

PISCATAQUOG LAND CONSERVANCY

STRATEGIC PLAN

FY18-FY22

July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2022

FINAL as adopted by PLC Board of Trustees, August 24, 2017

PLC'S PURPOSE

In New Hampshire, as across America, rural undeveloped land is limited and increasingly under pressure. Undeveloped lands provide incalculable environmental benefits including clean water, clean air, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, natural scenery, and are indispensable for agriculture and forestry. The continuing conversion of these lands to urban and suburban development too often results in the diminishment or loss of natural and environmental assets that sustain significant and irreplaceable environmental values.

In 1970 a group of visionary citizens concerned about the rapid urbanization of their corner of southern New Hampshire founded the Piscataquog Watershed Association (PWA). Its purpose was to protect the natural resources of the 12-town Piscataquog River watershed by conserving strategic properties through purchase or easement. In 2008 PWA became the Piscataquog Land Conservancy (PLC), and in 2015 the organization expanded its service area to include another 11 towns in the Souhegan and Nashua River watersheds. Today PLC is part of a community of 31 land trusts in New Hampshire protecting more than 800,000 acres, all dedicated to conserving the natural landscape and the environmental resources it embodies.

PLC'S MISSION

Energized by this purpose, PLC has a focused mission:

The Piscataquog Land Conservancy works to conserve the natural and scenic environment of its southern New Hampshire communities for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future generations.

PLC'S VISION

PLC's mission is aimed at helping create a future where conservation continues to play a significant part. A vision for the future, 20 to 50 years from now, can and should help guide the day-to-day and year-to-year activities of PLC's many volunteers, staff and board as well as the stakeholders in the communities it serves. While each individual will have his or her own sense of the future, the following is PLC's shared vision:

New Hampshire in general and the PLC region in particular, comprise a rural region characterized by large tracts of forests, small farms, and small towns and villages. The PLC region, the Piscataquog, Souhegan and Nashua River

watersheds, fall within the orbit of rapid urban development radiating from Boston as well as Manchester and Nashua. The increasing cost of living in the urban centers coupled with ease of transport and commuting, combined with a desire to live in a more rural setting and enjoy all that the rural setting offers, is exerting a growing pressure on undeveloped land.

The PLC trusts that preserved aquifers, forests and agricultural parcels continue to perform essential environmental services and help to maintain the rural character of living we presently enjoy. The conserved parcels will contribute to cleaner air and water while continuing to provide access to traditional New England activities such as snowshoeing, skiing, hiking walking, hunting and fishing along with other ‘outdoor’ pursuits. We feel these activities, being enjoyed in a natural and unpolluted environment, contribute significantly to the region’s quality of life.

Future residents will share this preserved land with plants and animals that may otherwise be threatened or lost if open space is not protected. Forested lands protected by the PLC, will continue to be logged using sustainable methods that are consistent with their preservation. Protected agricultural lands will provide for small-scale farming that is beneficial now and of continued importance into the future. These farms will provide locally produced fruits, vegetables, dairy goods and other non-edible items such as Christmas trees and most of the pumpkins grown locally today.

PLC’S ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Actions to carry out PLC’s mission will advance its core values through work, that

1. Is legally, ethically and financially sound;
2. Is guided by and consistent with the Land Trust Alliance’s Standards and Practices for Land Trusts; and
3. Is known, respected and supported by residents throughout the Piscataquog, Souhegan and Nashua River watersheds.

FULFILLING THE VISION: STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

From its inception in 1970, PLC has worked hard in pursuit of this vision. By 2012, when the last Strategic Plan was adopted, PLC had protected 89 properties totaling 5,075 acres of conservation land in 12 towns. Five years later PLC has added 17 properties totaling 1,788 acres, and as of July 2017 held fee land and easements on 106 tracts totaling 6,863 acres. PLC has also added 11 towns to its service area in late 2015, bringing the total to 23 towns served.

PLC’s future is bright, but there are substantial challenges ahead to maintain the scope and high quality of its services. Though the foundation is solid, success will demand new efforts, new resources, and new strategies. Our capacity is strong; PLC currently has two full-time and two part-time staff, along with more than 75 dedicated volunteers, but may need to expand in the years ahead. Further PLC’s

accomplishments in meeting its land protection, stewardship and outreach goals has given us the confidence to apply for Land Trust Alliance Accreditation, which was awarded in August 2017

PLC's Strategic Plan is designed to guide program activities in four distinct areas:

1. **Land Conservation** – Continuing to conserve key land tracts;
2. **Stewardship** – Responsibly managing those lands already conserved;
3. **Outreach** – Inviting the public to responsibly enjoy PLC's conserved lands and educating them about the value of conservation; and
4. **Strength and Sustainability** – Ensuring that PLC has the capacity and financial resources to effectively fulfill its mission, both today and in the future.

This Strategic Plan is intended to be a living document that will inform annual work plans and periodic operational plans. It identifies "measures of progress" to help quantify PLC's accomplishments and is also intended to help PLC prepare for reaccreditation in 2022.

LAND CONSERVATION GOAL

The goal of PLC's land conservation program is to conserve land through the acquisition of conservation easements and fee simple interests in order to:

1. Enhance and protect the ecological health and sustainability of the water resources and wildlife habitat of the Piscataquog, Souhegan and Nashua River watersheds;
2. Nurture and preserve the ability of watershed lands and waterways to provide sustainable natural resources, including support for suitable agriculture and forestry, preservation of open space and protection against climate change and other environmental services; and
3. Provide low-impact recreation and education opportunities for the benefit of current and future generations.

LAND CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

1. Identify land protection opportunities by emphasizing:
 - a. Large, contiguous tracts of land;
 - b. Land or waterways that directly impact or have the potential to significantly impact water quality, or that lie in aquifer recharge or headwaters areas of the Piscataquog, Souhegan and Nashua River watersheds;
 - c. Lands containing prime forestland or agricultural soils;
 - d. Important and/or larger blocks of forest lands that contribute to the overall protection of both common and rare species of plants and animals; and
 - e. Lands that provide other important environmental services.
2. Prioritize conservation opportunities in areas of strategic importance as identified by and in accordance with the PLC's Land Protection Priorities.
3. Ensure that each conservation project undertaken is conducted professionally and responsibly, adheres to all applicable legal and ethical standards, serves the public interest, supports PLC's conservation priorities and utilizes protection vehicles that are legally defensible and will stand the test of time.

LAND CONSERVATION MEASURES OF PROGRESS

1. Number of projects completed;
2. Acres conserved;
3. Towns where PLC has conserved land for the first time.

STEWARDSHIP GOAL

PLC's stewardship program is designed to ensure that PLC meets its legal and ethical obligations to the land, the donors, future landowners and the public, in perpetuity.

STEWARDSHIP STRATEGIES

To satisfy the stewardship goal, PLC adheres to the following strategies:

1. Annually monitor all conservation lands.
2. Maintain positive, cooperative relationships with easement landowners, abutters, and the public at large.
3. Maintain a working knowledge of current legal and ethical issues related to land stewardship.
4. Ensure close collaboration with the PLC Land Protection Committee and staff during conservation project planning and development.
5. Provide Land Protection Committee and staff with informed guidance and recommendations to minimize risk and insure the identified conservation values are protected.
6. Develop and implement policies and procedures that support and reinforce PLC's conservation goal through landowner education and through responsive, attentive and respectful easement oversight and enforcement.
7. Provide for board, staff, and committee participation in state and/or national training opportunities.
8. Develop and implement management plans for all fee-owned properties and insure best management practices are followed on fee-owned properties as appropriate to the management goals established.

STEWARDSHIP MEASURES OF PROGRESS

1. Number of properties monitored and number of volunteers
2. Number of training sessions and workshops attended by staff.
3. Number of training sessions held for volunteers.
4. Number and percent of successfully resolved land use conflicts.

OUTREACH GOALS

The successful conservation of watershed resources relies on a strong commitment to conservation values throughout the communities we serve. Accordingly PLC's outreach program goals are to:

1. Build a greater public understanding of the importance of land and water conservation;
2. Stimulate a favorable opinion of land and water conservation projects generally and PLC's work specifically; and
3. Inspire active engagement in land and water conservation through financial, technical, volunteer or other means of support.

OUTREACH STRATEGIES

1. Maintain a full calendar of outdoor recreational and educational activities, such as hiking, kayaking, snowshoeing, forest management field days, wildlife observation and tracking, showcasing PLC-conserved land.
2. Provide for stewardship volunteer activities to showcase and improve PLC-conserved land, such as trail maintenance and clean-up days.
3. Enhance electronic communications media, including existing E-newsletters and social media presence, guided by available statistical data.
4. Expand the event co-sponsorship program as a means to better attract and engage diverse audiences.
5. Utilize, to the extent feasible, volunteer resources to orchestrate PLC participation in public community events (farmers markets, fairs, festivals).
6. Establish specific and quantifiable outcomes for all outreach programming, and regularly evaluate program performance in relation to outcomes, adapting outreach programs as indicated.
7. Increase utilization of fee-owned properties for both educational and recreational opportunities.
8. Reach out to schools and other youth-oriented groups with stewardship and recreational opportunities.
9. Track state budgetary, regulatory and legislative issues that may affect PLC through NHLTC and other organizations.
10. Celebrate receipt of Accreditation via the newsletter and press release.

OUTREACH MEASURES OF PROGRESS

1. Number of recreational events and number of participants.
2. Number of stewardship events and number of participants
3. Number of new members.
4. Number of new donors.

STRENGTH AND SUSTAINABILITY GOAL

To achieve PLC's conservation, stewardship and outreach goals, it is imperative that the PLC maintain organizational strength and stability commensurate with the size and scale of PLC's programs and holdings. PLC will focus on building capacity in three areas: Financial, Human, and Organizational.

STRENGTH AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES

Financial Capacity:

1. Increase annual revenue streams to meet or exceed basic operating expenses.
2. Lead regular community based project fundraising campaigns for revenue generation and to build awareness and engagement in PLC's work in each community we serve.
3. Expand grant-seeking efforts for project or operating needs.
4. Cultivate participation in the Piscataquog Legacy Society and Business Sponsorship Programs.
5. Augment existing major donor and business sponsorship programs.
6. Develop fee-for-service revenue streams as appropriate.
7. Initiate a capital campaign to help secure funds sufficient to meet PLC's long-term needs.
8. Set a target for a capital campaign in relationship to PLC's 50th anniversary, to be met by 2020.

Human Capacity:

1. Analyze staffing requirements to meet the needs of the annual work program.
2. Ensure board, staff or volunteer resources are in place as needed to conduct the work of the organization responsibly, professionally and successfully.
3. Attract, train, supervise and retain a cadre of volunteers sufficient in size, experience, knowledge and ability to effectively carry out the program work of the organization.
4. Develop a leadership recruitment and development program to provide a reliable influx of capable, informed and knowledgeable leaders.

Organizational Capacity:

1. Implement any remediation requirements resulting from LTA accreditation.
2. Develop and utilize a three-pronged planning structure to guide the work of the organization: 5-year Strategic Plan, 1-3 year Operations Plan, and Annual Work Plans.
3. Analyze staffing and volunteer requirements to meet work plan needs, including budget levels.
4. Fully develop and support volunteer recruitment, retention and evaluation programs.
5. Establish and adhere to a schedule of ongoing of board development, organization policy review, and organizational, board and program evaluation and assessment.
6. Continue to expand relationships within the regional and national land trust community in order to remain current in our practices and policies.

STRENGTH AND SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES OF PROGRESS

Financial

1. Increase in annual revenue.
2. Increase in capital funds.

Human Capacity

1. Number of active volunteers
2. Geographic distribution of board member among towns within the service area.
3. Expertise of the board

Organizational Capacity

1. Number of training sessions for new board members
2. Number of training sessions for new volunteers
3. Number of training sessions for staff

Adopted by the PLC Board: August 24, 2017