

BY Christina Soto

What I Learned at Camp

In early 2007 a light bulb went on over conservation finance expert Story Clark's head. Why not gather conservation leaders in one place for an intensive learning experience on the latest (and often underused) conservation finance techniques? With the support of Peter Stein of Lyme Timber Company and the offer to host of Yale University's Brad Gentry, co-director of the Center for Business and the Environment at Yale (CBEY), the Conservation Finance Boot Camp series was born on the Yale campus in June 2007.

"Each year our instructors are leaders and innovators in their fields, and there is plenty of opportunity for the intentionally small group of attendees to address their own funding needs over five days," says Clark, who teaches at and coordinates the camp with Stein and Gentry. "Although the camp structure is intense and very fast-paced, it is also informal, congenial and highly interactive, with tremendous shared learning and networking among the speakers and attendees."

Co-sponsors of the first camp included CBEY, Island Press, the Land Trust Alliance, the Conservation Finance Innovation Network (affiliated with the Program on Conservation Innovation at the Harvard Forest) and Clark's Conservation Consulting company.

The camp was such a success that four more have been held, including one in the West sponsored by Island Press and hosted by the Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University. The camps have a timely theme and have included such topics as:

- Trends and Opportunities in a Capital-Constrained World
- Innovations in Philanthropic Fundraising
- Tapping Conservation and Mission-Related Investor Capital

Clark says that attendees comprise a mix of conservationists that includes U.S. and international land trust board members, executive directors and other staff members, as well as conservation investors, foundation staff and consultants. "Board members, whether they attend themselves or send staff, can especially benefit from the camps because of their long-term view of organizational direction and outcomes. The camps present strategies to achieve these."

Launching a Capital Campaign

The board of directors of the Downeast Lakes Land Trust in Maine had a very good reason to send Executive Director Mark Berry to the Conservation Finance Boot Camp.

"We were at the beginning of a four-year, \$24 million capital campaign," says Berry. "I have had ample opportunity to apply what I learned."



The Wilderness Land Trust recently purchased this 640-acre inholding in the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness in the Mendocino National Forest in Northern California. The trust is currently working to transfer it to the U.S. Forest Service for permanent protection.

THE WILDERNESS LAND TRUST

PROFILE OF A BOARD MEMBER CHALLENGE GROUP

Columbia Land Conservancy Celebrates 25 Years

Berry explains that he gained a better understanding of good practices; that the instructors drilled down into details of how to apply a concept. “The information about private philanthropy, about working with individuals, was most helpful—for instance, the importance of understanding your potential donors’ interests and motivations for being involved in a specific conservation project.”

With its West Grand Lake Community Forest campaign, Downeast Lakes Land Trust is working to acquire a 22,000-acre forest with 17 miles of lakeshore. The project will complete an initiative to conserve 370,000 acres around the village of Grand Lake Stream, a thriving community surrounded by lakes and forest supporting public recreation, fish and wildlife, and sustainable forestry. Understandably, donor prospects are drawn to the effort for their own reasons. “Some are interested in the wildlife habitat protection and forest management for local benefit because the community relies heavily on fishing, hunting, camping and guiding,” says Berry. “Others are interested in the scope of the project, as this forest is the last piece of a large landscape-scale project in Maine. Still others look at the really big picture, at how this landscape is relevant to climate change and biodiversity conservation.”

Is the campaign on target? “Yes,” says Berry. “Though we are still in the middle of the effort, the campaign has received strong local support and is an outstanding conservation opportunity at the national level.”

Creating an Internal Loan Fund

Across the country, Aimee Rutledge applies what she learned at the boot camp she attended in 2009 to The Wilderness Land Trust, a nationwide group with a California program that Rutledge manages.

“We are working hard to develop private financing mechanisms such as those discussed at the camp,” says Rutledge. “We purchase private inholdings that threaten federally designated wilderness areas with incompatible development, then transfer those inholdings to the appropriate federal agency to perma-

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, Columbia Land Conservancy in New York works in partnership with landowners and the community to protect wildlife habitat, farmland and rural open space, and to strengthen connections between people and the land. In its 25 years, CLC has protected over 21,000 acres with conservation easements, helped establish more than 5,000 acres of public lands, and created nine public preserves for free recreational use. These protected areas represent more than 5% of the total land in Columbia County.

Executive Director Peter Paden was first invited to join CLC’s board in 1988. At the time he was practicing law in New York City and owned a weekend home in the area. As an attorney he had a special interest in land conservation through his work in environmental and land use law. He is proud that CLC has been able to bring together long-time residents, weekend homeowners, farmers, hunters and local government leaders over a shared interest in the future of Columbia County’s natural beauty and exceptional conservation qualities. CLC operates an extensive education program, working with local daycare centers, youth groups, public and private schools, and senior living facilities. CLC provides regular training workshops for local land use officials and has an innovative program to support the county’s active agricultural sector.

The most important work for his organization in 2011 will be outreach. “We’re going to use the occasion

of our 25th anniversary to mount a concerted campaign to increase awareness in our community of who we are and what we are trying to do,” he says. “We’ve been doing outreach for a long time, but it is impossible to do too much of it.”

Peter strongly values the work of the Land Trust Alliance and has encouraged his board to support the Alliance through the Board Member Challenge, a program through which board members of an organization join the Alliance as individual members. “What the Alliance has been able to accomplish in public policy and professional support simply could not be done by an individual land trust,” says Peter. “Having a voice in Washington really makes a difference for the work that we are doing locally. The support the Alliance provides through standards and practices, accreditation and conservation defense is invaluable.”

nently protect the wilderness. In most cases, we have to be able to close quickly with the private owners, which means we have to have quick access to funding.”

Rutledge says the group had been dealing with private individual lenders on a case by case basis, but had been developing a different concept when she went to the camp. “The camp offered ways to think about private equity financing, about how to group individuals together. That really helped us gel our idea of the Wilderness Opportunity Fund (WOF), an internal loan fund we created to work with donors to get advance pledges and commitments, which then gives us the ability to quickly purchase an inholding.”

With a long list of inholdings, Rutledge says only 3-5 % become available per year, usually because of a generational change. “The beauty of the WOF is that as soon as we sell the property to the Bureau of Land Management, or to the Forest or Park Service, we can rotate those funds back in. It’s the WOF that keeps on giving. It gives us quick, business-like buying power, so we can quickly purchase the properties, then rotate the funds back in and use them over and over again. Depending on their needs, investors have access to some interest return, and the satisfaction of knowing that their assets are being used to protect these wonderful properties.”

Rutledge enjoyed her experience at the boot camp so much that the following year she went back, only this time as an invited speaker. “We wanted to share our experience working more with private equity financing and how to use resource mitigation as a tool to protect conservation lands. It was great to go back. Directly learning from the other knowledgeable participants and speakers is the best part of the camp.”

Becoming Self-Sustaining

Donna Meyers, director of conservation programs at Big Sur Land Trust in California, took home a different message from the boot camp she attended.

“We are looking at utilizing some of our properties as earning properties,” says Meyers. “But we are figuring this out with our attorney’s help because we want to do it

right, and programmatically we want to find the right potential economic uses for the properties that fit with our mission.”

Big Sur Land Trust is looking at some of its farms and ranches, and at ideas such as leasing buildings on a property to run environmental education programs; creating community gardens on other properties; or tying together some properties with a farm business plan.

“By looking at our land and projects as economic drivers, we can both consider making some projects self-sustaining, and also support the communities in which these projects are located,” says Meyers. “We’re working on a couple of business plans now. It’s an exciting way to think about conservation.”

Thinking about the Future

Some of the boot camp attendees came away with ideas to consider for the future. Joe Moll, executive director of McKenzie River Trust in Oregon, says the camp “changed the way I look at projects of significant scale, for instance, integrating our work with larger regional efforts and developing creative ways to finance them. We’re also considering our need for

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enduring income streams for stewardship, and finding that our donors appreciate the fact that we can look at our projects with that long-term perspective.”

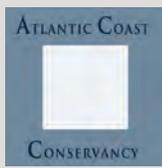
Jeff Marshall, vice president for resource protection at the Heritage Conservancy in Pennsylvania, says that some of the things discussed at boot camp, like mitigation and carbon sequestration, are just now becoming interesting to them. “Overall, though, the camp was great at presenting the economics of conservation,” says Marshall, “and at studying smart ways to meet our mission and ensure we have a dependable income stream not related to grants and traditional sources.”



Board Member Challenge
 When 50% or more of your land trust’s board members join the Land Trust Alliance as individual members, your land trust will be recognized and celebrated nationally for providing leadership for America’s land conservation community. To learn more, contact Megan Taaffe (mtaaffe@lta.org, 202-638-4725, ext. 320) or visit www.lta.org/get-involved/bmc.

AS OF JANUARY 2011

100%

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- Finger Lakes Land Trust
- Ranchland Trust of Kansas
- Sierra Foothill Conservancy
- Western New York Land Conservancy