




# **Blue Hill Heritage Trust 2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan**







**This document relies on annual assessment – and possible amendment – of our priorities. Assessment will look at organizational success in meeting yearly governance and operational work plans. It will also involve ongoing strategic and governance conversations about Blue Hill Heritage Trust’s work.**

**We will conduct a full review of our achievement of this plan’s strategic goals, starting in January 2023. We will make revisions as needed to keep this a living document and representative of the organization.**



## **Mission**

**To lead in conserving land, water, and wildlife habitat on the greater Blue Hill Peninsula. To teach and practice a stewardship ethic. To promote ecological, economic, and community health for this and future generations.**

## **Stewardship**

**Care and gratitude – for land and people, past, present, and future – guides our work.**

**Blue Hill Heritage Trust (BHHT) acknowledges our responsibility to the land, our communities, and our donors, as well as to the conservation community and coming generations. These stewardship responsibilities influence all facets of our organization: land management, educational outreach, and fundraising.**

**Our land management is a relationship with the natural world centered around good stewardship. It focuses on creating ecological beauty, abundance, and biodiversity. It looks to hand something better to future generations, while showing gratitude for those who were stewards before us. This means learning from those with traditions and expertise different from our own, as we teach those who follow.**

**Our educational outreach is a relationship with our communities, and especially future generations, who will follow us in stewarding the land. It focuses on sharing and learning the many ways people can care for the land and one another, as the foundation of creating the next generation of stewards. This means including those who care for our organization as well as the land.**

**Our fundraising is a relationship with our partners, donors, and volunteers, and stewardship is vital here as well. It focuses on acknowledging both the gratitude that we have for supporters, and their gratitude for our work. We cannot carry out our responsibilities without them and we will steward these relationships with care.**

## **Vision**

**Blue Hill Heritage Trust will conserve the farmland, forest, wetlands, and wildlife habitat needed to sustain ecological and community health in a changing climate. We will protect the resources and sense of place upon which traditional livelihoods depend. Led by our educational outreach, the communities of the Blue Hill Peninsula will embrace a stewardship ethic, recognizing the value of conserving land and water for its own sake, as well as valuing the recreational, economic, and quality-of-life benefits of conserved land and water. By advancing this vital connection between healthy land and healthy communities, BHHT will be fully involved in peninsula communities and widely supported by all. Through strong collaborations with partners, including municipalities, Blue Hill Heritage Trust will be an energetic, effective, innovative, well-managed, and well-funded organization.**



## **Organizational Values**

- ♦ **Mission provides focus and guides all we do.**
- ♦ **Climate Change is the defining challenge of our time.**
- ♦ **Community and Science are necessities in a changing world.**
- ♦ **Honesty and Fairness must define our relationships with supporters and the public.**
- ♦ **Innovation and Courage are needed to the take risks inherent in a changing world.**
- ♦ **Partnerships provide diverse strengths and skills for common good.**
- ♦ **Stewardship is our obligation to future generations.**



**Blue Hill Heritage Trust (BHHT), founded in 1985, began as a small, all-volunteer organization and is now a highly successful nonprofit, with a professional staff of six and an annual operating budget of nearly three quarters of a million dollars. Having merged with The Conservation Trust of Brooksville, Castine, and Penobscot, in 2014, we now are the only local land conservation organization working on the Blue Hill Peninsula. In addition to protecting and managing land, we carry out numerous community programs, and work collaboratively throughout the wider region.**

**Through our 35-year history, BHHT has become increasingly sophisticated in our conservation work. We judge land projects through science-based criteria, and approach conservation as a community endeavor. We have led the way in engaging people with the philosophy of land stewardship and have protected nearly 12,000 acres to date.**

**BHHT has undergone intellectual development alongside organizational growth, and we have been a leader in the conservation community. We were early practitioners of farmland conservation in Maine, using mechanisms like “buy-restrict-sell” to protect farmland and lower the entry price for new farmers. We continue our commitment to farmland and farmers, and this is part of a larger philosophy of protecting and stewarding working landscapes for community benefit.**

**In the past, BHHT developed a broad network of trails across the peninsula, creating community benefit through recreational access. More recently, we have focused on age-friendly, accessible trails to be more inclusive in meeting needs. Maintaining these trails is a considerable part of BHHT stewardship, in both financing and capacity.**

**Engaging community through expanded public access remains central to our work, as do our growing educational programs. These began as a wide variety of offerings focused on BHHT land, and have become increasingly focused on land stewardship, outdoor education for school kids, and creating mutually beneficial relationships between people and our woodlands and wild places.**

**This Strategic Plan is meant to carry forward our history of expanding a philosophy of conservation and community, in a way that gives shape and continuity to our next five years of work. In both in the evolution of public engagement and the evolution of public attitudes about BHHT, it is increasingly clear that our work has grown from being an added benefit to life here on the Blue Hill Peninsula into something more vital. This plan acknowledges that shift and will guide further development in our expanding role in the community.**



**Blue Hill Heritage Trust acknowledges that the land we conserve is part of the homeland of Wabanaki peoples who have lived in this region from time immemorial, and who are now sovereign tribal nations – distinct legal and political entities with the powers of self-governance and self-determination.**

**BHHT expresses our deepest respect for and gratitude to these original and ongoing stewards of the land, recognizing the historical and ongoing harm to their culturally important and sacred places. As an organization, we acknowledge our responsibility to establish and maintain relationships with Wabanaki peoples, and to include their voices and concerns in our conservation work. To those ends, we begin our understanding of conserved land with their long history and continued connection to this peninsula, a legacy from which we all benefit.**





## **2021 – 2025 Strategic Goals**



## **Strengthening Organizational Capacity**

**Under our last strategic plan, BHHT underwent significant growth in our operational capacity. Both staffing and scope of work expanded, driven largely by a doubling of conserved acres in a three-year period, but also by our success in community outreach. Balancing this with equivalent growth in governance and organizational capacity is vital for long-term conservation success, and must be a primary focus under this plan.**

**BHHT will be successful in this if we:**

- ◆ **Build an external and internal culture of gratitude.**
- ◆ **Hold regular strategic discussions, building on the work of the Strategic Initiatives Committee.**
- ◆ **Engage in regular professional development.**
- ◆ **Focus on skills, diversity, and policy improvement, guided by the Governance Committee.**
- ◆ **Continually strengthen communication between Board and staff, management, and governance.**
- ◆ **Fully engage with fundraising and donor communication.**
- ◆ **Analyze and address issues around our physical capacity in office, meeting, and storage space.**



## Conserving Land

Development pressure is growing on the Blue Hill Peninsula, driven in the short run by public health concerns, but more importantly by the long-term impacts of climate change. The peninsula will be an increasingly attractive alternative to other places adversely affected by these changes. BHHT will conserve high-priority land, water, and habitat on the Blue Hill Peninsula by focusing our efforts on diverse aspects of climate resiliency, a full understanding of development trends, and the needs of peninsula communities over the long term.

**BHHT will be successful in this if we:**

- ◆ **Implement and continually refine a 10-year Conservation Plan for the peninsula, focusing on:**
  - ◆ **Mitigating climate change impacts on already conserved land.**
  - ◆ **Understanding future conservation needs.**
  - ◆ **Protecting farmland and enhancing local food production.**
  - ◆ **Protecting source water Protection – aquifers and wetlands.**
  - ◆ **Safeguarding water access for recreation and work.**
  - ◆ **Understanding and shaping development pressure.**
  - ◆ **Protecting connectivity and large habitat blocks.**
  - ◆ **Creating focus areas and wildlife corridors.**
  - ◆ **Communicating with towns about their priorities.**
- ◆ **Engage donors and grant funders to conserve priority lands.**
- ◆ **Continually build new conservation partnerships with towns and private landowners.**
- ◆ **Encourage town planning and buildout analyses and assist in these efforts.**



## Deepening Organizational Finances

**BHHT will require significantly increased funding over the next five years to meet growing organizational operating and land protection expenses. We will increase our financial strength through fundraising and pursuing diversification of income streams. We will seek innovation in our fundraising, including engaging in enterprises that will meet community needs while supporting our work toward conservation, stewardship, education, and outreach goals.**

**BHHT will be successful in this if we:**

- ◆ **Successfully communicate the importance of donations toward organizational operating expenses.**
- ◆ **Build a culture of gratitude in our donor development and stewardship.**
- ◆ **Continually update our understanding of the funding landscape, considering our strategic goals.**
- ◆ **Find a healthy balance across all revenue streams.**
- ◆ **Work to understand 21st-century giving patterns and steward the next generation of support.**
- ◆ **Fully understand the legacy of the current generation of donors.**
- ◆ **Assess the feasibility of, and initiate, if appropriate, a capital campaign.**
- ◆ **Identify and act on appropriate mission-aligned green infrastructure collaborations.**
- ◆ **Complete a funding analysis for our conservation agenda.**
- ◆ **Assess total stewardship funding needs, given our expanding role in conservation.**



## **Enhancing Ecological Durability Through Land Management**

**BHHT has nearly 12,000 acres of conservation land under our protection. We have a responsibility to care for that land in perpetuity, for the sake of our communities and for the land itself. We will practice a stewardship ethic in the management of our lands and will continually learn from other landowners and municipalities who are practicing good stewardship of their own.**

**BHHT will be successful in this if we:**

- ◆ **Assess the impacts of climate change on our ecosystems and landscape, and steward our lands proactively in response to an increasingly changing climate.**
- ◆ **Incorporate a culture of gratitude into our approach to land management and stewardship.**
- ◆ **Successfully carry out our land stewardship responsibilities to meet accreditation standards.**
- ◆ **Conduct needed rehabilitation projects that enhance ecological and recreational infrastructure.**
- ◆ **Build staff capacity for summer trail work and other seasonal activities.**
- ◆ **Find mission-compatible opportunities to manage land for revenue.**
- ◆ **Focus on interns and the requisite funding, to build their skills and expertise and create value for BHHT.**



## **Building Community with Educational Outreach**

**There is a growing educational and emotional need for people in our communities to connect with the land. There is an equal need for people in our communities to appreciate and understand the ways in which they can work toward building beauty, abundance, and biodiversity on our peninsula. BHHT outreach will focus on teaching these stewardship principles, as well as collaborating with and learning from people, schools, and organizations with shared values and goals. This will align programming with the other work of BHHT, continually reaching out to new people.**

**BHHT will be successful in this if we:**

- ◆ **Fully embrace climate change in programming.**
- ◆ **Engage, where appropriate, the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Wabanaki people.**
- ◆ **Continue to grow our Forest Days Curriculum and our individual school programs.**
- ◆ **Continue to offer quality public programming related to BHHT's mission.**
- ◆ **Build additional online resources.**
- ◆ **Build partnerships that amplify BHHT outreach goals in stewardship.**
- ◆ **Influence outreach in the greater land trust community.**



## **Including Maine's Native Communities**

**BHHT conserves land in the homeland of the Wabanaki, and their ongoing presence here moves us to build meaningful relationships with their communities. We will work to better understand these relationships on our conserved land, to broaden our community engagement with Native peoples, and to enhance our practice and outreach in stewardship within that framework. Mutual benefit for Native communities will be our guiding principle.**

**BHHT will be successful in this if we:**

- ◆ **Continue to participate in the First Light Learning Journey with Wabanaki peoples.**
- ◆ **Work to better understand Native land use needs, and gain greater appreciation of native stewardship values.**
- ◆ **Make Native voices a regular part of our programming and communications.**





## **Influencing Beyond the Peninsula**

**BHHT has innovated in conservation in the past, and we will seek to continue that in the future, using the skills and knowledge of our Board and our staff. To achieve outward influence, we will seek out external partner organizations and networks with whom we will be involved in statewide, regional, and national conservation efforts.**

**BHHT will be successful in this if we:**

- ◆ **Create more value-added benefit in our Land Trust Alliance membership.**
- ◆ **Engage in Hancock and Washington County conservation through networks and partnerships.**
- ◆ **Engage in Northeastern conservation through networks and partnerships.**
- ◆ **Work with regional higher educational institutions.**



## **Aligning Mission and Investments**

**BHHT has chosen to move our investment portfolio toward Environmental, Social, And Governance (ESG) funds, seeing this as an important for our communications around our finances and fundraising. We will continually explore strategies for aligning our investments more fully with our mission to conserve land and community on the Blue Hill Peninsula.**

**BHHT will be successful in this if we:**

- ◆ **Monitor and refine our ESG investment strategy.**
- ◆ **Investigate local green investment projects.**
- ◆ **Seek community and supporter input on issues surrounding investments**