

NELF Explorer Case Study: **Saco Watershed Collaborative Working Group**

Who: Saco Watershed Collaborative

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The Saco Watershed Collaborative (SWC), is a group of 50+ partners working to protect the irreplaceable water resources and benefits of the Saco watershed, which spans 1,700 square miles from the headwaters in White Mountain National Forest (NH) to Saco Bay (ME). The SWC formed in 2017 to unite the dozens of organizations working independently to protect the Saco watershed under a shared structure and agenda. The SWC uses a collective impact approach and multiple strategies including stakeholder outreach, ecological restoration, and land protection to achieve its goal of sustaining the Saco watershed for future generations.

What: Municipal Outreach

The SWC used maps of the Recent Trends and Connected Communities scenarios shown in NELF Explorer to develop visual graphics and science-based messages to engage and inspire municipal audiences within the Saco watershed. The specific local outcomes of each scenario within the Saco watershed were analyzed and framed in ways that support the messaging and goals of the SWC. These maps and messages were used to create an outreach brochure that the working group project leaders will share with municipal leader in meetings, which were delayed due to COVID-19.

Why: Drinking Water at Risk

The Saco watershed provides drinking water to over 40,000 people and livelihoods and recreation opportunities for many more. The municipalities within the watershed face different pressures and range from suburban coastal towns to rural mountain towns, but are all reliant on the same watershed for their water. Development pressures have increased recently, particularly in southern Maine and since COVID-19, making the preservation of this watershed essential for the well-being of current and future generations. Municipal leaders are critical in that process because development is largely decided at the town level.

What's next: Continuing the Conversation

In this working group project, maps shown in NELF Explorer were used to develop visuals and messaging for municipal audiences that supports SWC's mission to protect the water quality and benefits of the Saco watershed. Although the NELF working group component has ended, the SWC will continue using NELF in their outreach efforts.

