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**EXAMINING THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE OF LAND USE DECISION MAKING: A CASE STUDY OF THE
LAMPREY RIVER WATERSHED AND COMMUNITIES IN COASTAL NEW HAMPSHIRE**

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ABSTRACT: The New Hampshire seacoast is a mere 18 miles in length, but includes over 40 coastal watershed communities experiencing tremendous population growth and development pressure resulting in sprawl and increased impervious surface cover. This pressure challenges land use decision making, impacts water quality and quantity, and ultimately threatens the ecological health and functioning of Great Bay, an estuary designated as both a NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserve and an EPA National Estuary Program. All of Great Bay's contributing watersheds face these challenges, resulting in calls for strategies addressing growth, development and land use planning. This led to the question, is there a potential for re-framing land use decision making at the watershed scale? The answer to this question is discussed through a case study of the social landscape of land use decision making in the Lamprey River watershed and its 14 communities. A mixed social science methodology was employed including semi-structured interviews with GIS maps designed as visual probes. In addition to interviews with experts and professionals, data was collected from volunteers on town planning boards, conservation commission, zoning boards, open space committees and heritage or historic district commissions. Grounded theory directed the analytical strategy, resulting in a theoretical framework and an opportunity for strong collaborative engagement and participatory action research. This presentation will describe the background, methods, data collection and analysis, key findings, results and outcomes of the case study. This research successfully developed a theoretical framework and novel methodology which can be tested and replicated. It provided critical groundwork for understanding decision making challenges and opportunities at the local level, which continues to support the work of scientists and natural resource managers. Of particular importance, this mixed social science approach and participatory action research ultimately led to real outcomes concerning the future of the Lamprey River and its watershed by affecting social change in its communities.

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