

STOWE LAND TRUST

Strategic Plan

2023–2028





connect to something more

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This is where my love of what I hold most dear—trees, rivers, and the wonder of being outside in nature—all started. Without the land trust, it would have disappeared.

Melanie Atkinson

Stowe community member

A regional jewel, a place to call home

Where do we go from here?

It is no secret that the Stowe area is an amazing place to live, work, and play for many. Or that it is now considered among the safest places in the United States to avoid the damages and stresses that come along with a changing climate.

We have it all: beautiful forests and working farms, clean water and fresh air, year-round outdoor recreation, and a welcoming, small-town community—and increasingly, a mounting pace of development, skyrocketing housing costs, epic traffic jams, and favorite trails at risk of being loved to death.

Yes, we truly do have it all. The question is, where will we go from here?

For 35 years, Stowe Land Trust has excelled at protecting special places and creating connections to land. This work has been possible thanks to your commitment and that of others like you.

But the places we have protected in the past will not be enough to meet the demands and community needs of the future. And too many people have been left out from the many benefits of conservation. Our community's farms, forests, waters, and future generations still need our help. And they need it now.

The bold ambition of this plan is to use the power of land conservation—in both traditional and new ways—to enhance quality of life for everyone with a connection to the Stowe area. Before it is too late. This includes you and your family, your friends, your neighbors, and the plants and animals who also call this place home.

By asking and listening to you—our community and partners—we know that you want Stowe Land Trust to stay focused on protecting more land now. You also want us to expand our impact and reach. The priorities in this plan reflect a commitment to invest in the foundation of the land trust so that we can inspire more people to find belonging in this special place; help create a sustainable future for our community in the face of a changing population and climate; work in partnership to make sure more land, waters and trails are conserved for generations to come; and be a compassionate and creative leader in changing lives through conservation. This is what we need to do to get to where we all want to go.

Now is the time for all of us to come together and ensure the next five years count for this community, now and forever. It is you and people like you who will make all the difference.

Thank you for helping to create a healthy and sustainable future for all.



Kristen Sharpless
Executive Director



One community, many voices

Your role in shaping Stowe Land Trust's direction

Beginning in early 2022, we collected input from **488 community survey responses**, through **14 in-depth interviews with stakeholders and partners**, and through countless conversations with community members in town and on the trails. Your collective dreams and concerns for the Stowe area have shaped the direction of this plan and can guide our shared future. Thank you!

A special thanks to our interview participants:

Jen Vogel Bass, *Volunteer* | Chess Brownell, *SLT Emeritus Director* | Mila Lonetto, *Stowe Planning Commission* | Chris & Martha Mask, *Stowe business owners* | Christine McGowan, *Stowe Conservation Commission* | Kendra McGuire, *Appletree Learning Centers* | John Merrill, *SLT Founding & Emeritus Director* | Lucy Nersesian, *Stowe Trails Partnership* | Annie Paradee, *Long Winter Farm* | Emily Rosenbaum, *Lamoille Working Communities Challenge* | Gus Seelig, *Vermont Housing and Conservation Board* | Chief Don Stevens, *Nulhegan Band Abenaki* | Allan Thompson, *Waterbury Lands Initiative* | Sally Watts, *Volunteer*

And thank you to the past and present board members, emeriti directors, and staff of Stowe Land Trust who contributed to this plan:

Metzi Anderson | Anna Black | Cliff Borden | Beth Bradford | Chess Brownell | Doran Dolan | Catherine Drake | Amy Farley | Marc Felgar | Frank Foti | Walter Frame | Sam Gaines | Jesse Goldfine | Sarah Kalil | Meg Kauffman | Jess Laporte | Carolyn Loeb | Walt Looney | Jason McLean | Barry Matthews | John Merrill | Brooke Mitchell | Darsey Moon | Ryan Percy | Kerry Sedutto | Kristen Sharpless | Jason Slocum | Amy Stewart | Tom Sweet | Alan Thorndike | David Wilkens | Roger Witten



Photo by Teresa Merelman

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We are on the land which has served as a site of meeting and exchange among indigenous peoples for thousands of years and is the home of the Western Abenaki People. Stowe Land Trust honors, recognizes, and respects these peoples, especially the Abenaki, as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which we gather today. We acknowledge their enduring connection to this place and honor their work advocating for their citizens and lands throughout their ancestral territories. We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the many gifts of this place and to help protect it.

Kristen Sharpless, executive director

Statement read at Mayo Farm during Indigenous Peoples' Day Rocks!, October 2022

Our Vision

Protecting the health and vitality of our lands and waters is essential to our well-being, our economy, and our future. Stowe Land Trust envisions a community in which everyone can access, connect with, and enjoy the benefits of conserved land.

We will work to make our natural resources resilient to changes in use and climate and will strive to ensure the lands that make this place special are protected and enjoyed for generations to come.



our mission

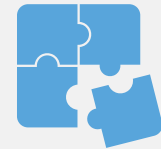
Conserving the land and waters we love to enhance quality of life for all connected to the Stowe area.

What we believe

our core values



Access for All



Collaboration



Community



Equity & Inclusion



Innovation



Next Generation



Sustainability

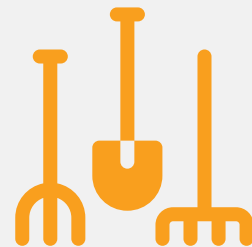
How we work

our pillars



Protect

We protect land and water in partnership with landowners and our community to ensure they are available for future generations.



Care

Conservation is forever. Year after year, we coordinate a diverse group of partners and volunteers to fulfill our ongoing commitments to the land.



Connect and Inspire

We champion a shared vision for a sustainable future for our community and create opportunities for people from all walks of life to connect with conserved land and each other.



Farms and Forests

Thriving farms and forests are essential to our community's identity and well-being. But their future is at risk in a changing climate. We protect the critical farmland that supports our tourism economy and can feed our community, as well as the connected forests and wildlands that are sources of wood and fuel, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation.



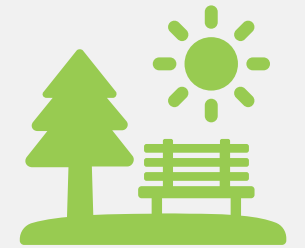
Recreation for All

Everyone deserves the opportunity to have a healthy connection to the outdoors. We create new public land, help build trails close to where people live, and provide opportunities for more people to access and enjoy the outdoors, whether they are heading for a walk out their backdoor or on the adventure of a lifetime.



Healthy Habitats for People and Wildlife

We help safeguard the local food, waters, sanctuaries, and natural environments that are part of what make this place home for people and wildlife. And we support other community needs like affordable and workforce housing, innovative climate change solutions, and trail networks that connect neighborhoods, schools, and businesses.



Community Spaces and Connections

By creating and caring for trails, parks, natural areas, and community gardens, we help more people build life-long connections with land and with each other. In these spaces, we can play, learn, refresh our spirits, and create lasting memories. We bring people together to build community, create joyful connections, and include more people who have been left out of conservation in the past.

Strong Organization



We make sure we have the right people, infrastructure, systems, and resources to deliver on our mission. And we stay nimble and creative so we can adapt as needs and opportunities change.

What we will accomplish, together

5-Year Goals & Action Highlights

♥ **Protect More Land**

Increase the pace of land protection that responds to community needs

- Help protect at least ten more farms, forests, waters, and community spaces in the Stowe region.
- Pinpoint where, when, and how land conservation can help meet community-identified needs for workforce and affordable housing, more public greenspaces, and better access to parks, natural areas, and trails.
- Protect land and support related strategies important to adapting to a changing climate.
- Enhance support for local families and landowners who want to conserve the region's special places.
- Support local planning to ensure conservation and community needs are heard and advanced.

♥ **Care for Conserved & Public Lands**

Invest in our commitment to steward special places

- Identify and work to address the most pressing issues facing our conserved and public lands from recreational overuse to invasive species to climate impacts.
- Grow and support a diverse group of volunteers to help care for conserved lands, public recreation areas, and trails.
- Strengthen community partnerships to maintain an ecologically healthy and welcoming network of public lands, waters, and trails.
- Invest in technology to help better understand and more easily respond to land and water stewardship needs.

♥ **Deepen our Work on Land-Related Community Issues**

Advance a shared vision for a sustainable future

- Advocate for a compact settlement pattern that supports people, wildlife, and the economy.
- Define how the land trust will support the development of local affordable and workforce housing.
- Foster new relationships with organizations representing marginalized groups to better support their work and expand access to the benefits of conservation for more people.



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Volunteering with the land trust gives me a chance to help care for some of my favorite places, and to connect with wonderful people who enjoy the land as much as I do.

Phil Branton
Volunteer Land Steward

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Despite incredible land conservation achievements throughout the region, habitat loss and fragmentation continue to limit the ability of wildlife to shift their ranges in response to climate change. More important land needs to be protected for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Staying Connected Initiative



5-Year Goals & Action Highlights, continued

♥ **Nurture a Love for the Land**

Provide critical experiences and connections

- Partner with local schools and community organizations to develop programs and projects to get more kids and families outdoors on an ongoing basis.
- Host events and programs that build community, create joyful connections and memorable experiences, and include more people who have been left out of conservation.
- Expand our efforts to make key community conservation areas more welcoming, accessible, and engaging to everyone connected to the Stowe area.

♥ **Invest in Trails**

Increase the accessibility, connectivity, and sustainability of our trail network

- Collaborate with partners to create a community-wide Master Trail and Recreation Plan to support a community that is more walkable, bikeable, and accessible.
- Help establish new trails, especially key connectors between neighborhoods, schools, existing trail pods, and other community spaces.
- Support critical investments in our most-loved and most-used trails to ensure their long-term health and sustainability.

♥ **Build the Foundation to Create Needed Change**

Increase our ability to act quickly, innovatively, and strategically

- Expand our communication strategy to be more diverse, integrated, and welcoming to grow support across programs and initiatives. Share more stories of change that are designed to inspire and connect with all people.
- Increase the pace of conservation by expanding opportunities for people and businesses to contribute financially, including growing participation in our planned and corporate giving programs, gifts of land, and ongoing annual support.
- Undertake a comprehensive capital campaign of at least \$5 million to support immediate and long-term conservation needs. Accelerate our fundraising to achieve strategic goals.
- Grow and invest in our staff to ensure we can seize opportunities, build lasting relationships, enhance volunteer capacity, and expand our impact.
- Establish a permanent headquarters that will serve as a hub for community and conservation connections.

Front cover: *Ricketson Farm*. Photo by Rich Levine.
Back cover: *Little River, DuMont Meadow*.

The Stowe area's special places need you!

One of the inspiring aspects of this plan is that everyone can play a role.

Your enthusiasm for conservation never fails to inspire us—and others. Whether it's volunteering in the field or on a committee, joining us for an event or outing, or making new conservation and community projects possible through charitable donations, the long-term health and wellbeing of the Stowe area community depends on you.

Year after year, you are the backbone of expanding our reach and impact. Monthly donations and planned gifts—including donations from an IRA, gifts of stock, or gifts of land—could save you taxes and leverage the conservation work and educational programming you want to see happen.

Your generosity will last for generations to come.

**Feel free to call our office at (802) 253-7221, or email info@stowelandtrust.org.
We look forward to hearing from you!**

STOWE LAND TRUST