



UPPER SUSQUEHANNA CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

The Upper Susquehanna Conservation Alliance (USCA) – Fifteen years old, this model of collaborative, member-driven landscape conservation is hitting its stride.

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Mission Statement

- ▶ The mission of the Upper Susquehanna Conservation Alliance (USCA) is to promote the conservation of natural resources in the headwaters region of the Susquehanna River in New York. The USCA is an alliance of agencies, organizations, academic institutions, and individuals who are working collaboratively to conduct green infrastructure planning, implement restoration and maintenance of high quality waters and habitats, protect and restore species of greatest conservation need, reduce impacts of flooding, and promote sustainable working landscapes for the people of the watershed.

Take home message – My perspective

- ▶ To achieve meaningful landscape conservation, you must meet people where they are, understand what their priorities are and strive to find common interest and move forward together in a collaborative manner that benefits all partners and has meaningful conservation outcomes.
- ▶ Collaborative effort benefits include effective, efficient use of resources. By sharing expertise, equipment, staff time, and network contacts you can achieve outcomes that you may not be able to achieve on your own.
- ▶ Granting entities look favorably at collaborative efforts as valuable investments and most often give more weight to collaborative proposals than single entity proposals.
- ▶ There tends to be more public support for conservation that reflects a broad representative effort based on local and regional interests.

The evolution and success of the USCA model of landscape conservation

- ❖ How does it work
- ❖ Why does it work
- ❖ The evolution and accomplishments
- ❖ USCA and Chesapeake WILD – a mutually beneficial partnership
- ❖ Come join us

USCA – How does it work?

- ▶ The USCA is a facilitated network of agencies, organizations, and people who are matched up to address conservation priorities of common interest.
- ▶ There are no full-time staff, no dedicated budget, and no explicit governance structure - It is member driven.
- ▶ My role is a part time partnership coordinator supported by the USFWS. In my role as the chair of the USCA much of what I do is to help facilitate coordination and collaboration and bring members with similar interests together, disseminate information and assist in finding resources to accomplish landscape conservation.
- ▶ There is an annual meeting of the entire membership and ad hoc meetings of the working groups through out the year.
- ▶ Working groups form or are dissolved based on member interest.
- ▶ Members not actively involved in work groups continue to be engaged to learn what is going on in the upper watershed – one of the values of networking.



There are currently 13 self formed working groups:

- ❖ Brook Trout
- ❖ Flood
- ❖ Hellbender
- ❖ Invasive Species
- ❖ Landscape Planning
- ❖ Migratory Fish
- ❖ Mussel
- ❖ Outreach
- ❖ Roadside Ditch
- ❖ Wetlands
- ❖ Wood Turtle
- ❖ Butternut Valley
- ❖ E-DNA Community of Practice

These workgroups work at their own pace based on a consensus decision making approach.

The workgroups are encouraged to coordinate and collaborate whenever they can share data and resources especially when working in the same sub-watershed to achieve more holistic outcomes.

Why does it work?

- ▶ USCA started in 2010 as an effort of the USFWS New York Field Office desire to engage and collaborate with others working in the watershed. Many other partners desired the same and it quickly blossomed (currently over 250 members, representing over 65 agencies, organizations and individuals)
- ▶ There are many reasons why it has been sustained over the last 15 years:
 - ❖ It is member driven – it exists because the members find value in the power of coordination, collaboration, and sharing of resources.
 - ❖ Members work at a pace that they can manage along with their day-to-day responsibilities.
 - ❖ Our members understand that landscape conservation is a long game which requires patience, persistence and flexibility.
 - ❖ Granting entities tend to favor collaborative efforts as they are community supported, efficient, cost effective and results oriented. USCA work groups have become very successful in competing for funding as a recognition of the USCA has grown.

Landscape Conservation at Multiple Scales – USCA & Chesapeake WILD

- ▶ Chesapeake WILD is administered by the USFWS in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- ▶ Chesapeake WILD provides flexible funding through multiple pillars (Implementation, Collaborative Conservation, Planning and Technical Assistance, Restoration and Protection, Recreational Opportunities) from which the multiple work groups of USCA can request funding. This has greatly accelerated planning and implementation of projects in the upper watershed.
- ▶ This flexibility in funding allows for more alignment with and contributions toward conservation priorities at multiple landscape scales.
- ▶ USCA, having been established prior to the existence of Chesapeake WILD, was primed and ready to support the pillars of the Act and to benefit from the funding that could now be directed to USCA priorities in the upper watershed – a mutually beneficial situation.

What does success look like – the value of membership

- ▶ Members have an increased network of support.
- ▶ Annual meetings provide presentations of new information and opportunities for workgroups to interact, share and coordinate activities, new members get to meet others and join work groups of interest.
- ▶ Information is regularly disseminated to all members to keep them informed of new information, funding opportunities and for coordination purposes.
- ▶ Funded projects extend collaborative networks, develop strategic plans, implement on the ground projects, and train up-and-coming students in areas of expertise needed in the watershed.

What does success look like – the value of membership – Funding - USFWS

- ▶ From 2019 to 2022 the USFWS New York Field Office provided a total of \$120,000 in small grants to work groups to advance their priorities:
 - ❖ *Owego Creek Headwater Protection and Restoration (Landscape Work Group)*
 - ❖ *Greenaker Property Habitat Assessment (Landscape Working Group)*
 - ❖ *Flood Education Brochures - Flood Work Group*
 - ❖ *Reintroduction of American Eel (Pearly Mussel/Eel Work Group)*
 - ❖ *Culvert Replacement (Brook Trout Work Group)*

What does success look like – the value of membership – Funding- USFWS

- ❖ *Hellbender Reintroduction into the Upper Susquehanna River Watershed (Hellbender Workgroup)*
- ❖ *Invasives Species Prevention (Invasives Workgroup)*
- ❖ *Mitigating Barriers with Aquatic Organisms in Wheeler Brook (Brook Trout Work Group)*
- ❖ *Hellbender Head Start Monitoring Project in the Upper Susquehanna Watershed (Hellbender Working Group)*

What does success look like – the value of membership – Funding - USFWS

- ▶ *An Assessment of Catatank Creek Brook Floater Population (Mussel Work Group)*
- ▶ *Yellow Lamp Mussel Life Cycle Research (Mussel Work Group)*

What does success look like – the value of membership – Funding - Chesapeake WILD

- ▶ From 2023 through 2024 Chesapeake WILD has provided \$500,000 to support projects submitted by USCA members (2025 grant recipients will be announced soon)
- ❖ SUNY Oneonta (Paul Lord) – *New York Susquehanna Watershed Brook Floater Habitat Assessment*
- ❖ Trout Unlimited (Tracy Brown w/ USFWS, DEC) – *Assessing Brook Trout Habitat in the Cohocton and Owego Watersheds*
- ❖ Western Pennsylvania Conservancy – (Mary Walsh) – *Conserving At-Risk Mussel Species in the Upper Susquehanna River Watershed*

What does success look like – the value of membership – Funding – Chesapeake WILD

- ❖ Tioga County Soil and Water Conservation District (USC – Wendy Walsh) *Aligning Partnerships to Address Conservation Priorities in the Upper Susquehanna Watershed*

EPA/NFWF Related Grants

- ▶ Several Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction and Small Watershed Grants have also gone to members during this time frame.
- ▶ As you can see USCA members have been very successful in advancing landscape conservation through their collaborative efforts!

Thank you – Please consider being part of the USCA

- ▶ To become a member all you need to do is send me your email address and I will add you to the member list.
- ▶ If you have any questions or need assistance, please feel free to contact me:
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