

WeConservePA

formerly Pennsylvania Land Trust Association

Strategic Plan For 2016-2021

Adopted by the Board of Directors on December 8, 2015

Extended from 2020 to 2021 on September 8, 2020

WeConservePA'S Vision

WeConservePA envisions future generations enjoying—undiminished—Pennsylvania's natural areas and open spaces. The organization envisions communities having deep connections with their urban, suburban, and rural lands and people recognizing the health, safety, recreational, economic, and other benefits delivered by land conservation.

WeConservePA's Mission

WeConservePA helps people conserve the lands needed for healthy, prosperous, and secure communities—the forests, farms, parks, urban gardens, and other green places that safeguard our drinking water, prevent flooding, protect wildlife, provide recreational and economic opportunities, and preserve scenic beauty and community treasures. WeConservePA accomplishes this by helping nonprofits and local governments improve their effectiveness and efficiency in acquiring and stewarding land and easements, advancing sustainable land use practices, and connecting people to the outdoors; the organization also fosters public understanding of conservation, advocates for sound governmental policy, and leads state and national endeavors to achieve far-reaching advancements in conservation.

WeConservePA'S Goals

- Increase the pace of land conservation.
- Improve the quality and efficiency of land conservation work.
- Ensure that land conservation is lasting.
- Build strong land conservation organizations.
- Improve land use planning and advance sustainable development practices.
- Raise public understanding and support for conservation.
- Align public policy with conservation principles.

Who is WeConservePA?

More than 70 land conservation organizations count themselves as dues-paying members of the WeConservePA. These organizations elect the Board and set WeConservePA's purposes. The organizations in turn count more than 100,000 Pennsylvanians as members and contributors.

WeConservePA was created by land trust leaders who recognized the value of an entity that would address and focus on the broad needs of the land conservation movement—to take on activities that no one organization could effectively handle or wish to handle on its own.

WeConservePA'S Strategies

- A. Build tools that facilitate the pursuit of excellence in the accomplishment of effective and efficient conservation acquisitions, land stewardship, land use planning, and organizational operations.
- B. Train, deliver technical assistance, and foster stronger communications and relationships to empower and inspire people to achieve more in their conservation work.
- C. Change and improve the systems in which conservationists operate to achieve better conservation outcomes and keep conservation and land trusts vital in a changing world.
- D. Advocate for better public policies impacting land conservation and water resource protection.
- E. Build a more effective WeConservePA.

Strategy A

Build tools that facilitate the pursuit of excellence in the accomplishment of effective and efficient conservation acquisitions, land stewardship, land use planning, and organizational operations.

Supporting Actions

1. Create and maintain model legal documents, policies, and ordinances.
2. Create and maintain technical guides.
3. Improve the utility of ConservationTools.org.

1. Create and maintain model legal documents, policies and ordinances.

Create, maintain and improve model grants of conservation easement, grants of access easement as well as model documents accessory to easement acquisition and stewardship.

Create, maintain, and improve other model legal documents for use in conservation real estate transactions.

Create, maintain, and improve model land use ordinances.

Create, maintain, and improve model organizational policies that advance the practice of conservation.

Create, maintain, and improve other model documents that advance the effectiveness and efficiency of conservation-related efforts.

2. Create and maintain technical guides.

Publish new guides.

Update, expand or otherwise improve previously published guides.

3. Improve the utility of ConservationTools.org.

Identify needs of conservation organizations and local governments for guidance and resources and plan accordingly.

Post original WeConservePA content; collect useful content from other sources and post and highlight it as appropriate.

Ensure productive user experiences; maintain security and the effectiveness of site functions in a constantly changing technological environment.

Strategy B

Train, deliver technical assistance, and foster stronger communications and relationships to empower and inspire people to achieve more in their conservation work.

Supporting Actions

1. Provide training and networking opportunities.
2. Provide technical assistance.
3. Facilitate the creation and maintenance of peer networks—following the principle that participants must be substantially engaged in communicating with and helping one another if a network is to be effective and viable in the long-term.

4. Deepen and broaden interactions and communications.

1. Provide training and networking opportunities.

Manage the Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference as Pennsylvania's *premier* annual training, networking and inspirational event for the advancement of land conservation.

Organize and sponsor webinars, seminars, roundtables, workshops and other events to supplement conference programming. Promote other organizations' offerings as appropriate.

Identify training needs of land conservation staff, board members, other volunteers, and advisors, and implement or partner on offerings to meet those needs.

2. Provide technical assistance.

Deliver direct technical assistance by staff to the staff, volunteers, and advisors of conservation organizations and local governments via phone, email and in-person.

Manage the Conservation Easement Assistance Program. (The program provides small grants in support of quality conservation and public access easement transactions, easement amendments and restatements, baseline documentation and easement signage.)

Facilitate peer and consultant based technical assistance to conservation organizations and foster mentoring to build organizational strength.

Facilitate mergers and land trust collaboration where such actions present substantial potential to achieve significant operational efficiencies and better conservation outcomes.

3. Facilitate the creation and maintenance of peer networks—following the principle that participants must be substantially engaged in communicating with and helping one another if a network is to be effective and viable in the long-term.

Manage the EAC (Environmental Advisory Council) Network, supporting the network at a level directly reflective of donor-support for the network.

Foster the creation and development of networks of other peer groups.

4. Deepen and broaden interactions and communications.

Prepare and distribute educational materials to orient board members of land trusts to WeConservePA and the broader conservation movement and to keep them informed during their tenures.

Use electronic communication tools (e.g. ConserveLand.org, email and social media) to provide conservation news and information for the public and build a sense of community for conservationists.

Publish and distribute the ConserveLand newsletter to reach those who are not web-oriented and to reinforce web-based communications.

Keep WeConservePA focused on delivering high value to the land conservation community by keeping informed of land trust needs, policies, activities and expectations of WeConservePA via informal and *ad hoc* interactions as well as surveys.

Strategy C

Change and improve the systems in which conservationists operate to achieve better conservation outcomes and keep conservation and land trusts vital in a changing world.

Supporting Actions

1. Help organizations adapt themselves to address changes in culture, demographics, and finance that can impact the success and meaning of conservation.
2. Promote private land trust movement policies, standards, and systems that advance conservation excellence.
3. Assist with improving the efficacy of these policies, standards, and systems, and ensuring that they don't unduly redirect resources away from direct conservation work or stifle initiative and experimentation in achieving conservation objectives.
4. Help build people's connections to the land.
5. Communicate to the public and key subsets to build understanding of conservation.
6. Seek to identify and pursue opportunities to broadly improve upon the status quo.

1. Help organizations adapt themselves to address changes in culture, demographics, and finance that can impact the success and meaning of conservation.

Into WeConservePA events and materials, incorporate explorations of (a) how cultural and demographic changes should be and have been considered in the delivery of conservation and related services and (b) how an organization can better reflect the diversity—race, ethnicity, age, etc.—of people in its service area in the make up of its board, staff, volunteer groups, and those directly served by the organization.

Support land trusts in the broad array of activities—education, outdoor recreation, etc.—they may undertake in conjunction with and in support of their conservation acquisition and stewardship work by addressing these activities in WeConservePA training and other WeConservePA efforts.

2. Promote private land trust movement policies, standards, and systems that advance conservation excellence.

Encourage and assist land trusts in achieving conformity with Land Trust Standards and Practices (and, as appropriate to the organization, preparing for accreditation).

Facilitate sharing of experiences and discussion of issues amongst accredited land trusts and organizations pursuing Land Trust Accreditation.

Recognize accredited land trusts in WeConservePA's communications.

3. Assist with improving the efficacy of movement policies, standards, and systems, and ensuring that they don't unduly redirect resources away from direct conservation work or stifle initiative and experimentation in achieving conservation objectives.

Actively engage in the revision process for Land Trust Standards and Practices.

Continue to develop and communicate suggestions for the improvement of Land Trust Accreditation; take national leadership roles in advocating for improvements identified as important to Pennsylvania land trusts.

If and when appropriate, develop Pennsylvania-specific land trust movement policies and standards that help land trusts of all sizes and maturity strive for higher levels of excellence and efficiency.

4. Help build people's connections to the land.

Continue WeConservePA's leadership role in promoting outdoor recreation via Get Outdoors PA.

Promote other vehicles for connecting people to the land (e.g., nature play) as opportunities present.

5. Communicate to the public and key subsets to build understanding of conservation.

Identify and implement ways of framing land conservation that resonate with the public and that facilitate outreach to those who do not hold conservation as a core value.

Make presentations to key audiences and display WeConservePA materials at key locations and events.

Promote land conservation, sustainable land use practices and land trusts to the general public through a variety of communications channels.

Make available or facilitate the availability of geographic information regarding land trust service areas and conserved lands.

Build bridges with other sectors and organizations to find and build upon common interests supportive of conservation.

6. Seek to identify and pursue opportunities to broadly improve upon the status quo.

Engage the policy advisory committee, board, membership, and outside parties in looking outside the box for ways to better achieve conservation.

Strategy D

Advocate for better public policies impacting land conservation and water resource protection.

Supporting Actions

1. Meet, educate, and build relationships with government officials.
2. Maintain a public policy agenda.
3. Make public investments in conservation the highest agenda priority.
4. Foster involvement by the people that make up WeConservePA's member organizations.
5. Advocate for better governmental policy.

1. Meet, educate and build relationships with government officials.

Reach out to state elected officials and their staff; state appointed officials and their staff; gubernatorial candidates and their campaigns; and, to a lesser priority, members of the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation and their staff.

2. Maintain a public policy agenda.

Hold regular meetings of the policy advisory committee to help guide and implement WeConservePA's policy work (including advising the board on policy priorities).

On an as needed basis, convene attorneys deeply committed to conservation to advise WeConservePA on addressing judicial threats and opportunities for conservation.

Proactively identify and research potential policy issues and initiatives and formulate policy solutions.

3. Make public investments in conservation the highest policy agenda priority.

Ensure continued public investments in conservation.

Increase the level of investment.

4. Foster involvement by the people that make up WeConservePA's member organizations.

Regularly invite member organizations to nominate their organizational leaders for policy advisory committee positions.

Maintain communications channels with members regarding WeConservePA policy positions and actions.

Engage member organizations in fostering relationships and communications between their board members, staff and supporters and legislators.

5. Advocate for better governmental policy.

Express and promote interests, concerns, positions and requests to policy makers and opinion leaders.

Enhance online outreach and advocacy functions.

Continue to build and maintain a network of organizations having intersecting agendas and work cooperatively to advance shared interests.

Engage in national advocacy efforts as appropriate. Maintain relationships with LTA and other conservation organizations active at the federal level to ensure that WeConservePA actions are consistent with the interests of the conservation movement and are calibrated to have maximum impact on the conservation issues of importance to Pennsylvania.

Strategy E

Build a more effective WeConservePA.

Supporting Actions

1. Strengthen and diversify the funding base.
2. Continue and refine WeConservePA's ongoing fundraising activities.
3. Refine the management of WeConservePA's financial assets to address the growth of WeConservePA.

4. More fully utilize the resources, skills, talents and energies of board members, advisors, volunteers and staff and expand the circle of those involved with WeConservePA.
5. Improve marketing and branding of WeConservePA as an organization.

1. Strengthen and diversify the funding base.

Expand the annual financial support of member organizations to WeConservePA by an amount to be determined by the board.

Establish a fund to help WeConservePA guard in perpetuity the legal and public policy underpinnings of conservation work in Pennsylvania.

Conduct campaigns to encourage land trust board member and supporter contributions to WeConservePA's endowment.

Develop and implement other strategies for increasing and diversifying WeConservePA revenues.

2. Continue and refine WeConservePA's ongoing fundraising activities.

Identify and implement strategies to increase the number of individual contributors and move them to higher giving levels as they renew their commitments to WeConservePA.

Refine the system of classifying memberships and sponsorships and providing recognition and benefits in association with contributions made.

Continue annual appeal to individuals, conference sponsorship solicitations, grant writing, and other present fundraising efforts.

3. Refine the management of WeConservePA's financial assets to address the growth of WeConservePA.

Establish finance committee (and/or other committees) to support good financial management.

Adopt and update policies regarding WeConservePA investments, reserve fund, endowment, and other financial matters.

4. More fully utilize the resources, skills, talents and energies of board members, advisors, volunteers and staff and expand the circle of those involved with WeConservePA.

Design and implement as appropriate *ad hoc* task groups and advisory or honorary bodies to draw a larger pool of people into WeConservePA and its work.

Diversify the membership of the board of directors, seeking to move the board with its present predominance of land trust executive directors to one that retains majority representation by executive directors but includes more individuals with different backgrounds who are identified as being able to significantly help move the organization to a more stable financial footing.

Engage younger—less senior—staff in the work of WeConservePA.

5. Improve marketing and branding of WeConservePA as an organization.

Develop marketing materials, describing WeConservePA and its value to potential investors in its efforts.

Establish a system for reaching out to land trust board members and supporters.

Maintain a consistent look and feel to WeConservePA's electronic and print communications.

Promote to member organizations the use of a “member of the WeConservePA” message in their communications and the creation of web linkages to ConservationTools.org.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan

Responsibilities

Staff are responsible for leading the implementation of Actions for Strategies A through D (regarding programmatic activities), and Action sets 2 and 5 of Strategy E (regarding organizational development). Actual tasks may be carried out by staff, board members acting as program volunteers, consultants and others as needed.

Responsibility for leading implementation of Action sets 1, 3, and 4 for Strategy E (regarding organizational development) sits with the board of directors. Actual tasks may be carried out by board members, the board as a whole, staff, consultants and others as needed.

Putting the Plan in Practice

The board of directors and staff will consider potential WeConservePA activities in the context of the strategic plan. The board will adopt annual budgets consistent with the plan.