EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1973, Wildlands Conservancy has been at the forefront of conservation and sustainability, acting locally in the Lehigh Valley and Lehigh River Watershed to accomplish vital results and fulfill a significant role in what is now a complex global effort.

WILDLANDS CONSERVANCY IS THE LEHIGH VALLEY’S AND LEHIGH RIVER WATERSHED’S NONPROFIT AND ACCREDITED LAND TRUST. Since 1973, we have been creating lasting connections to nature through land protection, environmental stewardship, and education—working to achieve a region that contains expansive natural areas, connected green spaces, healthy waterways, and an enlightened community where people embrace conservation and sustainability. To fulfill this vision, we actively partner with community members and businesses throughout the Lehigh Valley and the 10-county watershed. From cleaner water to more natural places for recreation and respite to outdoor classrooms for children, we make conservation happen.

We carry out our vision and mission by being the preeminent full-service land trust in the Lehigh Valley and Lehigh River Watershed. We achieve our goals through various land protection and stewardship strategies; science-informed water quality, quantity, and ecological restoration projects; environmental educational programs; comprehensive community planning efforts; and greenway and recreational trail development. To date, the Conservancy has preserved over 55,000 acres of natural land and habitat, educated more than 450,000 children and adults, developed and implemented countless environmental and water-quality restoration projects, and planned and constructed over 100 miles of aquatic and terrestrial trails. Wildlands Conservancy has a staff of 35 full- and part-time professionals and an annual operating budget of approximately $2.5 million.

Wildlands Conservancy's Strategic Plan development was overseen by a board-designated task force comprised of board members and skilled, knowledgeable volunteers. In addition, extensive background data about the organization and its peers were collected and analyzed. We interviewed peer organizations, funders, and key partners about the future of conservation and education in the region. The organization engaged key stakeholders in the strategic planning process through several meetings and the broader community through a community survey. The organization also held strategic planning workshops with the board and staff. All of this information was critical in the creation of Wildlands Conservancy’s Strategic Plan.

VISION
A LEHIGH VALLEY AND LEHIGH RIVER WATERSHED THAT CONTAIN EXPANSIVE NATURAL AREAS, CONNECTED GREEN SPACES, HEALTHY WATERWAYS, AND AN ENLIGHTENED COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE EMBRACE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

MISSION
PROTECT AND RESTORE CRITICAL NATURAL AREAS AND WATERWAYS, AND EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY TO CREATE A LEGACY OF A HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

STRATEGIC GOALS

OUR SEVEN KEY STRATEGIC GOALS for the future will enable Wildlands Conservancy to complete its important conservation and education mission. The period through 2022 is critical to the success of Wildlands Conservancy, and the strategies outlined below will ensure our continued success and help elevate the organization to the next level.

1. Wildlands Conservancy will continue to be the premier accredited land trust in the Lehigh River Watershed and Lehigh Valley. We understand the value of our green infrastructure and the role a healthy environment plays in the "quality of place" in our region. Our conservation work will focus on projects and activities with the highest conservation value.

2. Wildlands Conservancy understands the importance of creating a community that supports conservation and will leverage our premier environmental education programming, expanding our offerings and locations for complete coverage of the Lehigh Valley and positioning Wildlands to extend our programming northward in the Lehigh River Watershed. Connecting the community to our world and exposing them to the wonders of nature will inspire stewardship of our irreplaceable natural resources.

3. Wildlands Conservancy will continue to be the premier organization to protect, restore, enhance, and connect with water resources in all of our region. We understand the importance of clean, abundant water and the interconnected nature of the environment. Our preservation and restoration work will focus on projects and activities with the highest conservation value.

4. Wildlands also understands the need to provide our conservation and environmental education work throughout the Lehigh River Watershed, and we will grow our presence in the Lehigh Valley and expand in the northern parts of the Lehigh River Watershed.

5. Wildlands will also dramatically increase our focus on our preserves and connect people with our land. Our nature preserves are critical resources for achieving our mission and provide an exceptional opportunity to expose more people to our wonderful conservation accomplishments and education programs.

6. To achieve our strategic goals and ensure our perpetual work, Wildlands Conservancy will dramatically increase funding for operational costs, endowment, and capital projects. We will significantly increase our philanthropic and grant funding and initiate a major capital and endowment campaign.

7. To achieve our funding objectives, we need to dramatically increase public awareness of, and the base of support for, Wildlands Conservancy. We have a great story to tell and need many more people to understand our mission, accomplishments, and capabilities. We will increase our community base of support, resulting in increased funding, volunteer efforts, and engagement.
GOAL 1: BE THE PREMIER ACCREDITED LAND TRUST IN THE LEHIGH RIVER WATERSHED AND LEHIGH VALLEY

STRATEGIES
1. Work to Land Trust Alliance accreditation standards
2. Lead the Upper Lehigh cluster
3. Be a leader in the Delaware River Watershed Initiative
4. Protect land per the priorities of the updated Lehigh River Watershed Conservation Management Plan, the Upper Lehigh Cluster Phase 2 plan, and the Lehigh Valley land protection plan
5. Facilitate open space protection and stewardship by providing assistance and encouragement to municipalities and counties wishing to pursue funding initiatives
6. Develop and maintain productive, reciprocal relationships with counties and municipalities, and leverage our resources with increased partnerships
7. Increase acquisition of land for preserves, providing a Wildlands preserve within, at most, 15 minutes of everyone in the Lehigh River Watershed, while addressing the urgency for open space preservation felt by our constituents/stakeholders
8. Lead the development and implementation of a network of greenways and trails by closing greenway and trail gaps throughout the Lehigh River Watershed and the Lehigh Valley. Our trails work will increase significantly, recognizing its importance to the watershed and reflecting the orientation of our constituents/stakeholders
9. Elevate the research component of our land efforts through cooperation with local universities and other educational institutions

GOAL 2: LEVERAGE OUR PREMIER ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING, EXPANDING OUR OFFERINGS AND LOCATIONS FOR COMPLETE COVERAGE OF THE LEHIGH VALLEY AND POSITIONING WILDLANDS TO EXTEND OUR PROGRAMMING NORTHWARD IN THE LEHIGH RIVER WATERSHED

STRATEGIES
1. Engage people at all stages of life with programming ranging from young children to seniors, urban to rural, science to wellness, covering the entire watershed, longer-term programs engaging people for years, and more
2. Continue to optimize our most impactful programs, freezing resources for new programming. Continually increase the quality and value of our programs, using measures showing effectiveness of our programs and retention of content by our students. Implement programming that is sustainable every year
3. Significantly improve the advertising and publicity of our programs, increasing attendance and revenues. We need more “headlines” and additional efforts to educate voters, decision-makers, and supporters
4. Significantly improve our infrastructure for education, including establishing the Dorothy Rider Pool Wildlife Sanctuary as a destination nature center with an enhanced visitor center and a nature play area, a mobile nature center, and work toward replicating DRPWS in Northampton County and north of Blue Mountain
5. Engage our participants via technology (e.g., a Wildlands app), trail guides and signs, and citizen science programs. Technology-enabled remote education programs will provide opportunities for people throughout the watershed to connect to Wildlands and learn about nature
6. Strive to increase community involvement, including opportunities for jobs and a more robust internship program, including full-year assignments, resulting in conservation success stories
7. Position Wild About Learning to be a nationally admired program
8. Work toward implementing the NAAEE Guidelines for Excellence for Non-formal Environmental Education Programs
9. Provide educational programming to every school district in the Lehigh Valley and northward in the Lehigh River Watershed
10. Establish facilities within 20 minutes of everyone in the Lehigh Valley and eventually the Lehigh River Watershed
11. Develop and implement programs that extend over the Lehigh River Watershed, beginning at the Lehigh River headwaters and concluding at its confluence
12. Increase programming for adults, including broadening our clientele by offering programs that provide an educational component, and attract people who are already outdoors pursuing health, wellness, fitness, recreation, sports, walking, hiking, running, fishing, hunting, etc.
13. Develop and expand key partnerships
14. Elevate the research and internship components of our environmental education efforts through cooperation with local universities and other educational institutions

GOAL 3: BE THE PREMIER ORGANIZATION TO PROTECT, RESTORE, ENHANCE, AND CONNECT WITH WATER RESOURCES IN ALL OF OUR REGION

STRATEGIES
1. Implement the highest priority stream restoration and water quality and quantity projects listed in the updated Lehigh River Watershed Conservation Management Plan
2. Protect streams and wetlands though land preservation
3. Protect streams through the establishment of riparian buffers on public and private properties
4. Leverage our educational programs to include water-based education
5. Enhance and develop innovative partnerships
6. Build support for our water resources projects by promoting our successes and developing and maintaining community relationships so that readiness can be assessed prior to undertaking projects
7. Elevate the research component of our water efforts through cooperation with local universities and other educational institutions
8. Expand our dam removal strategy into Carbon County
9. Promote and expand our AMD work in Carbon County
10. Utilize Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) funds and other creative funding approaches

GOAL 4: GROW OUR PRESENCE IN THE LEHIGH VALLEY AND EXPAND OUR PRESENCE IN THE NORTHERN PARTS OF THE LEHIGH RIVER WATERSHED

STRATEGIES
1. Be the only full-service land trust, including providing land, water, and education programs in the Lehigh River Watershed and the Lehigh Valley
2. Promote and leverage our leadership role in the Delaware River Watershed Initiative for high recognition of our position as the leading accredited land trust in the Lehigh River Watershed
3. Pursue new nature reserves to achieve the goal of having a nature preserve within, at most, 15 minutes of everyone in the Lehigh Valley and Lehigh River Watershed
4. Be prepared to execute beneficial mergers and partnerships
5. Achieve increased presence in the northern watershed in parallel with increasing Lehigh Valley projects and programs
6. Build recognition and awareness of Wildlands Conservancy
7. Complete trails related to our preserves and connect our preserves into the larger greenway network
8. Connect people in urban cores to green spaces by maximizing the environmental value of existing green spaces and identifying new additions to green infrastructure, including pocket parks and urban trails
9. Present education programs at all major preserves
10. Utilize the Lehigh Valley and Carbon County Return on Environment studies and other research to promote the true values of conservation
11. Establish a second Wildlands Conservancy office location north of the Kittatinny Ridge or in Northampton County

Continued
GOAL 5: DRAMATICALLY INCREASE OUR FOCUS ON OUR PRESERVES AND CONNECT PEOPLE WITH OUR LAND

STRATEGIES
1. Create “Friends of” preserve organizations for donors, volunteers, stewardship, and support
2. Solidify the necessary resources to manage and maintain our existing preserves. We will increase our abilities to steward our conserved lands by innovative partnerships, long-term relationships, selective habitat management, tree harvesting, increased specific donation asks, increased endowments, creative fundraising approaches, and significantly increased use of volunteers
3. Implement high-priority recommendations from the management plans for all preserves, completing the infrastructure to make our preserves safe and accessible to the public
4. Utilize key partners to improve the ecological health of our preserves
5. Expand and enhance our existing preserves through land acquisition and increase the number of preserves in diverse habitats
6. Progress toward achieving a preserve within, at most, 15 minutes of everybody in the watershed and the Lehigh Valley
7. Convert a farm (that counties will not conserve) into a nature preserve, preferably one with wetlands and a stream and land that could be converted to grasslands. This will add diversity to our conserved lands and provide opportunities for our education programs
8. Increase the public awareness of our current preserves, including enhancing our website and creating interactive, mobile technologies to facilitate the use of our preserves
9. Increase public access to our preserves. There will be different levels of management and usage for each preserve, and they will be opened for use by the public on different timelines
10. Establish Dorothy Rider Pool Wildlife Sanctuary as a showcase preserve and destination nature center with an enhanced visitor center and a nature play area
11. Establish South Mountain as a showcase preserve and model for other Wildlands preserves
12. Operate Dorothy Rider Pool Wildlife Sanctuary in accordance with the deed and will of Leonard Parker Pool and pursue alternatives that will reduce the public and staff impact on the property
13. Present education programs at all major preserves
14. Use trails on and between preserves to connect people with land. Trails-Greenways-Corridors-Connectivity are keys to our relationships with municipalities and urban/suburban areas, as well as ecologically critical
15. Ensure that all Wildlands preserve trails remain open and easy for the public to navigate
16. Elevate the research component of our preserve management efforts through cooperation with local universities and other educational institutions
17. Establish a committee of the board of directors dedicated to the operations and stewardship of Wildlands Conservancy’s preserves

GOAL 6: DRAMATICALLY INCREASE FUNDING FOR OPERATIONAL COSTS, ENDOWMENT, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS

STRATEGIES
1. Address challenging capital campaign, major donor, and legacy society goals as well as at least 6%/year increases in the annual fund and donor base. Our major gifts will achieve a step-change for the organization and align us for even larger growth to follow
   a. Engage the board and staff for connections and fundraising
   b. Increase and stabilize operational fundraising to allow for increased capital project fundraising
   c. Increase focus on long-term sustainable funding through bequests and endowment gifts
   d. Build our base of donors and philanthropic funding over the first three years of the plan by investing in a Moven Management system to increase our base of donors at entry- and mid-levels
   e. Launch and execute the public phase of the capital campaign
   f. Utilize “Friends of” organizations for all major preserves and other needs to increase funding
   g. Engage/connect program participants and preserve visitors in our mission by ensuring that we capture contact information via utilizing development staff in key educational programs so that we can convert participants and visitors to donors. We will be highly proactive in converting every person we engage into a donor. We want to be engaged with all of our stakeholders throughout their lives
   h. Communicate more frequently with our base of supporters
2. Incorporate more creative approaches for fundraising and provide opportunities for donors to give in a wider variety of approaches that suit their philanthropic objectives. We will manage our efforts to apply the right amount of effort for the expected results
3. Increase significantly asks for specific needs and ingrain those asks in our normal operations
4. Utilize the centralized database to provide all appropriate staff members with a global view of a constituent’s interactions with the organization, especially education participants and land protection contacts
5. Make a concerted effort to address the aging boomer population, bringing them into our Legacy Society and aligning them for donations offsetting their required minimum distributions
6. Manage effectively our relationships with key politicians and influencers
7. Achieve exceptional individualized constituent experience through personal engagement and excellent customer service
8. While there are potential headwinds for philanthropy nationally, we have generally not mirrored those trends and see many opportunities for high growth. Our development program has only recently reached a critical mass and should see increasing productivity, but we have just implemented the central database, permitting more sophisticated asks and reduced work; we are in a growing community; we are in an era of strong community orientation to our mission; our penetration of the potential donor base is extremely small; and we have historically grown faster than national averages and should be able to do even better

GOAL 7: DRAMATICALLY INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF, AND BASE OF SUPPORT FOR, WILDLANDS CONSERVANCY

STRATEGIES
1. Address our major fundraising goals, building our donor base and communicating our programs and results. There will be strategic and tactical communications aligning with the capital campaign. We will be proactive in producing “headline” results and communicating them for maximum benefit and greatly increased public awareness of all that Wildlands achieves for our community. We will have an increased frequency and breadth of our marketing communications
2. Tell the Wildlands story better, more often, and in more places, by increasing communications with supporters and the general public through a direct mail campaign, program promotions, social media, videos, online content, a project success booklet, and tailored publications at all donor levels
3. Better market and advertise who we are and what we do—by creating and implementing a strategic marketing campaign with clearly articulated goals and leveraging our preserves, education programs, partnerships, and social media—in the first two years of the plan to position us for achieving Goal 6
4. Substantially increase the advertising of our education programs, resulting in increased attendance and revenue
5. Increase the frequency and breadth of promoting our conservation successes
6. Address the effects of our changing climate. We incorporate this in our education programs, and our land and water projects are specifically designed to mitigate those effects

1 Funding is broadly defined, including all sources: endowment, donors, revenue, grants, legacy, foundations, government, corporate, and private

2 Public awareness includes brand recognition, media coverage, inquiries, credibility, and communications recipients. Base of support includes donors, volunteers, partners, users of facilities/programs, and loyal supporters

UNDERPINNING OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS, WE WILL DEVELOP OUR INFRASTRUCTURE, OUR PEOPLE, OUR PRACTICES, AND OUR SYSTEMS TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY AS A TEAM.