



STRATEGIC PLAN

PART I: STRATEGIC DIRECTION



2019-2021

Created 2005. Updated 2012, 2015 and 2018.

Adopted by the SLT Board of Directors November 15, 2018

Many thanks to the Stowe Land Trust (SLT) Board of Directors and staff for their hard work and dedication in creating this Three -Year Strategic Plan.

Special thanks to the Strategic Planning Committee for their vision and leadership through this process: Chess Brownell, Walter Looney and Amy Stewart.

Sincere appreciation to Andy Robinson for leading the organization through a productive and fun planning retreat.

Lastly, thanks to the SLT staff, Metzi Anderson and Elisabeth Fenn, for their invaluable input and energy as well as my predecessor, Caitrin Maloney, for her leadership through the beginning of this planning process.

Stowe Land Trust's accomplishments would not have been possible without the incredible dedication and commitment of its Board of Directors, volunteers and members. Thank you.

- *Kristen Sharpless, Executive Director*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2017, Stowe Land Trust (SLT) celebrated 30 years of conserving land for our community. What began as a volunteer-led, grassroots effort to save the Mayo Farm has grown into a mature, professional organization that has protected over 3500 acres of important farm, forest and recreation lands that matter to those who live in, visit, and love the Stowe area. Yet, we remain tied to and rooted in our community – perhaps more now than ever before.

Since the last update of this strategic plan in 2015, SLT has accomplished a bold array of initiatives, projects and changes, including the following:

- Completed Stowe’s first Farmland Access project with the conservation of the Kaiser/Long Winter Farm in 2016
- Have undertaken two landscape-scale conservation efforts: Hunger Mountain Headwaters (HMH) Project and the Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor (SHWC) Partnership
- Dramatically expanded our network of conservation and community partners
- Maintained and improved trails and ecological values of conserved lands with a focus on engaging volunteers, particularly youth
- Moved the SLT office to a prominent Main Street location in Stowe Village
- Cultivated a Naturalist Program that now engages hundreds of children and families in exploring, learning about, and caring for our natural world each year
- Diversified the gender and age composition of our Board of Directors to better reflect our community

As we look ahead to our next three years of work, it is clear that there is still much to be done. A 2018 town meeting survey showed that support for conserving additional land in our community is still strong. Yet, our land protection work is likely to be more challenging and expensive than in the past. Land values and development pressures continue to rise, as do concerns that associated stresses on our natural resources and community will be elevated to new heights - at least in part due to changes precipitated by the purchase of Stowe Mountain Resort by Vail Resorts in 2017. Our community continues to evolve as more families are drawn to move to our area and the numbers and demographics of visitors shift. Statewide and local growth in the popularity of outdoor recreation - particularly in the areas of mountain biking and backcountry skiing - presents new opportunities and challenges associated with the sustainable management of our conserved lands. As our community evolves, so must our organization, which at 31-years-young needs to maintain the traditions and strengths which have underpinned our successes to date while also embracing change and new ideas.

Over the next three years, we will continue to work with willing landowners to protect land that is important to our community. We will remain true to our traditional focus areas of productive farm and forestland with recreation and scenic values while exploring emerging needs and opportunities such as affordable housing, smart-growth, transportation needs, regional conservation efforts, and new partnerships with schools. We will continue to uphold our commitment to manage increased stewardship responsibilities as we are successful in protecting more land, and we will continue to prepare for the future by growing our Stewardship Endowment. We will continue to make sure we

have the best systems, people, and partnerships in place so that we can maintain our strong organization with the resources to achieve our mission. We will be smart about how we use our resources, prioritizing data-driven approaches while valuing human connections and relationships. We will be a learning organization with a growth mindset that embraces challenges, persists in the face of setbacks, learns from criticism, and finds lessons and inspiration in the success of others. We will be the go-to resource for conservation in our community and an incubator for the next generation of conservationists as they get their wings, then launch. We will seek out and listen to new perspectives and ideas, even when it may not always be easy to hear what people may have to say.

To guide our work and respond to the challenges before us, this Strategic Plan articulates five specific goals:

- 1. LAND PROTECTION:** The essential character and function of the Stowe landscape is conserved through proactive and responsive land protection.
- 2. STEWARDSHIP:** SLT conserved and owned properties are sustainably managed to protect and enhance their conservation values. SLT properties are “gateways” to the organization, and encourage use and enjoyment by the community.
- 3. FUNDRAISING:** SLT has sufficient funds to meet its land protection goals, fulfill its perpetual stewardship obligations, and support annual operations.
- 4. SOLID ORGANIZATION:** Effective people and systems throughout the organization provide direction, resources, and follow-through to implement SLT’s mission. A culture of appreciation and inclusion throughout SLT is evident.
- 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** SLT is an essential community institution with an educated, diverse and active base of support that participates in land conservation practices throughout Stowe.

This plan details the strategies to achieve our goals and is supported by a three-year action plan. This plan also defines our mission, core values, benchmarks, and key performance indicators that we will use to measure our success. Most importantly, this plan underscores our commitment to land protection and stewardship in the greater Stowe community.

It is our hope that this plan keeps us on the path to securing - for our current and future generations - all the benefits and inspiration that permanent land protection; active, ongoing land stewardship; and human connection with the land and community provide.

With gratitude,



Kristen Sharpless
Executive Director

VISION

Stowe Land Trust seeks to protect the fabric and character of Stowe's landscape forever, and for the benefit of all. We work to conserve the rich agricultural, forestry, scenic and recreational heritage of this place and support the mutual success of viable farms, productive forests, thriving wildlife, healthy watersheds, and the tourism and land-based economy. We work to ensure the perpetual stewardship of protected lands, and strive to engage the community in celebrating, enjoying, and enhancing Stowe's farms and forests.

At the heart of our vision is a vital land trust — one that is a treasured resource, and works hand-in-hand with the community and local, regional and national conservation partners to protect and care for the places we love. Into the future, the Stowe Land Trust will evolve and adapt to meet the changing needs of the land and the community, and continue to be a respected community institution with a broad base of support and the financial independence to fulfill the commitments we've made.

All community members benefit from the permanent protection of our community's spectacular scenic vistas, open land and natural resources. Whether it's taking advantage of the numerous recreational opportunities, experiencing the richness and diversity of the working landscape, or enjoying the scenic qualities of our region, residents and visitors alike will know that Stowe Land Trust has played a significant role in enabling these experiences.

MISSION

Stowe Land Trust is dedicated to the conservation of scenic, recreational, and productive farm and forest lands for the benefit of the greater Stowe community.



CORE VALUES

Values matter, and at our core, we will live our values through our commitments to the community and to each other.

Community: We inspire and bring people together to explore, learn about, and care for the land that makes and supports our place. We work to ensure that everyone is able to access and enjoy the beauty and health of Stowe's natural environment. We strive to include all members of the Stowe area community our work.

Sustainability: We are a leader in promoting the protection and wise use of the Stowe community's forest, farm, recreation, scenic and other natural resource for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

Partnership: We cooperate and collaborate with other organizations and individuals to accomplish shared goals. We believe that we can accomplish more working together than alone. Our network is broad and diverse.

Legacy: We do our conservation work for the next generation. Our vision is long-term, and we commit to care for conserved lands now and forever.

Integrity: We are respectful, transparent, and trustworthy in all our interactions and transactions. We always put public benefit before private gain.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

GOAL 1. LAND PROTECTION: The essential character and function of the Stowe landscape is conserved through proactive and responsive land protection.

Strategies

- a. Protect the most important lands identified in our strategic conservation plan.
- b. Respond to land protection opportunities that meet the criteria for permanent conservation.
- c. Maintain and expand partnerships that support permanent land protection.

GOAL 2. STEWARDSHIP: SLT protected and owned properties are sustainably managed to maintain and enhance their conservation values. SLT properties are “gateways” to the organization, and encourage use and enjoyment by the community.

Strategies

- a. Protect the land trust's legal conservation interests.
- b. Maintain, and as appropriate, restore and enhance conservation values on fee owned and conserved land.
- c. Develop strong partnerships with easement co-holders and land managers.
- d. Maintain a stewardship program that is sustainable, efficient, effective and accountable.

GOAL 3. FUNDRAISING: SLT has sufficient funds to meet its land protection goals, fulfill its perpetual stewardship obligations and support annual operations.

Strategies

- a. Increase the total amount and overall stability of revenues as necessary in order to meet program goals. Adapt as necessary to maintain financial stability.
- b. Hold fundraising events that effectively use resources to meet budget goals.
- c. Ensure the long-term financial security of the stewardship program.

GOAL 4. SOLID ORGANIZATION: Effective people and systems throughout the organization provide direction, resources, and follow-through to implement SLT's mission. A culture of appreciation and inclusion throughout SLT is evident.

Strategies

- a. Maintain an active and engaged Board of Directors.
- b. Maintain strong organizational and financial systems and management tools.
- c. Ensure SLT's staff is highly skilled, productive, satisfied and has the capacity to meet the needs of the organization.
- d. Guide organization with effective planning.

GOAL 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: SLT is an essential community institution with an educated, diverse and active base of support that participates in land conservation practices throughout Stowe.

Strategies

- a. Increase public awareness of the organization, our mission and its importance.
- b. Inspire people to actively conserve, restore, care for and enjoy the land.
- c. Represent the organization on important land and conservation issues.
- d. Develop and cultivate the next generation of conservationists. Position SLT as the go-to local resource for conservation activities and education.
- e. Develop and cultivate a base of support that is racially, economically, and culturally diverse. Foster a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion within SLT
- f. Evaluate the community's understanding of and engagement with SLT and our mission

3 YEAR BENCHMARKS AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Goals	Benchmarks <i>What we want to have accomplished in 3 years</i>	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) <i>What we track to know how we are doing</i>
Land Protection	Complete 3-5 high-priority land protection projects Update Strategic Conservation Plan action plan by 2021; emerging issues are incorporated into plan	# high-priority projects in the pipeline # high-priority projects active # high-priority projects complete
Stewardship	Monitor all properties annually Connect with all owners of conserved lands and stewardship partners annually Respond to all stewardship issues promptly Complete all management plan activities for fee lands Increase Stewardship Endowment to at least 30% funded	% properties monitored each year % landowners & partners contacted/engaged each year # enforcement issues; % issues resolved in 1 year or less % scheduled management plan activities completed each year % Stewardship Endowment funded
Fundraising	Increase number of current donors to at least 800 Increase number of current PS members to at least 100 Increase average donation size by at least 10% Increase donor retention rate to at least 80% Increase hotel/corporate partnerships to at least 10 Eliminate reliance on events for operating income by 2021 Increase total fundraising income by 10% Increase online annual giving to 10% donations	# donors # donations and average donation size # donors acquired minus # donors lost in a year (churn) % online annual donations (donations & \$) # hotel/corporate partners Year-over-year giving/retention rate
Strong Organization	Maintain active board participation in meetings, committees and events Staff and committees prepare work plans annually Approve comprehensive budget by Oct 1 each year Receive positive financial review/audit annually and maintain strong financial ratios LTA accreditation renewal complete in 2020 Begin Strategic Plan update in 2021	% attendance at board meetings % directors active on committee or project % board & staff highly satisfied % staff and committees with annual work plans # financial ratios on target or improving each year
Community Engagement	Engage at least 1000 people per year at SLT outings, events and programs Grow email list to at least 2000 addresses; calculate and improve digital conversion rates Increase interaction on social media Engage at least 200 volunteers each year Hold annual meeting and celebration each September Survey community understanding and engagement by 2021	# participants in SLT outings and events # emails subscribed to list # volunteers each year Open, click through, and conversion rates for email communications % social media posts that start a conversation