

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Strategic Plan 2023-2027

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Introduction	2
Mission & Vision Statements	3
Guiding Principles	3
Strategic Goals	4
1. Dramatically increase the pace and amount of land protected in Connecticut	4
2. Build a strong, sustainable land conservation community with capacity to permanently conserve and steward natural and working lands	4
3. Enhance permanence of protected lands	4
4. Integrate diversity, equity, inclusivity, and environmental justice into all aspects of land conservation	5
5. Strengthen CLCC's organizational capacity and sustainability to lead the land conservation community in Connecticut.	5
Conclusion	5
Appendix	6
About CLCC	6
2016-2022 Strategic Plan	7
Current Planning Process	7

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Introduction

Land conservation in Connecticut is at a pivotal moment. For decades, Connecticut's 130+ land trusts have done extraordinary work conserving over 204,000 acres of land. **Unfortunately, Connecticut's protected and unprotected lands have never been more threatened...**

- The climate crisis is disrupting natural systems, resulting in degraded habitats, biodiversity loss, and an uncertain future for Connecticut's forests, fields, and waterways.
- Development pressure is on the rise, and unprotected natural areas are becoming fragmented, disconnected, and destroyed.
- Connecticut has not made the necessary investments in land conservation programs, having the lowest combined federal and state funding per capita for land conservation in New England, and nationally ranking among the lowest for public conservation funding.
- The State of Connecticut does not have sufficient environmental restrictions and regulatory controls.
- Societally, we are losing our connection to the natural world, and with it, our conservation imperative.

Connecticut's land trusts are poised to respond to these threats by accelerating the rate of land conservation and using their land to address the challenges facing our environment and our society. With a shared goal of conserving Connecticut's forests, fields, and waterways, land trusts understand that **land conservation is a critical solution to the challenges we face today and into the future...**

- Natural climate solutions are proven to be one of the most effective and efficient ways to provide resilience against and mitigate the impacts of the changing climate.
- Conserved natural lands, and the habitats therein, are essential to halt unprecedented declines in biodiversity and rates of extinction.
- Protected working lands, including farms and forests, strengthen local economies and reduce negative externalities from imported food and forest products.
- Equitable access to the outdoors provides countless benefits, including clean air, clean water, opportunities for recreation, and space for outdoor activities that improve physical and mental health.
- Conserved natural areas can reduce the need for costly investments in community services while boosting local economies and increasing property values.

Land trusts make two promises. The promise to their communities to protect the quintessential places they love, and the promise of *perpetuity*. The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC), driven by an understanding of the threats to land and the critical role land plays in addressing a broad spectrum of issues, stands with land trusts in upholding these commitments.

CLCC will expand its role as the primary resource to Connecticut's land trusts to effectuate the change needed to sustain the land conservation community's capacity to protect more land and ensure these lands remain protected. In order to do this, CLCC recognizes the need for land conservation to be reflective and inclusive of the state's racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, sociocultural, and age diversity. CLCC also recognizes the need to equip itself with the tools and resources to be instrumental and effective in leading, nurturing, and sustaining change.

Land conservation in Connecticut is at a turning point. CLCC, and the land trusts it serves must rise to the occasion, and be vehement in the strategic, expeditious, and inclusive pursuit and stewardship of lands that benefit and build Connecticut's communities.

Mission & Vision Statements

CLCC's mission is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut.

CLCC's vision is a future where every Connecticut community is supported and sustained by a diverse mix of conserved land, and land conservation is embraced as an essential community value.

Guiding Principles

As the leader of Connecticut's land trust network, CLCC understands the diverse challenges and opportunities faced by Connecticut's land trusts and their communities. CLCC takes a multifaceted approach to best serve organizations of varying size and capacity, and commits itself to the following principles to guide our work.

Permanence: Permanence is a necessity to sustain all Connecticut communities today and forever. We must be unrelenting in our efforts to permanently safeguard natural and working lands, water, and other natural resources. We are dedicated to strengthening laws and policies at every level that support land conservation in perpetuity. This is our moral obligation to the current generation and our legacy to future generations.

Relevance: To be successful in the long term, protected land must be valued by all Connecticut communities. We must ensure that people from all walks of life have the ability to engage with and experience the benefits of conserved land, and that a conservation imperative is passed from generation to generation.

Trust: We recognize that conserved land has long been seen as a luxury for the few. We are committed to changing this perception by listening to, learning from, and engaging with more communities across the state so that all voices are woven into the fabric of Connecticut's land conservation future.

Partnership: Everything we do is done in partnership with others. We are grateful for, and honor, the work of every organization dedicated to conservation in Connecticut. We also

recognize the importance of non-conservation partners engaging with land trusts to further the reach and increase the impact of their work.

Empowering Youth and Leadership: We believe that engaging young people and building a new generation of conservation leadership is essential to the sustainability of today's land conservation efforts. We are committed to provide a platform and ongoing opportunities both at CLCC and through the land trust community to empower young people to establish, share, and implement their vision for land conservation and a healthy planet.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice: We believe that the land conservation community must work to address the enduring systemic racism, prejudices, and injustices faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities in all elements of our society – urban, suburban and rural. We embrace and espouse a commitment to understand and take action alongside those we serve to address and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and environmental justice.

Innovative, Responsive Service: CLCC prides itself on being a risk-taker. We are committed to piloting creative and innovative programs with new approaches to solve the challenges facing Connecticut's conservation community. We provide timely, topical, and accessible programs to build and sustain strong and effective organizations.

Strategic Goals

1. Dramatically increase the pace and amount of land protected in Connecticut

- A. Increase public (Federal, State and Municipal) funding for land protection in Connecticut
- B. Increase private funding for land protection in Connecticut
- C. Build capacity for entities to protect land
- D. Advocate for legislative policies and programs which increase land protection

2. Build a strong, sustainable land conservation community with capacity to permanently conserve and steward natural and working lands

- A. Provide technical assistance that strengthens and improves effectiveness of land trusts, their volunteers, board, and/or staff
- B. Increase assistance to build and sustain capacity within land trusts
- C. Promote and assist leadership diversification, succession, and transitions
- D. Enhance CLCC's role as the lead convenor of the land trust community

3. Enhance permanence of protected lands

- A. Promote and support implementation of science-driven land management, such that land trusts are model/exemplary land stewards

- B. Ensure conservation permanence by assisting land trusts in mitigating threats including encroachments, trespass, eminent domain, and adverse possession
- C. Foster collaborative relationships between land trusts that enable layered and backstop protections on conserved lands
- D. Advocate for increased financial assistance for land stewardship programs that permanently protect conservation values

4. Integrate diversity, equity, inclusivity, and environmental justice into all aspects of land conservation

- A. Demand equitable access to nature and the countless benefits it provides
- B. Assist land trusts in serving a wider audience through intentional and deliberate community engagement and partnerships
- C. Elevate the importance of land conservation as a priority in every community for all residents
- D. Engage and empower the next generation of conservation leaders

5. Strengthen CLCC's organizational capacity and sustainability to lead the land conservation community in Connecticut.

- A. Increase statewide awareness of and engagement with CLCC
- B. Ensure CLCC has inclusive leadership and personnel to effectively govern and operate the organization and serve as a model for the land trusts we serve
- C. Build resources and organizational infrastructure needed to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of CLCC
- D. Plan and prepare for succession of organizational leadership and personnel

Conclusion

Land conservation in Connecticut is at a pivotal moment. Guided by this plan, CLCC is poised to address the threats to Connecticut's land, and elevate land conservation as a critical solution to the challenges we face today and into the future. With a strong record of achievement, a commitment to cooperation and partnership, and passionate and dedicated professional and volunteer leadership, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council is uniquely suited to collaboratively lead and serve the needs of Connecticut's land trusts and land conservation community.

With the adoption and implementation of this Strategic Plan, CLCC is committed to accelerating the rate of land conservation, building stronger land trusts, and including more people along the way.

We wish to acknowledge the consulting services of Connie Manes, Manes Consulting LLC., for her patience, leadership, and facilitation of this process. We also acknowledge the wonderful leadership and input provided by members of our Board of Directors and staff, without whom we could not have arrived at this point.

Appendix

About CLCC

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council is the only statewide service provider and voice for all Connecticut land trusts. As such, CLCC is a leader in advocacy and policy, education and training, and technical assistance to empower Connecticut's ~130 land trusts and ensure the long-term viability of land conservation efforts in the state. Since its formation in 2006, CLCC has grown into one of the most effective land trust service associations in the country, offering a wide range of programming and services – from traditional capacity building, training and education, to new and creative opportunities for land trusts to better connect to one another and their communities for greater conservation, economic, and social impact.

CLCC was created in 2006 by the merger of two existing and well-known programs of The Nature Conservancy - Connecticut Chapter: The Land Trust Service Bureau, which was organized in 1980 to provide technical support to land trusts, and the Land Conservation Coalition for Connecticut, which was organized in 1987 to serve as the advocacy arm of the land conservation movement. This consolidation provided the conservation community with an effective statewide land trust service organization that works to realize the core missions of both programs in a unified and more targeted approach.

From 2006 through 2017, CLCC operated as an unincorporated association overseen by a 19-person Steering Committee composed of representatives from conservation organizations throughout the state. In 2010, pursuant to a five-year Business Plan, the Steering Committee entered into a fiscal sponsorship agreement with the Connecticut Forest & Park Association. At this time, CLCC also hired its first Executive Director.

In October 2017, CLCC received its 501(c)(3) nonprofit determination from the Internal Revenue Service. CLCC started off 2018 as a fully independent organization, led by a Board of Directors and an Advisory Council. CLCC continues to flourish and has grown to include a staff of three full time employees (executive director, deputy director and project specialist) and three part-time employees (operations manager, development director, and student conservation fellow.)

CLCC prides itself on its commitment to building partnerships that advance land conservation, strengthen land trusts, and build healthy and sustainable communities. From implementing land trust programs to advocating for conservation policy and funding, that commitment extends to fostering CLCC's own relationships with national, state, and regional organizations, as well as government agencies at all levels that work in partnership with local land trusts and their communities.

2016-2022 Strategic Plan

In 2016, the CLCC Steering Committee adopted its first Strategic Plan to provide a roadmap forward in the organization's operational growth. Guided by David Allen of the Conservation Consulting Group, the planning process consisted of intensive internal Steering Committee conversations as well as input from external partners and stakeholders. The result was an ambitious five-year plan, including a detailed year-by-year implementation plan intended to solidify CLCC as the state leader in delivering to land trusts and the land conservation community the tools, training, and mentoring needed to support strong and effective organizations with a clear vision of their conservation priorities.

Of note was the plan's emphasis on fostering partnerships and collaboration between neighboring conservation groups and on CLCC's commitment to diversifying the ranks of all stakeholders in land conservation. The plan also recognized that, to strengthen CLCC's position, it was imperative to establish 501(c)(3) status with a diverse and committed board of directors and a staff of sufficient capacity.

In the five-plus years since adopting that plan, CLCC has implemented most, if not all, of its key initiatives and, as a result, has emerged stronger and more visible as the state's leader for the land trust community. With a board composed of exceptional local and statewide conservation leaders, a talented and dedicated staff, and a growing network of support, CLCC is well positioned to take land conservation in Connecticut to the next level at a time when its advocacy and services have never been more important.

Current Planning Process

Embarking on a new round of strategic planning, CLCC's board and staff came together with Connie Manes of Manes Consulting, LLC. to examine CLCC and the land trust community's history. The intent of this plan is to build on CLCC's successes and pursue more land conservation on a scale reflective of the needs of Connecticut's communities and in measure to the pace at which land has been and continues to be lost.

Charting a path through the value CLCC has provided its members and the integral work that still needs to be done, the board and staff identified their vision and priorities for CLCC to uphold and expand its position as the sole statewide organization serving Connecticut's land trusts. This plan is informed by information gathered through a survey of CLCC's membership and individual interviews with CLCC's board and advisory council.

This plan advances five goals, supported by guiding principles, that seeks to increase the quantity of protected land in Connecticut, elevate the financial and organizational capacity of the land conservation community to conserve and steward more land, broaden the reach of land trusts to equitably serve all Connecticut residents, and ensure CLCC's long-term sustainability and effectiveness.