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Abstract Track: Conservation in the Face of Change
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Title: Are They Ready? Determining Whether or Not Towns are Prepared to Shift From Town-Based Land Use Master Planning to Watershed Master Planning.

Population pressure in coastal New Hampshire challenges land use decision-making and threatens the ecological health and functioning of Great Bay, an estuary designated as both a NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserve and an EPA National Estuary Program site. Regional population in the seacoast has quadrupled from 1940 to 2000. This growth is characterized by sprawl, increasing impervious surface cover and larger lot rural development. All six of Great Bay's contributing watersheds, including the Lamprey River watershed, are facing these challenges, resulting in calls for strategies addressing growth, development and land use planning. The communities within the Lamprey River watershed comprise this case study. Do these towns communicate upstream and downstream when making land use decisions? Are cumulative effects considered while debating development proposals? Do town land use groups consider the Bay, the coasts or the ocean in their decision-making? By characterizing the existing social landscape of decision-making in this case study, a framework will be presented describing the understanding, challenges, communication networks and cooperation potential within the towns of the watershed. The methodology employed is a grounded theory approach with mixed qualitative methods consisting of semi-structured interviews and GIS based map biographies. Data collection directly involves the local land use decision makers found on each town's Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Zoning Board of Appeal, Heritage Commission and Open Space Committee. Data is organized, coded and analyzed within qualitative data analysis software resulting in an integrated theoretical framework describing the social landscape of land use decision making within this watershed. This presentation reviews the results of this case study and the developed methodology, which can be used in watersheds elsewhere to map out the potential for moving towns towards an ecosystem based management paradigm of watershed master planning.