



## **The Strategic Plan of the Monadnock Conservancy, 2012-2017**

### **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 five priorities of the Monadnock Conservancy for the next five years. Each priority touches on both the core work that we intend to continue and new programming we will undertake. Our foundational premise is that people with strong connections to land and to their communities will tend to value the landscape more, which leads, in turn, to better-informed land use decisions and greater support for the work described in this plan.

Before reading the plan, it may be helpful to understand the flow and ordering of the priorities. The first priority addresses the connections of people to land, to one another and to the Monadnock Conservancy, and how we intend to increase and deepen those connections. Building upon the idea of connection, the next two priorities discuss how we will continue and enhance the work we're already doing toward fulfilling the vision, including increased outreach and community assistance that facilitate good land use practices region wide. The fourth priority addresses a timely, unmet need—farmland conservation—that has emerged as a top concern among the residents of our region. This new priority is not intended to supersede or entirely redirect our land protection efforts, but rather to increase emphasis on a specific outcome for the next several years. The final priority articulates how we must maintain the strength and permanence of the organization as we grow and face new challenges.

This plan will be complemented each year by an internal work plan that prescribes specific program tasks and establish benchmarks for measuring progress. The five programs of the Monadnock Conservancy are: Land Protection, Stewardship, the Monadnock Community Conservation Partnership, Communications, and Membership and Development.

## PRIORITIES

### 1) **Connect people and the land, people and their communities and people and the Monadnock Conservancy**

- a) Protect the places that are highly meaningful to people and their communities by increasing conservation of locally identified priorities and by supporting community-led outreach that leads to such conservation
- b) Evaluate the potential of land protection projects that are closer to where people live, such as pocket parks and other open space in downtown and village centers
- c) Engage people and communities as participants in the land protection process
  - i) Encourage community and neighborhood involvement in locally driven project initiation, publicity and advocacy
  - ii) Increase the visibility of projects with significant community value, such as those prioritized for protection by local planning efforts, those featuring iconic views, economic drivers like working farms and forests and sites with a history of public access and use.
- d) Increase opportunities for a diverse citizenry to connect with the land and with the Conservancy through recreation, learning and service programming
  - i) Acquire and manage Conservancy-owned lands for recreation and education
  - ii) Protect existing and develop new recreational access and infrastructure (trails, parking areas, kiosks, etc.) for a range of uses and abilities, both on Conservancy-owned land and on private conserved land when appropriate, and promote their use by creating and distributing maps and guides
  - iii) Introduce people to conserved lands, their benefits and the Conservancy (e.g., workshops, hikes, films, celebrations) by providing Conservancy-sponsored programming
  - iv) connect strategically with new and broader audiences, with a better understanding of our region's population
  - v) Expand the use of grassroots fundraising campaigns to engage community members in helping to protect important lands
  - vi) Provide meaningful volunteer service in the work of managing and stewarding land
  - vii) Promote and encourage community- and town-sponsored efforts to connect people and land (e.g., community forums, recreational opportunities on public lands, educational events)
  - viii) Increase collaboration with educational partnerships by hosting interns and student projects

- 2) Protect and steward land that contributes to ecological health, wildlife habitat, water quality, outdoor recreation and working farms and forests**
- a) Develop a conservation priority map that reflects the priorities of this plan and of community-developed conservation plans, to guide proactive selection and initiation of new projects
  - b) Conserve more properties identified as priorities
    - i) Assist communities with initiating new projects through local, neighbor-to-neighbor outreach to owners of priority land
    - ii) Increase Conservancy-led direct outreach to priority landowners when local contacts are not feasible
    - iii) Assist communities with maintaining strong municipal funding mechanisms for fee land and conservation easement purchases and for associated project costs
  - c) Work with our conservation easement landowners to encourage management practices that enhance ecological health, wildlife habitat, water quality, outdoor recreation and working farms and forests
    - i) Engage our easement landowners in understanding and applying best management practices
    - ii) Partner with other organizations and agencies to educate conservation easement landowners about pests, invasive species and other threats to natural resources
  - d) Uphold exemplary operating practices consistent with the Conservancy's accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and the Land Trust Alliance's Standards and Practices
  - e) Strengthen community involvement in stewardship and land management activities by perpetuating a culture of volunteerism
    - i) Strengthen the core of volunteer easement monitors to both ensure adequate monitoring and enhance volunteers' satisfaction with the experience
    - ii) Broaden the scope of the land steward program to include volunteers for other needed land management activities

- 3) Facilitate informed land use decision-making at the individual, landowner and community levels, targeting broader audiences beyond owners of existing conservation land**
- a) Increase education and demonstration programming
    - i) Identify properties and projects, including Conservancy-owned lands, with potential for public education or demonstration of appropriate land use and management practices
    - ii) Promote exemplary management practices via communications tools and other outlets
  - b) Provide informational materials that foster good land use decisions by landowners, including owners of not-yet conserved land, as well as the broader public
  - c) Provide community planning assistance
    - i) Develop a workshop series targeting town boards and commissions to initiate community conversations about how people want to see their community evolve over time
    - ii) Continue to provide communities with assistance in identifying lands with important conservation values, building broad community support for conservation and working with landowners to conserve their lands
    - iii) Working with partners, assist communities with delivering interactive workshops for community members focused on wildlife and habitat, agriculture and forestry, water resources, rural character and community development
    - iv) Integrate results of individual town open space planning into a region-wide, shared vision for promoting policies that support sound land use practices and settlement patterns
    - v) Facilitate meetings of abutting towns to share town priorities, conservation success stories and challenges, and to help each other identify solutions, all toward coordinating efforts in building a shared vision

**4) Conserve agricultural lands, the agricultural way of life and viable local food systems**

- a) Increase the selection and proactive initiation, as resources allow, of projects to conserve prime farmland soils and working farms
- b) Reduce obstacles, such as access to land, for new and expanding farmers
  - i) Use conservation easement purchases on farmland to reduce land value and, consequently, land purchase costs for subsequent farmer-owners
  - ii) Study the potential for the Conservancy to own farmland and lease it to farmers at affordable rates
- c) Adapt procedures and tools to accommodate the unique needs of working farms, incorporating knowledge and resources from organizational partners
- d) Promote and increase support for local farms, capitalizing on existing strong support for family farms and local food
- e) Provide town farmland conservation and planning assistance, including identifying agricultural land protection priorities and identifying underutilized farmland that could be matched with farmland seekers
- f) Help farmers of conserved lands implement best management practices by encouraging them to utilize technical assistance and education from University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Cheshire and Hillsborough County Conservation Districts

**5) Ensure the sustainability of the Monadnock Conservancy**

- a) Achieve re-accreditation with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission
- b) Increase annual revenue streams to meet basic operating expenses
  - i) Expand Conservancy membership and Annual Fund giving through strategic prospecting
  - ii) Implement a comprehensive major donor program and programs for business memberships and sponsorship
  - iii) Increase grant-seeking for unrestricted funding, capacity-building and funding for annual program-specific expenses
  - iv) Increase land project income to fund a greater share of land project expenses, including staff costs and overhead
  - v) Increase the use of project-specific fundraising campaigns and work thereafter to retain project donors as members and Annual Fund donors
- c) Explore new revenue streams
  - i) Manage appropriate reserve funds to generate annual operating income without compromising fund principal for dedicated purposes
  - ii) Develop fees for service
- d) Increase and diversify the Conservancy's visibility to ensure a prominent and positive reputation among donors, partners, public officials and the general public
  - i) Analyze membership data and regional demographic data in greater detail to tailor fundraising and increase donor retention
  - ii) Complete a comprehensive marketing plan to guide "branding" and strategic communications to target audiences
  - iii) Enhance and develop electronic communications media, including a website redesign and creation of a social media presence, and establish policies and procedures to govern such communications
- e) Establish and maintain adequate financial reserves to meet long-term obligations, especially conservation easement stewardship, enforcement and land management
  - i) Participate in the Conservation Easement Defense Insurance Program to reinforce existing enforcement procedures and funds
  - ii) Attain and maintain stewardship and enforcement fund balances adequate to meet anticipated needs, and manage the investment of these funds to meet annual stewardship expenses without compromising long-term growth
  - iii) Develop new mechanisms for growing stewardship and enforcement funds including transfer fees, fundraising for fee-land stewardship, timber revenue and corporate sponsorship

- f) Increase the promotion of the Monadnock Forever planned giving program
- g) Maintain strong and stable human resources to meet mission needs by providing competitive compensation and benefits, regular employee assessment, professional development opportunities and an organizational culture of respect, appreciation and innovation
- h) Ensure diverse board composition and skills to provide necessary leadership and governance, technical advice, positive public visibility and strong board-led fundraising