

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2027

Section 1: Introduction and Overview

This Strategic Plan for 2023-2027 aims to advance the mission of the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust by setting new, vital strategic goals for our programs, enhancing organizational effectiveness and efficiency, and bringing financial sustainability to a new level.

The new strategic goals are ones that arise from three urgent, intertwined challenges:

- The challenge of climate change that imperils biodiversity, ecosystem functioning, and human well-being.
- The challenge of inequalities with roots deep in the past.
- The challenge of educating us all, and especially the young, to the importance of making our community and the wider world more resilient for all living things.

We set about pursuing these new strategic goals realizing that the context in which we work has become more difficult. The impacts of climate change are increasing in frequency and severity. The COVID global pandemic is still with us. Social media is changing our ways of communicating with one another. Real estate prices are rising quickly, as is inflation. The growth in our own staff and in the diversity of activities and relationships in which we are engaged require fresh efforts to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, and good working conditions. We are confident we can negotiate these challenges while pursuing the vital strategic goals that frame this plan.

Background. Our 2017-2021 Strategic Plan was prepared after a successful Comprehensive Capital Campaign and aimed to bring BTLT to a “new normal” sustainable level of staffing and operating budget. We expanded and improved community engagement based on a community survey, improved communications, and broadened partnerships with other organizations and the towns of Brunswick and Topsham. We completed several priority lands projects (notably the Woodward Point, Androscoggin Woods, Neptune Woods, and Head of Tide Park projects) and increased stewardship capacity. These goals were substantially accomplished through a significant increase in our membership and in our Annual Fund, which also enabled staff growth, strengthened organizational functioning, and expanded use of volunteers. While an endowment goal of \$2 million was not achieved during the plan period, about half that goal was reached, allowing initiation of endowment draws for the annual budget for the past three years. We also successfully made a much-needed change in office and meeting space and upgrade in information technology with a move to Brunswick Landing.

This new strategic plan has arisen out of many conversations among our staff and board members. It also, importantly, draws upon a community survey from which we learned a great deal about how people in Bowdoin, Brunswick and Topsham view the work of the land trust and what they hope for the future. We know we are an organization grounded in our membership.

Section 2: Core Directions for 2023 to 2027

We believe the most important directions for the work of the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust over the next few years are to enhance our core conservation programs for land acquisition and stewardship and expand our efforts in youth education to foster long-term support for conservation, while integrating our commitments to addressing climate change and increased diversity, equity, and inclusion in all our work, and using our voice to leverage impact on mission-related issues in the wider public. Specifically, we aim to:

1. *Amplify BTLT's ability to pursue new land conservation projects*, recognizing that there remain both significant opportunities in our communities and the availability of increased funding for conservation from national and state-level governments and private donors.
2. *Increase stewardship capacity further* to support land conservation and ongoing required stewardship in view of the increasing impacts of climate change, demands for public access, need to implement DEI recommendations, and desire for expanding programs on BTLT lands.
3. *Expand youth education* through integration with the Cathance River Education Alliance (CREA).
4. *Integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation* more explicitly in our lands, stewardship, agriculture, and educational programs, in line with the Climate Action Plan adopted for Maine.
5. *Integrate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practices* from an action plan to be adopted, building on an explicit commitment we made in April 2021 and on activities already underway.
6. *Engage in more sustained advocacy efforts on important issues connected with our mission.*

To pursue the foregoing, we know we will have to devote energy to two other significant undertakings:

- *Prepare for and embark on a new Comprehensive Fundraising Campaign* to increase the resources we have available to devote to BTLT's essential functions and these core directions, and especially to further build an endowment that can ensure the land trust will be able to stand behind its commitments to conservation and stewardship in perpetuity.

- *Work on strengthening our organization* in its staffing and human resources policies and practices, in its financial planning, in its management systems and practices, and in the makeup and organization of its board and committees.

Section 3: Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust Mission

The land trust by its very mission of conserving natural landscapes and ecosystems promotes ecological resilience within our area, which in turn, promotes resilience within our human communities through the myriad of ecological services that ecosystems provide. Moreover, specific goals and activities of the land trust promote community resilience through the support of local farms, fisheries, and sustainable forestry as well as through community engagement and education.

Updated Mission Statement:

Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust conserves and stewards vital natural areas, supports a vibrant local food system, and connects people with the natural world through inclusive education and recreation programs. Our goal is to protect our natural resources, cultivate care for the natural world, and in so doing, foster resilient, connected communities now and for generations to come.

Section 4: Core Values

In all our efforts, we are committed to these core values:

COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION. We work in collaboration with a thriving network of volunteers, landowners, public agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and diverse community members to enhance our regional sense of place and ecological and community resiliency. Our staff, volunteers, and leadership respect and support one another and the broader community in all our efforts to achieve our shared mission and goals. Our management practices embrace setting of priorities, transparent decision-making, and coordination of activities.

EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY. We aim to be both effective and efficient in using our resources to meet our program goals.

EXCELLENCE AND INTEGRITY. Every aspect of our organization exemplifies excellence. We fulfil our commitments, respect those we work with, and remain true to our mission. In all our actions and interactions with others, we value truth, honesty, and transparency.

INCLUSION AND EQUITY. We seek, actively and respectfully, to be inclusive as we work to build community among a diverse array of stakeholders, taking care to especially include those traditionally not engaged with conservation work, so that our conservation efforts will

acknowledge an honest history of the land, provide benefits to our entire community, and help to build a more equitable future.

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. We raise, plan, manage, and spend our funds so that donor and grant dollars are used responsibly to carry out our work and to ensure that BTLT will be able to live up to our commitments in perpetuity.

INNOVATION. Recognizing that individual creativity contributes to organizational success, we leverage our skills and expertise to develop innovative solutions to achieve maximum impact.

PERSEVERENCE. Acknowledging that conservation opportunities, stewardship needs, and community building require patience as well as resources to bring to fruition, and that we will be faced with adversity in accomplishing this work, we are committed to perseverance in evaluating and refining our goals and methods and continuing our work with resolve and determination.

Section 5: Goals and Priority Activities for Cross-Cutting Themes

Three of the Core Directions for 2023 to 2027 arise from challenges that cut across the full range of what we do. These are the challenges of climate change; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); and advocacy. We need to address these urgent challenges in all that we do.

A. CLIMATE CHANGE

“Climate change represents the greatest threat of our age. There is widespread consensus on the urgent need to take action.” Those are the opening sentences of *Maine Won’t Wait*, the State of Maine’s climate action plan. We are committed to having the land trust put its shoulders to the wheel working on climate change.

Goal

- Integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation considerations and activities into all BTLT program areas where feasible.

Priority Activities

1. Maintain a climate change working group to provide advice and support to committees, staff, and volunteers in designing and implementing climate change activities, and to monitor overall progress.
2. Combine best available science with proven traditional knowledge of the natural world to ensure our work supports exceptional ecosystem functioning and climate change resilience.
3. Assess actions that the land trust properties can take that contribute to the mitigation of the adverse effects of climate change.

4. Assess impacts of regenerative farming practices on sequestering carbon in soil and advocate for managed grazing and other regenerative farming practices.
5. Be a force for reducing human impact on climate and on building local climate change resilience.
6. Demonstrate how organizations can eliminate their carbon footprint by taking steps to reduce BTLT's own fossil fuel use with reduction through efficiency and electricity generated through renewables.

B. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION (DEI)

In a statement on *Our Commitment to Access, Diversity and Inclusion* approved by the Board in April 2021, we said "We believe it is imperative for the conservation community to build a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse movement. Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust (BTLT) is committed to being a leader and full partner in this transformation."

Goal

- Integrate DEI considerations in all program areas and in our internal staffing and management practices.

Priority Activities

1. Adopt an organizational DEI action plan, one that addresses and integrates our goals for diversity, equity and inclusion throughout the land trust's programs and organizational functioning.
2. Maintain a DEI Committee to support committees and staff in identifying feasible ways to incorporate DEI considerations in our programs and to monitor overall progress.
3. Adopt a land acknowledgement statement and policy.
4. Develop a clear and well-researched strategy for finding and onboarding staff, volunteers, Board, and committee members outside of BTLT's traditional demographics. Assure that arrangements are in place to support these new members as they carry out their work.
5. Review and take necessary steps to grow a workplace culture at BTLT that is equitable, just, and supportive for everyone involved.
6. Engage in DEI education for Board, staff, and committees, and find ways to integrate that knowledge into the organization.

C. ADVOCACY

Many of the issues that affect our service area can only be addressed effectively by regional, state-wide, or national action. The Land Trust has a role in broader policy, rulemaking, and legal arenas on behalf of our work in our service area as well as in conservation and nonprofit work writ large.

Goal

- Engage in advocacy on important issues connected with our mission.

Priority Activities

1. Establish a working group to refine BTLT's advocacy criteria and to identify possible priority issues for deliberate advocacy on an annual basis (and *ad hoc* as needed), and a process to obtain Board approval.
2. Mobilize committed and knowledgeable volunteers to support Board-approved advocacy initiatives.

Section 6: Goals and Priority Activities for Major Functional Areas

Brunswick Topsham Land Trust's major program activities are organized into the categories of amplified land conservation, stewardship of lands, promotion of and support for local food system, education, and other community programs. These are our goals and priorities in these areas.

A. AMPLIFIED LAND CONSERVATION

Goals

- Amplify BTLT's land conservation capacity to take advantage of generational changes in key properties, the fast-paced real estate market, increased availability of state and federal conservation funding, and to support land conservation goals laid out in the Maine Climate Change Action Plan.
- Explore opportunities and possible partnerships for land projects that would enhance the accessibility of conserved lands to a broader cross section of our community.
- Maintain compliance with LTA Standards and Practices.

Priority Activities

1. Continue to have our conservation work be guided by BTLT's Strategic Conservation Plan and Land Protection Guiding Principles. These documents focus our conservation priorities on:
 - Mitigating or slowing climate change
 - Protecting the rivers and bays in our service area, including buffering those resources as we anticipate marsh migration and sea level rise, providing water access, and protecting fisheries.
 - Conserving large areas of unfragmented ecologically important habitat and forest blocks

- Connecting recreational trails and other recreational assets and work to conserve lands for diverse recreational uses including hiking, biking, fishing, skiing, hunting.
 - Connecting ecological assets to protect large ecological habitat blocks and maintain wildlife corridors
 - Conserving farmland (particularly parcels containing greater than 50% prime farmland and/or land actively being farmed)
 - Encouraging public use of land where such public use does not harm the important ecological features of the land
2. Focus on projects that promote climate resiliency and fill gaps in statewide conservation efforts.
 3. Explore potential for low-income housing partnerships, recognizing that income is a major source of inequality and non-inclusion in our area.
 4. Increase our knowledge of lands in our service area that have significant historical and cultural importance and work to conserve these.
 5. Monitor changes in LTA Standards and Practices and update BTLT policies and procedures as needed.

B. STEWARDSHIP OF LANDS

Goals

- Increase capacity of stewardship staff to accomplish existing essential stewardship obligations, discretionary activities, and integrate climate change mitigation practices into property management.
- Sustainably meet essential required stewardship obligations and existing trail maintenance, while undertaking additional discretionary activities as staff and volunteer resources permit. These discretionary activities include managing our lands and trails so that they are accessible for a diverse array of recreational and ecological uses that meet articulated needs in our community.
- Integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation activities focused on invasives, pathogens, and disturbance, on fee properties and, with permission, on easement properties.
- Incorporate DEI considerations in stewardship practices and in volunteer recruitment, training, and supervision.

Priority Activities

1. Create and apply criteria matrix tool for assessing and prioritizing existing and new trails and when planning for future trails
2. Maintain compliance with LTA stewardship standards and practices
3. Retain and recruit a diverse pool of volunteers, including younger people, to support ongoing stewardship work

4. Assess, determine, and prioritize forest management activities and resources required
5. Continue to actively manage and steward the blueberry barren at Crystal Spring Farm and other rare or vulnerable natural communities on BTLT's conserved lands
6. Assess and prioritize invasive plant and pest management across BTLT fee properties
7. Identify and prioritize potential climate change impact activities in consultation with the climate change working group.
8. Adjust stewardship priorities and practices as directed in the DEI Action Plan.
9. Increase longer-term historical and cultural knowledge of conserved lands that BTLT stewards.

C. PROMOTION OF AND SUPPORT FOR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Goals

- Advance BTLT's mission in supporting the local food system including agriculture and fisheries through both BTLT-managed programs and partnerships with local farmers and organizations involved in the food system.
- Pursue ways in which agricultural and fisheries programs can support climate change and DEI goals.

Priority Activities

1. Maintain agricultural programs highly valued in the community survey, especially the Crystal Spring Farm Saturday Farmers Market and the Tom Settlemire Community Garden, and the New Mainers Community Garden and Mowita'nej Epijij (Wabanaki garden).
2. Manage local food system programs as cost centers able to attract grants and earned income.
3. Strengthen BTLT's *ad hoc* Agriculture Steering Committee by forming a Local Food Programs Committee to provide guidance and oversight on agricultural and fisheries programs, including relationships with food producers and leadership in the Merrymeeting Food Council.
4. Advocate for climate change-friendly agricultural practices and sponsor demonstration projects by willing farmers.
5. Identify ways to advance BTLT DEI goals in agriculture programs in consultation with the DEI working group and in accordance with the DEI Action Plan.

D. EDUCATION AND OTHER COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Goals

- Significantly expand BTLT involvement in youth education through integration with CREA.

- Align adult education activities with both expressed community interests and strategic BTLT goals for climate change, DEI, and advocacy.

Priority Activities

1. Establish an Education Committee as part of the process of integration with CREA.
2. Integrate CREA staff and Board members effectively at the program, committee and Board levels.
3. Identify target audiences and best ways to reach them, including considerations of inclusion and accessibility.
4. Create an Education and Community Programs work plan covering both the educational activities the CREA merger will bring to BTLT and a program of community educational and recreational activities that integrates BTLT’s and CREA’s program agendas.
5. Support community conservation projects that align with our mission, including recreation areas in the Brunswick Landing Redevelopment Plan and expanded opportunities for mountain biking.

Section 7: Organizational Improvements & Capacity Building

The Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust has been growing larger and more capable year by year since it was created in 1985. After a period of especially rapid growth, we need to assess and increase financial and human resource capacity and revise & improve our organizational structure, governance, and management policies & practices.

A. ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

Goals

- Take a fresh look at our organizational structure and our governance and management policies and practices to be sure they are effective and fair.

Priority Activities

GOVERNANCE

1. Ensure that LTA Accreditation is maintained, and that we remain in compliance with revised Standards and Practices.
2. Adapt Board size and membership as appropriate if merger with CREA is approved.
3. Update Bylaws to reflect developments in practices, organization, and possible legal requirements of merger with CREA.
4. Ensure succession planning for leadership and membership of the Board and committees.
5. Adopt a process for the board to regularly review its own successes and areas for improvement, including staff feedback on Board operations and culture.

6. Assess the role of the Advisory Council and revise the expectations, responsibilities, and terms of membership as needed.

STAFF MANAGEMENT

Ensure employment policies are equitable, that employees can be successful in their work, and that we welcome diversity in the organization from staff, committee, volunteers, and board members. To do this we will:

1. Adopt a compensation and personnel management policy that is equitable, attractive to a wide array of employees, and sustainable for the organization, and develop an accompanying Staff Handbook.
2. Develop and maintain a positive workplace environment that promotes healthy work/life balance and employee well-being.
3. Work to increase BTLT's human resource management capacity.

COMMUNICATIONS

1. Develop and implement a robust annual communications plan that utilizes a diverse array of communication channels (press, social media, web site, emails, print communications, etc.) to broadly share stories demonstrating the work and impact of BTLT in our community.
2. Use communications to highlight the voices and stories of marginalized communities and their involvement in nature education, conservation, and land use.

FINANCE

1. Maintain conservative projections of budgeted revenues and expenses together with disciplined accounting and auditing.
2. Develop an overall financial plan that includes opportunities to expand the Annual Fund, grant funding, and earned income.
3. Effectively manage the financial implications of a merger with CREA, both in revenues from donors and adjustments in expenditures required.
4. Oversee management of BTLT's endowment and quasi-endowment funds to ensure investments are made in compliance with our investment policy and that the investment policy is updated as needed to comport with current market conditions and BTLT's investment goals.
5. Develop financial reports that more clearly allocate general operating expenses and functional budgets to support committee and staff needs for budget management tools.

B. COMPREHENSIVE CAMPAIGN

Goals

- Undertake preparation and implementation of a new Comprehensive Capital Campaign.

Priority Activities

1. Conduct a feasibility study for a campaign
2. Set goals for a campaign
3. Establish policies and procedures for a successful campaign

Section 8: Plan for Review and Revision

Board Committees will have primary responsibility for implementation of the Strategic Plan in their areas of responsibility and monitoring progress through metrics appropriate for their programs linked to their annual workplans. The Governance Committee will annually assess progress in implementation of the Strategic Plan overall with input from all committees and report to the Board on issues requiring adjustment in expectations and their implications. A mid-term Board and Staff retreat will also be planned to assess progress and amend the plan as appropriate.