# Insights from Extension in utilizing a partnership-building approach to address complex issues.

Robert E. Bardon, Professor

Dennis W. Hazel, Associate Professor

North Carolina State University

Raleigh, NC USA

John Diaz, Assistant Professor

University of Florida

Plant City, FL USA

Introduction

- Why the partnership
- Purpose of the study
- How the case study was done
- Findings
- Partnership's perception of the value of Extension
- Milestone's achieved by the partnership
- Recommendations

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

MILITARY READINESS

NATURAL RESOURCES

WORKING LANDS
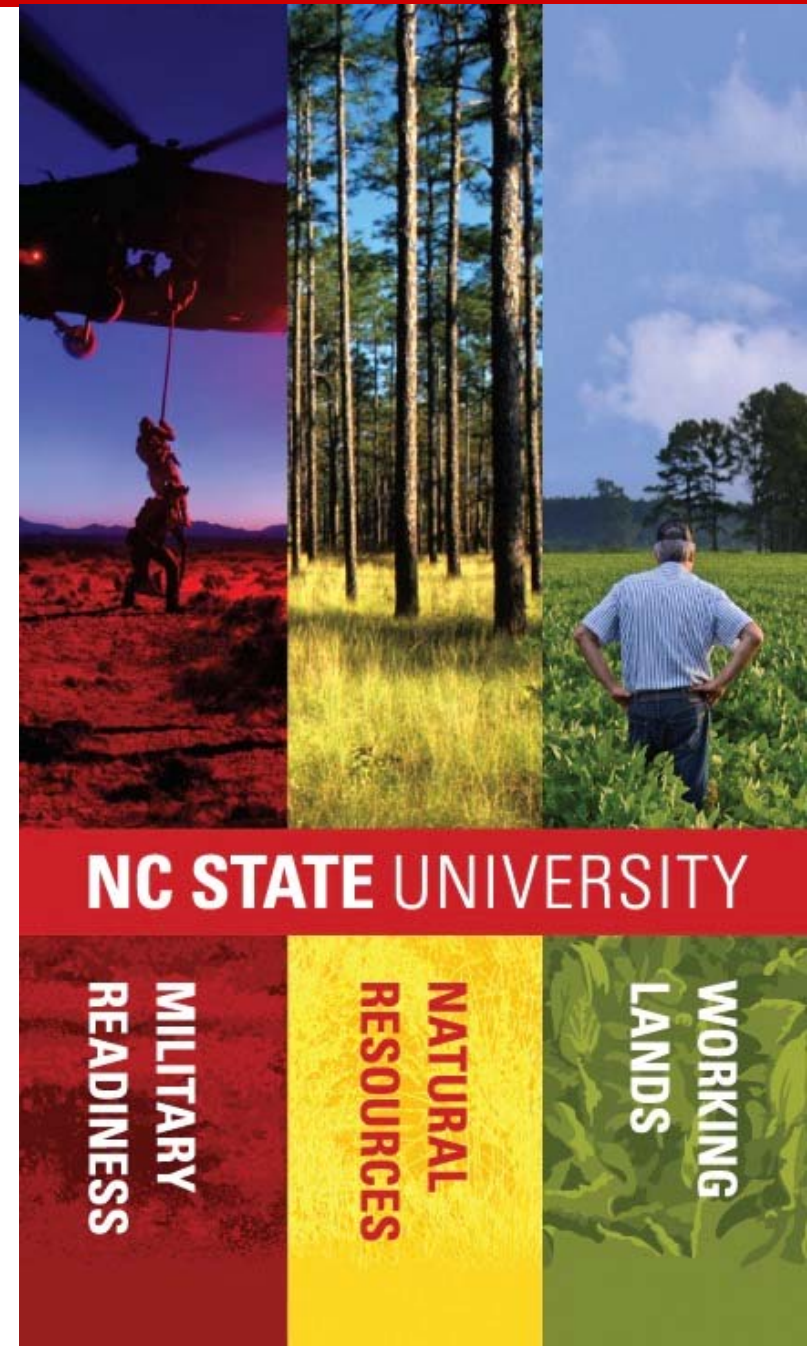
Why the partnership?

National leader in the net loss of farmland and forestland due to urbanization

Study Purpose

- Determine and describe the role of Extension in the coordination and management of a partnership involving multiple stakeholders

Methods

- Single case study design

- Purposive sampling method to ensure representation of key stakeholders

- Semi-structured interview protocol with 13 participants

- Constant comparative method to identify emergent themes based on interviews, participant observation and organizational documents

Study Participants

North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Partnership
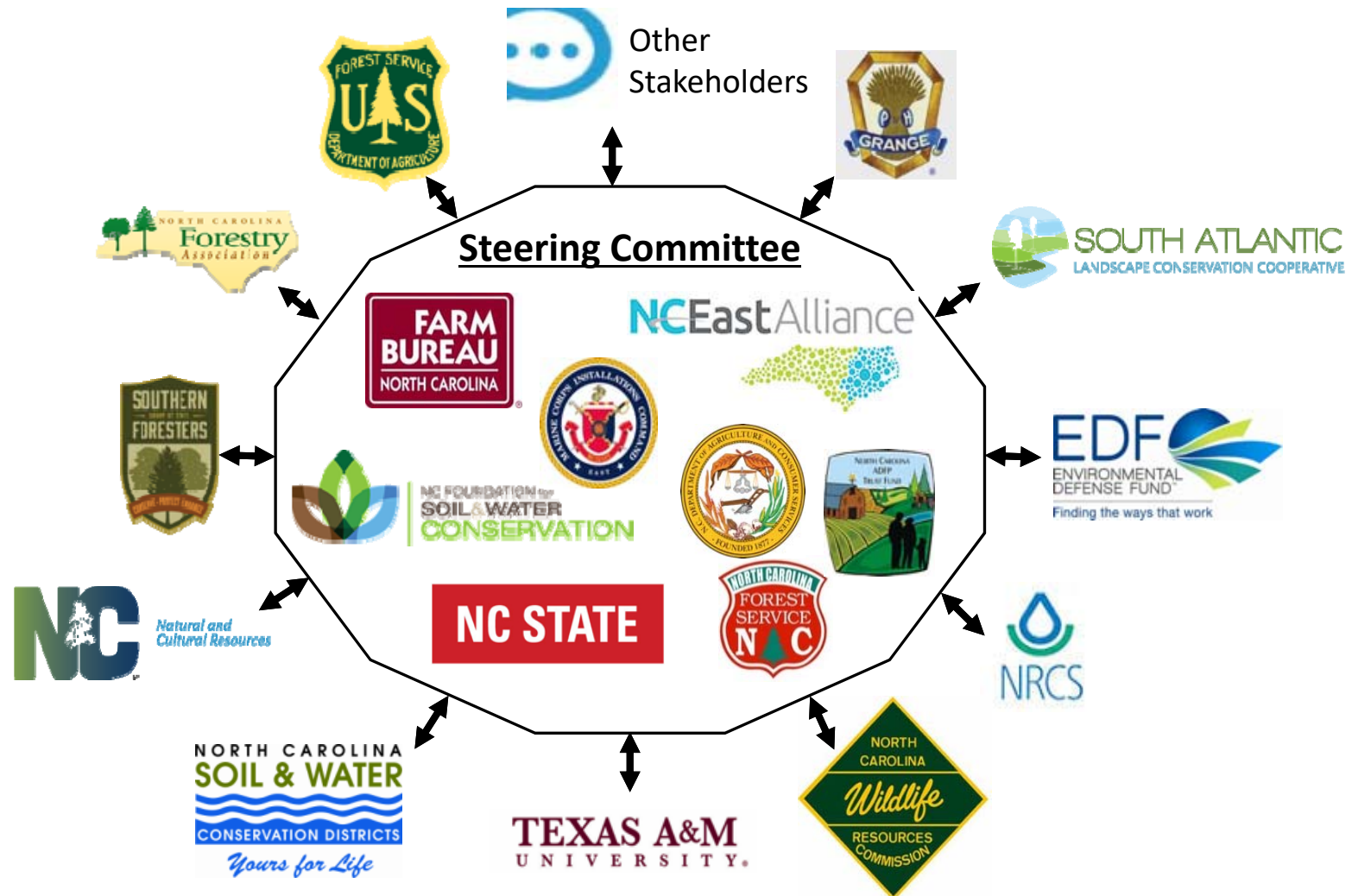
Findings

- Five key strategies and/or processes emerged for the coordination of working partnerships
  - Bringing Together Diverse Partners
  - Planning, Evaluation, and Monitoring
  - Steering Committees and Work Groups
  - Engagement Structure
  - Strategic Communication

"A key strength of Extension is its ability to "leverage pre-existing relationships to create a diverse partnership (Participant 1) ."

Bringing together diverse partners

- Utilized brainstorming meetings with over 30 different agencies and organizations that represented the interest of rural landscapes

- Facilitated discussion among the group to develop an understanding of how these diverse stakeholders could move forward in a collaborative fashion

- Leveraged relationships to get the partnership off the ground

"A key strength of Extension is its ability to "leverage pre-existing relationships to create a diverse partnership (Participant 1) ."

Planning, Evaluation, and Monitoring

- Initial approach was project-centric
  - Evoked a stakeholder driven approach to ensure the partnership stayed focus on the shared vision
  - Develop goals that achieve mutual gains
  - Program planning was guided by the Targeting Outcomes of Programs Model, allowing to link to program evaluation
  - Ensured collaborative accountability among the members through regular program reporting

Targeting Outcomes of Programs (TOP)
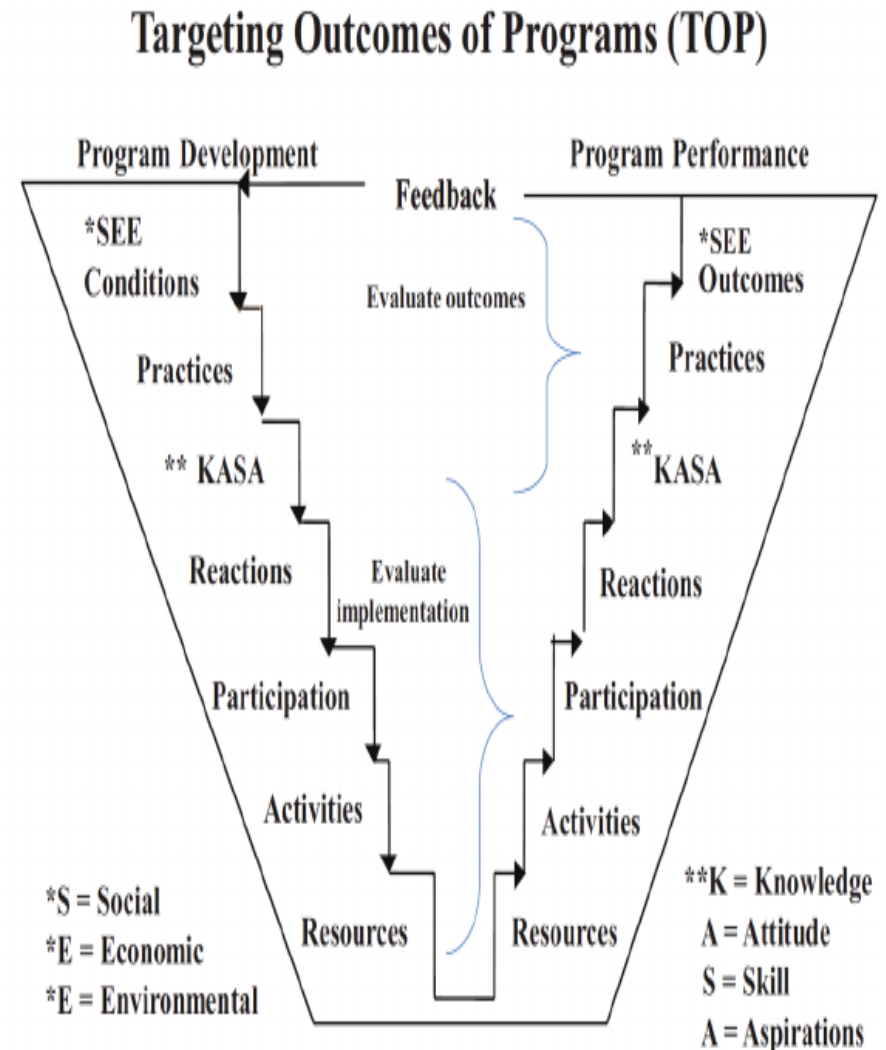
Steering Committees and Work Groups

- Relationships leveraged across various stakeholder groups required the formation of a steering committee

- Provided a tier, formal problem-solving process

- Consensus-driven model resulted in acceptance of diverse set of ideas (Cited as the trademark of the partnership)

"the [committee structure] makes sure that each of the elements are focusing on the prime objectives of the Sentinel Landscapes and not going down rabbit holes that are of little or no value to the overall strategy of Sentinel Landscapes. (Participant 10)"

Engagement structure

- Consistency with communication and meetings

- Robust engagement structure

- Face-to-face meetings designed to facilitate group discussion

- Dedicated time to informal engagement

Another program lead vocalized the importance of "consisten[cy] with communication and meetings" explaining that "once you lose communication you cannot build trust. (Participant 4)"

http://changelab.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Cartoon.jpg

"Extension understood the need for a more structured approach leading to the facilitation and development of a communication plan"

Strategic Communication

- Open line of communication.
  - Essential for development of trust
  - Resulted in transition from project-based approach to partnership building
- Communication at multiple levels
  - Requires developing an education strategy due to turn over in partners
  - The newness of the effort resulted in some partners under estimated the degree of communication needed
  - To link various project efforts together and have a common knowledge

Value of Extension

- Provides appropriate administrative structure for providing guidance and coordination
  - Have available leadership and capacity to facilitate the process
  - Can leverage preexisting relationships while forming new linkages
    - Utilize program champions across multiple sectors to securing resources, attain institutional support, market the efforts and push for effective implementation.
  - Conduct outreach, teaching and research functions that support the partnership

Milestones

- leverage over $100 million in funding and fiscal opportunities in support of military training, working lands, and conservation

- national sentinel Landscape program designation for 32 counties in Eastern NC

- state legislation forming the NC Sentinel Landscape Committee

- a military mission footprint of North Carolina

- establishment of projects and programs such as Market Based Conservation Initiative and Food and Fuel 4 the Forces Initiative

- more than 3100 acres of working lands protected with conservation easements and approximately 32,000 acres under conservation easement options

- more than 9,000 acres of wildlife habitat that supports up to 49 colonies of red cockaded woodpecker being managed and protected

- over 5,800 acres with sound forest management plans

Recommendations

- Leverage pre-existing relationships to build a diverse partnership.

- Form a steering committee of trusted leaders that represent the interests that exist across the landscape.

- Evoke a stakeholder-driven, consensus building approach for organizational development (i.e. strategic planning and program evaluation).

- Design a program evaluation and monitoring framework that promotes collaborative accountability and proactive program improvement.

Recommendations

- Develop an engagement structure to maintain an open line of communication.

- Face-to-face meetings should engage partners and stakeholders in a meaningful way.

- Develop a robust communications structure that promotes program compatible action.

- Employ a skilled facilitator to guide organizational development efforts as well as engagement activities.

Sentinel Landscapes

Where shared priorities for conservation and working land preservation converge to protect national defense