

August 23 was the date we held our first roundtable discussion on our concept that the ecologically valuable lands of the Downeast region, if promoted for research and education, could be an economic driver for the communities in the area (you have seen it in the white paper we shared last winter).

Originally the roundtable was envisioned as a way to involve some of our donors more closely in our work by asking them for their input on an issue of interest to us. In trying to include a few "experts" from the education and research institutions in the area we quickly found ourselves with a far larger group than we intended (34 rather than 12). The enthusiasm for the concept was so high that we had to turn people away. As it was it took Misha's masterful management of the group to keep the discussion focused, but still lively and exciting.

Representatives around the table from research, education, and conservation organizations were clearly interested in and enthusiastic about the emergence of Downeast Maine as an environmental research and education region of international importance. Extensive work on the new SERC campus (right outside the door) highlighted the economic value of our environmental R & E institutions and conserved lands- in this case - \$18million!

The initial roundtable discussion was rich with thoughts on the potential future of a Downeast research and education coalition and how we may help to foster the emergence of Environmental R & E as an important economic driver for Downeast Maine.

The grant from the Elmina B Sewall Foundation gave FBC money to put together a full conference that could include all folk possibly interested in involvement in a coalition to explore the R & E concept further for Downeast Maine.

Here are a few of Tom and my thoughts on how a coalition and the conference might go forward next year and beyond:

Ideas for the 2011

1. Focus the work of the group around a central theme- the economic, social and cultural value of schools, colleges, universities and other institutions conducting ecological research and practicing stewardship on the conserved lands of our region.
2. Compile a list of the R & E institutions now working in our region.
3. Expand and strengthen the network of educational institutions, land conservation organizations, government and community leaders whose voices should be heard at the 2011 conference.
4. Quantify the dollar and job advantage that environmental R & E can provide for our region's economy with examples like SERC, COA, ANP, UM Machias, Orono and more. Possibly use analogies from other regions such as North Carolina's Research Triangle Park.
5. Showcase the work of the 2011 SERC interns
6. Communicate about the conference to our communities and reach out to the media to gain positive coverage for the conference and the underlying concept.

FBC will be discussing all of this at our next board meeting on October 12 and in depth in conjunction with a review of all the work of FBC at our retreat on October 23.