



TELE CASE STUDY

TACONIC RIDGE PARTNERSHIP

Key Takeaways

- Informal peer-to-peer chats with refreshments are more likely to attract landowners than formal lectures from experts.
- Find your audience's hook (in this case birds) and include that in messaging, materials, and *follow-up*.
- When working across state boundaries, be strategic in locating events. Choose places within reasonable distances that residents of both states will feel tied to.
- Coordination with organizations across state lines is *crucial* to avoiding event duplication and forming partnerships.
- Some subject matters like estate planning require relationships to be developed *before* outreach begins.

TELE (tools for engaging landowners effectively) is an approach and planning methodology that emphasizes understanding landowners' perspectives and interests and tailoring outreach messages to be more persuasive. TELE case studies showcase projects that have used the TELE methodology to engage more landowners in land stewardship and conservation. TELE is a project of the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative.

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Introduction

The Taconics Group is a Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) working across state boundaries to achieve three main goals: landscape conservation, stewardship, and economic development in the Taconic Mountain region of the northeastern US. The Taconics RCP is divided into three sub-groups: the northern, central, and southern groups. The southern collaborative group combines the efforts of the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA), Columbia Land Conservancy, Audubon Connecticut, and Audubon Massachusetts. Other partners include Franklin Land Trust, Sheffield Land Trust, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, and Salisbury Land Trust. The Southern Taconics group used TELE's six-step planning process to develop communications and outreach plans for three events: an Estate Planning Workshop, a Woods Forum, and a Foresters for the Birds workshop. This case study, while recognizing lessons from the first event, will highlight the use of TELE in the Woods Forum, which was arguably the most successful project of the three.

STEP 1: SET OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this outreach were for landowners to 1) attend a free Woods Forum for forest landowners at a strategically convenient location (Indian Mountain School, Lakeville, CT), 2) take advantage of free follow up consultation with naturalists/foresters, and 3) promote the subsequent Forests for the Birds workshop.

STEP 2: DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

Before hosting any events, the Southern Taconics group compiled a database of over 800 landowners in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York. For the Estate Planning workshop, all 800 were targeted; this turned out to be too wide of an audience. Therefore, partners narrowed down the audience to 275 landowners in Connecticut and New York for the Woods Forum and had much greater success.



STEP 3: PROFILE YOUR AUDIENCE

The Woods Forum advertisements were targeted at Woodland Retreat owners primarily located in Connecticut and New York. These landowners are likely to feel a strong emotional connection to their land and use the land more for recreation and enjoyment than economic reasons.

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STEP 4: CLARIFY YOUR MESSAGE

People pay attention to a message when it is relevant to a problem they wish to solve, links to their identity, or if it taps into their core values. The Taconics group attempted to align their messages to appeal to the interests and values of their target audience. They used their own template for a postcard, which included a large picture of a bird and an offer of pie. They incorporated TELE best practices like the phrases “I care about my land. How can I care for my woods?” They emphasized the opportunities to get information from experts, sign up for bird habitat assessments, and learn how to manage woods while benefiting wildlife.

STEP 5: CHANNELS AND MATERIALS

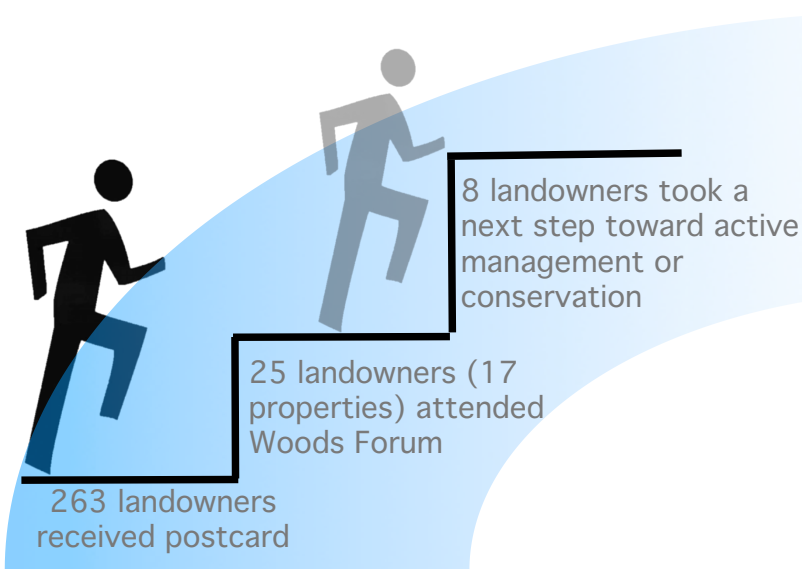
The Southern Taconics partnership reached out to Connecticut and New York Landowners. They used the landowner database they compiled to mail 275 postcards first class to targeted woodland owners in these two states. Bulk mail proved to be ineffective during the Estate Planning outreach process. After the low turn out at the Estate Planning workshop, partners also realized that posting flyers in public places was not an effective medium for advertising their events. They instead took advantage of the opportunity to publicize the workshop through the Nature’s Notebook column that Tim Abbott (of HVA) writes for the local Lakeville Journal weekly. About half a dozen additional landowners were contacted directly by either Salisbury Land Trust or HVA and invited to attend. They tried to contact landowners as many times as possible before the event, as one “hit” was likely to result in low attendance.



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STEP 6: EVALUATION



Woods Forum Strategy's Results

Lessons Learned

- It was a very good idea to choose a site (Indian Mountain School) near the state line that was well aligned with local cultural assumptions about the “community” and where it would be reasonable to travel for a meeting.
- Partnering with a school can lead to significant cost savings.
- It worked well to combine the Audubon bird assessments with the Woods Forum. Unlike in the Estate Planning workshop’s case, where similar events had been hosted in the area by another conservation organization that same year, HVA was able to partner with Audubon to minimize event duplication.
- Pie and birds are powerful motivators to get people in the door and keep them talking!

Challenges

- Working in a fragmented landscape: It was hard to attract people from different geographies when the actual landscape is geologically fragmented, and landowners feel ties to cities, towns, etc. rather than large landscapes. It was especially hard to attract people from one state to a meeting in another.
- Reaching younger woodland owners: While these events were able to attract older woodland retreaters, outreach was ineffective for middle-aged landowners who own second homes in the region. Further exploration of electronic media will be needed to reach these folks.

