



LAKES REGION CONSERVATION TRUST

STRATEGIC PLAN 2014 – 2018

Mission

The Lakes Region Conservation Trust (LRCT) is an independent, nonprofit, member-supported organization dedicated to the permanent protection, stewardship, and respectful use of lands that define the character of the region and its quality of life.

Vision

The natural beauty of the Lakes Region and the character of its communities attract and inspire year-round residents and seasonal visitors alike. Spectacular views from summits and ridgelines, pristine waters and shorelines, expansive wilderness and wildlife habitat, abundant recreational opportunities, and scenic lands around the places we live all remind us how fortunate we are to share a landscape that inspires us in every season of the year. These qualities are essential to a vibrant and sustainable local economy, and they help make the Lakes Region a place where people enthusiastically embrace conservation and stewardship of our treasured lands.

The Lakes Region Conservation Trust is the premier provider and guarantor of these open space values in the Lakes Region, working to ensure that the cherished character of our region will be enjoyed by future generations. We are unique in focusing on the natural heritage of the entire region and in connecting the work of individual towns, local groups, state-wide organizations, and volunteers to accomplish projects that reflect community priorities and have region-wide importance. Our work engages a dedicated and growing network of individuals who share an ethic of conservation and stewardship.

During the next five years, guided by the Strategic Plan, LRCT will strengthen and expand our work: protecting the quality of our precious water resources, maintaining wild lands and exceptional habitat for native plants and animals, supporting productive forest and farms, preserving local historic and cultural resources, and providing accessible open space for recreational and learning opportunities. This work will leave a legacy of conservation benefiting the entire Lakes Region and all of its inhabitants.

Our Accomplishments

Over the past 35 years, the Lakes Region Conservation Trust has conserved more than 23,000 acres of land in 22 towns, of which 17,000 acres are owned by LRCT. These lands, with an aggregate value of over \$40 million at the time of acquisition, represent a priceless part of our local heritage. Among our most significant land conservation accomplishments:

The *Castle in the Clouds Conservation Area*, 5,250 acres overlooking Lake Winnepesaukee from the Ossipee Mountains, is LRCT's largest property. This land and

its unparalleled network of carriage roads and trails, enjoyed by visitors year-round, surround 135 acres containing the historic Castle buildings and grounds, which were originally conserved by LRCT and are now owned and managed by the Castle Preservation Society.

The ***Red Hill Conservation Area***, 2,675 acres on this mountain landmark between Squam and Winnepesaukee, features popular hiking trails and is remembered by many as “my first big mountain hike!”

Our 3,000-acre ***Ossipee Mountain Preserve***, with its wild character and pristine plant and wildlife habitat, contains rare old growth forest and is a key component of the habitat corridor linking the Ossipees to the White Mountains.

Our ***Squam Range conservation easement*** on 2,471 acres of the Burleigh lands provides public trail access and permanent protection for significant habitat and a scenic landscape overlooking Squam Lake, and facilitates sustainable management of privately owned forest land.

LRCT’s five ***Winnepesaukee island properties***, including our first major land acquisition on Stonedam Island and beautiful Ragged Island, preserve Winnepesaukee’s natural heritage and provide paddle trail destinations for residents and visitors.

LRCT has worked with other land conservation organizations and with local officials and volunteers to achieve ***community conservation priorities***. Noteworthy examples include the four transactions that together achieved the conservation of ***Wolfboro’s Sewall Woods*** (179 acres) and the partnership with the Squam Lakes Conservation Society and the Town of Center Harbor to conserve the 220-acre ***Center Harbor Woods***. In addition, LRCT is a key partner in the ***Newfound Land Conservation Partnership*** and the ***Belknap Range Conservation Coalition***, both of which work to conserve key parcels in their areas.

Our Future

LRCT will continue to pursue a broad range of land conservation projects to maintain the region’s distinctive natural heritage and character and to benefit our region’s human, plant, and animal communities in perpetuity. Given the need for action before opportunities are lost, land conservation is our highest priority. To maximize the efficacy of our efforts, LRCT will work to integrate land management planning, stewardship, education, and fundraising into our land conservation activities.

Conserving the land is a great accomplishment, but it is only the beginning of the work to protect these valued lands through our lives and the lives of those who will follow us ... forever. This work encompasses planning and management for recreational activities and habitat enhancement, monitoring to protect against misuse, studying the land’s history and ecology, maintaining long-term relationships with landowners, and meeting professionalized best practices and documentation standards that are placing new responsibilities on the land trust sector. Consequently, stewardship is an increasingly important part of our work, currently

involving the valued efforts of over 200 volunteers. More than a legal obligation, stewardship is how we fulfill the vision and expectations of those who helped conserve these lands and ensure that the lands continue to provide enjoyment, benefit, and inspiration for future generations.

Sharing the values of LRCT's work with our communities and particularly with younger generations is also essential. Accomplishing this requires us to embrace new approaches and technologies in communication, connect people with the conserved lands, and secure the financial resources necessary to foster an appreciation of the region's natural heritage and reinforce a conservation ethic, so that people in the future will value and build on this legacy.

With our own expanding aspirations and responsibilities, and with the increasing expectations of our supporters and communities, the Lakes Region Conservation Trust is poised to achieve even greater impact. We are engaging in the program of accreditation established by the national Land Trust Alliance. We are allocating additional resources to increase stewardship, outreach, and engagement with our volunteers and our towns. We will build the financial resources necessary to sustain and expand our growing organization and allow us to continue pursuing projects of region-wide significance. This strategic plan will guide us over the next five years in meeting these responsibilities and expectations, acting on new opportunities, and sustaining all that has been accomplished.

Our Five-Year Priorities

This strategic plan sets forth five strategic goals of the Lakes Region Conservation Trust for the next five years:

- A. Land Conservation:** LRCT will move proactively before conservation opportunities are lost, pursue projects of region-wide importance, and integrate the full spectrum of our work into land conservation activities.
- B. Stewardship:** LRCT will enhance its capacity to meet the growing stewardship responsibilities that come with increased protected acreage and with evolving professional practices in the field of land conservation and stewardship.
- C. Outreach and Communication:** LRCT will expand, diversify, and enrich its outreach work to connect people to the land and engage them in the efforts that make conservation and stewardship successful.
- D. Financial Sustainability:** LRCT will be proactive in attracting a diverse funding base that enables us to act on emerging land opportunities, steward our owned lands and conservation easements, and sustain the fiscal health of the organization for the long-term.
- E. Organizational Excellence:** LRCT will maintain a strong network of Board, staff, volunteers, and professional practices to fulfill our mission and respond flexibly to changing needs and opportunities in our region.

Each goal encompasses core work already underway as well as new programs we will undertake.

LRCT Strategic Plan 2014 – 2018

Goal A: Land Conservation

LRCT's highest priority is land conservation for the benefit of our region's human and natural communities, in order to maintain our cherished natural heritage and character in perpetuity in the face of growth and development pressures.

1. Move proactively to develop and pursue land conservation opportunities that create a region-wide presence, and where appropriate, partner with residents, towns, local conservation groups, and regional and statewide organizations.
2. Clarify and elaborate on land conservation priorities to create a mixture of public access, ecological protection, and economic value, so as to better guide our work, ensure better understanding of our work by people involved with the organization, and facilitate more effective communication with the public.
3. Integrate the full continuum of land management planning, stewardship, education, and fundraising into land conservation activities.

Goal B: Stewardship

LRCT fulfills its legal responsibilities as a land trust and meets its stewardship commitments to landowners and the community, maintaining the promise of protection and inspiration for generations to come.

1. Develop and implement land management plans for all of our owned conserved properties, complete baseline documentation for all of our conservation easements, and establish systems to ensure appropriate monitoring and due diligence for all of our conserved properties.
2. Ensure that funding for perpetual stewardship matches the growing stewardship obligations associated with our existing and new conserved properties.
3. Increase our volunteer and volunteer management capacity to support stewardship and outreach.

Goal C: Outreach and Communication

LRCT cultivates an understanding among Lakes Region residents, visitors, organizations, and local officials about the importance of protecting and stewarding the special places of our region, thereby drawing more people into participating and supporting our work.

1. Increase our outreach to connect people with the land and raise community understanding of LRCT's accomplishments and activities, by emphasizing the importance, benefits, and urgency of conserving and stewarding lands in our region.
2. Develop and implement a plan to integrate communication into all of our activities, to strengthen and diversify our messaging capacities.
3. Attract residents and visitors of all ages into engaging with LRCT as volunteers, donors, committee and board members, and word-of-mouth networks for broadening public understanding of our mission.

Goal D: Financial Sustainability

LRCT's diverse funding base enables us to act on emerging land conservation opportunities, steward our owned lands and conservation easements, and sustain the organization for the long-term.

1. Create and implement an integrated fund development plan that will support our five-year budgeting and growth needs.
2. Build strong relationships with our donors at all levels of giving, and increase our one-on-one donor communication by both board and staff.
3. Develop a strong plan, timeline, and capacity for a campaign to build reserves that will ensure our long-term organizational financial stability, our ability to pursue important land conservation opportunities, and our fulfillment of long-term stewardship responsibilities.

Goal E: Organizational Excellence

LRCT maintains a strong network of Board, staff, volunteers, and professional practices to effectively pursue the organization's goals, fulfill our responsibilities, and respond flexibly to changing needs and opportunities in our region.

1. Build/improve the professional systems that make us a more efficient, effective organization and complete the land trust accreditation process.
2. Develop staff and facilities over five years to match our needs in the areas of land protection, stewardship, education, outreach and communication, volunteer management, and fund development.
3. Build a strong board and committee structure that represents the scope of our region, engages new members of our regional and seasonal communities, expands fundraising capacity, encourages networks among conservation-minded people and organizations, and develops leadership skills to meet the evolving nature and needs of our work.