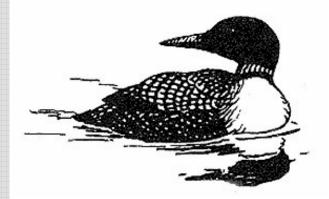# The Wildlife Conservation Society in the Adirondacks: Building Capacity for Conservation

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Prepared by:

T. Bruce Lauber
Human Dimensions Research Unit
Department of Natural Resources
Cornell University

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Executive Summary

The Adirondack Program of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) works collaboratively with communities to advance natural resource conservation and promote community health. In this report, I assess WCS's success at this work and identify areas of particular strengths and weaknesses. The report focuses on three areas:

- conservation outcomes;
- community capacity; and
- organizational capacity.

Achieving natural resource conservation often depends on first achieving other intermediate ends. These intermediate ends may be intangible but nonetheless critical for attaining long-term conservation outcomes. They include:

- promoting recognition of a conservation need;
- reaching agreement on objectives;
- selecting actions to achieve objectives; and
- implementing these actions.

In some cases, the ability to achieve any of these conservation outcomes depends on community capacity. WCS's Adirondack program works to attain conservation goals by trying to build community capacity. Community capacity for conservation is influenced by a variety of community characteristics:

- relationships between important stakeholders;
- formal partnerships between organizations;
- knowledge of a variety of types;
- leadership;
- a sense of common purpose; and
- the credibility of key stakeholders.

WCS's success at building community capacity and achieving conservation outcomes depends to some degree on its organizational capacity – those characteristics of the organization that influence its ability to function effectively, including:

- organizational personnel;
- operational funding;
- materials available for the organization's work;
- partnerships between the organization and other organizations; and
- the credibility of the organization to outsiders.

In cooperation with WCS staff, I conducted five focus group sessions to assess WCS's impacts in the Adirondacks. One group was composed of WCS's Adirondack staff. The other four groups included representatives of other Adirondack organizations, community and agency

leaders, and Adirondack residents who had interacted with WCS in the past. The level of interaction participants had had with WCS varied, but all had some level of familiarity with WCS's activities. Eight staff members participated in one focus group and 31 external stakeholders participated in the other four focus groups. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their perceptions of WCS and its impacts. Each session lasted approximately two hours. I analyzed transcripts of the focus group sessions by categorizing participants' statements about:

- the tangible and intangible conservation outcomes to which WCS had contributed;
- the community capacity characteristics that WCS had helped build; and
- WCS's capacity as an organization.

The precursors to conservation outcomes and elements of community and organizational capacity described above served as the initial framework for categorizing these statements. This framework was expanded as necessary to capture the full range of participants' perspectives.

WCS's activities contribute to the capacity of communities to conserve resources in several ways.

- WCS conducts research and synthesizes information on critical issues related to natural resource conservation in the Adirondacks. They disseminate this information to key stakeholders who have come to rely on it in a variety of ways.
- WCS builds and nurtures relationships between others in the Park. This relationship-building work has lowered tension between traditional adversaries in the Adirondacks.
- WCS has helped diverse interests forge a sense of common purpose on important Adirondack issues. Focus group participants argued that WCS's work led to the development of a vision that bridged environmental and community interests.
- WCS staff believe that their work has motivated and enabled others to become involved in resource conservation efforts.

WCS's contributions to building community capacity are influenced by its organizational capacity. Several characteristics of WCS were cited as important components of its success.

- Perceptions of WCS staff as having a rare ability to work with a wide variety of people were almost universal. Their ability to listen, to be open to others, and to be non-threatening were mentioned repeatedly.
- The strength of WCS's staff contributes directly to another strength – its credibility. Its credibility, in turn, gives it an ability to influence decisions and actions in a way that not all organizations can.
- WCS's relationships with other stakeholders in the Park are a key to their success. These relationships are important in helping to ensure that the information they produce gets used and contribute to their success at working with communities.

Contributing to community capacity is an important element of WCS's mission, but it is not the only element. WCS is also interested in promoting natural resource conservation. WCS's work contributes to a variety of conservation outcomes.

While focus group participants recognized the strength of WCS's work in the Adirondacks (and hoped that these strengths would be maintained), they also suggested several areas of improvements.   These suggestions fell into five primary areas:

- WCS's activities have been diverse. Not all of these activities are closely related to natural resource conservation. Many staff and external stakeholders felt that WCS should focus on a narrower range of activities. However, focusing its activities more narrowly could create other tensions. One reason WCS's activities have not been narrowly focused is that it has been willing to be responsive to communities' interests and agendas. This willingness has been perceived as a strength and has built its credibility in the Adirondacks. Narrowing its focus could decrease WCS's ability to be responsive to community needs.
- WCS's efforts at publicity and communication were identified as a weakness. Many people are not aware of WCS and its key activities, and most agreed it would be helpful if WCS communicated more regularly about them.
- Several focus group participants argued that WCS's Adirondack Program needed more stable funding.
- The relationship with WCS International was seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage – providing the Adirondack Program with additional resources and experience but tying them to distant leaders who might not give them or the Adirondacks sufficient attention.
- Several participants argued that WCS should make a greater effort to reach out to and work with traditional sportsmen such as hunters and anglers.

At one focus group, the creation of an advisory board to address some of these shortcomings was proposed. This proposal received considerable discussion, although the group had mixed opinions about it. The group concluded that WCS staff were probably in the best position to decide whether an advisory board was needed.

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Background

The Adirondack Program of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) works collaboratively with communities to advance natural resource conservation and promote community health. In this report, I assess WCS's success at this work and identify areas of particular strengths and weaknesses, focusing on three core areas:

- conservation outcomes;
- community capacity; and
- organizational capacity.

Conservation Outcomes

Models of natural resource management and public policy development portray policy making as a process that proceeds through a series of discrete steps or stages (Jones 1984, Hahn 1990, Krueger and Decker 1993). Achieving the concrete ends for which policy is implemented (such as stabilizing the population of a species or improving habitat) often depends on first achieving other intermediate ends. These intermediate ends may be less tangible but nonetheless critically important for attaining long-term conservation goals and objectives. They include:

- promoting recognition of a conservation need;
- reaching agreement on objectives;
- selecting actions to achieve objectives; and
- implementing these actions.

Even if long-term goals (such as a stabilized population) have not yet been attained, demonstrable benefits of conservation work may still exist if some of these intermediate ends have been achieved. Identifying the degree to which WCS has helped to achieve both long-term conservation goals and intermediate steps towards these goals was one focus of this project.

Community Capacity

Working directly on conservation problems is not always enough to guarantee achievement of conservation goals. Many conservation problems are messy both from a biological and a human standpoint (McCool and Guthrie 2001, Lauber et al. 2002). Uncertainty about the causes of a problem or the best steps to resolve it often exists. Disagreement and disputes about the most worthy ends to pursue are common. Consequently, in some cases, communities must first build their capacity for conservation before they can manage natural resources effectively (Raik et al. 2005). Some conservation organizations may work to attain conservation goals by trying to build the capacity of communities to identify and pursue these goals. WCS has taken this approach in the Adirondacks.

Past work on capacity building has identified a variety of characteristics that contribute to the ability of communities to define and pursue conservation goals (Katon et al. 1999, Frentz et al. 2000, McCool and Guthrie 2001, Tucker 2004). Raik et al. (2003) articulated a number of these characteristics:

- relationships between important stakeholders;
- formal partnerships between organizations;
- knowledge of a variety of types;
- leadership;
- a sense of common purpose; and
- the credibility of key stakeholders.

The second component of this project was to determine to which of these elements of community capacity WCS's work contributed and how community capacity influenced conservation in the Adirondacks.

Organizational Capacity

Past work on capacity building has explored areas other than community capacity. Organizational capacity consists of those characteristics of organizations that influence their ability to function effectively. Raik et al. (2003) identified several organizational capacity characteristics:

- organizational personnel;
- operational funding;
- materials available for the organization's work;
- partnerships between the organization and other organizations; and
- the credibility of the organization to outsiders.

As part of my evaluation of WCS's work in the Adirondacks, I explored these characteristics of WCS and how it influenced its work.

Methods

Many of the community and organizational characteristics this study was trying to measure were intangible (e.g., awareness, relationships, etc.). I believed the best way to measure these characteristics was through people's perceptions of them. Rather than trying to identify an objective measure of awareness, relationships, or other attributes, this study sought to determine whether and how knowledgeable people perceived these qualities.

Consequently, the primary data gathering took place in a series of five focus group sessions. One group was composed of WCS's Adirondack staff. The other four groups included representatives of other Adirondack organizations, community and agency leaders, and Adirondack residents who had interacted with WCS in the past. The level of interaction participants had had with WCS varied, but all had some familiarity with WCS's activities. Eight staff members participated in one focus group and 31 external stakeholders participated in the other four focus groups.

External stakeholders participating in focus groups were asked to complete a brief open-ended questionnaire prepared by WCS's Adirondack staff prior to their scheduled focus groups

(Appendix A). These questionnaires contained a series of open-ended questions intended to prepare the external stakeholders for participation in the focus groups. The questionnaires also contained a checklist of WCS information resources and activities to assess usage of WCS resources. Twenty-five individuals (81%) completed the questionnaires.

The focus groups were facilitated by a researcher from the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell University. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their perceptions of WCS and its impacts (Appendix B). Participants were encouraged to share a variety of viewpoints. Each session lasted approximately two hours.

All sessions were tape recorded, and the recordings were transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed by categorizing participants' statements about:

- the tangible and intangible conservation outcomes to which WCS had contributed;
- the community capacity characteristics that WCS had helped build; and
- WCS's capacity as an organization.

The elements of conservation outcomes, community capacity, and organizational capacity listed in the Background section served as the initial framework for categorizing these statements. This framework was expanded as necessary to capture the full range of participants' perspectives.

Results and Discussion

The results describe the range of participants' perspectives on WCS and its work. Representative excerpts from focus group transcripts are included to demonstrate and clarify these perspectives. Each excerpt is labeled to indicate from which of the five focus groups it came.

Building Community Capacity

Responses to the written questionnaires reflected the usage of WCS information resources and activities by focus group participants (Table 1). In the focus group sessions, participants described three primary ways in which WCS activities helped build the capacity of the Adirondack community: generating and disseminating knowledge; building relationships and partnerships; and helping foster a sense of common purpose.

Knowledge: A Go-To Resource for Information

Conducting research, synthesizing information, and disseminating the results were seen as key activities of WCS in the Adirondacks by participants in all five focus groups:

> *WCS is a go-to resource. … very helpful to me … in terms of "I need information on this species and what can you tell me?" … The publications are excellent references because they're something that you can cite very easily. [FG5]*

> *I would definitely say the research [is important] and it's Adirondack-specific, which is our mission... We use every one of those white papers. [FG2]*

> *When I look at information there's three ways to look at it ... fact, perception and opinion... We make most of our decisions by opinion without peeling back what are the perceptions behind it and often ignoring the facts, or we don't have the facts. To me, where WCS comes into this is putting the facts on the table. [FG4]*

The Adirondack Atlas was mentioned in four out of the five focus groups as a particularly valuable product:

> *Personally I think the Adirondack Atlas is something that a lot of us hoped would happen at some point in our decades of working in the Adirondacks, but it took WCS to get it done. It's a wonderful, wonderful volume. [FG 5]*

One participant argued that the Atlas was an example of information synthesis that WCS does exceptionally well.

> *I think an important role with WCS is synthesis... For example, the Atlas ... it's all right there at one spot. You don't have to go talk to three different biologists from various universities... So I would say that's a continuing important role is synthesis, because very few people seem to have the time or motivation to synthesize all the things that have been done, bring them together in one place that's convenient, it's practical, it's accessible. [FG3]*

WCS staff believed that not only was their information valued, much of it was actually put to use in the Adirondacks:

> *And a lot of the groups that end up playing the role of advocacy and policy makers, they end up using our information, which I think goes back to our unique contribution to the science, the information that we provide. [FG1]*

Participants in other focus groups confirmed that belief, including this participant from a state planning agency:

> *The publications are uniformly excellent. [A] publication [on] exurban development ... really we thought had practical value for us and what we do in the park... This paper went right through the heart of it, very practical treatment of it... We're taking that information and trying to go a bit further with it and producing some guidelines or policy that would allow us to better treat the issue of exurban development. [FG3]*

One reason WCS's work in this area is so highly regarded is that it is seen as filling a niche that few others in the Adirondacks fill. This perception was held by WCS staff:

> *I think it's important that we're doing on-the-ground wildlife research because I think that while there are a lot of environmental advocate groups here, not many of them are*

> *doing science on the ground... I think that we fill that niche a little bit as a science group that isn't an academic group and therefore maybe a little bit more of it gets used immediately here instead of ending up back in Syracuse or wherever. [FG1]*

This perception was also shared by participants in the other focus groups:

> *We ... rely heavily on groups like the Wildlife Conservation Society. I think that any time we can bring better information and better science to the policy then we get away some from the opinions that "I like it" and "I don't like it" and there's a whole bunch of issues that I would say are science-based, in which activists groups throw out without the science behind it... We really depend on the science community. And WCS is in it ... more than perhaps anybody else that we look to. [FG4]*

WCS also was described as skilled at being able to make that information accessible not only to policy makers and advocacy groups, but to a broad range of people:

> *If you want to peel down a couple of layers in their documents there's really hard science. But on the other side it's understandable. It's just a pleasure ... Jerry Jenkins stood up and explained climate change in the Adirondacks and ... he took something you could chew on in terms of data and made it very understandable to the public and raised awareness as a result. [FG5]*

> *Some of the people in the community think about their daily work and going to their job. To them the Adirondacks is where I work, where I eat, where I sleep, and my kids grow up and they don't really think. ... Wildlife Conservation [Society] ... brings conservation issues to the local communities and makes people aware. [FG5]*

Relationships and Partnerships: Breaking Down Walls

A second key contribution WCS makes is building and nurturing relationships between others in the Park. WCS staff believe that this relationship-building work has gone a long way toward lowering tension between traditional adversaries in the Adirondacks:

> *One of the things I came away from all my meetings ten years ago with was that the biggest barrier to conservation was that most Adirondackers hated environmentalists... There's a lot of tension. There were literal fights in the couple of years before we started things, and I think one impact has been to really smooth some of that stuff out and lower the negative feelings... I wrote a letter to people ... who knew me in the program in different ways and I probably got twenty letters back and a lot of folks said this program really changed the equation up here, had people feeling much more positively toward the conservation community. [FG1]*

Participants in other focus groups confirmed this perception and some argued that it was one of the unique roles that WCS filled:

What makes [WCS] key is the bridge. It's unique. It's the only one of its kind... There's a certain amount of process involved in breaking down these barriers that have been so strongly constructed... The information centers, the exchange days, they're fleeting things that sort of dissipate and are gone, but in the footprint of what's left is ... this breaking down and eroding these walls and I think that's what's critical in the process... So I think that's something that's different about this organization and what needs to be kept going in it and why I've been a big advocate of keeping it going, because that's missing... It's nowhere except here. [FG2]

This bridge-building work was argued to be "critical" to helping the Adirondacks move forward in defining and pursuing a common agenda.

I think sometimes it's easy to focus on the specific scientific products that the WCS has worked on... But the real work I think that's so valuable ... is getting people to work together and to understand each other's views, and that's not always easy to measure. It's not always easy to see as valuable, but is absolutely critical, I think, if we're going to move forward as a community here in the park. [FG3]

Building relationships not only has benefited those who have traditionally been adversaries, but it has helped local communities establish relationships with other communities. These relationships are important as communities try to figure out how to address their problems. Referring particularly to the community exchange days, one town supervisor said:

For me it's that I feel as a town supervisor that I'm not completely alone out there... In our little isolated towns we feel that we don't have access to what other places are doing. WCS has given us an opportunity to see what other towns are doing, but they also brought in a kind of whole world of information that these are things that we can make connections for you. [FG5]

WCS's work has also opened doors for organizations that work in the Adirondacks. Some focus group participants argued that these relationships were critical as a way to get the most out of their work:

We try to think of ways in which we can extend ourselves ... and when you look at the vast size of our geography and the fact that we all have limited staffing in terms of doing any community work, that ability to leverage each other I think becomes exceptional and they do it very well. [FG5]

I rode with [individual's name] from Wilmington [at a WCS event] who also happened to be with the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks and probably would have never had the chance to interface with him [otherwise]... but developed a good relationship. Now I can call him to get research done or I have I guess an "in" with the Association rather than being a dues-paying member. [FG4]

A Sense of Common Purpose: A Bridge between the Environment and Communities

Closely related to WCS's relationship-building work has been its success at helping diverse interests forge a sense of common purpose on important Adirondacks issues. This contribution was cited in three of the focus groups as a benefit of their community work. Focus group participants argued that WCS's work led to the development of a vision that bridged environmental and community interests.

> *I think a lot of the community planning that we've … done with WCS is … going into a community, meeting with people, looking at … their strengths and weaknesses. … In most cases when you're looking at Adirondack communities it's that intersection between the natural environment and the manmade environment and how can they best benefit as a community? How can they have access to the public land? What businesses do they need? So that visioning work that they've done I think has been very useful. [FG5]*

> *Their essential niche has been this bridge, serving as a bridge between the environment and the communities, between local governments and us as managers and the environmental groups. That I see as their number one role and then you know, through their research, through their outreach, they build on that. [FG2]*

One participant argued that although WCS does not work to try to build consensus, its work provides the foundation that allows consensus to be built:

> *I don't think that WCS as an organization is building consensus. I think they're enabling the players to build consensus. They don't take that responsibility to actually have people come to a consensus. They put the pieces in place that allow those people to then take it the next step, to develop that consensus. I think that's a strength. [FG2]*

WCS's emphasis on both conserving natural resources and promoting healthy communities was seen as a critical component to the support they received and to their success:

> *The fundamental relationship started with the idea for the ACICs [Adirondack Community Information Centers] – to integrate ecology and economy. And … that concept is very important to winning hearts and establishing relationships. [FG5]*

> *I think the strength of [WCS] facilitation was that conservation really was also something that was good for the people. It wasn't just good for the environment… It didn't have to be one side versus the other… Community wasn't necessarily just people. Community was also the natural environment… I think a lot of what [WCS does] within programs is help to bring that discussion together, to really create that holistic view. [FG3]*

A member of one focus group maintained that this work ultimately contributed to support for conservation goals:

> *And I really think the value of WCS, up to now and in the future, is to continue to … be somebody that can bring people together, can create awareness within the communities*

here in the Park that the Park is good for them. And say it in ways that aren't threatening and that turn lights on in people's heads that you know, it's okay to be in favor of things that they only see as threats right now. [FG3]

The ability to bridge diverse interests in the development of a common vision was one of the attributes of WCS that was often cited as being unique.

That's WCS meeting with community members. It's sitting down with them. It's listening to them in the communities. ... That's the difference. Advocacy groups ... [are] not sitting down in communities in the same way. And I think that's a very unique feature of WCS, and I think that's where it becomes much more challenging to bridge the science and the community dialogue. [FG5]

Cultivating Leadership: Getting Fired Up

An outcome of WCS's work that was mentioned primarily in the WCS staff focus group was the way in which WCS's efforts could help others to become more involved in environmental efforts. This outcome was mentioned several times in the staff focus group, either in the context of getting individuals involved in activities in which they otherwise might not be involved or helping them find the motivation and energy to carry out those activities:

And the gap that I think we're filling is ... there aren't many researchers in the Park that are bringing research and conservation education to schools and to the general public and getting them actually involved and aware of how they can participate. A lot of people are requesting donations to help ... but they aren't actually having people do on-the-ground work. [FG1]

I think another outcome ... was getting [individual's name] fired up and that's another example of sort of someone who is a preexisting community leader who sort of wants to find tools to be a bit greener in one way or another and he has. [FG1]

We've got some of our teachers in the schools [who] would take on projects and continue the work that we started with whichever curriculum they participated in. And then also some of the college students ... they've gone on and done research projects based on the work that we're doing. [FG1]

This type of outcome was mentioned only once in the other focus groups, although this finding does not mean that participants in the other focus groups would not have agreed with it if it had been brought up.

The local institutions were doing great science work but I think WCS brought a new focus to that, and you renew excitement about the need and opportunities around that that we hadn't seen in a while... [FG3]

Organizational Capacity

WCS's contributions to building community capacity were influenced by its organizational capacity. Several characteristics of WCS were cited as important components of its success. First and foremost among these was its staff.

WCS Staff: Opening Doors

Perceptions of WCS staff as having a rare ability to work with a wide variety of people were almost universal. Their ability to listen, to be open to others, and to be non-threatening were mentioned repeatedly:

> *For me it's the approach that they take. Our organization works with a lot of other agencies ... And we sometimes have to really pull teeth to get those agencies to work with us. WCS comes to us in a very non-threatening way and they provide us with a lot of information. ... I like that ... They assist me ... on I'd say at least a monthly basis if not more than that. ... The ACIC is a good example of that. They helped us through that. They were not pushy. They were never forceful. They helped us. [FG5]*

> *I like the low-key approach... There's enough loud volume talking and beating of issues and all that does in my experience is to polarize, put people on one end and people on the other end. They are quietly competent. They go about their job. They're not hollering. They're not grinding an ax. They're presenting rational well-thought-out positions, and I think people appreciate that. People are tired of being pounded on. [FG3]*

One participant saw this ability as partially an outgrowth of their mission. Because it is not an advocacy group, it has the ability to work in a non-threatening way.

> *I think the fact that the Wildlife Conservation Society doesn't feel political, it doesn't feel academic. ... I think it sets up a very non-threatening ... you know it's not represented by any one university or college, nor is it affiliated with a particular viewpoint or a particular political cause. [FG5]*

Many focus group participants attributed this ability to the personalities of the particular individuals who serve on WCS's staff:

> *I think it's who they are. It's that thing that's harder to find. It's personality. It's a level of understanding with people. It's a level where you're able to bring information to people in ways that isn't threatening, that opens doors for communication. I think it's being a certain level of pleasant outreach that's non-threatening, especially when you're dealing with issues that are difficult. ... We came up against some difficult community reactions and the ability to listen to that and not be judgmental I think is a tremendous skill. [FG5]*

> *I think just the willingness to listen to people and genuinely care about what their concerns are and be able to recognize that wildlife is never on the top of that list but*

that's okay because there are other ways to find solutions that can benefit wildlife and communities also. When I first started working here ... I listened to these guys answer the phone and every time somebody called they were like, "Hey! How are you doing?" And I was just amazed... I was like, "Are you really that friendly with every single person that calls here?" [FG1]

In four out of the five focus groups, the staff's skill with people was attributed, at least in part, to the fact that the organization is dominated by women:

In a world where every single NGO is run by guys, every single agency is run by guys, this has been a women's group ... and if you look at those positive comments, I think that reflects something. I'm not sure what, but something is different with this group than others. [FG1]

But they're ... mostly female staff ... much more organized, much more willing to listen, much less intimidating than in an environmental group that has a loud male voice. [FG4]

One participant also attributed their success to the staff being from the Adirondacks:

I think one of the other reasons they're accepted is that they have a locally-based staff. It isn't looked upon as a bunch of outsiders coming in. Many of their staff have been born and raised or are known in the local community. They live in the local community. They aren't second homeowners coming in here and supporting different groups. [FG4]

Staff Credibility: Respect and Trust

The strength of WCS's staff contributes directly to another strength – its credibility. Its credibility, in turn, gives it an ability to influence decisions and actions in a way that not all organizations can.

They get to know the community before they react and there's lots of times other organizations I've dealt with have reacted to a certain issue. Maybe it's a power line. Whatever the issue, they react instead of really sitting down with the community and knowing the players. And I have to tell you, Zoë is a household name in Clifton-Fine and that's an important thing. And the influence. I think they definitely influence but they're able to get to know the players before they pass judgment, before they push their ideals on it, and I think a lot of organizations within the park try to push their agenda on communities and communities are going to rebel from that because they haven't taken the time to meet the people who live in the community. [FG5]

The credibility extends beyond their work with communities. Their science also is widely viewed as credible as one staff member observed:

That is one of our field marks ... pretty fair information that is not information that just argues one side of an issue and so I think we're known...we have a strength and I think

we're known as an information provider. I think we are increasingly trusted as an information provider. [FG1]

Their credibility allows them to work effectively with people from a variety of perspectives:

It's not an easy thing to be able to move between the various interests and enjoy respect ... pretty much universally... To be able to be viewed as good, strong scientific contributors amongst the scientific community, and then at the same time be able to enjoy the confidence of local government is an amazing thing. And they've done it. [FG3]

Several explanations were offered for their credibility. First, because the Adirondack program is relatively new, people did not have preconceptions about them because of their history:

They were the new kid in town, so therefore they don't have a history of being watchdogs and acting as a watchdog... They're ... soft sold rather than anything else, and I think at the same time they are more research based, so people tend to look at them as less propaganda. [FG2]

Second, they can be trusted to follow through on their commitments:

It's the basic things, like respect and trust... You look at some of the organizations and why do people hate them? Well obviously they may dislike them for their views, but usually it gets personal. And it gets personal because someone came to a meeting. They said something that the other person believed and then they went back and did something else... Building trustful relationships and having opportunities like this where you encourage open and honest feedback. To me those three elements are critical and I think that's where many of the environmental organizations have failed. [FG2]

Finally, WCS International is viewed as a wildlife conservation organization rather than an environmental protection organization:

One of course is I think one of the reasons they have been accepted is that they came from a conservation base rather than more of an environmental protection base. [FG4]

Partnerships: Connected to Everyone in the Park

WCS staff see their relationships with other stakeholders in the Park as a key to their success. They believe these relationships are important in helping to ensure that the information they produce gets used:

I think that we've been very strong at building relationships and without having the solid relationships with all these different people in the Park I don't think we'd be able to get our science or our information that we generate to them in an effective way. I think we've been very successful in that. [FG1]

Staff also think these relationships contribute to their success at working with communities:

Respondent 1: I think personal relationships with the leaders. I think that's a big factor of how well we're working in particular communities... having a personal relationship is a big factor...
Respondent 2: If you look at the communities that we work well with, it's often either a good personal relationship just by happenstance or common history with the leaders... or there are communities where maybe those relationships are really hard ones and come from trying again and again, working with the community again and again. [FG1]

Participants in the other focus groups also saw WCS's network of relationships as a strength:

And then the next resource that I would say is much more intangible and that is the human community networking aspect of WCS – is only connected to everyone in the park. It's unbelievable. [FG5]

But WCS's interconnections with other stakeholders are not limited to informal relationships. WCS has a number of more formal partnerships as well, which extend its capacity as well as the capacity of other organizations (such as the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and regional community development groups):

We had a very extensive outreach in education effort leading up to our ... regulation that requires the use of bear canisters in the eastern High Peaks, and [WCS] basically reached out to people whom we identified as potential users of the back country, who were universally having problems with bears, and people that were camping and explained to them why they were having problems, what they needed to do to address them... It was really important that we worked together on that... I might have one staff person that works on that part-time, and so to have a resource like WCS who says, "I'm interested in that. I think we can help. We have some expertise." It's just invaluable. [FG3]

Their staff in essence became an extension of ours. We thought that their overall skills in terms of working where communities are exceptional and the staff has always been very, very pleasant to work with. [FG5]

What we've done is kind of complimented and supplemented each other's efforts... we have had ... cooperative efforts... and have shared information and worked on developing education and outreach, shared products for distribution... There are numerous aspects for issues that we've worked on with WCS over the years. [FG2]

Participants in two of the focus groups argued that another kind of "partnership" was a strength of WCS's Adirondacks program, too. They saw the connection between the Adirondacks program and WCS International as a relationship that extended the capacity of the organization:

I see it as a strength... It's not just the Adirondack experience. It's like all these global experiences that they learn from... I see that as a strength, a serious strength. [FG2]

They can draw on what they're learning in the rest of the world... They can apply that here and then they can inform [policy makers]: "Gee. Guess what worked in Uganda and maybe it'll work here." [FG4]

Conservation Outcomes

Contributing to community capacity is an important element of WCS's mission, but it is not the only element. WCS is also interested in promoting natural resource conservation. In theory, capacity-building is often an important step towards resource conservation, but the influence of capacity-building on resource conservation has often gone undocumented. The focus groups also provided an opportunity to explore whether and how WCS's capacity-building efforts influenced resource conservation. I found that WCS's work contributed to a variety of conservation outcomes.

Recognizing Conservation Needs

A prerequisite for natural resource conservation is recognizing a need for conservation. WCS staff believed their research and dissemination of information could play an important role in improving understanding of threats to the Park:

Increasing the awareness of their effect on the environment around them ... so they're more receptive to doing things to minimize the impact. [FG1]

Comments from participants in three out of the other four focus groups clearly demonstrated that they believed that WCS's work contributed to the recognition of conservation needs in the Adirondacks:

If you look at the Adirondack Park there are a number of threats to the ecosystems of the park as well as threats to the economy of the Park. And the degree to which WCS has been able to focus on those aspects and provide scientific results does improve understanding of a wide variety of organizations. And enables them to reflect on what are the changes that are likely to occur as a result. [FG5]

Some comments also reflected the likelihood that increased awareness would affect the behaviors of individuals and organizations:

What I liked about the bear project ... there was a period of research in which they went out on the trails and they talked to hikers and they documented the interactions... And so even if I was a little opposed to it as a hiker, I'd be definitely more open to it because I realized ... all the things that led up to and supported the policy that was to come later. [FG2]

I think a lot of what WCS did was they started to suggest that first of all, we can't exist that way. And it's okay to actually say to yourself, "I am an environmental developer" and "I believe in sustainable development..." I think they help to bring out new terms the Adirondacks had not heard before, such as sustainable development. Granted, these

aren't concrete things that you could show, "there's a building right there that was because of WCS" or "the loons" and that kind of thing, but I think it helped to create conversation. So that allowed my organization, for example, which historically was a community planning economic development agency, to say, "What we are now going to be doing is sustainable development." [FG3]

It was clear that this work benefited not only environmental organizations, but communities, too. Several participants maintained that information they got from WCS had a direct influence on local planning processes.

I think they bring environmental issues into community planning. I think that's what's really important. So they're there giving that input and actually participating in that planning. I think that's where they're really ... outstanding. With us, from a Chamber of Commerce standpoint, whether we're developing a Raquette River corridor project or whether we're talking about scenic byways. ... Any of those things. That's the type of information that we need. [FG5]

Promoting Agreement on Conservation Objectives

Participants also noted how WCS's work influenced natural resource conservation objectives. To some degree this finding was reflected in the previous section on the "sense of common purpose" that WCS helped t cultivate, but more specific examples also exist. Even those organizations which might not initially have been sympathetic to wildlife conservation efforts could be "converted" by the information WCS helped to develop:

They conducted research that kind of piggybacked on research that was done in Vermont, and they helped translate that research and focus it to what we have here on Whiteface Mountain, and helped to kind of fulfill requirements of the SEQR process to look at potential impacts to a species of special concern. ... It was interesting to see the personnel that worked for the Olympic Regional Development Authority who basically thought, "Well, we're just going to run the ski slopes up and down across Bicknell habitat." ... Two years later they're converted. ... "How're we going to do the work to have more Bicknells and what do we do to educate people about Bicknells?" [FG5]

In another example, WCS information influenced community objectives regarding the development of trails for all-terrain vehicles:

I can give a highly specific example of how something that the Wildlife Conservation Society did that was an enormous help to me... It deals specifically with the ATV or all-terrain vehicle issue. There was enormous pressure to open up lots of land for all-terrain vehicle use. I believed that in the six million acres that comprised the Park there ought to be ... somewhere for recreation for all of us. However, what I saw was this headlong rush to do things in the good old fashion Adirondack way, which is to jump into it head first and then try to figure out what all the problems are as they arise. And by taking the publication that the Wildlife Conservation Society produced on all-terrain vehicles ... I was able to sit with constituent groups as well as my Board of Supervisors and said,

"Look, if we're going to do this, let's do it right." Let's plan for the thousand dollars a year per mile maintenance expenses. Let's make sure we harden the trails. Let's make sure we do all of these things that are necessary to do it right. I was able to get a whole lot of people to just throw up their hands and give up on the issue... And I was able to use this publication to force people to at least look at it from that perspective and it was enormously helpful because there was enough fact and there was enough well-written documentation there that it took the argument out of the emotional and put it where it should have been, which is on the table so people could look at it in the hard light of at least some semblance of reality. [FG4]

Selection of Actions

Several participants from both WCS staff and external stakeholder focus groups also described ways in which WCS's work influenced agency and community deliberations about future actions to take.

So they can inform us as we make decisions on projects ... that fits right into our decision process. [FG4]

In some cases, this influence seemed to be primarily the result of WCS's research and information dissemination activities. In this excerpt, a staff person from a state regulatory agency describes how WCS research is influencing their actions:

Another publication that we use ... exurban development ... it excited us to think that people were doing this type of work. It was a synthetic paper that ... really we thought had practical value for us and what we do in the Park. A particular problem ... that the agency deals with all the time is backcountry development and this paper went right through the heart of it, very practical treatment of it ... and put our staff onto a path where we're taking that information and trying to go a bit further with it and producing some guidelines or policy that would allow us to better treat the issue of backcountry development ... but still allow some type of development activity to occur... In fact, our staff is collaborating with WCS staff at this time... Two of my staff is working very closely with WCS staff to develop what we hope to be a practical method to evaluating back country development. [FG3]

I also have spoken with some regional northern forest groups and presented the living landscapes analysis to them and also the [Nature] Conservancy I just met with a couple of days ago and they were very, very interested in that work. And that may translate into helping them set priorities for land acquisition. [Adirondack Park Agency staff are] interested in it also very much from a perspective of when they're evaluating particular projects, what can we bring to the table to show them that this might be a critical area for ... moose or something like that. [FG1]

In other cases, WCS either worked in partnership with other organizations or provided ongoing advice and guidance during decision-making processes.

The work that we partner with WCS on, looking at the Champlain Foothills has had some influence on the open space plan and what was going to be a priority. This caused us to shift the focus down, get off the mountains and move to the valley, so I think that's been very helpful. [FG3]

The town people were really ... not very happy. ...We held a series of what we call Renaissance meetings ... we picked 25 people in the community that we thought were the most positive people that we could think of, who really did not have a negative thought...but we did not invite any politicians purposely. And then we had these series of facilitated breakfast meetings. Okay? This is where the Ten Rivers region concept came out ... and also with the visitors center.... So anyway, the supervisor decides to have more meetings ... and that's where we came up with our revitalization plan. ... And that's basically how we get started. All along the way Wildlife Conservation was there. ... One of the biggest things that came out of there was that our biggest asset in ... is natural resources, our land, our water, and everything that's ours. [FG5]

Their work also influences the policies that advocacy groups argue for government to take:

WCS provides a lot of applied science results. I can look at Nina Schoch and know that her research on loons, the effects of mercury informs what we need to do with policy makers to really get reductions of mercury. [FG5]

Implementation of Actions

Focus group participants in four out of the five groups referred to a variety of situations in which WCS's work not only educated people and influenced their objectives and deliberations, but resulted in concrete effects on regulations, policies, and actions. These effects covered a wide variety of situations including: (1) a requirement that backpackers in the High Peaks region use black bear canisters to store their food; (2) the adoption of a new policy on ATV use in the Adirondack Park; (3) the manner in which ski slopes were developed; and (4) state and federal policy on environmental contaminants. For example:

To study the bear problems, to talk to us [the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation] about bear canisters and such, we're able to take that and then piggyback on that, go through our own efforts, start our own study building on what they'd already done and then going and getting the regulation in place with very little opposition with it... If WCS hadn't been involved from the beginning ... I would suspect we would not have gotten the same reception [FG2]

One of the amazing things that happened when this first came up, when we brought the issue up, was "this is a big joke, some silly bird on top of the mountain that our ski slopes are going to impact." And then when you read the Unit Management Plan amendment that they just put out, it's very comprehensive. You can see the entire study. It's laid out and ... they're very proud that now we have a way to deal with something that was stopping us from putting in our ski slopes, and we're actually going to have an educated program. We're going to put together this funding package for the winter home and

they're very proud of what WCS put together for them to be able to implement the next step in doing a very cooperative thing. So everybody's win-win. [FG5]

I'll refer back to Nina's work with mercury and lead sinkers. ... We've changed the laws in New York. ... And then the mercury really added a lot of weight to the thinking of "It's not just the fish. It's the birds and it's the humans," which is really changing EPA regulations and state regulations. ... One of these just last week to really reduce mercury. These are really important policies for improving the environment and human health. [FG5]

Tangible Outcomes

Tangible natural resource benefits are very hard to document. In many cases, these benefits are difficult to demonstrate because the work prevents bad things from happening rather than reversing the effects of bad things that have occurred.

Community-based conservation. It's a difficult field... So much of success is what doesn't happen. Bad things don't happen on your watch and how do you quantify that? ... It's easier to say, "We stopped the bulldozer and we sued the bastards." [FG1]

Even when concrete effects on the resources of interest do occur – increases in the population of a particular species, the reduction of environmental contaminants, etc. – the effects take years to be evident and so evidence for them is not readily available. WCS staff clearly believed that their work not just led to policy changes but had concrete benefits for natural resources:

For the loon program we've had very good conservation successes in terms of the lead, getting the lead out of the water. [FG1]

The DEC has seen a lot of people using canisters and they think [bear-human encounters] are going down because of the canister use... They do believe the canisters are making a difference. [FG1]

Although participants in the external stakeholder focus groups did not cite clear evidence that effects of these types had been achieved, they clearly believed that WCS's work was contributing to these effects. In addition, examples of improvements in communities were common as discussed in the community capacity section.

Improvements Needed

While focus group participants recognized the strength of WCS's work in the Adirondacks (and hoped that these strengths would be maintained), they also suggested several areas of improvements. These suggestions fell into five primary areas: narrowing the focus of its activities, improving its publicity and communication, securing more stable funding, enhancing the relationship of the Adirondack Program with the parent WCS organization, and working with a greater diversity of partners in the Adirondacks.

Improved Focus: Mushrooms after the Rain

Several focus group participants raised the question of whether WCS's activities in the Adirondacks were focused enough:

> *One problem I have is that I think WCS is like mushrooms after the rain. Pops up here and then you don't hear about it for a long time, then you see it over there... [FG5]*

> *I think part of what WCS, in my opinion, needs to think about, is what is its role... Does WCS in the future, the Adirondack chapter at least, want to be a scientific research group? Do they want to provide research and statistics ... which were desperately needed? Do they want to, in some cases, be an advocacy group? Do they want to be a facilitating group? Those are very different missions, I think. And I think WCS needs to be careful about going forward what its priorities are and what it's mission should be in the Adirondacks. I think it will be very difficult to play all three of those roles. [FG3]*

> *It was cloudy to me a couple of months ago what WCS was about... It's still a little cloudy to me on exactly what is the mission of the organization? Are they facilitators? Are they advocates? Are they researchers? I think you need ... specific messages, which maybe ties into the overall Park conversation. [FG3]*

WCS staff agreed that this was a concern and speculated about how it might be addressed:

> *I think of maybe some narrowing of focus to a smaller set of issues and being able to say we're dealing with that... Having a couple of things ... you could be known for, it might be better than eight. [FG1]*

> *I think one of the things ... is making that connection between our research and our conservation goal and the community outreach. And so I sat on the [Board of the] Chamber of Commerce. I think that's great and everybody loves me and it's fun, but what is that doing? ... Does it contribute to conservation? Is there a question we can ask every time we're asked to do something? Does it contribute to conservation or is it going to help protect bears, loons, whatever the question is? [FG1]*

The question raised in the last excerpt about whether WCS should be continually evaluating the relationship between its community work and its conservation goals points to an obvious tension in WCS's work in the Adirondacks. On the one hand, WCS's responsiveness to community needs has been seen as a great strength. Staff are willing and able to recognize conservation considerations as only one aspect of the great array of issue that affect Adirondack communities, and, as part of that recognition, they have participated in activities that may not be clearly related to their conservation goals. This recognition, in turn, has built credibility for them in their work in the Adirondacks. Community leaders are more willing to trust them, work with them, and make use of their information. Their influence is greater than it would otherwise be. The cost of this responsiveness to community needs, however, is a dilution of their focus. Rather than setting and pursuing a clearly defined agenda of their own, they have allowed that agenda to be shaped by community needs and, therefore, have worked on projects that they otherwise might

not have. Because of WCS's choice to pursue conservation goals through community-based work, this tension will likely be a continuing one in their work.

In an effective illustration of this point, focus group participants suggested a wide array of other project and activities in which WCS might usefully become involved. These suggestions focused on:

- major issues that could be used to frame WCS's activities (e.g., climate change, invasive species, and alternative energy);
- particular projects in which WCS might become involved (e.g., Adirondack All Taxa Biodiversity Initiative);
- types of activities in which WCS might become involved (e.g., more local planning efforts, helping to define an Adirondack research agenda, and facilitating discussions about an array of issues facing the Park); and
- research questions WCS might explore (e.g., the changing relationship of people to nature in the Adirondacks, the basis of economic problems facing the Adirondacks, and how to more effectively maintain Park lands).

Suggestions were numerous and no apparent consensus existed about which direction WCS should take. In fact, some focus group participants recognized that some of the suggestions they offered might not be appropriate, at least not without major changes in WCS's direction:

If you expand that bubble too far that might not be appropriate … that may be not what WCS should be doing in the first place. [FG3]

If they're going to move into [that] role it probably will be mean some pretty fundamental changes, not only in mission but also in structure… [FG3]

A suggestion made to improve WCS focus, which received discussion in several focus groups, is whether some type of advisory board would be beneficial:

I mean … a board that can help to focus staff efforts so that it's not like mushrooms after a rain. Because while these guys do amazing work, I know that it can be scattered because there's six million acres of a park and there's so much to do. So that board could help to just give themes maybe each year or something to what we want to focus on. [FG5]

Not everyone agreed with the recommendation. Some felt the creation of an advisory board would create more of a burden on staff rather than provide genuine assistance to them. Disagreement also existed as to whether the board should be made up of Adirondackers or not. The closest participants came to a consensus was that WCS staff members were probably in the best position to determine whether a board would be useful or not:

It appears that the question of an advisory board or a local board is an internal management question that can be answered through a similar type of round table with

the staff. Where are their needs being met or not being met in terms of their communications with the larger organization? [FG5]

Publicity and Communication: Not Their Strongest Area

A lack of a clear focus can affect external stakeholders' perceptions of WCS, but these perceptions are also affected by WCS's efforts at publicity and communication. A number of focus group participants felt that WCS could be better about communicating about its activities and making its accomplishments clear:

> *I've never found their regular ... communications vehicles about what they do on a regular basis very informative. And they're very sporadic. So that would be something that if it wants to improve its image ... I mean I learned at least five different things around the table today that I didn't know WCS does, and I get its regular mail every now and then. So that's one area that I think could be improved [FG5]*

> *Their communications hasn't been their strongest ... or publicity and marketing hasn't been their strongest area of interest. [FG3]*

> *I don't think it would hurt the WCS by any stretch of the imagination to put out press releases from time to time. [FG4]*

Some of the lack of understanding seemed to be specifically about the community-based work and the way in which that related to wildlife conservation:

> *I think when most people think of WCS, that they do think of them as international... They don't know enough about these community projects that are going on, which I think is a shame. I think that's something that would be better ... WCS as a whole, if they did promote and make people more aware of these community programs that are going on. [FG2]*

> *I think that there were so many different things they were doing that really had nothing to do with the name in too many people's eyes. Maybe for those of us who understood what the overall agenda was and what they were trying to do, they understood it. But ... thinking of the folks in Inlet and Old Forge and different communities: "Wildlife Conservation Society? What are they doing with these tourism centers?" But then they got it after a while. They understood that connection. [FG3]*

One of the concerns raised by the lack of publicity and communication is that WCS may not receive credit for the work they do. One staff member was concerned that their work was often "coopted" by others. Another spoke about the importance of getting credit for their work to maintain themselves as a viable organization:

> *It gets back to the whole question, which to me is kind of fundamental of this whole program, is how do you get credit for what you do and then how does that credit lead toward helping you to continue doing what you do?... I think people are extremely*

> *appreciative of this group but they also take you for granted ... but it takes money to run it. [FG1]*

However, they viewed this partly as a problem inherent in community-based conservation – efforts in which, by definition, many parties must be involved:

> *Having watched conservation ... the really good things that I know that have happened ... by the time they're finally accomplished ... it is very hard to tell who the principal actors were, who started it, who is responsible. Because anything successful in conservation almost by definition has so many hands in the pot by the time it's accomplished, that it is very, very hard to say, "Okay ... she did it..." These are community accomplishments so they are created ... community participation. [FG1]*

This discussion pointed to another fundamental tension in WCS's work in the Adirondacks. External stakeholders widely described them with words like "low-key," "quiet," and "non-threatening." Their unassuming nature was viewed as one of their great strengths – a strength that enabled them to work effectively with a diverse array of individuals and groups. However, the external stakeholders also recognized the costs of being unassuming:

> *The quiet company. They stand in the background and I think to a lot of people that is one of their greatest assets. But it's also a detriment because unless you really look around, you don't find that. [FG4]*

> *It seems to me that the only advantage, or the greatest advantage to having a higher profile is if you are trying to raise money... Otherwise ... a low profile is much more effective because there are so many people jumping up and down, beating their chests, that you don't want to be another one that's saying the sky is falling, the sky is falling... I think people are tired of that, but I also realize that organizations can't exist on thin air. I have no idea how WCS is supported, but if there's a way to continue to do their good work quietly... [FG3]*

Given the nature of their work, this tension is another one that likely will have to be balanced in WCS's decisions for the foreseeable future.

Funding: A Little Bit More Secure

As the above discussion implies, being able to maintain funding for their activities is a concern that is closely related to the concern about receiving credit for their work. Staff recognized that maintaining funding was an ongoing challenge:

> *Trying to raise money for North American work is a bitch. [FG1]*

Some focus group participants recognized this concern and that WCS might need to link its decisions about the focus of its activities with its need to raise funds:

> *Is part of the reason we're doing this exercise the fact that WCS, or at least this Adirondack program, needs more funding? Because then I do think there is a direct link to what are then some of the needs that funders, whether they be foundations, or our residents or our towns, might be interested in funding... If there is a funding issue, there needs to be a correlation between needs that these communities perceive, these foundations perceive, and programs that you create as well. If funding is not an issue, then that doesn't have to be part of it. [FG3]*

Others offered appeals for more stable funding for the Adirondack program from the parent organization:

> *But I would also love to see WCS give a little bit more secure funding to this group. I say that for the record. [FG5]*

Relationship with Parent Organization: Getting lost?

Some focus group participants clearly saw the relationship between WCS's Adirondack program and the WCS parent organization as a benefit:

> *WCS has … the resources. They have an international program that is to die for… Any opportunity WCS can have to bring in other staff from around the world to this area to talk about what's going on around the country. Some of the people working for WCS are unbelievable [FG3]*

Others saw it as a disadvantage:

> *Remote leadership outside is not particularly effective if you want to raise your profile and have a higher profile. [FG3]*

Still others wondered whether the Adirondack program got as much attention and funding out of this relationship as it should. One person suggested that the proposed advisory board might be able to advocate for the Adirondack program's interests within the parent organization:

> *That board would help to interface and represent this small part of WCS in the larger WCS where it often gets lost. Even though your direct advisor has been the head of the North America program, still you've been small and maybe not gotten as much as you might have gotten. [FG5]*

Some WCS staff believed that they could and should do more to engage leaders from the WCS parent organization in their work:

> *We have not engaged a couple of key people [from] the overall organization … get those folks up banding some loons. [FG1]*

More Diverse Partners: Hook and Bullet Country

Although WCS's partnering with other organizations was seen as a strength by focus group participants, one participant suggested that WCS was well positioned to reach out to a more diverse group of partners. A suggestion that arose in two focus groups was for WCS to reach out to more traditional users of Park resources:

> *There's factions in ... our part of the Adirondacks, which is still referred to as hook and bullet country there. There's that closed group ... people who enjoy motorized sports and that's a certain socioeconomic group of people. And then they turn around and they look at some of the environmental organizations with their political viewpoints and ... they're seen as enemies. And I think one possibility for the Wildlife Conservation Society is to get to reach out to hunting clubs and to snowmobile groups, for instance, and say, "Listen, we'd like to partner with you and deal with this ATV issue here." ... I think an apolitical group like the Wildlife Conservation Society, if they could partner with some of the groups like the snowmobilers or the hunting clubs and say, "Look, let's partner together ... perhaps if we work together we can bring this ATV situation to ... we might be able to help bridge that gap." [FG5]*

> *I think the Wildlife Conservation Society should approach some of the sportsmen's groups ... the Adirondack Conservation Council, Federation of Fish and Game clubs, sportsmen love to brag... I saw a moose. I saw a bald eagle. We love to tell each other that. If there was a centralized location where I could report that ... I think it would be very well received and it would be helpful because it would bring in a lot of these groups into the fold and they would know their voice is being heard and they can contribute. And it would lend a great deal for research purposes too. [FG4]*

Conclusions

By all accounts, WCS's Adirondacks program is well-respected and highly successful. Its efforts have contributed in a variety of ways to increased capacity for conservation in the Adirondacks. In particular, it has:

- developed the knowledge base that underlies conservation decisions, through research and information dissemination;
- enabled the sharing of resources and ideas by working with diverse interests in the Park and building bridges between them; and
- facilitated the identification of common ground by linking the conservation of natural resources with the health of communities.

Both WCS staff and external stakeholders believe it fills a unique and critical niche in the Adirondacks and fills it exceedingly well. Its chosen focus is one reason for its success. The other key reason is the quality of its staff who are well-liked and respected and widely viewed as highly competent and caring.

Nevertheless, WCS faces some ongoing challenges. Some of their key strengths also contribute to the challenges they face:

- Their willingness to be responsive to communities' concerns and agendas has earned them respect and credibility and has made them much more influential within the Park. However, it also has made it more difficult for them to maintain focus on a core set of issues.
- Their low-key, unassuming approach has enabled them to work with a diverse group of external stakeholders and to have their information widely trusted and used in the Park. However, it also has made it more difficult for them to receive credit for their work, and, in turn, to generate financial support for it.

These tensions are likely to be ongoing in WCS's work in the Adirondacks for the foreseeable future.

In addition, WCS choice to focus on *community-based* conservation has made it more difficult to demonstrate the effectiveness of its work. Community-based conservation is widely argued to be the approach to conservation that yields the greatest long-term benefits. However, many of the immediate outcomes of community-based work (such as increased knowledge and improved networks of relationships) are intangible outcomes that only affect conservation over the long term. Nevertheless, many of the focus group participants were able to point to a variety of specific incidents in which WCS work had led to tangible impacts on conservation decision making and actions in the Adirondacks. Continuing to be able to demonstrate the impacts of its work on conservation will be important into the future for WCS.

Table 1. Percentage of focus group participants utilizing WCS information resources and activities.

Information Resource	Percentage of Participants
Newsletters	
ACCP[1] newsletter, Villages and Vertebrates	41.7
ACLP[2] newsletter, The Adirondack Tremolo	54.2
Adirondack Atlas	
Adirondack Atlas (book)	95.8
Adirondack Atlas (presentations and lectures)	62.5
Working and Technical Papers	
Adirondack Communities and Conservation Working Paper	50.0
Common Loon Working Paper	41.7
All-terrain Vehicle Working Paper	70.8
Hardwood Regeneration Working Paper	25.0
Blowdown 1995 Working Paper	45.8
Exurban Development Technical Paper	41.7
Websites	
WCS website	70.8
ACCP website	62.5
ACLP website	79.2
Presentations and Lectures	
ACLP presentations and lectures	66.7
Black Bear Presentations and Lectures	41.7
School and Education Programs	
ACLP school programs	12.5
Other education programs	29.2
ACLP Activities	
Loon Banding Observation Night	25.0
Loon Census	33.3
Community exchange days	37.5
Adirondack Community Information Centers	41.7
Oswegatchie Round Table	66.7
Community Visioning or Planning Meetings	29.2
Other	41.7

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[1] Adirondacks Communities and Conservation Program.
[2] Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program.

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Appendix A
Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire

Wildlife Conservation Society – Adirondack programs
7 Brandy Brook Avenue
Saranac Lake, NY 12983

By completing the questions below, you can help us better understand our effectiveness. Thinking about these questions will also help you prepare for the kinds of issues we hope to discuss in more depth during the focus groups. Please be open and honest. You can choose to return this anonymously or with your name. Please send your response in the postage paid envelope provided or you can give us your form at the focus group. We appreciate you taking the time to help us strengthen our programs.

Please answer the following questions briefly and in your own words:

1. What is your understanding of what WCS does in the Adirondacks?

2. What do you think the organization is trying to achieve?

3. What do you value about WCS' work?

(over, please)

4. Please indicate the resources (written, electronic, or lectures) you have read, attended or used? (*Check all that apply*.)

	ACCP Newsletter, *Villages & Vertebrates*		Adirondack Communities & Conservation Working Paper
	Adirondack Atlas (Book)		Common Loon Working Paper
	Adirondack Atlas Presentations/Lectures		ATV Working Paper
	ACLP Newsletter, *The Adirondack Tremolo*		Hardwood Regeneration Working Paper
	Wildlife Conservation Society Website		Blowdown 1995 Working Paper
	Adirondack Communities & Conservation Website		Exurban Development Technical Paper
	Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program Website		Oswegatchie Round Table (ORT)
	Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program Presentations/Lectures		Black Bear Presentations/Lectures
	Community Exchange Days		Loon Banding Observation Night
	Adirondack Community Information Centers (in Inlet, North Creek & Star Lake)		Loon Census
	ACLP's school programs (*The Loon Scientists Program* and *Science on the Fly!)*		Community visioning or planning meetings
	Other education programs (please indicate) - WCS education department materials - GIS in schools - Resource Fair hosted by ACEE		Other, such as meetings, articles or presentations (please list):

5. How useful have these publications or activities been to you?

Thank you!

Appendix B
Focus Group Questions

Wildlife Conservation Society
Focus Group Questions
May 12, 2006

Introduction

At the beginning of the group, the following points will be made:

- **Purpose.** The purpose of the focus group is to help WCS evaluate its contributions in the Adirondacks, assess its effectiveness as an organization, and develop plans for the future. Because WCS does not have a group of people from whom it regularly receives feedback, advice, and direction, the focus group will provide valuable input for WCS.
- **My Role.** I am a senior research associate in the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell University. I have experience in facilitation and evaluation. I've conducted a lot of research on communities and natural resource management. These focus groups will also help us to understand the variety of impacts that conservation organizations can have. This information can benefit not only WCS, but other conservation organizations, too.
- **Guidelines.** I will ask a series of open-ended questions. For most of these questions, I will encourage participants to respond in an open-ended discussion. I may follow up with additional questions in response to particular points people raise. All perspectives are important. There are no right or wrong answers. I will check in with participants periodically to find out if they agree or disagree with points that have been made.
- **Procedures.** The session will be recorded and sections of the recordings may be transcribed. It may last up to two hours. The WCS staff who are present are playing the roles of observers and note takers. They will not actively participate in the discussion, but can respond to factual questions if needed.
- **Questions?** Are there any questions before we get started?

Focus Group Questions
Primary questions are followed by possible probing questions (indented) to be used if the initial questions do not elicit a suitable response.

Please introduce yourself and say something about how you have been involved with the Wildlife Conservation Society in the Adirondacks?

> What kinds of contact have you had with the Wildlife Conservation Society in the Adirondacks?
>> Cooperated with them on a project?
>> Participated in an activity they've run?
>> Provided them with assistance?
>> Etc.

How have you or your organization personally been influenced by the Wildlife Conservation Society's work?

What are the Wildlife Conservation Society's most important activities?
What have the effects of these activities been?

The Wildlife Conservation Society in the Adirondacks works both to conserve natural resources and to promote healthy communities. I will ask you about what kinds of impacts you think it has had in each of these areas.

What impacts has the Wildlife Conservation Society had on natural resource conservation in the Adirondacks?
      Promoted …
            Recognition of a conservation need?
            Agreement on conservation objectives?
            Selection of action to achieve objectives?
            Implementation of actions?
            Tangible conservation outcomes?

What impacts has the Wildlife Conservation Society had on Adirondack communities?
      Fostered …
            Relationships or partnerships?
            Increased knowledge?
            Local leadership?
            A sense of common purpose?
            Credibility of key stakeholders?

What unique contributions does the Wildlife Conservation Society make to conservation work in the Adirondacks? What other contributions is it well situated to make?

How could the Wildlife Conservation Society improve its work? In what areas could it most usefully expend more energy?

What assets and strengths does WCS have as an organization? How could it improve its effectiveness as an organization?
      Personnel?
      Funding?
      Materials?
      Partnerships?
      Credibility?

What do you think the Wildlife Conservation Society's top priorities should be for the future?

Backup Questions (if the primary questions do not elicit responses)

How visible is the Wildlife Conservation Society's presence in the Adirondacks?

What might the Wildlife Conservation Society do to better reach those who would be interested in its work?

What conservation needs in the Adirondacks could WCS address?

What needs of Adirondack communities could WCS address?

What characteristics does an organization need to have to work effectively on conservation issues in the Adirondacks?