



Metropolitan Conservation Alliance
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October 14, 2005

Mr. Christian Miller
City of Rye Planner
1051 Boston Post Road
Rye, NY 10580



Dear Mr. Miller:

The summer of 2005 has been one of significant change for the Wildlife Conservation Society's Metropolitan Conservation Alliance (MCA). As many of you know, I founded MCA in 1997 to develop models of locally-based land use planning in the Tri-State New York metropolitan area. To that end we have been successful, with the launching of biotic corridor projects throughout the region. Conservation of wildlife and wildlands (i.e., biodiversity) is now part of the local planning agenda. While we cannot claim sole propriety for the change, it has been stated repeatedly by many of our partner organizations, agencies, and towns that the MCA model has significantly affected their institutional thinking and agenda.

Early on in our development, MCA received a leadership gift of support from the Surdna Foundation and the Doris Duke Charitable Trust. This helped launch MCA and sustained us through 2001. The post-2001 financial landscape has become increasingly complex for not-for-profit organizations. The Wildlife Conservation Society has generously and consistently supported the activities of its MCA program, as have a suite of donors including the New York State DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program, Connecticut DEP, Westchester Community Foundation, as well as private gifts. However, with escalating costs of basic program support, office rent and staff, coupled with cuts and possible elimination of support from key government programs, it became apparent that I needed to rethink the MCA infrastructure as well as how MCA could become a force for innovation and change at a larger scale. In addition, in the early summer of 2005, two of my key staff members decided that it was time for them to pursue new directions in their professional and personal lives.

Jennifer Schmitz joined MCA in 2001 at which time she told me that she was seeking a two-year appointment, however she stayed for more than twice that time and was integral in the development of the MCA of today. Jennifer is now

working for the summer and fall with the WCS Gabon program and following her stint in Africa with a return to graduate school to continue her career in conservation.

Nick Miller joined MCA shortly before Jennifer's arrival. He provided tremendous intellectual and programmatic development to the program. After an extended term in the New York region, Nick decided to return home to Wisconsin where he has accepted the position of Director of Conservation Science for the Wisconsin Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. One of the best aspects of working for The Wildlife Conservation Society is our "corporate ethos" of always encouraging our staff to further their careers in directions that provide personal fulfillment and professional growth. Both Jennifer and Nick are examples of that commitment, and each of them will take what they have learned at MCA and build on that as they pursue their conservation careers.

The convergence of staff departures, diminishing donor support, and my own sense that MCA still had more important work to do propelled me to reconsider our entire operations and structure, including our programmatic and fiscal sustainability. What has emerged from this restructure is a program that will continue our commitment to disseminating information and creating positive changes in the conservation/land use paradigm in the New York Tri-State region. However, we will also begin to engage communities on a national scale on the interrelated issues of natural resource protection and quality human habitats in an evermore urbanizing landscape. As the founding director of MCA, I intend to continue to advise communities and disseminate our "lessons learned" over the last eight years. I also plan to spend significantly more time writing about issues of land use, sprawl, and public policy.

In terms of infrastructure, MCA now has two full time staff, and one half time position (Outreach Coordinator). This is a reduction of 1.5 staff positions from January 2005. These staff are:

Michael W. Klemens, PhD, Founding Director (mca@wcs.org)
Kevin J. Ryan, BT, Program Officer (kryan@mca.org)
Danielle LaBruna, MA, Outreach Coordinator (dlabruna@wcs.org)

Many of you know Kevin through his work as our seasonal field technician. Kevin has been promoted to Program Officer and will assume many of the day-to-day managerial tasks at MCA. Danielle has worked with a diversity of WCS programs, including her current appointment that is a split between MCA and the WCS Hunting & Wildlife Trade Program. Danielle brings both outreach skills and GIS knowledge to MCA and will assume management of our database as well as developing outreach strategies and working directly with communities.

This reduction of staff and the redirection of parts of the MCA program has reduced our capacity to offer the previous level of intensive one-on-one

interaction. We will no longer be able to manage the "nuts and bolts" of data collection for future biotic corridor projects, but rather will advise our partners on how best to obtain those data. We will continue to work with our partners to create projects in which the responsibilities for both funding and implementation are considered shared endeavors. This has already occurred in the expansion of the Eastern Westchester Biotic Corridor where the communities of Pound Ridge, Lewisboro, and North Salem have raised grants funds to obtain a planning consultant to work with them on creating the inter-municipal conservation overlay district and the town of Bedford has entered this planning compact with a commitment of both funds and staff resources.

In order to reduce costs of office infrastructure we have relocated the MCA office from Rye, NY to Ridgefield, CT:

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I would like to conclude this letter with a brief overview of MCA's plans for our partnerships in the Tri-State region of New Jersey, New York and Connecticut (exclusive of lectures, charrettes, and workshops):

New Jersey:

- Dependent upon grant funding, continue to develop an implementation strategy for the biodiversity needs assessment for the townships of Chester, Lebanon, and Washington as a model for locally-based land use planning in New Jersey.

New York:

- Continue to work with the Eastern Westchester Biotic Corridor towns (Bedford, Lewisboro, North Salem, and Pound Ridge) to develop inter-municipal conservation overlay district and to integrate Bedford into the Biotic Corridor.
- Continue to encourage and work with the towns of Yorktown, Cortlandt, Putnam Valley and New Castle to develop an inter-municipal strategy to implement the Croton-to-Highlands biotic strategy.
- Continue to encourage and work with the towns of Warwick, Goshen, Chester and the village of Warwick to develop inter-municipal strategies to implement the Southern Walkkill biodiversity strategy.
- Evaluate how best to make available data to the Northern Walkkill towns of New Paltz, Esopus, and Lloyd. MCA was unable to gain access to sufficient sites in these towns to create a formal biotic corridor strategy.

Funding to continue all these New York projects has been committed by the NY DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program through and likely ending in

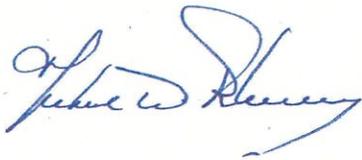
December 2006. Therefore, it is a high priority for MCA to make significant inroads in the implementation process of all our New York projects prior to that date.

Connecticut:

- Publish the Farmington River Biodiversity Strategy (Avon, Canton, East Granby, Farmington, Granby, Simsbury, and Suffield) and work with these seven towns to develop the legal and conservation framework for implementation. We have limited funding available to complete the Farmington project from the CT-DEP.
- Continue to deliver land use and biodiversity training to local decision makers throughout the State through the LULA program (Land Use Leadership Alliance).

We have already begun the process of contacting the principal partners in the projects outlined above to discuss our next steps. I hope that this has provided some context to guide the future of our partnerships in the forthcoming year. We at MCA are very encouraged by the enthusiasm of our local partners, and by the very real changes that they continue to make in their land-use practices, creating communities where the natural infrastructure is valued and viewed as integral to the success of human endeavors.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael W. Klemens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "K".

Michael W. Klemens, PhD
Founding Director
Metropolitan Conservation Alliance