



The Strategic Plan of the Monadnock Conservancy, 2017-2022

Together, protecting forever the land we love

VISION

Rolling hills and mountain ridges, broad expanses of woods and open meadows surround a village, a meetinghouse, a stone wall, a narrow dirt road. This beautiful landscape—anchored by Mount Monadnock, bounded by the eastern hills and the Connecticut River—has working farms and forests as well as wild lands. Moose browse on spring buds and black bears forage for blueberries; the deeper lakes are home to nesting loons and native brook trout thrive in coldwater streams. There are places to hike, to hunt, to paddle and to simply enjoy the quiet outdoors. The water is clean, the air clear and the night skies dark.

The New England that has disappeared in so many other places is alive and well in the Monadnock Region. The people who live, work and play here value and care for the land, embracing the connections between the landscape and the economic and social vitality of the region. There is a strong sense of community, and people work together to ensure that the region's unique rural character will remain through the changes of today and tomorrow.

MISSION

As a land trust for southwestern New Hampshire, our mission is to work with communities and landowners to conserve the natural resources, wild and working lands, rural character and scenic beauty of the Monadnock Region. We care for our conservation lands, and we engage people in ways that strengthen their communities and their connections to the land.

INTRODUCTION

This strategic plan articulates the four priorities of the Monadnock Conservancy for the next five years. Each priority addresses the core work that we intend to continue while placing emphasis on new objectives we will undertake or further develop. The plan will be complemented each year by internal work plans that prescribe in greater detail specific program tasks intended to advance these priorities.

CONNECT

Wendell Berry wrote: “You cannot save the land apart from the people or the people apart from the land.” Continuing from the prior strategic plan, our foundational premise is that effective, lasting conservation depends upon people having strong connections to the land and to their communities. The concept of connection continues to touch nearly everything we do, both to extend the benefits of conservation to more people and to foster greater support for conservation and critical institutions like the Monadnock Conservancy.

PROTECT

Though the term “protect” may be interpreted broadly, this category primarily includes our acquisition of new conservation holdings, which remains a core objective in advancing the mission. In the coming years, our goals emphasize becoming more strategic in our selection of both new land protection projects and appropriate land protection tools based on traditional and new criteria. We will also maintain significant priority on the conservation of farmland and support for agriculture.

STEWARD

In the context of this plan, the term “stewardship” is intended to address multiple activities, among them the monitoring and enforcement of conservation easements, the management of fee-owned land and the promotion of good land management practices on conservation land and across the landscape in general. Our stewardship goals in the coming years strive not only to enforce the letter of conservation easements, but also to promote and model active, value-added land management in order to maximize the public benefits of all conservation land. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying and mitigating the increasing liabilities of older conservation holdings.

SUSTAIN

This final priority articulates how we must maintain the strength and permanence of the organization as we grow and face new challenges. Emphasis is placed on fundraising using established and proven activities and tools, asset preservation and growth through wise investment management and maintenance of our most critical assets: the staff and board.

PRIORITIES

1) CONNECT

Sharing a love for the land and connecting people to nature and open space are key to extending the benefits of land conservation to new constituencies and ensuring its perpetuity. By expanding the ways in which we serve the communities of our region and focusing efforts on connecting people to the land and to each other, we will help build a society rooted in place—invested in the land, its stewardship and the institutions that serve to protect it.

Increased engagement, including with those who haven't traditionally benefited from land conservation, will open new doors, deepen relationships, address inequities, enrich a sense of belonging and strengthen both our communities and the Monadnock Conservancy.

- a) **Invite** our supporters and the general public to be inspired by and share with others our print and digital media.
- b) **Connect** a diverse citizenry with the land and the Conservancy through recreation, educational programs, research and volunteering.
- c) **Direct** to Conservancy-owned land people who are seeking the restorative physical and mental health benefits of the outdoors by offering events, trail guides and programming.
- d) **Expand** partnerships and form new relationships with a broad range of other organizations and municipalities to help people meet their needs through interactions with nature.
- e) **Identify** and publicize what work we already do to serve non-traditional constituencies or issues, and consider additional community challenges or opportunities that can be addressed through our mission.
- f) **Maintain** open lines of communication with municipalities throughout our service area, both to provide support for their conservation and stewardship activities and to ensure their financial and political support for our efforts.
- g) **Listen, examine, respond and refine** what it means to connect others to the land, to each other and to the Monadnock Conservancy, especially with respect to changing demographics and the emergent needs of each generation.

2) PROTECT

Protecting land benefits both human and non-human communities by maintaining and enhancing ecological functions, climate change resilience, wildlife habitat diversity and health, the viability and productivity of working farms and forests, clean water supplies and outdoor recreation opportunities.

As a generalist land trust, we take pride in celebrating and perpetuating the region's rural, natural and cultural heritage, recognizing with open minds that the values people derive from this special place are diverse and ever-changing. We welcome and, where appropriate, encourage people to connect with and enjoy the landscape in a variety of ways.

We value especially the institution of farming, not only for the food that sustains us, but also for the critical role agriculture plays in our cultural heritage and local economy. We seek to support farmers and conserve productive farmland to prevent its conversion to other uses, enhance farm business viability and reduce barriers to farmland access.

- a) **Prioritize** the selection of land protection projects that best serve the region, maintaining flexibility in weighing the following criteria:
- i. Ecological significance, including the quality and connectivity of plant communities and wildlife habitat.
 - ii. Ecosystem resilience to climate change.
 - iii. Surface and ground water features, including wetlands, streams, ponds, lakes, underground aquifers and drinking water supplies.
 - iv. Rural and urban green space offering high actual or potential public benefit through scenic, recreational, educational, or other direct-use value, particularly in areas where access to green space is an unmet need for some constituents.
 - v. Productive farm and forest land, especially land containing prime agricultural soils and soils highly ranked as productive for forest products.
- b) **Maintain** resilience in the evolving land protection industry, seeking a balance between short-term conservation success and long-term organizational viability when choosing among conservation easements, fee ownership or other means as the best land protection tools.

- c) **Stay abreast** of climate science and its implications for land project selection, conservation easement drafting, ongoing land management and public communications.
- d) **Embrace** innovative strategies to protect land, especially farmland.
 - i. Explore the purchase of farmland by the Conservancy and selling or leasing it to farmers as a means of increasing affordable farmland access.
 - ii. Consider acquiring, in conjunction with agricultural conservation easements, future options to purchase land at its agricultural value (“OPAVs”) as a means of ensuring long-term access and affordability for farmers.
 - iii. Identify underutilized farmland that could be matched with farmland seekers.
 - iv. Consider future rounds of farm disaster relief fund grants or similar direct assistance.
- e) **Assist** constituents such as towns, schools and organizations in identifying and conserving land that is uniquely important to them.

3) STEWARD

Stewardship of the land is an essential component of land protection. In fact, the initial acquisition of conservation land is but the tip of the iceberg—the real challenge in successful land protection is ensuring perpetual stewardship of the land once the deal is done. As such, we believe that stewardship merits its own distinct priority category.

Vigilant monitoring and effective enforcement of conservation easements and other legal instruments are the cornerstones of a land trust stewardship program. Truly exemplary stewardship, however, entails going beyond the letter of conservation agreements. Through responsible, active management and other value-added activities, we strive to ensure that the public benefit of each conservation property achieves its full potential. We also seek to promote good stewardship of the broader landscape through the example we set for other landowners.

- a) **Provide** adequate staffing and other resources to anticipate and manage evolving stewardship challenges as our portfolio of conservation holdings continues to grow, age and diversify.

- b) **Maximize** the effectiveness of the monitoring program by balancing staff resources with volunteer activities.
- c) **Understand** and stay abreast of the evolving landscape of conservation easement law, keeping our legal responsibilities contemporary, realistic and achievable; and of climate science and its implications for land management.
- d) **Evaluate** the risks and liabilities of our older conservation easements and address deficiencies through proactive amendments or other means.
- e) **Promote** active best management practices among owners of conservation easement-encumbered lands to enhance and balance ecological health, wildlife habitat, water quality, outdoor recreation and economic return as appropriate to each property.
- f) **Partner** with other organizations and agencies to assist landowners in stewarding their land.
- g) **Optimize** the potential of fee properties, as appropriate to each property, through active management, public demonstration and education programming and the development and management of trails and other recreational infrastructure.
- h) **Expand** opportunities for volunteers to participate in needed land management and other stewardship activities.

4) SUSTAIN

Conservation plays a key role in providing a high quality of life for all who live, work and play in the Monadnock region. We seek to position the Monadnock Conservancy as an organization recognized for its ability to sustain the land's capacity to maintain this quality of life in perpetuity.

- a) **Focus** on proven, fundamental development activities such as annual giving, new donor prospecting and retention, tiered donor development, grant seeking and project- or program-specific fundraising campaigns.
- b) **Meet** with donors in person, seeking to visit at least 75% of all major donors (\$750+) annually.
- c) **Increase** participation in the Monadnock Forever planned giving program.

- d) **Maintain** a strong and stable staff by providing competitive compensation and benefits, regular employee assessment, professional development opportunities and an organizational culture of respect, appreciation and innovation.
- e) **Provide** a physical space for our staff that supports their productivity and wellbeing.
- f) **Ensure** diverse board composition that is representative of the constituencies we seek to engage and that possesses the skills necessary to provide strong leadership and governance, effective fundraising, technical advice and positive public visibility.
- g) **Participate** in relevant regional and national land trust programs such as:
 - i. Land Trust Alliance conferences, workshops and other offerings;
 - ii. Accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission;
 - iii. Terrafirma conservation defense insurance; and
 - iv. The New Hampshire Land Trust Coalition.
- h) **Assure** annual revenue streams, in addition to traditional fundraising, to meet operating expenses from sources including:
 - i. Income from investments;
 - ii. Income from periodic fee land management; and
 - iii. Project-generated income that recovers staff costs, other direct expenses and overhead.
- i) **Develop and maintain** adequate financial reserves to meet future needs and obligations, including ensuring stewardship, enforcement and other fund balances are adequate to meet those needs. Seek to make the stewardship program self-sustaining from annual investment income.