

## Wetland Adaptation Forums

Conduct periodic public wetland symposiums/forums to advance adaptation knowledge

In rapidly evolving fields like climate change adaptation, regular opportunities for practitioners and key thinkers in the field to come together to exchange experiences and ideas are essential. Small focused invitational workshops are helpful, but there should also be a regional symposium or forum every 1-3 years. This could be open to all interested parties focused either specifically on wetland conservation and restoration in a changing climate or more generally on climate change adaptation. Unrestricted attendance broadens the adaptation network and provides more opportunity for new voices to participate and emerge.

The format can be more directed, for example, built around a set of invited speakers and workshops put together by the organizers, or more participant-driven, with open submission of proposals for presentations, posters or workshops. In either case, the schedule should include ample time for informal interaction and networking, which are essential components of the empowerment and internalization of climate-smart thinking that are such important outcomes of this sort of forum. Webinars may also be considered to reach more people.

The outcomes of wetland adaptation forums are two-fold. There should be a set of written outputs in the form of proceedings, synthesis reports or overview essays. These may be disseminated via websites and blogs, published reports, or a collection of papers published in a peer-reviewed journal. No less important, however, is the creation of partnerships, project ideas and general inspiration to act; forum organizers and participants should consider ways in which these latter outcomes can be fostered.

### Case Example | Coastal Habitat Conservation in a Changing Climate Workshop

In September 2011, the National Wildlife Federation and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) hosted a two-and-a-half day workshop titled "Coastal Habitat Conservation in a Changing Climate: Strategies and Tools for the Great Lakes Region." The meeting began with a series of presentations giving an overview of regional climatic variability, longer-term changes and impacts. Presenters addressed questions such as how particular climatic changes might affect species, ecosystems, water quality and economies; possibilities for ecological adaptations; and how to integrate climate information into coastal conservation and management despite uncertainties. These presentations provided a common understanding of the state of knowledge for meeting participants.

The second day consisted of breakout sessions built around issues of regional importance, including fish passage, Areas of Concern, invasive species management, agricultural watersheds, and conservation and acquisition. There was also a Tools Café introducing participants to a range of tools supporting regional conservation and restoration work. The breakout format provided an opportunity for extensive interaction and sharing among meeting participants. The second day concluded with field trips to ground participants in the reality of Great Lakes coastal habitat management and restoration work. The third day included another set of breakout sessions as well as an overview of ongoing efforts and next steps.

In evaluations, participants commented on the value of the workshop in providing a diversity of new information and developing new collaborations and partnerships.

## Challenges and Benefits

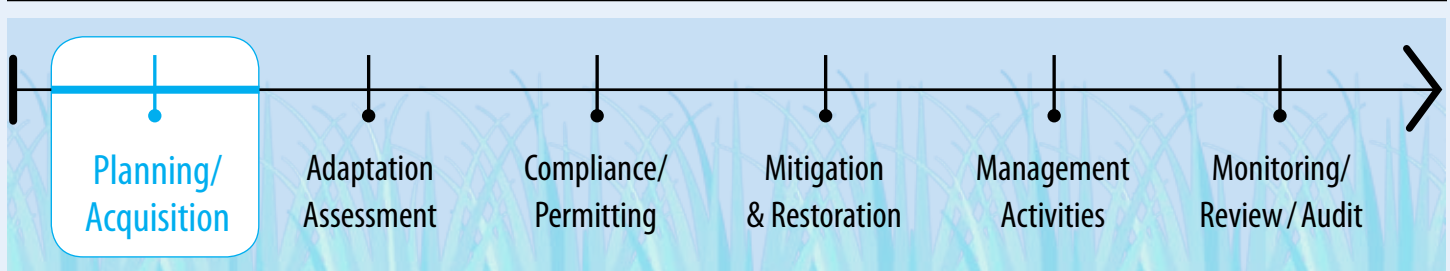
Organizing and implementing regional meetings are not small tasks, requiring a host of logistical considerations including venue, catering, registration, and corralling the necessary staff and volunteers to support speakers, posters and workshop facilitators. Attendance can also pose a challenge. Agency staff and other natural resource practitioners typically have their plates full meeting their day-to-day responsibilities, and it can be difficult to secure the time and funding (if travel is required) to attend meetings not directly linked to project work. Webinars are another option that reduce travel expenses. Webinars have the benefit of reaching more dispersed audiences but are limited to those with Internet technology. Also, they don't provide the same level of interaction that in-person meetings do.

The potential benefits of wetland adaptation forums make dealing with these challenges worthwhile. They allow the sharing of experiences and ideas among a broad audience in a short period of time, and provide an opportunity for back-and-forth discussion and brainstorming that webinars or presentations do not. They can also limit the frequency with which people "reinvent the wheel," meaning more resources can go toward on-the-ground action than toward searching for solutions that already exist.

## Who should implement the practice?

Symposia or forums should be organized by teams made up of a diversity of players, including federal, state, local or tribal government agencies, intergovernmental groups, non-profits, academic institutions, and businesses engaged in wetland conservation and restoration. Groups charged with supporting regional adaptation outreach and capacity-building, such as Landscape Conservation Cooperatives or NOAA climate hubs, are particularly well-suited to these sorts of efforts.

## When should this practice happen?



## Tools and Resources

**National Adaptation Forum** | This biennial forum is not wetlands-focused, but it is one of the largest gatherings of adaptation professionals, and materials from previous NAFs can serve as models for a wetlands-focused forum. | [www.nationaladaptationforum.org](http://www.nationaladaptationforum.org)

**The Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange** | CAKE's calendar of adaptation events can help users see when and where related events are happening, and use its georeferenced search capability to find potential partners. | [www.cakex.org](http://www.cakex.org)

**Michigan Wetlands Association** | The annual meetings are not all adaptation-focused, but typically there are opportunities through one or more sessions to address adaptation issues. | [www.miwetlands.org](http://www.miwetlands.org)

