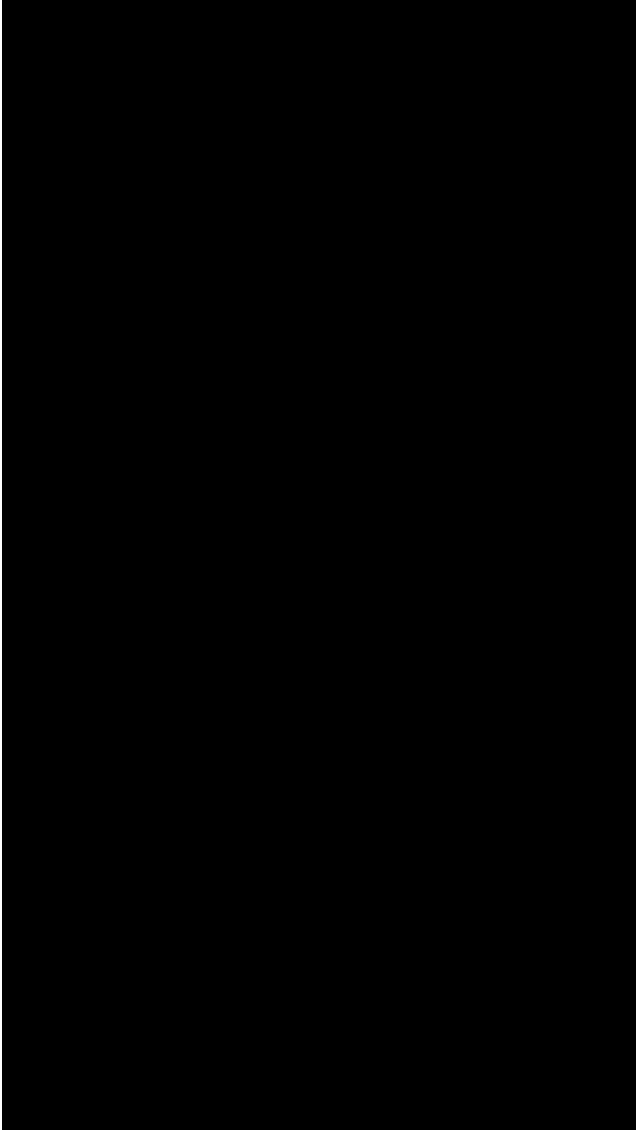
Stakeholder engagement was carried out by the VFWD throughout the eighteen months preceding the completion of the plan. The process was initiated in early 2004, when non-agency stakeholders were invited to participate in the first of Vermont's two large partner meetings.<sup>80</sup> Stakeholder engagement concluded with the two comment and review periods, which both ended on August 12, 2005 (though additional events have been held during implementation).<sup>81</sup> As reported in Table 23, 55.6 percent of

<sup>80</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFWD), "Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan." (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 3-8

<sup>81</sup> *ibid*



Stakeholder engagement was carried out by the VFWD throughout the eighteen months preceding the completion of the plan. The process was initiated in early 2004, when non-agency stakeholders were invited to participate in the first of Vermont's two large partner meetings.<sup>82</sup> Stakeholder engagement concluded with the two comment and review periods, which both ended on August 12, 2005 (though additional events have been held during implementation).<sup>83</sup> As reported in Table 23, 55.6 percent of respondents agreed that the timing of engagement was appropriate, while 19.5 disagreed. Three respondents, all of whom were part of this latter 19.5 percent, submitted comments addressing the issue of timing. According to one, the process had a "seemingly short and hurried time frame,"<sup>84</sup> while another felt that "they needed to get people involved earlier in the process."<sup>85</sup> The final respondent, who expressed disappointment that his or her organization was not engaged earlier, recommended that the agency conduct a "slightly



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<sup>82</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFWD), "Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan." (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 3-8

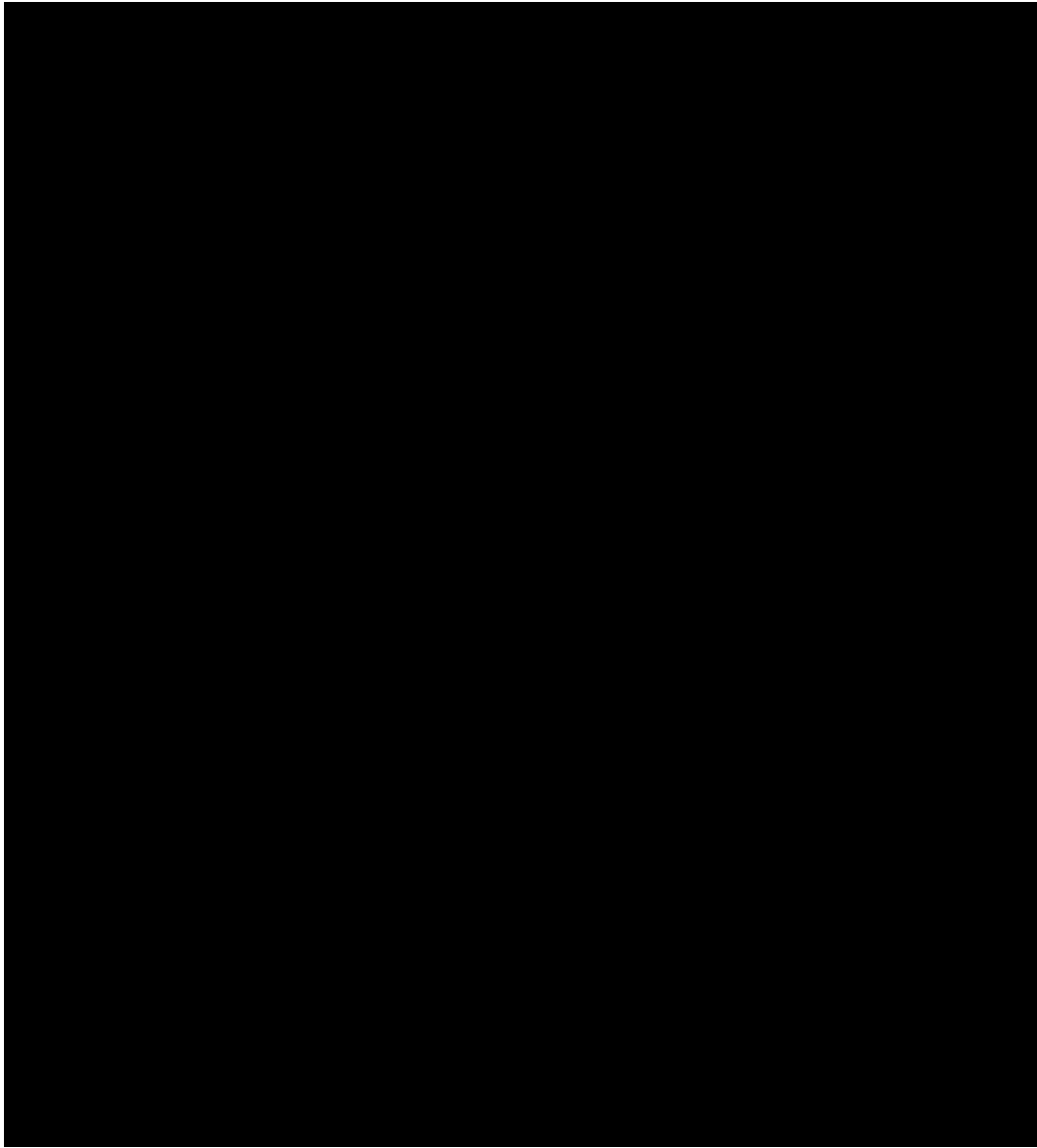
<sup>83</sup> *ibid*

<sup>84</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 22, November 15, 2007

<sup>85</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 33, November 21, 2007

more thorough solicitation of stakeholders early in the process,” though otherwise had no complaints about the process.<sup>86</sup>

There appears to be a relatively strong association between agreement that the timing of stakeholder engagement was appropriate and satisfaction with the overall process. As indicated in Table 24, 100 percent of respondents who felt that timing was appropriate were also satisfied with the plan, while only 42.9 percent of those who disagreed were. The former group had an average overall satisfaction level of 6.05 while the latter group’s average level was 3.86. An  $R^2$  of 69.79 percent confirms the strong relationship between attitudes towards the timing of engagement and overall satisfaction.



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<sup>86</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 10, November 9, 2007

The majority of Vermont respondents felt that stakeholders were given an opportunity to influence the content of the plan. Sixty-six point seven percent of respondents agreed with this statement, while 22.2 percent disagreed. Two respondents, both part of this 22.2 percent, described feeling frustrated with a perceived inability to shape the plan. One respondent expressed concern that “our public comments were, by and large, not adopted,” but did not mention whether he or she felt that other stakeholders input had been incorporated.<sup>87</sup> The other felt both that the agency should “utilize more stakeholder suggestions,” and that the “conclusions [of the process] were predetermined.”<sup>88</sup>

While not as robust as that found for the timing of engagement, there does appear to be a relatively strong association between agreement that stakeholders influenced plan content and satisfaction with the overall engagement process. As indicated in Table 24, 95.7 percent of those who agreed with the statement were also satisfied with the plan, while only 50 percent of those who disagreed were. Average satisfaction for the former group was 5.96, while for the later it was 3.86. The  $R^2$  confirms this reasonably strong association by showing that 53.5 percent of the variation in satisfaction levels can be accounted for by variation in agreement with the statement that stakeholders influenced the plan.

Many fewer respondents felt that stakeholders were able to influence the format, as opposed to the content, of the plan. Only 25.5 percent of respondents agreed with this statement, while 30.5 percent disagreed with this statement. The average agreement level for this statement was 3.85. None of the comments written by Vermont respondents addressed their ability or inability to influence the format of the plan. Despite this, 66.7 percent agreed that the plan is well laid out and easy to navigate, indicating that most respondents did not feel that stakeholder input was necessary for creating a well formatted plan.

The relationship between this factor and overall satisfaction appears more modest than that found for the other aspects of the Vermont process considered so far. All of those who agreed that stakeholders had influence over plan format were satisfied with the

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<sup>87</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 38, November 28, 2007

<sup>88</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 1, November 9, 2007

overall engagement process, while only half of those who disagreed were. The average agreement satisfaction levels of the two groups, 6 and 4.5 respectively, revealed a relationship between being agreement and satisfaction though to a somewhat less substantial degree than with either timing or influence over content. An R2 of 23.89 suggests that variation in agreement levels accounted for about a quarter of the variation in satisfaction among Vermont respondents.

Unlike in New Hampshire and Maine, the make-up of engaged organizations and interests was perceived by a significant number of respondents as having been a challenge for the Vermont stakeholder engagement process. Twenty-two point two percent of respondents felt that certain interests were missing from the process, while nearly half (47.2 percent) believed that certain interests had been overrepresented. Fifty-eight point three and 33.4 percent respectively disagreed with these statements.

Tension between those who saw themselves as primarily representing wildlife or habitat conservation and those who saw themselves representing sportsmen or working landscape interests was the theme of a significant number of respondent comments. According to one respondent, there were “not enough working forests interests” and “too many ‘wilderness’ proponents.”<sup>89</sup> According to another, “hunting organizations were overrepresented and dominated too much of the discussion.” A third respondent believed, “private property rights advocates and the timber industry...have been able to greatly hamper the usefulness and effectiveness of this plan for on the ground conservation.” A few comments also suggested that the process was inherently biased towards a particular interest. One respondent argued that the time commitment associated with engaging in plan development “favors heavily staffed, heavily funded environmental groups and disfavors largely volunteer sporting organizations.”<sup>90</sup> Another argued that the agency “pandered to the hunting groups” and did not make clear that the “plan was to be focused on non-hunted species.”<sup>91</sup> All told, six respondents expressed concern that sportsmen’s groups had been overrepresented, and one each focused on overrepresentation by wilderness groups and the timber industry.

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<sup>89</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 45, February 11, 2008

<sup>90</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 38, November 28, 2008

<sup>91</sup> Vermont Survey Response #2, November 9, 2007

Interestingly, when asked which aspect of stakeholder engagement they were most satisfied with, eleven of the twenty-four respondents who answered this question praised the diversity of stakeholders engaged in the process. Typical comments included, “I thought that the list of organizations engaged in the process was, overall, comprehensive and a good representation of Vermont's stakeholders”<sup>92</sup> and “agency staff was successful in engaging people from across wide spectrum of interests.”<sup>93</sup> While the agency generally received praise for their efforts at engaging diverse interests, one frustrated respondent argued that “the ‘anyone who is breathing has a valid perspective’ approach was nonsensical.”<sup>94</sup> Similarly, another respondent felt that the agency “tried to pay attention to too broad a spectrum of stakeholders.”<sup>95</sup>

As a remedy to this issue, one respondent suggested that the agency only engage those who supported the mission of the agency and the plan, rather than anyone who was interested.<sup>96</sup> Another respondent, however, pointed out that while excluding what they saw as “special interests” might ease the process it would also “cause an uproar.” It is also likely that excluding certain interests would be construed as going against the mandate of Congress, which required states to make use of “broad public participation” in the development of the plans.<sup>97</sup> While feeling that too much agency energy had gone into engaging diverse stakeholders, one respondent concluded, “I suppose it's best to err on the side of too much input, rather than too little.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite the frequent mention of this topic in comments, only 18.8 percent of respondents who agreed that interests were overrepresented were dissatisfied with the overall stakeholder engagement process, while 62.6 were satisfied. In contrast, 91.7 percent of those who disagreed were satisfied, while no one in this group was dissatisfied. Those who felt that overrepresentation was a problem did, however, have a significantly lower overall satisfaction level (4.5) than did those who did not think this was an issue

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<sup>92</sup> Vermont Survey Response #10, November 9, 2007

<sup>93</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 26, November 19, 2007

<sup>94</sup> Vermont Survey Response #21, November 13, 2007

<sup>95</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 18, November 12, 2007

<sup>96</sup> Vermont Survey Response #21, November 13, 2007

<sup>97</sup> The Biodiversity Partnership, “Federal Requirement for States to Develop Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans,” <http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/bioplanning/elements.shtml> (accessed March 14, 2008)

<sup>98</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 3, November 9, 2007

(6.08), though both were above “neutral” on the likert scale. Regressing these two sets of agreement and satisfaction levels found that 39.41 percent of the variation in satisfaction levels could be accounted for by the variation in agreement scores.

While the comments tended to be much less strongly worded, a few respondents did point out interests and organizations they felt were missing from the stakeholder engagement process. One respondent felt that including more private landowners would have been beneficial<sup>99</sup> while another felt that more effort should have been made to engage the general public.<sup>100</sup> A third respondent recommended enhancing outreach about engagement opportunities at the grassroots level in the future.<sup>101</sup>

There appears to be only a weak association between agreement that stakeholders are missing from the process and satisfaction with the overall stakeholder engagement process. Seventy-one point four of those who agreed that interests were missing from the process were satisfied with the stakeholder engagement process, as opposed to 85.7 percent of those who disagreed with this statement. The  $R^2$  found by for this factor was 11 percent.

While not specifically addressed by the survey, two respondents commented that political pressure to avoid making priority maps caused those engaged in the development of the plan to “avoid decisions that might be politically risky, but are absolutely necessary if anything real is to come of this effort.”<sup>102</sup> Both of these respondents recommended that priority maps be developed in the future to facilitate plan implementation.

As reported in Table 24, the associations between satisfaction with specific mechanisms of stakeholder engagement, described in detail below, and satisfaction with the overall engagement process appear to be quite substantial. While all four associations are relatively strong, those addressing satisfaction with the inclusion of stakeholders on committees and satisfaction with small partner meetings were particularly robust. Ninety-three percent of those who were satisfied with the inclusion of stakeholders on committees were also satisfied with the overall process, while 67 percent of those who

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<sup>99</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 32, November 20, 2007

<sup>100</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 11, November 9, 2007

<sup>101</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 8, November 9, 2007

<sup>102</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 35, November 28, 2007

were dissatisfied with this mechanism were dissatisfied overall. One hundred percent of those who were satisfied with the small stakeholder meetings were also satisfied with the overall process, while 100 percent of those who were dissatisfied were dissatisfied overall. When regressed with overall satisfaction, satisfaction with these mechanisms was found to have R<sup>2</sup> values of 68.92 percent and 62.04 percent respectively. A more detailed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of these engagement mechanisms is offered immediately below.

*Inclusion of Stakeholders on Plan Development and Implementation Committees*

Along with federal and state

agency employees, non-agency stakeholders were included on six species teams, a plan integration team, and a conservation strategy review team.<sup>103</sup> The six species teams, which



addressed birds, fish, invertebrates, mammals, plants, and reptiles and amphibians, were charged with developing lists of species of greatest conservation need, assessing threats and appropriate action strategies, and addressing comments made by conservation partners during the initial comment and review period.<sup>104</sup> Members of the integration team were responsible for coordinating the work of the species teams, organizing all species into habitat groups, synthesizing reports from other teams, and prioritizing strategies.<sup>105</sup> The conservation review team, which was created due to early feedback from stakeholders, reviewed strategies developed by the species and integration team and developed new strategies as needed.<sup>106</sup> The integration team and species teams met approximately once a month between May 2004 and January 2005, while the conservation strategy review team met in December of 2004 and in February and March of 2005.<sup>107</sup> Nominations for individuals serving on these teams were solicited from conservation partners during and after the first large partner meeting in March of 2004.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFW), “Vermont’s Wildlife Action Plan.” (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 3-4 – 3-5.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 3-3

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 3-4

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 3-4

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 3-9

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 3-3

Of the 19 respondents who answered questions regarding this mechanism, 79 percent were satisfied with this mechanism, while 15.8 percent were dissatisfied. Two individuals also identified the inclusion of non-agency experts on technical and development teams as the aspect of stakeholder engagement with which they were most satisfied. Most respondents felt that this mechanism provided a good opportunity for stakeholders to express their opinions and influence the plan. There was however less certainty that non-agency team members were able to shape the format of the plan. Respondents also expressed concern about the pace of the committee process and the lack of funding for non-agency participants.

Respondents were asked to report their level of agreement with five statements addressing various aspects of the committee process. With one exception, similar average agreement levels were found for the statements (5.33 to 5.89), though the percent of respondents agreeing with particular statements varied. A large majority of respondents agreed that inclusion on technical and development teams gave non-agency stakeholders an opportunity to both express their opinions and to influence the content of the plan. Eighty-four point seven percent agreed with the former statement, while 79.5 percent agreed with the latter. Only 36.9 percent agreed, however, agreed that non-agency team members were able to influence the format of the plan.

There is an apparent association between satisfaction with the inclusion of non-agency team members and both agreement that non-agency team members were able to express their opinions and that they were able to influence plan content. Eighty-seven point six percent of those who agreed that non-agency team members were given sufficient opportunities to express their opinions were satisfied with the engagement mechanism, while 100 percent of those who disagreed with this statement were dissatisfied. Similarly, 86.7 percent of those who agreed that non-agency team members were able to influence the content of the plan were satisfied with the mechanism, while 100 percent of those who disagreed were. While only a few respondents believed that non-agency team members had influence over the format of the plan, this factor seemed more modestly associated with satisfaction. One hundred percent of respondents who agreed with this statement were satisfied, but so did 57.2 percent of those who disagreed.



More than 50 percent of respondents agreed that team members represented an appropriate range of interests (64.1 percent) and that the process by which non-agency team members had been selected was fair and transparent (52.7 percent). Twenty one point one percent of respondents, however, selected “I don’t know” in response to this latter statement. One respondent commented that while he or she assumed that stakeholders were asked because of their expertise, he or she was not aware of the specific process used.<sup>109</sup>

One hundred percent of those who agreed that non-agency team members represented an appropriate array of interests were satisfied with the engagement mechanisms; 100 percent of those who disagreed with this statement were dissatisfied. Belief that the selection process was fair was more modestly associated with satisfaction. All of those who agreed the process was fair and transparent were satisfied, but so were 50 percent of those who disagreed with this statement.

When asked to recommend how the inclusion of stakeholders on committees could be improved in the future, two individuals noted that at times the process had seemed somewhat rushed. One respondent commented that time needed to be given for “organizations to develop positions and responses,” noting that those representing non-governmental organizations “need to take content back to our executive committees and membership [for review].”<sup>110</sup> Another respondent felt that towards the end the committee process was too rushed for participants to give feedback on the plan.<sup>111</sup>

One respondent also reported being notified of only one meeting of the committee on which he or she sat, suggesting either that this committee did not meet as frequently as reported in the plan or that there was a communication failure.<sup>112</sup> Most committees did meet once a month, however, and one respondent that this frequency caused some non-agency representatives to minimize their involvement for financial reasons. According to this respondent, “If you want non-agency experts and biologists to have time and energy to devote to these [committees] you have to pay them.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Vermont Survey Response #7, November 9, 2007

<sup>110</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 22, November 15, 2007

<sup>111</sup> Vermont Survey Response #7, November 9, 2007

<sup>112</sup> Vermont Survey Response #17, November 12, 2007

<sup>113</sup> Vermont Survey Response #4, November 9, 2007

*Stakeholder Summits*

In March of 2004, VFGD convened a large meeting of 80 organizations and agencies to gain initial input on its approach to developing the plan.<sup>114</sup> Those in attendance were asked to become



conservation partners with the expectation that they would be kept up-to-date with the plan and involved in its development. The approximately 70 organizations that accepted this invitation were invited to attend another large meeting in June of 2005.<sup>115</sup> This later meeting was intended to give partners the opportunity to collectively review the draft plan and discuss strategies for its implementation.<sup>116</sup>

As Table 26 indicates, 69.5 percent of the 23 respondents who answered questions related to the two large meetings were satisfied with them as a mechanism for stakeholder engagement, while 26.1 percent were dissatisfied. Two individuals also identified these meetings as the aspect of stakeholder engagement they were most satisfied. Most respondents were happy with the organization of the meetings and felt that attendees were given the opportunity to express their opinions. They were less sure, however, about the influence of input gathered at the meetings and the substance of the issues meeting participants were asked to address. There was also some concern that meeting objectives were not met. Satisfaction with the two meetings appears to be at least moderately associated with all three of the last factors mentioned.

Respondents were asked to report their agreement with a variety of statements describing various aspects of the large meetings. The three highest average agreement levels were found for the statements, “you were given sufficient notice of the time and location of each partner meeting” (6.22), “meeting participants were given opportunities to express their opinions and be heard” (5.65), and “between partner meetings you were kept up-to-date on plan development” (5.52). The three lowest average levels, on the

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<sup>114</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFW), “Vermont’s Wildlife Action Plan.” (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 8-3.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid*

<sup>116</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFW), “Vermont’s Wildlife Action Plan.” (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 8-3.

other hand, were found for the statements “input gathered at the meetings influenced the content of the plan” (4.62), “the objective of each meeting was achieved” (4.5), and “input gathered at the meetings influenced the format of the plan” (4.29).

Looked at another way, seventy-three percent or more of respondents agreed that they received timely notice of the meetings (95.7 percent), that they were kept up-to-date on plan development (86.9), that participants were given opportunities to express their opinions (86.9), that the objective of each meeting was clear (73.8 percent), and that the meetings were well-facilitated (78.2 percent). Fifty-two percent or less of respondents agreed that meeting participants had influence over the content of the plan (52.1 percent), that the objective of each meeting was achieved (43.4 percent), and that meeting participants had influence over the format of the plan (34.7 percent).

Once again, overrepresentation of certain groups was perceived as a challenge by a substantial number of respondents. Forty-seven point eight percent of respondents agreed that certain interests were overrepresented at the meetings, while 26 percent disagreed with this statement. Hunting and fishing interests were identified by three out of the four respondents who specified interests as overrepresented, though another respondent suggested that volunteer “traditional use” groups were underrepresented at the meetings due to their lack of paid staff. Only 30 percent of respondents agreed that certain interests were absent from the meetings, while 43.4 disagreed with this statement. Once again, private landowners were specified as missing from the process.

Respondent satisfaction with the two large stakeholder meetings appears to be at least moderately associated with agreement with four of the statements referred to above. First, 100 percent of the respondents who agreed that meeting participants had influence over the format of the plan were satisfied with the meetings, while only 16.7 percent of those who disagreed with this statement were satisfied. Second, and somewhat less dramatically, 91.3 percent of respondents who agreed that meeting participants had influence over plan content were satisfied with the meetings, while 37.5 percent of those who disagreed with this statement were satisfied. It also appears that agreement that meeting objectives were achieved is associated with large meeting satisfaction. Third, 100 percent of those who agreed that meeting objectives were achieved were satisfied with the meetings, while only 25 percent of those who disagreed were satisfied. Lastly,

76.5 percent of those who agreed that meeting participants were asked for input on substantive issues were satisfied, while 25 percent of those who disagreed were.

Three of the ten comments submitted in regard to large stakeholder meetings expressed frustration with a perceived shortage of substance in the issues addressed at the two meetings. One respondent simply commented “get real and get substantive,”<sup>117</sup> while another felt that too much time was spent on the agency’s funding issues and not enough on “real substantive issues regarding how we work in particular landscapes to protect land, manage it, or restore it for conservation.”<sup>118</sup> A third respondent, argued that “it’s pretty much impossible to make substantive comments at large meetings,” and recommended having earlier opportunities to review pieces of the plan and submit substantive comments.<sup>119</sup> A fourth respondent did not specifically address the issues considered at the meetings, but recommended additional small breakout sessions since they are “helpful in soliciting ideas.”<sup>120</sup>

#### *Small Stakeholder Meetings*

During the course of plan development VFWD conducted 40 meetings with representatives from individual conservation partner organizations.<sup>121</sup> These meetings were conducted both to increase awareness of plan development among partners and to seek additional input on issues related to the plan.<sup>122</sup> According to an agency employee, invitations to set up an individual meeting were extended to all partner organizations through correspondence, phone calls, and announcements at meetings.<sup>123</sup>

As indicated in Table 27, 71.5 percent of the eight respondents to this section of the survey were satisfied with the small meetings, while 14.3 percent of these

<sup>117</sup> Vermont Survey Response #35, November 28, 2007

<sup>118</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 33, November 21, 2007

<sup>119</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 11, November 9, 2007

<sup>120</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 10, November 9, 2007

<sup>121</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFW), “Vermont’s Wildlife Action Plan.” (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 8-3

<sup>122</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife representative, telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, October 4, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid*

respondents were dissatisfied. One respondent also identified these individual meeting as the aspect of stakeholder engagement with which he or she was most satisfied.

Respondents were generally felt that the meetings were well organized and an opportunity for participants to express their opinions on substantive issues. There was, however, less certainty that inputs collected at the meetings influenced the plan.

Respondents were asked to report their agreement or disagreement with eight statements describing the organization and substance of the small stakeholder meetings. The percentage of respondents agreeing with the statements, and selecting neutral or “I don’t know,” varied among statements. One respondent, however, consistently disagreed with all statements, and was the only individual to disagree with any of them. This respondent was also, fittingly, the only respondent to be dissatisfied with the small stakeholder meetings.

Eighty-seven point five percent of respondents agreed that participants in small stakeholder meetings were given an opportunity to express their opinions; this statement also received the highest average agreement level (5.63). This is perhaps not surprising given that this engagement mechanism represented an opportunity for representatives of partner organizations to have individual conversations with agency employees.

Seventy-five percent of respondents also agreed that background materials were written at an appropriate technical level, that meetings were well facilitated, and that participants were asked for input on substantive issues. On the other hand, only 50 percent of respondents agreed that influence gathered at these meetings influenced either the content or format of the plan. Statements that participant input influenced the content or format of the plan also received the lowest average agreement levels (4.67 and 4.83 respectively). One respondent felt that, while he or she “was given a sympathetic ear from agency staff,” recommendations given through these meetings were “ignored.”<sup>124</sup>

Two issues make it difficult to tease out associations between these factors and respondent satisfaction with the meetings. First, for each statement 100 percent of those who disagreed were also dissatisfied with the process. Second, none of those who agreed with statements were ever dissatisfied. It may be useful, however, to explain that the one respondent who reported feeling neutral about the small stakeholder meetings was in

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<sup>124</sup> Vermont Survey Response #33, November 21, 2007

agreement with every statement except those addressing the influence of participant input, on which he or she was neutral. This suggests that these two factors shaped how this individual felt about the meetings.

Two individuals who had not participated in one or more small stakeholder commented that they had never been informed that these meetings were available. “We are a large conservation organization in the state,” commented on respondent, “why were we not invited to an individual partner meeting?”<sup>125</sup> This suggests that while the majority of conservation partners may have been aware that this opportunity was available, the invitation missed at least a few of its intended targets.

#### *Comment and Review Period*

The VFGD organized two comment and review periods, the first open only to conservation partners and the second open to the general public. The conservation partner review period began on June 20, 2005 and lasted for seven weeks<sup>126</sup>. The public review period began in July and lasted for five weeks.<sup>127</sup> The two periods both concluded on August 12. During these periods comments could be submitted on the draft plan via the agency website, email, phone, or mail.<sup>128</sup>



During this time the agency also held two public meetings at which the draft plan was presented and comments from the public were accepted.<sup>129</sup> These meetings were advertised to the public through press releases, the agency website, and the agency newsletter. Conservation partners were also asked to inform their constituencies of these meetings.<sup>130</sup>

When considering the findings presented here, it should be remembered that all respondents to this survey participated in the process as conservation partners. They were thus able to make comments during the longer review period and, for the most part, did

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<sup>125</sup> Vermont Survey Response # 2, November 9, 2007

<sup>126</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFW), “Vermont’s Wildlife Action Plan.” (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 3-8

<sup>127</sup> *ibid*

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*

<sup>130</sup> *ibid*

not take part in the public meetings. For the sake of simplicity, the two periods are referred to below as a single comment and review period.

As Table 28 indicates, 62.5 percent of the twenty-four respondents to this section of the survey were satisfied with the review and comment period, while 16.6 percent were dissatisfied. There was general agreement that the comment period was sufficiently advertised and of an appropriate length, and that the draft plan was easy to access. Many respondents were unsure, however, of whether comments submitted during this period influenced the plan.

Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed that the draft plan was easy to access and that the review and comment period was sufficiently advertised, while 12.6 and 14.7 percent respectively disagreed with these statements. However, one respondent commented that the opportunity to comment on the plan should be “advertised more widely,”<sup>131</sup> while another emphasized the need to reach out to more non-traditional stakeholders who might not normally submit comments.<sup>132</sup> Seventy percent of respondents also agreed that the length of the comment period was appropriate, though one respondent recommended a “longer time for submission of written comments.” The public and conservation partner review and comment periods were both extended by several weeks from their original lengths. All of these statements garnered average agreement levels of between 5.26 and 5.55.

Respondents did not generally agree that the comment period influenced the plan. Twelve point five percent and 8.4 percent of respondents respectively believed that comments received during this period influenced the content and format of the plan, while 37.5 and 20.8 respectively disagreed. The influence of comments over content and format also garnered the two lowest average agreement levels for this section of the survey (3.29 and 3.64). Forty-one point seven and 54.2 percent of respondents respectively, however, reported not knowing whether or not comments influenced the content and format of the plan. This suggests that while some respondents felt that comments did not have an influence, significantly more simply did not know whether or not this was the case. Realistically the draft plan cannot be changed to reflect all

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<sup>131</sup> Vermont Survey Response #32, November 20,2007;

<sup>132</sup> Vermont Survey Response #32, November 20,2007;

comments, but it may be useful in the future for stakeholders to know more precisely how their input will be taken in to consideration.

Of the factors discussed above, agreement that the comment period was sufficiently advertised, that its length was appropriate, and that comments submitted during this period influenced the plan seem most strongly associated with satisfaction with the comment period as an engagement mechanism. Approximately 83 percent of those who agreed that it was sufficiently advertised and of an appropriate length were satisfied with the comment period, while 100 percent of those who disagreed with these statements were dissatisfied. One hundred percent of those who believed that comments had an influence over plan content were satisfied with the comment period, while only 33.3 percent of those who disagreed with this comment were satisfied. Similarly, all of those who believed that comments influenced plan format were satisfied, which was the case for only 20 percent of those who disagreed.

Respondents were also asked to respond to statements describing the public meetings, though were instructed to select “I don’t know” if they had not attended these events. Accordingly, 58.3 and 54.3 percent respectively reported not knowing whether the key points of the plan were clearly presented at the public comment meetings or whether those attending the meetings were given sufficient opportunity to express their opinions. About a quarter of respondents agreed with each of these statements, while 8.3 percent disagreed. One respondent recommended that the review and comment period feature “smaller, more local meetings to engage landowners and sportsmen rather than to continue to preach to the choir.”

#### *Implementation and impact of the plan on stakeholders*

Since the publication of the plan, the VFGD has held an annual Wildlife Congress, which brings together a wide array of stakeholders to discuss plan implementation. At the first of these congresses, a coalition of conservation partners launched the Vermont Wildlife Partnership. The Partnership, which is coordinated by the Northern Forest Alliance and is not directly associated with the VFGD, includes 53 member organizations and works to secure increased funding for the VFGD and for plan



implementation.<sup>133</sup> An agency employee has also expressed an interest in organizing a separate implementation work group or coalition to work on issues other than funding.<sup>134</sup> A conservation partner list serve continues to be maintained by the agency, though some respondents felt that more frequent updates were necessary.

In Vermont, a portion of SWG funds are distributed to non-agency partners through a recently developed competitive grant process.<sup>135</sup> Organizations now compete

<b>Implementation factor</b>	<b>Average Agreement/ Satisfaction Level</b>	<b>Percent Agreed/ Satisfied*</b>	<b>Percent Disagreed/ Dissatisfied</b>
Satisfaction with the plan implementation process since 2005	4.21	45.40%	30.30%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has worked with the agency on plan projects	5.34	69.70%	21.20%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted funding or program priorities as a result of the plan	3.5	33.40%	45.50%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has shifted formed new partnerships as a result of the plan	3.82	33.40%	42.50%
Agreement that the respondent, or the organization represented, has used the plan in some way (e.g. referenced in a grant)	4.84	54.50%	24.20%
*Due to neutral responses percentages do not always add up to 100%			

for grants to conduct implementation projects and have put up a portion of the matching funds necessary to access the SWG funds.<sup>136</sup> As described below, however, several were frustrated with aspects of the granting process.

As Table 30 indicates, 45.4 percent of respondents were generally satisfied with the implementation process, while 30.3 percent were dissatisfied. Respondents were generally pleased that SWG funds were being made available to partner organizations for implementation projects. Some respondents, however, argued that the granting process was too cumbersome, that more outreach was needed, and that a priority map was necessary for effective

<sup>133</sup> Vermont Conservation NGO representative, Telephone interview with Nicole Lewis, October 29, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>134</sup> Vermont Conservation NGO representative, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, October 3, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>135</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, (VFW), “Vermont’s Wildlife Action Plan.” (Waterbury, VT: 2005). 5-16

<sup>136</sup> Vermont Fish and Wildlife representative, Telephone interview with Lauren Pidot, October 4, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI.

implementation.

When respondents were asked with which aspects of implementation they were most satisfied, six out of the nineteen respondents expressed approval for the availability of funds for partner-led implementation projects. Several respondents also commented on the availability of the plan as an educational resource, specifically, according to one respondent, for private landowners. Three respondents also approved of the agencies participation with partnerships and work with stakeholder groups.

While no respondent was against the distribution of SWG funds through competitive grants, several expressed concern over the process by which this is carried out. Three respondents felt that the application process was cumbersome and slow. Others were concerned about the focus of the grants, with one feeling that “the funding is narrowly focused, [with] not enough consideration given to habitat protection,”<sup>137</sup> and another wishing “to have seen the funds distributed to more organizations.”<sup>138</sup> Additionally, two respondents were concerned about agency’s financial expectations of its conservation partners. The first felt that it was unreasonable to expect partners to provide a 1:1 match for the SWG funds. The second, quite pointedly, expressed concern that the agency was too focused on securing matching funds to access the state’s full allocation of SWG funds. He or she argued, the agency is “not talking about plan implementation so much as pushing the environmental community to raise money for them to make up for sagging license revenues.”<sup>139</sup>

. Several respondents also suggested that the agency needed to engage in additional outreach and stakeholder engagement activities. Specifically, two respondents felt that it would be beneficial to have additional updates on the progress of implementation, while another felt that additional outreach to private landowners was needed. It was also recommended that the agency go forward with creating an implementation coalition to offer a forum for partners and agency employees to “regularly discuss substantive progress toward habitat protection, management and restoration priorities that need to be identified within the plan.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Vermont Survey Response #16, November 12, 2007

<sup>138</sup> Vermont Survey Response #10, November 9, 2007

<sup>139</sup> Vermont Survey Response #33, November 21, 2007

<sup>140</sup> Vermont Survey Response #33, November 21, 2007

The final significant theme of respondent comments was the continued need for a priority map to aid in conservation efforts. Four respondents felt that a priority area map was a necessary next step. As one respondent argued, “Now that species and habitat types are prioritized, you need to prioritize actual places! The plan, as it is, isn't that useful to land protection organizations.”<sup>141</sup>

Beyond their attitudes about implementation, 69.7 percent of the respondents are collaborating with the agency on one or more projects outlined in the plan, while 54.5 percent have used the plan in some way (see Table 30). A third of respondents, or the organizations they represent, have also shifted program or funding priorities and have formed new partnerships as a result of the plan.

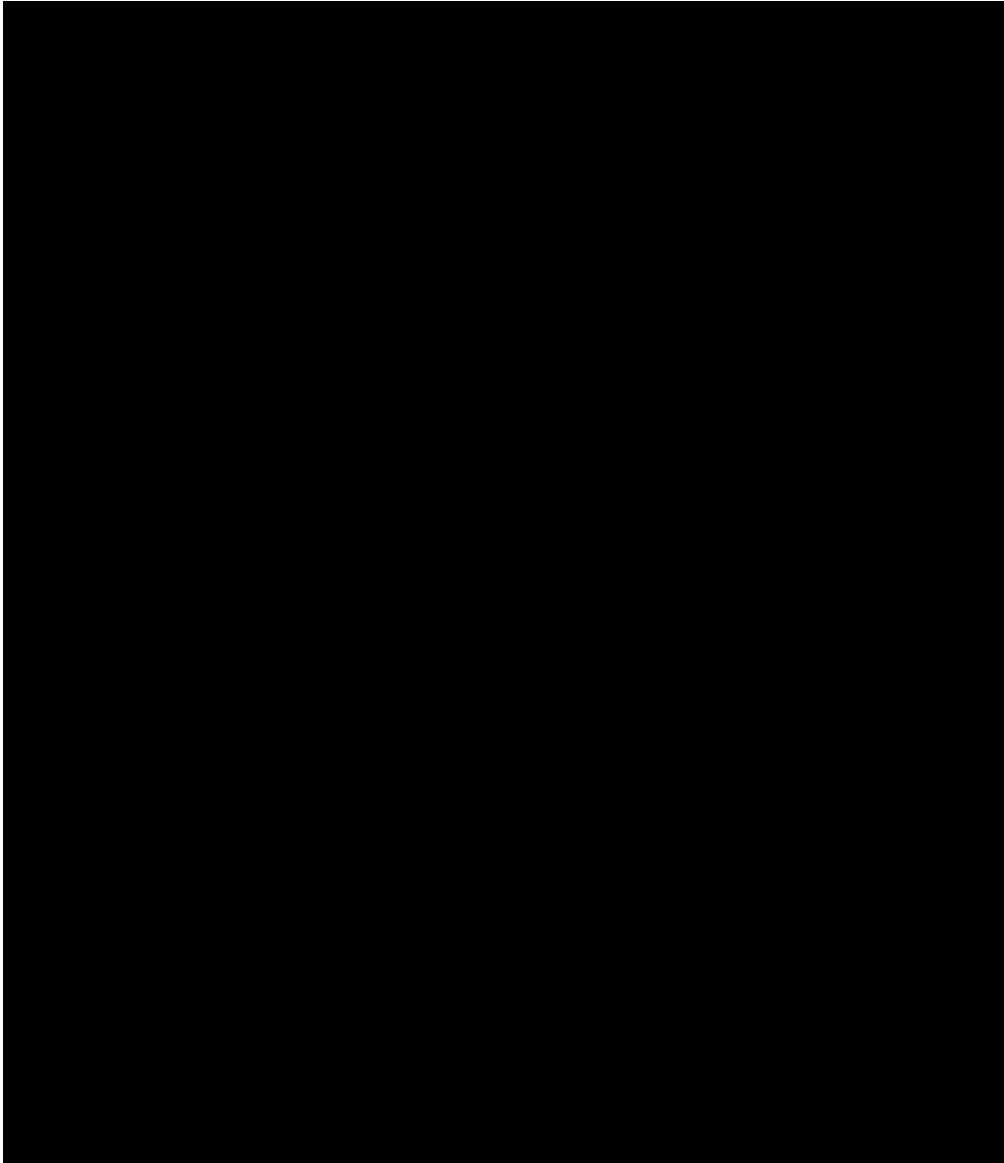
Respondents were asked to specify how they have been engaged in implementation. Three were engaged directly in projects or research designed to implement the plan. Two respondents noted that they had referenced the plan and its priority species in grant applications, while an additional two reported having used it to for educational purposes. Another noted that it had been used to set priorities for a program for which he or she serves on a committee. Only one respondent identified themselves specifically as a member of the Vermont Wildlife Partnership.

Relatively modest associations were found between the satisfaction of Vermont respondents with stakeholder engagement in plan development and their agreement with statements addressing the impact of the plan and their involvement with implementation (see Table 31). The strongest association was found between satisfaction with the overall engagement process and satisfaction with the implementation process. Fifty-six percent of those who were satisfied with engagement were satisfied with implementation, while 100 percent of those who were dissatisfied with engagement were also dissatisfied with implementation. Regressing the two sets of satisfaction levels found that 33.62 percent of the variation in how satisfied respondents were with implementation can be accounted for by their level of satisfaction with engagement. Those who were satisfied with engagement were also more likely to collaborate with the agency on implementation projects: 84 percent of those who were satisfied had collaborated, while only 33.3 percent of those who were dissatisfied had. An  $R^2$  of 28.33 supported this modest association. A

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<sup>141</sup> Vermont Survey Response #2, November 9, 2007

similar  $R^2$  (25.16 percent) was found when stakeholder engagement satisfaction levels were regressed against agreement that stakeholders had used the plan in some way. Sixty-eight percent of those who were satisfied had used the plan, while 66.7 percent of those who were dissatisfied had not (44.3 percent were neutral on the subject). Only weak association could be discerned between engagement satisfaction and agreement that a respondent had either formed new partnerships or shifted priorities as a result of the plan.



These generally modest levels of association suggest that satisfaction suggest that factors other than satisfaction with stakeholder engagement shaped respondents' actions and attitudes. These factors include, but are certainly not limited to, the usefulness of the plan as a guide to action, how engaged stakeholders were with the agency and with each other

prior to the development of the plan, the availability of funding tied to plan priorities and actions, and the interest of an individual or organization in aligning its priorities with those of the state. These factors are only partially addressed here, though all would be worthy of further inquiry. The issue of new funding associated with the plan is addressed in a characterization of the development and implementation of plans in the Northeastern United States prepared in association with this study. This report can be found at [www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/swap](http://www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/swap).

As indicated in Table 22 (above), 69.4 percent agreed that the plan is an effective wildlife strategy and 63.9 percent agreed that it is well laid out. Twenty-two point two percent and 16.7 percent respectively disagreed with these statements. Agreement that the plan is an effective strategy appears moderately associated with levels of respondent satisfaction with implementation, but only weakly associated with involvement with implementation. Sixty-three point seven percent of respondents who agreed that the plan was effective were satisfied with implementation, while only 13.6 percent of those who disagreed were satisfied. An  $R^2$  value of 46.46 confirms that this association is relatively strong.

As with Maine and Vermont an attempt was made to assess the impact on participation in plan implementation of previous engagement with the agency. It was, once again, difficult to make interesting generalizations due to the distribution of the respondents. All Vermont respondents had previously been engaged with the agency. Seventy-eight point eight percent of Vermont respondents had previously both collaborated with the VFGD on projects and commented on its plans. Eighteen percent had previously collaborated with the agency but had not commented on plans, and 3 percent (one individual) had previously commented but not collaborated.

A higher percentage of those who had only collaborated with the agency, compared to those who had both collaborated and commented, were satisfied with implementation (50 percent compared to 46.2 percent), had shifted priorities and formed new partnerships as a result of the plan, and had used the plan in some way (50 percent compared to 26.9 percent in all cases). However, 73.1 percent of those who had both collaborated and commented were collaborating with the agency on plan projects, as compared to 66.7 percent of those who had just collaborated. The one individual who had

only commented on agency plans was not satisfied with implementation, but did agree that his or her organization had shifted priorities and formed new partnerships as a result of the plan and that he or she had made use of the plan in some way. In sum, at least among these respondents, it does not appear that there is a relationship between the robustness of previous engagement and participation in implementation. Further investigation using random sampling of stakeholders would be useful to better understand the relationship between previous engagement and participation in implementation.

#### *Recommendations*

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are offered for the development of future iterations of the Vermont plan and the implementation of the current plan. Recommended actions are directed at the lead agency and are intended to maintain and enhance stakeholder satisfaction with the engagement process and boost support for implementation.

- If possible, hold additional, facilitated meetings with multiple stakeholder groups. This will not resolve the tension between certain groups, but may ensure that everyone feels like the process has been balanced and fair.
- Work on building trust with concerned private landowners and communicating the importance of priority maps for conservation planning. Consider inviting stakeholders and agency employees from states where maps have successfully been completed to answer questions from those who are concerned about mapping.
- Increased engagement of private landowners in the process to the extent possible.
- Ensure that all participants are kept up-to-date on the progress of plan development, and are given timely notification of relevant meetings.
- Clarify to stakeholders the method by which individuals are appointed to future technical and development committees.
- Increase opportunities for substantive input at large conservation partner meetings, perhaps by having more breakout sessions devoted to working on specific issues.

- Clarify to stakeholders the extent to which comments made during review and comment periods will influence the plan. If possible, respond to those who submit comments explaining why their suggestions have, or have not, been made use of.

**Implementation**

- Work with stakeholders to address concerns over the SWG grant application process.
- Increase implementation updates to conservation partners.
- Increase outreach about the plan to private landowners.
- Convene an implementation working group made up of engaged conservation partners and relevant agency employees.