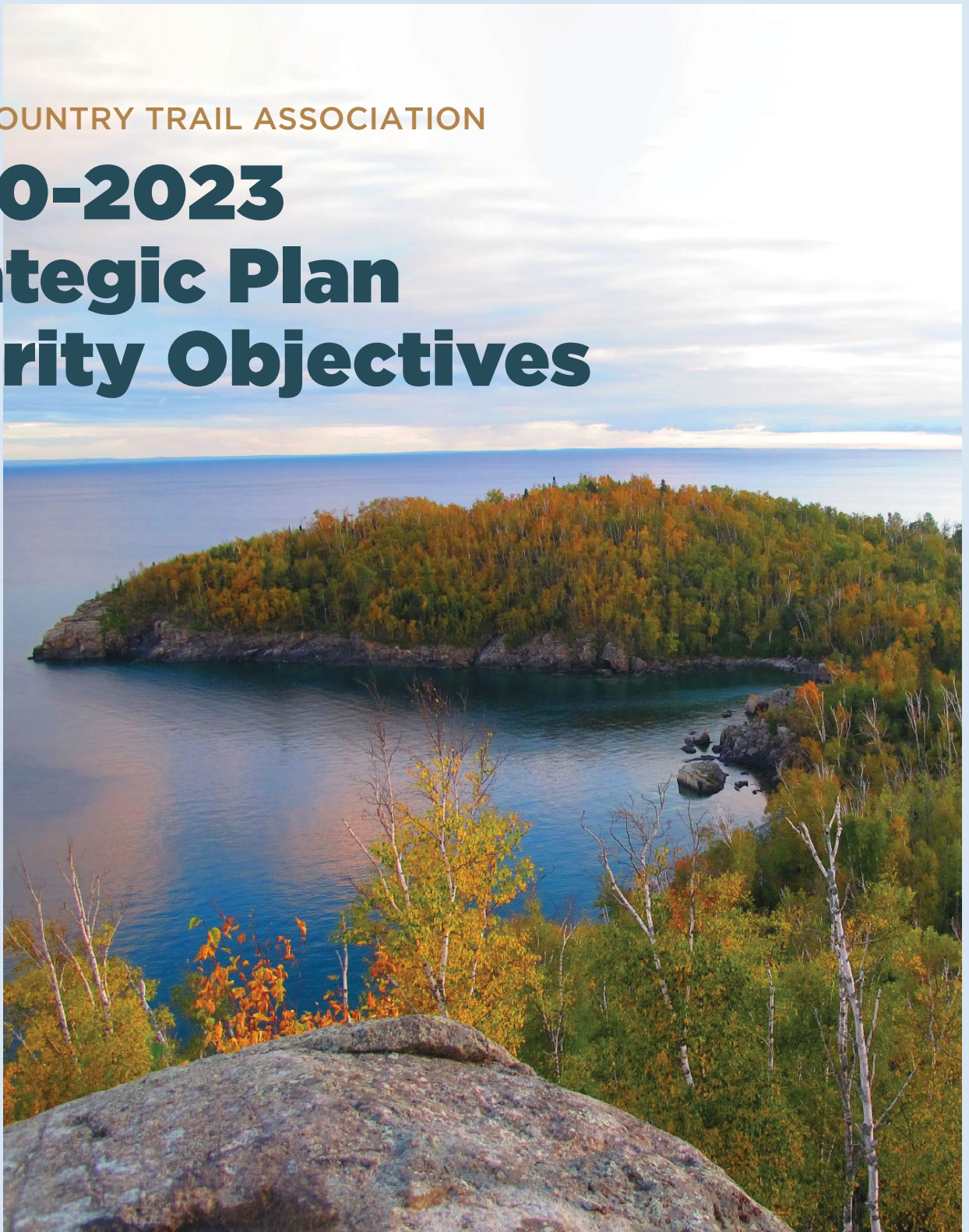


NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

2020-2023 Strategic Plan Priority Objectives



Strategic Plan Priority Objectives

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Our Mission, Vision and Core Values

MISSION STATEMENT

The North Country Trail Association develops, maintains, protects and promotes the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States through a trail-wide coalition of volunteers and partners.

VISION STATEMENT

Our vision for the North Country National Scenic Trail is that of the premier footpath of national significance, offering a superb experience for hikers and backpackers in a permanently protected corridor, traversing and interpreting the richly diverse environmental, cultural, and historic features of the northern United States.

CORE VALUES

The Board and Staff of the North Country Trail Association are guided by the following core values that represent the organization's commitment to the Trail, our partnerships and each other.

Accountability

We take ownership and responsibility for our actions, policies and decisions. We engage in wise stewardship of public and private resources.

Collaboration

We value the spirit of cooperation between staff, volunteers, all partners and landowners and are committed to building and maintaining this culture of collaboration. Service is the backbone of our organization.

Excellence

We strive for exceptional quality and safety, both in the work we do in building and maintaining the Trail and in the experiences of the users of this world class Trail.

Inclusion

We are committed to ensuring that everyone is respected, included and valued for their contributions to our mission and culture. We actively welcome people of different backgrounds, perspectives, thoughts and beliefs.

Strategic Planning Vocabulary



GOALS

Long-term outcomes expected over 30 years or more.



PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

Statement of expected outcomes in next 3+ years.



SUCCESS MEASURES

Measures or indicators which display progress along the journey toward achieving the priority objectives.



STRATEGIES

How resources will be focused to achieve the priority objective.

1. Maintain the Trail



Long-Term Goal

Every mile will have an active Chapter or Affiliate responsible for maintaining the Trail to NPS standards and reflecting the quality of a National Scenic Trail.



Priority Objective

During the next three years, we will develop procedures and relationships so that the existing Trail is maintained by Chapters and Affiliates to a consistent set of standards, with a consistent methodology for assessing and reporting Trail conditions.



Success Measures

- Consistent maintenance - Consistently maintained and marked Trail is prioritized over new Trail construction.
- Every section of existing Trail has a responsible Chapter or Affiliate.
- Ability to address needs—Year-end reports will be adjusted to better capture and respond to areas needing improved maintenance.
- Skills of our volunteers—Volunteers are aware of NPS Trail Standards and adopter responsibilities and have training and resources available to them.
- Safety of our volunteers—Volunteers are trained appropriately and understand accident protocol.



Strategy

NCTA Staff will identify areas of Trail that have no responsible Chapter or Affiliate and work toward official agreements for stewardship of those sections which could include establishing a new Chapter.

Chapters and Affiliates will assess the Trail and repair sections which need maintenance. They will make plans to repair the damage and if they cannot repair the damage on their own, it will be reported to NCTA for assistance finding resources. They will also leverage local relationships to get the trail sections adopted.

NCTA creates and administers a consistent training program that provides annual training in each state covering: trail design and construction, maintenance and adopter program, volunteer management and crew leadership as well as additional responsibility for sawyer, CPR and first aid training.

NCTA will have a process for dealing with urgent trail hazards and closures due to weather events or fires including both response to the issue and communication to the public.

2. Complete the Trail



Long-Term Goal

There are 3,150 miles of off-road trail currently completed. Over time we will move 1,600 miles of the route that are currently on roads to the optimal location that serves to fulfill the North Country Trail's nature and purpose.



Priority Objective

Provide leadership for volunteers and partners to complete 150 miles of trail in priority areas as long as responsibilities of maintenance are met.

Work with NPS on a comprehensive strategy and process for planning ahead to develop approved routes for new trail construction.

Identify meaningful, achievable gaps or needed connections in the Trail route in each state to address.



Success Measures

- Clear definition of what it means to complete the Trail.
- Clear process to identify and communicate priorities.
- Functional project planning protocol with clear procedural documentation.
- 150 miles over three years.



Strategy

We will work closely with the National Park Service to update the trail planning and approval process and a framework to ensure that volunteers meet all laws and NPS regulations during construction.

Build up Field Grants funding pot to better support trail development projects and assist Chapters in finding additional sources of project funding.

Utilize paid crews and youth corps programs to supplement larger scale construction projects. Explore need for more technical trail staff and roving crews at NCTA to supplement Chapter efforts.

Then as trail projects are approved, NCTA's role as project coordinator becomes critical, bringing together the resources and requirements of NPS, local land managers, local Chapters or Affiliates and their volunteer corps.

3. Protect the Trail, Viewshed and Hiker Experience



Long-Term Goal

Become an organization that has capacity and structure to prioritize and permanently secure access for the route and protect the trail experience.



Priority Objective

Catalog and map all existing Trail Access Easements, Trail Use Agreements and other leases and agreements, update annually to reflect changes, renew expirations and to measure progress for Trail Progress Report.

Identify and secure funding for a staff person dedicated to trail protection whose immediate imperative will be prioritizing trail sections and parcels which are not currently in government ownership or with enforceable easements.



Success Measures

- Gather baseline data and track miles of Trail protected by easement or acquisition.
- Ensure management areas in USFS Forest Plans.
- Track Federal legislation and appropriations that have potential to impact the Trail.



Strategy

Establish a clear response flow to external trail threats.

We will leverage partnerships to pursue easements (and government land purchase when feasible). These partnerships will protect the priority parcels, with NCTA coordinating between NPS staff, volunteer attorneys, land trust staff, property owners and donors.

Influence relevant state legislation and policy by ensuring representation on state sanctioned trail committees in all eight NCT states.

Influence federal legislation and budget appropriations with robust Advocacy Committee.



4. Promote the North Country National Scenic Trail



Long-Term Goal

Increase national, state and local awareness of the North Country National Scenic Trail hiking experience, the natural and historical resources it offers and volunteer opportunities to engage with NCTA and our work.



Priority Objective

We will strengthen channels of communication and grow partnerships which NCTA, our Chapters and Affiliates can reliably use for expanding awareness and use of the Trail. During the next few years we will target our messaging and programs to trail users, outdoor adventurers, families, younger generations, more diverse populations, people seeking wellness and those wanting to make a difference.



Success Measures

- Number of new members and donors.
- Involvement/Engagement in different areas: Volunteer numbers and hours, Next Generation Coalition engagement, Hike 100 participation.
- Social media stats.



Strategy

We will leverage the Association's relationships and use NCTA's existing programs like Hike 100 and Next Generation Coalition to recruit and engage new members and hikers on the Trail.

We will support the membership growth of our Chapters and promote our Affiliate partners.

We will create tools and guidelines for our Chapters and Affiliates and prepare them with best practices and expectations for engaging the public.

We will build partnerships with recreation retailers and outdoor organizations in cities within a reasonable drive of the Trail that can help us to communicate: About the trail experience and how to access it; about NCTA's roles as a trail information provider, volunteer coordinator and trail protector.

We will leverage the National Park Service brand, which stands for the absolute best of America's natural beauty.

5. Support Our Vital Chapter and Affiliate Community



Long-Term Goal

Each Chapter and Affiliate organization will be actively achieving their commitment to our mission, with successful mechanisms to develop new members and new leadership over time.



Priority Objective

During the next three years, we will concentrate on developing a more standardized and easy-to-use onboarding and training process for all Chapter and Affiliate Leaders.

We will support current Chapter leaders and pay particular attention to supporting those Chapters that are currently identified as at-risk.



Success Measures

- Number of Chapters measured as “healthy” determined by our gap analysis, which includes membership size, volunteer numbers and skills and funding.
- Number of volunteers taking part in available training opportunities.



Strategy

Regularly assess the needs of Chapter and Affiliate community and adjust our programs and service to meet them.

We will build a better organized and user-friendly volunteer resource center, with tool kits which reflect best practices for marketing and outreach, safety and skill training, trail building and maintenance and volunteer management. We will also look to maximize opportunities for face-to-face training and interaction.

We will work with our community to clarify roles, communicate priorities and set shared expectations and offer opportunities for feedback.

Increase opportunities for both leadership mentoring and peer to peer networking.



6. Develop NCTA's Organizational Capacity



Long-Term Goal

Increase NCTA's capacity to meet the opportunities and challenges of fulfilling our mission and support our partners and community of trail stakeholders.



Priority Objective

During the next three years, we will increase NCTA's capacity by ensuring the effectiveness of our overall staff structure while adding new key positions, using the strategic plan as a guide for the skills and capabilities needed. The current priority positions are Event Coordination, Regional Trail Coordinators, and Trail Protection Staff.

We will also support the growth of our NPS partner and work together to maximize the alignment between our positions.

NCTA Board and Committees will recruit members that can contribute needed skills and contacts to further NCTA's strategic goals and priority objectives.



Success Measures

- Funding secured for key Staff positions
- Board and committee leadership needs identified and sought after
- Staff and Board onboarding and training plan progress



Strategy

Maximize the effectiveness of our current staff, board and committees.

Improve Board and Committee onboarding, training, goal setting and recognition processes.

Review all HR practices including staff onboarding and review process and, maintain a positive work environment including adequate benefits and compensation for staff retention.

We will strengthen communication all ways and fully develop and leverage technology (remote collaboration, etc.) to leverage staff, board and committee work and communication with our community.

7. Increase Available Funding



Long-Term Goal

Become a self-sustaining organization, enabling us to implement what has been identified within our strategic plan.



Priority Objective

During the next three years, we will focus on increasing annual raised NCTA support to reflect 80% individual giving, 15% foundation, and 5% corporate support.

We will grow our Operating Reserve to protect the organization's operations in times of need.

We will define revenue streams for our trail development, maintenance and protection needs.



Success Measures

- Meet the 80/15/5 raised revenue goal.
- Establish a 90-180 day reserve fund based on core operating budget.



Strategy (in priority order):

1. Define a Major Giving Plan.
2. Strengthen Donor Cultivation and Recognition that includes steps for new donors, multi-year giving, individual giving, and lapsed donors.
3. Grow stewardship in an effort to bring new individual, foundation, and corporate donors to the NCTA mission.

