WILDLANDS CONSERVANCY STRATEGIC PLAN

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 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, Wildlands has preserved more than 50,000 acres of natural land and habitat, educated more than 350,000 children and adults, developed and implemented countless environmental and water quality restoration projects, and planned and constructed more than 90 miles of aquatic and terrestrial trails. Wildlands has a staff of 35 full- and part-time professionals and an annual operating budget of approximately $1.9 million.

Wildlands Conservancy’s Strategic Plan development was overseen by a board-designated task force comprised of board members who met monthly. In addition, extensive background data about the organization and its peers was collected and analyzed. Wildlands interviewed 13 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 two strategic planning workshops with the board and staff. All of this information was critical in the creation of Wildlands Conservancy’s Strategic Plan.
THE SEVEN STRATEGIC GOALS outlined herein will forward Wildlands’ conservation and education mission over the next five years, ensuring the sustainability and long-term growth of the organization. As the heart of the organization’s strategic plan, these goals will align all board and staff efforts to be mission-centric, they will serve as a foundation for outlining performance objectives tied to Wildlands’ annual operating budget, and, ultimately, their full implementation will elevate the organization to a totally new level.

1. Wildlands will strive to be the premier 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 understands the importance of creating a community that supports conservation and, over the next five years, the organization 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 the stewardship of irreplaceable natural resources.

3. Wildlands strives 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 conservation and environmental education work throughout the Lehigh River Watershed, and over the next five years, Wildlands Conservancy will grow our presence in the Lehigh Valley and expand our presence 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 Wildlands’ identified strategic goals and ensure the organization’s perpetual work, Wildlands will dramatically increase funding for operational costs, endowment and capital projects. We will significantly increase our philanthropic and grant funding prior to executing 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.
WILDLANDS CONSERVANCY’S CORE VALUES stem from our conservation and education mission. As ambassadors of our organization, we wholly implement them across ALL our relationships. Collectively, they stand as our guiding principles, shaping our every action as the region’s premier nonprofit land trust.

**TEAMWORK:** We highly value teamwork, cooperation and collaboration among all members of our staff. Every single person is encouraged to share ideas and perspectives. This is the way to learn the most, have the most fun and get the most done.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** We insist that everyone treat their colleagues and the general public with respect and kindness. We handle disagreements honestly and professionally. Each employee is accountable for his or her actions and performance.

**INTEGRITY:** We will always be able to say we have acted with the utmost integrity. We believe the best decisions are made when there is complete honesty and transparency.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE:** We serve the community. We always strive to ensure that every single person has a wonderful and valuable experience with Wildlands Conservancy. We are always courteous and helpful and strive to provide excellent customer service.

**COMMUNITY:** We recognize that we cannot achieve our vision without the support of a well-informed, invested community. Every member of our staff has a role to play in educating the public about the organization and the importance of our work.

**CONSERVATION:** We care deeply about conservation. We will work hard and be ambitious. We will behave and operate in an environmentally responsible and conscientious manner.

At Wildlands Conservancy, we aspire to be a great place to work. This means providing good benefits, competitive pay and professional development in a flexible, yet results-oriented environment that focuses on achieving our strategic objectives, delivering high-quality work and continuously improving. We foster a friendly, family-like atmosphere that enables us to celebrate our successes and support each other through challenges. We take pride in knowing that every day our work is improving the environment and making a positive impact in our community.
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

GOAL 1: BE THE PREMIER LAND TRUST IN THE LEHIGH RIVER WATERSHED AND LEHIGH VALLEY

STRATEGIES

1. Working to Land Trust Alliance accreditation standards
2. Leading the Upper Lehigh cluster
3. Being a leader in the Delaware River Watershed Initiative
4. Protecting land per the priorities of the updated Lehigh River Watershed Conservation Management Plan and the Lehigh Valley land protection plan
5. Facilitating open space funding initiatives in the Lehigh Valley
6. Developing and maintaining productive, reciprocal relationships with counties and municipalities and leveraging our resources with increased partnerships
7. Leading 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
8. Elevating 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. Providing educational programming to every school district in the Lehigh Valley
2. Implementing programming that is sustainable every year and can be sustained over the entire educational career of students
3. Continually increasing the quality and value of our programs, using measures showing effectiveness of our programs and retention of content by our students
4. Establishing Pool Wildlife Sanctuary as a destination nature center with an enhanced visitor center and a nature play area
5. Establishing facilities within 20 minutes of everyone in the Lehigh Valley and eventually the Lehigh River Watershed
6. Engaging our participants via technology (e.g., a Wildlands app), trail guides and signs, and citizen science programs

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

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7. Increasing 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.

8. Developing and implementing programs that extend over the Lehigh River Watershed, beginning at the Lehigh River headwaters and concluding at its confluence

9. Developing and expanding key partnerships

10. Elevating the research component 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. Implementing the highest-priority stream restoration and water quality and quantity projects listed in the updated Lehigh River Watershed Conservation Management Plan

2. Protecting streams and wetlands through land preservation

3. Leveraging our educational programs to include water-based education

4. Enhancing and developing innovative partnerships

5. Building 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

6. Elevating the research component of our water efforts through cooperation with local universities and other educational institutions

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

**STRATEGIES**

1. Being the only full-service land trust, including providing land, water and education programs in the Lehigh River Watershed and the Lehigh Valley

2. Promoting and leveraging our leadership role in the Delaware River Watershed Initiative for high recognition of our position as the leading land trust in the Lehigh River Watershed

3. Being prepared to execute beneficial mergers and partnerships

4. Achieving increased presence in the northern watershed in parallel with increasing Lehigh Valley projects and programs

5. Building recognition and awareness of Wildlands Conservancy

6. Completing trails related to our preserves and connecting our preserves into the larger greenway network

7. Presenting education programs at all major preserves

8. Utilizing the Lehigh Valley Return on Environment study and other research to promote the true values of conservation

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

**STRATEGIES**

1. Creating “friends of” preserve organizations for donors, volunteers, stewardship and support

2. Solidifying the necessary resources to manage and maintain our existing preserves

3. Implementing high-priority recommendations from the management plans for all preserves, completing the infrastructure to make our preserves safe and accessible to the public
4. Utilizing key partners to improve the ecological health of our preserves
5. Expanding and enhancing our existing preserves through land acquisition and increasing the number of preserves in diverse habitats
6. Increasing the public awareness of our current preserves, including enhancing our website and creating interactive, mobile technologies to facilitate the use of our preserves
7. Establishing Pool Wildlife Sanctuary as a destination nature center with an enhanced visitor center and a nature play area
8. Presenting education programs at all major preserves
9. Using trails on and between preserves to connect people with land
10. Elevating the research component of our preserve management efforts through cooperation with local universities and other educational institutions

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

STRATEGIES
1. Rapidly building our base of donors and philanthropic funding over the first three years of the plan by investing in the Moves Management system to increase our base of donors at entry- and mid-levels
2. Utilizing one 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
3. Communicating more frequently with our base of supporters
4. Completing a capital campaign feasibility study, with the intent of the public phase of the campaign launching in the fifth year of the plan
5. Fully engaging board and staff members for connections and fundraising
6. Utilizing “friends of” organizations for all major preserves to increase funding
7. Increasing and stabilizing operational fundraising to allow for increased capital project fundraising
8. Increasing focus on long-term sustainable funding through bequests and endowment gifts
9. Fully engaging/connecting 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
10. Achieving exceptional individualized constituent experience through personal engagement and excellent customer service

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

STRATEGIES
1. Telling 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, project success booklet and tailored publications at all donor levels
2. More and better marketing and advertising of 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
3. Dramatically increasing our base of volunteers through the creation and implementation of a strategic volunteer program designed to engage the community in our mission and provide resources for organizational projects