

CENTRAL NEW YORK LAND TRUST

STRATEGIC PLAN 2024 - 2028

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/Background & Overview of Strategic Planning Process

The story of the Central New York Land Trust (CNYLT) is one of collaboration, commitment, and results. Its enduring success also rests on the efforts of countless people – from the handful of individuals whose vision and passion established the CNYLT in the early 1970's, to the thousands of school children of a new environmental movement who participated in the annual walkathons and raised the money needed to protect hundreds of acres of natural areas across Central New York. Originally known as Save The County, the organization changed its name to The Central New York Land Trust, Inc. in 2009. The CNYLT continues to grow, evolve, mature and move through the life cycle of a non-profit organization and has grown from an all-volunteer organization into one that now employs full time professional staff.

The Central New York Land Trust Board of Directors and staff created this strategic plan through dedicated in-person meetings and conversations with various staff and board members. As a result, this plan is the culmination of a dedicated effort of our Board, staff and citizens of our community.

It is important to emphasize that our Strategic Plan is a living document and that new partnerships and organizational structures will create opportunities not available at the time this strategic plan was put together. Nevertheless, the 2024 Strategic Plan is a roadmap to guide the actions and resources of our board, staff, volunteers, members, and all affiliates through calendar year 2028. The plan highlights our priorities, sets goals and action items, and will inform our decision making in the years ahead.

OUR MISSION

The Central New York Land Trust seeks to preserve and protect natural areas in order to provide our communities clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat, and a chance to connect with the land.

OUR VISION

A Central New York Community in which nature is valued as essential to quality of life, and people live with the appreciation and respect for the complex ecological systems that sustain life on earth.

OUR VALUES

Enduring Legacy:

Present and ongoing efforts will leave a long-lasting impact on the organization, the community, and our land.

Genuine Integrity:

We will earn and maintain trust from stakeholders.

Inspiring Action:

CNYLT is a defender of local ecosystems; the demonstrative impact of our programs and projects will inspire others to care for the land.

Versatile Stewardship:

Our actions promote functional ecosystems and landscapes, healthy watersheds, native plant and animal species, management techniques and uses appropriate for specific properties, long-term sustainability, perpetual stewardship, and equitable access to all peoples in our region.

Approved by the Board of Directors on October 17, 2023

Educational Collaboration:

We will support public education, communication, and collaboration to build engagement, and understanding of the importance of CNYLT's mission.

Sustainable Service:

Sustain our organization in perpetuity so that we may protect, restore, and care for our ecosystems in perpetuity.

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

By 2028, we will measure the success of our efforts by answering five overarching questions. Is the Central New York Land Trust:

1. known throughout New York State and beyond for being a leader in environmental conservation and protection practices across our preserves that promote functional ecosystems, healthy watersheds, and long-term, sustainable stewardship?
2. on solid financial ground to be able to support our staff and programming needs?
3. able to function effectively with a well-organized and secure administrative structure?
4. a trusted partner in conservation education and stewardship activities for schools, organizations, families and people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities who consider us an excellent organization to associate with?
5. able to maintain and enhance existing preserves, acquire new preserve lands, and balance the conservation needs of preserves while encouraging responsible recreation and enjoyment of our properties?

MEASURABLE OUTCOME #1

We will be known throughout New York State and beyond for providing superior environmental conservation and protection practices across our preserves that promote functional ecosystems, healthy watersheds, and long-term, sustainable stewardship.

MAJOR GOAL 1.1 (MAIN PRIORITY)

Increase stewardship capacity by pursuing perpetual stewardship funding opportunities and increase stewardship grant income sources to achieve more on-the-ground stewardship efforts annually and to keep pace with growth and expansion efforts.

ACTION STEPS:

- Review historical data and establish a baseline for funded stewardship activities.
- Pursue funding for additional technical labor.
- Explore and secure perpetual funding sources to sustain stewardship capacity and establish a baseline number and/or percentage of stewardship activities funded annually by 2028.

MAJOR GOAL 1.2

Assess existing stewardship staff structure to ensure efforts are being maximized.

ACTION STEPS:

- Evaluate effectiveness of existing stewardship activities and determine gaps in maintenance.
- Develop a stewardship training program geared toward volunteers.

- Foster partnerships with NYSDEC, NYS Parks, Finger Lakes Land Trust, and other conservation agencies and organizations to increase stewardship staff knowledge, resources, and up-to-date land management techniques.
- Increase internship opportunities by working with local universities and high schools.

MAJOR GOAL 1.3

Establish preserve-specific management plans for each preserve within 1 year of acquisition that includes an assessment of perpetual financial and labor needs for all project areas.

ACTION STEPS:

- Evaluate existing management strategies for existing preserves and utilize this evaluation to develop management plans for existing preserves.
- Conduct a conservation portfolio audit to evaluate the conservation value and stewardship expenses of currently owned preserves.
- Develop resources for review and annual update of management plans.
- Develop a priority maintenance schedule based on ecological significance (i.e., protection of rare, threatened, and endangered species) of priority areas.

MAJOR GOAL 1.4

Strengthen coordinated stewardship efforts with partners (NYSDEC, NYS Parks, municipalities, etc.) and establish an outreach protocol for potential conservation partners.

ACTION STEPS:

- Develop an interagency strike team to manage specific project areas on preserves.
- Develop stewardship outreach materials for partners and volunteers to educate them on the capabilities and practices of CNYLT.

MEASUREABLE OUTCOME #2

By 2028, we will be on solid financial ground to be able to support our staff and programming needs.

MAJOR GOAL 2.1 (MAIN PRIORITY)

Develop a comprehensive fundraising program by 2026.

ACTION STEPS:

- Set goals and strategies for each category of donor and type of gift (number and amounts)
- Establish Sustained Giving Program for specified gift levels.
- Establish 'Project Funding' program.
- Establish a donor recognition program.
- Develop and implement geographic expansion fundraising strategy.
- Integrate fundraising 'Operational Goals' into each committee in 2025.

MAJOR GOAL 2.2

Grow operational net income to a sustainable level that avoids deficits by 2028.

ACTION STEPS:

- Promote recurring gifts for 3-figure giving; develop a major donor cultivation approach for 4/5-figure giving and develop a legacy circle for 6-figure giving.
- Build campaign to grow operating cash income to \$900K by 2027.

MAJOR GOAL 2.3

Establish better financial visibility and metrics for the organization in 2024.

ACTION STEPS:

- Create a “financial health” document to provide donors and potential partners to demonstrate the strength of CNYLT’s organizational finance.
- Publish a financial report in the CNYLT newsletter to give members and donors an idea of our trajectory and needs.

MAJOR GOAL 2.4

Begin to develop a campaign and process for an endowment fundraising program by 2025, with the goal of launching the program in 2027.

ACTION STEPS:

- Look for an investment manager to assist starting an endowment and determine the minimum amount of funding to earmark and the endowment type (permanent, quasi-and term)

MEASURABLE OUTCOME #3

By 2028, we can function effectively with well-organized and secure administrative structure.

MAJOR GOAL 3.1 (MAIN PRIORITY)

Develop a Sustainable Hiring Plan by 2024 that defines current staff positions and creates additional staff positions intended to strengthen the effectiveness of the organization through increased staff capacity such as a fulltime director of development, assistant land steward along with an education/volunteer coordinator.

ACTION STEPS:

- Identify immediate staffing needs and anticipated salaries for these positions.
- Identify potential funding sources capable of funding staff positions for the foreseeable future.
- Identify whether any current roles need to be reorganized to better meet operational needs.

MAJOR GOAL 3.2

Recruit board members who will be:

- Actively engaged.
- Represent our geographic service area and diversity of our community.
- Have the skills, talents and connections needed to achieve organizational goals.
- Expand skills and connections with local, regional and national communities.

ACTION STEPS:

- Strategically recruit for board positions through CNYLT membership, and to partner conservation organizations/agencies.
- Create a CNYLT Board Member primer or document to provide to interested board members to better understand time commitments and expectations.

MEASURABLE OUTCOME #4

By 2028, we will become a trusted partner in conservation education and stewardship volunteer activities for schools, organizations, families, and people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities who consider us an excellent organization to associate with.

MAJOR GOAL 4.1 (MAIN PRIORITY)

Increase grant income sources specifically for education and outreach.

ACTION STEPS

- Review historical data and establish baseline data for funded education activities in 2024.
- By 2025 identify whether the education/volunteer coordinator should be part time or full time, and whether an existing staff member should take over this role.
- Seek sponsors for volunteer events.
- Collaborate with organizational/agency partners
- Grow and diversify income each year with 80% of education activities being funded annually by 2029.

MAJOR GOAL 4.2

Develop and implement an Access and Amenities Infrastructure Plan for preserves by 2027.

ACTION STEPS:

- Categorize appropriate level of public access and amenities for each preserve.
- Develop a 'Project Funding' section of the plan to build and improve trail amenities (i.e., parking, interpretative signs, kiosks, and boardwalks)
- Expand winter recreation opportunities (i.e., cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and winter animal tracking education)
- Develop coordination of promotional and marketing materials and increase dispersion of these materials.

MAJOR GOAL 4.3

Formalize Education Program by establishing a baseline of annual environmental education and outreach hours by 2028.

ACTION STEPS:

- Develop a program to strengthen ties to preserves to implement aquatic connectivity restoration, habitat restoration initiatives, and water quality improvement projects with help from volunteers and educational groups.
- Increase hike and workshop attendance through enhanced marketing, citizen science programs, and appreciation events.

- Develop a citizen science curriculum for grades 7-12 to encourage more youth participation in volunteer events, as well as a citizen science curriculum geared toward adults who do not have knowledge or experience with the outdoors.

MEASUREABLE GOAL #5

By 2028, we can maintain and enhance existing preserves, acquire new preserve lands, and balance the conservation needs of preserves while encouraging responsible recreation and enjoyment of our properties.

MAJOR GOAL 5.1 (MAIN PRIORITY)

Develop an Acquisition Plan.

ACTION STEPS:

- Evaluate the current acreage under CNYLT management and determine how many additional acres are able to be managed under current staffing levels.
- Set goals for how many acres will be acquired for preservation, conservation, and recreation.
- Identify specific priority properties and areas to guide future acquisition decisions.

MAJOR GOAL 5.2

Acquire a long-term organizational home.

ACTION STEPS:

- Secure a location.
- Build out the conference room.
- Build out space for increased staff.
- Create a Master Plan for the management of this preserve property.

MAJOR GOAL 5.3

Maintain protected land in our focal management areas.

ACTION STEPS:

- Determine whether there are any gaps in management and develop a procedure to address gaps.
- Create stewardship staff assignments for core focal management areas to ensure work is completed on time.

MAJOR GOAL 5.4

Educate and collaborate with local municipal leadership on understanding the value of land trust owned and managed properties, and implementing land trust goals on local preserves.

ACTION STEPS:

- Develop a municipal outreach strategy and best practices for getting in touch with municipal leadership.
- Develop a monthly touch point to brief municipal leaders on Land Trust actions being taken within their locality, and if there are any upcoming actions that municipal boards or leadership will need to address and/or approve.

- Schedule a regular time to present at municipal board meetings on land trust goals, values, property activities, and other details to increase buy-in and encourage open dialogue surrounding land trust actions and decisions.