

COASTAL MOUNTAINS
LAND TRUST



Protecting land for the community, *forever*.



Strategic Plan

2025 – 2030

Approved by Board of Directors 2.25.25

Letter from the President & Executive Director

Hiking to the summit of a coastal mountain... exploring a dense hemlock forest that stores carbon and provides habitat for owls and black bear... paddling through wetlands, down rivers that carry Atlantic salmon, and across lakes that filter drinking water for nearby communities... following a trail that connects towns and local schools with nature. These are experiences that Coastal Mountains Land Trust is committed to protecting.

As we approach our 40th anniversary, Coastal Mountains Land Trust is proud to celebrate our success, rooted in a common story of people coming together to protect the special places that make these experiences possible. Today, from Beech Hill in Rockport to Mt. Tuck in Prospect, the Land Trust manages a system of conservation lands that protects over 13,500 acres of open space and offers more than 55 miles of trail for the public to enjoy.

Our Accomplishments

It is remarkable to reflect upon the accomplishments of the last five years, which were guided by our last strategic plan and enabled by the loyal support of our members. Since 2020, we conserved over 3,000 acres and built 6.5 miles of the Round the Mountain Trail in the Bald and Ragged Mountains area, protected vital wetland and forested habitats around Hurds Pond and Mt. Tuck, opened the first nature preserves in the towns of Waldo and Knox, created our Learning Landscapes program to connect students and nature on a regular basis, and helped our community through a pandemic by welcoming more people to our preserves than ever before.

Our Strategic Plan

As we look ahead, our passion and enthusiasm for our mission are stronger than ever and our solid foundation sets the stage for us to plan new and ambitious goals.

We are thrilled to share the following 2025-2030 strategic plan which sets forth a bold framework to further the Land Trust's core work and presents new, innovative ways to support our community. We are at an important inflection point, and to move forward, we will carefully prioritize our work, expand our capacity, and raise the resources needed to sustain and fulfill our ambitions.

In this plan you will read about our goals to conserve and care for land at a large landscape-scale for habitat and natural resource protection, as well as to target smaller individual parcels that protect places important to our community. It describes how we plan to expand Learning Landscapes into more schools, have a greater presence in the towns we serve, and work with partner organizations to help address our communities' greatest needs.

Together, we can accomplish all this and more. We are excited and optimistic about our future and look forward to partnering with you – our past, present, and future members – to put this plan into action!

Gianne Conard
Board President

Ian Stewart
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

The Land Trust's 2025-2030 strategic plan is a result of a year-long planning process by Coastal Mountains Land Trust Board and Staff with the facilitation of *Solid Ground Consulting*. This work could not have been accomplished without the critical input gathered from more than 20 stakeholders and community listening sessions that included over 300 people. This plan will guide our work over the next five years to conserve thousands of additional acres in support of wildlife, climate resilience, and recreation, welcome more people to enjoy the outdoors and the benefits of nature, steward lands and trails through a time of continuing change, sustain a strong culture that values people and represents the community, and strengthen our capacity to act boldly *now*.

VISION

We imagine a future with healthy, diverse, resilient ecosystems and vibrant communities that come together to protect and share in the natural places we love.

MISSION

Coastal Mountains Land Trust permanently conserves land and connects people with nature in the Western Penobscot Bay region.

CORE COMMITMENTS

Permanent land conservation: We will continue to proactively identify and permanently conserve areas of high natural and community significance throughout the Western Penobscot Bay region.

Sustainable land stewardship: We will care for the natural resources and community values of our preserves, easements and trails.

Community engagement: We will work with the communities we serve to connect with and ensure they benefit from the lands we protect.

KEY PRIORITIES

Supporting Nature's Resilience



We will continue to support **BIODIVERSITY**, **WILDLIFE HABITAT** and **WATER QUALITY** through our land conservation, management, and stewardship work. We will learn from other conservation organizations and partners, and through our **EDUCATION** programs we will share what we have learned about **NATURAL SYSTEMS** and **CLIMATE** in our community.



Balancing Efforts across Western Penobscot Bay region

We will serve and represent all **16 TOWNS** in which we work. We are a **MULTI-LOCAL** organization that balances its efforts across our geography through **BOARD** and **VOLUNTEER** recruitment, hosting **FREE EVENTS**, and **CONSERVING LANDS** that connect diverse populations with nature across our service region.



Promoting Access and Inclusion

We will ensure that the benefits of land conservation are accessible to everyone in our community. We will expand **PUBLIC RECREATION** opportunities by making our preserves, trails, and programs more accessible, enhance **COMMUNICATION** and **SIGNAGE**, and collaborate with other local organizations to welcome **NEW** and **MULTI-GENERATIONAL AUDIENCES** within our community.



Supporting Community Needs

We will bring our skills and strengths as a Land Trust to **PARTNERSHIPS** with **SCHOOLS** and other **COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS** to support projects that address **COMMUNITY HEALTH** and **WELLNESS**, beyond the benefits of traditional conservation work.

Building Organizational Strength and Capacity



We will ensure capacity to fulfill our mission with a **STRONG BOARD** and **STAFF**, **SYSTEMS** and **FACILITIES**, and necessary **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**.

HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT'S NEW

- ❖ **Updated Mission Statement.** The Land Trust mission statement was updated to include “connects people with nature,” to emphasize our commitment to **both** land conservation and community engagement.
- ❖ **Geographic Expansion.** The Town of Monroe was added to our service region, expanding our service region from 15 to 16 towns.
- ❖ **New Conservation Focus Areas.** The Land Trust will select several new landscape-scale priority conservation focus areas in which to proactively conserve land over the next five years.
- ❖ **Community Access Focused Conservation Project.** The Land Trust will seek to conserve a property in the greater Belfast area that is easily accessible and well-suited for hosting large-scale community engagement events.
- ❖ **Increased Partnerships with Schools.** Our Learning Landscapes program will secure access to land for more schools throughout our service region and assist with the development of infrastructure needed for outdoor learning.
- ❖ **Collaboration with Community Organizations.** The Land Trust will collaborate with community partner organizations to engage underserved populations in our conservation work and conserve land in association with other community benefit projects.
- ❖ **Climate-Change Adaptive Forestry and Land Management.** The Land Trust will investigate and test new and evolving practices intended to manage forests and natural areas in response to changes brought about by climate change.
- ❖ **Advisory Council.** A group will be created to provide strategic guidance and strengthen community relationships.
- ❖ **Capacity-Building.** The Land Trust will build the necessary capacity to meet the goals of this plan including growing our staff, enhancing systems, and expanding our office space.

STRATEGIC GOALS

The plan is organized around five goals, which are further defined through the strategies and outcomes of this plan. The goals shape our annual plans and ensure that we are doing the work to meet our mission.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE MORE LAND – Acquire land that sustains healthy, diverse, and resilient ecosystems where people can connect with nature.

Strategy 1A: Proactively complete projects in ecologically significant, landscape-scale, priority focus areas identified in the Land Trust’s strategic conservation plan.

- **Outcome 1A1:** Conservation projects in one or more (1+) new landscape-scale conservation focus areas are initiated.
- **Outcome 1A2:** Five (5) properties in new focus areas are acquired.
- **Outcome 1A3:** Five (5) additional properties in or adjacent to existing focus areas are permanently conserved.

Strategy 1B: Proactively conserve parcels that connect people with nature.

- **Outcome 1B1:** Three (3) properties with access to rivers, lakes, ponds, and/or the ocean are conserved.
- **Outcome 1B2:** One (1) conservation property is acquired in the greater Belfast area that is easily accessible and well-suited to hosting large community engagement events.
- **Outcome 1B3:** Two (2) trail or community pathway projects are completed with partner organizations in high usage community areas.

Strategy 1C: Respond to conservation project opportunities outside focus areas as funding (or land donations) and capacity are available.

- **Outcome 1C1:** Five (5) properties adjacent to existing non-focus area preserves are conserved.
- **Outcome 1C2:** Five (5) properties with high conservation values, such as aquatic and rare habitats, large intact forests, roadless areas, or other high value areas identified in our 2020 conservation plan are conserved.
- **Outcome 1C3:** Three (3) conservation projects facilitated with partner conservation organizations (such as land transfers or dam removal projects) are completed.

GOAL 2: CONNECT PEOPLE AND NATURE - Connect people throughout our communities with nature for the benefit of people and the environment.

Strategy 2A: Provide inclusive, free programming that builds community across our service region.

- **Outcome 2A1:** Events on preserves and trails throughout the entire service region attract 5,000+ people annually.
- **Outcome 2A2:** Two or more (2+) partnerships that welcome new and diverse audiences to events and gatherings on our preserves are developed.
- **Outcome 2A3:** Self-guided and community science programming that foster connection with our preserves are offered.

Strategy 2B: Expand nature-based learning with children and schools.

- **Outcome 2B1:** More than thirty (30+) educators from ten or more (10+) schools throughout our service region are supported through professional development, mentorship, volunteer support, and resources annually.
- **Outcome 2B2:** Land is secured within close proximity of three or more (3+) schools for outdoor learning.
- **Outcome 2B3:** Outdoor classroom infrastructure is developed adjacent to two or more (2+) additional schools.
- **Outcome 2B4:** The impact and benefits of outdoor learning with school communities and other organizations are measured and shared.

Strategy 2C: Communicate our mission, projects, and programs to engage existing and new audiences.

- **Outcome 2C1:** A multi-faceted communications plan, including print, digital, and video formats, is designed and implemented across all channels.

Strategy 2D: Foster relationships with organizations that address basic human needs in our community. As partnership opportunities arise, the Land Trust will use its expertise to assist with the acquisition of land in support of these needs.

- **Outcome 2D1:** One or more (1+) projects that acquire land in support of Wabanaki land return or access are completed.
- **Outcome 2D2:** Two (2) special projects in which the Land Trust acquires land to assist a partner organization to fulfill a high priority community need are initiated. Examples of such partnerships may include organizations that address affordable housing, health and

wellness, social service or other needs identified through the Land Trust's engagement with the community.

GOAL 3: STEWARD CONSERVATION LAND - Care for the Land Trust's preserves and easements to nurture the land's ecological health while providing people with access to nature.

Strategy 3A: Care for preserves in accordance with best practices, meeting all requirements to sustain the Land Trust accredited status.

- **Outcome 3A1:** Preserve boundaries are monitored annually and maintained to be clearly marked, identifiable, and passable.
- **Outcome 3A2:** A digital recordkeeping system is adopted and maintained for all land records, including both acquisition and stewardship records.
- **Outcome 3A3:** Management plans are maintained and updated for all preserves.
- **Outcome 3A4:** Management agreements are in place with all partner organizations that have stewardship management responsibilities on preserves.

Strategy 3B: Nurture partnerships with landowners to care for the health of conservation easement lands, meeting all requirements for accredited land trusts.

- **Outcome 3B1:** All conservation easements are monitored annually including easement boundaries, surface alterations, and structures.
- **Outcome 3B2:** All easement owners receive regular communications, at least annually, regarding all aspects of their conservation easements including potential or real violations.

Strategy 3C: Enhance the ecological resilience and health of the Land Trust's preserves.

- **Outcome 3C1:** A system for monitoring and management of priority invasive plants and forest pests is in place.
- **Outcome 3C2:** Priority fields and open habitats on preserves are identified and maintained.
- **Outcome 3C3:** An approach to climate-change adaptive forestry and land management is developed, and two (2) test projects are implemented.

Strategy 3D: Manage and improve public access and trails to provide welcoming and thoughtfully maintained access to nature.

- **Outcome 3D1:** Existing trail networks, trailheads, and other public access infrastructure are well-maintained and welcoming.

- **Outcome 3D2:** A system of clear signage to guide and welcome users of our conservation lands is established.
- **Outcome 3D3:** Three (3) trails within the Land Trust's preserve system are restored and/or improved.
- **Outcome 3D4:** Three (3) new trail projects are completed.

GOAL 4: SUPPORT THE ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE AND PEOPLE -
Foster a collaborative and inclusive culture with the board, staff, volunteers, and the community, and ensure the necessary systems, spaces, and equipment to support an effective and efficient organization are in place.

Strategy 4A: Strengthen and retain a passionate, effective, and diverse volunteer Board of Directors that is committed to fulfilling our mission.

- **Outcome 4A1:** The Board of Directors includes 15-18 volunteers who bring professional skills, fundraising expertise, community relationships, and diverse perspectives that strengthen our connections with communities across our service region.
- **Outcome 4A2:** The Board of Directors' role in relationship building with members results in the recruitment of twenty-five (25) leadership donors per year in support of the general operating fund.
- **Outcome 4A3:** The Board of Directors is well-trained in Land Trust best practices in fundraising, conservation, governance, and access and inclusion through an annual commitment to continuing education by each member.
- **Outcome 4A4:** The Board of Directors fosters strong and effective committees based upon a clear and unified plan that defines roles, responsibilities, and annual goals for each committee.

Strategy 4B: Cultivate and support a skilled, engaged, collaborative staff that drives programs forward and sustains an effective organization.

- **Outcome 4B1:** One (1) administrative, one (1) development, and one (1) seasonal stewardship position are added to increase organizational capacity.
- **Outcome 4B2:** Two (2) additional program support positions are evaluated and added when work plans demand and funds are available.
- **Outcome 4B3:** Staff retention rate is high, and the team finds joy and fulfillment through their work.
- **Outcome 4B4:** Staff are supported in pursuing professional development and organizational learning opportunities to enrich knowledge and skills.

Strategy 4C: Build and sustain a robust volunteer engagement program that supports all departments and strengthens the Land Trust’s capacity to fulfill its mission.

- **Outcome 4C1:** The Land Trust maintains a base of 200 well-trained volunteers.

Strategy 4D: Ensure the staff has appropriate systems, space, and equipment to effectively and efficiently fulfill their work.

- **Outcome 4D1:** Coastal Mountains Land Trust’s accredited status is maintained.
- **Outcome 4D2:** Software and digital recordkeeping systems for finance, fundraising, stewardship, and lands records are up to date and follow industry best practices.
- **Outcome 4D3:** The Land Trust has office space to accommodate up to 13 staff and space to host organizational meetings.
- **Outcome 4D4:** The Land Trust’s carbon footprint is measured and reduced by 50%.

Strategy 4E: Explore collaborations with other non-profit organizations to enhance the impact of our organization.

- **Outcome 4E1:** Feasibility studies are developed to outline and describe specific collaborations the Land Trust may pursue with neighboring land conservation groups and other local non-profit organizations to increase our impact and efficiency.

GOAL 5: ENSURE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY - To fulfill our mission now and in the future, the Land Trust will expand its philanthropic relationships, increase revenues from grants and invested assets, and build our financial reserves.

Strategy 5A: Initiate and complete a capacity-building campaign to support organizational needs.

- **Outcome 5A1:** A three-year \$625,000 capacity campaign to invest in additional staff, computers and technology, organizational systems, and infrastructure has been accomplished.

Strategy 5B: Grow annual operating revenue sources by building relationships with people in and beyond our community.

- **Outcome 5B1:** Land Trust membership has grown from **1,735** to **2,000** members.
- **Outcome 5B2:** Land Trust base of annual individual unrestricted leadership donors has grown from **145** to **245** members.

- **Outcome 5B3:** Unrestricted operating gifts from family/private foundations have grown from **\$110,000** to **\$155,000**.
- **Outcome 5B4:** Business sponsorship program has grown from **10** to **25** members.
- **Outcome 5B5:** An Advisory Council, composed of 15-20 key advisors to provide strategic guidance and strengthen relationships, is established by the Board of Directors.

Strategy 5C: Strengthen the Land Trust's planned giving program to increase documented commitments to our reserves.

- **Outcome 5C1:** The Land Trust's planned giving Summit Circle has grown from **35** to **75+** members.
- **Outcome 5C2:** All obligations and agreements relating to realized planned gifts to benefit the organization are fulfilled.
- **Outcome 5C3:** An improved comprehensive strategy for long-term management of permanent, temporary, and board designated funds is implemented.

Strategy 5D: Raise and steward capital funds needed to support the goals of this plan.

- **Outcome 5D1:** A Land Conservation Action Fund is created to provide seed funding for strategic land conservation priorities.
- **Outcome 5D2:** Capital funding is raised to support specific land acquisition, stewardship, and community engagement projects.
- **Outcome 5D2:** A 40th Anniversary Comprehensive Campaign of \$10+ million acts as a catalyst for engaging new and longstanding members and raises the funds needed for increased capacity for land acquisition, stewardship, and connecting people with the land, as well as raising more organizational reserves for land stewardship, programming, and infrastructure.

CORE VALUES

We commit to bringing the following values to our work:

- ADAPTABILITY** Being agile, creative and curious makes our organization more effective, better at solving problems and more resilient in the face of unexpected challenges. We seek to be innovative in accomplishing our goals, always open to new tools and methods.
- AUTHENTICITY** Genuine relationships are built upon honesty, integrity, and transparency. We aim to be accountable; we own our mistakes and acknowledge our blind spots. We communicate openly, empathetically, and compassionately.
- COLLABORATION** Partnerships are integral to effective work. They enable us to share and learn in ways that enhance all of our strengths, elevate capacity in support of community needs, create solutions, and achieve mutual goals.
- LAND ETHIC** Our commitment to community includes not only humans, but all other parts of the Earth as well: soils, waters, plants, and animals – the land. We believe that the well-being of people and the land are deeply intertwined.
- INCLUSION** Nature is stronger through diversity, and so are we. We listen to and incorporate a wide variety of voices, perspectives, and experiences in our work. We commit to treating all people equitably and to creating an inclusive community connected to the land.
- INTENTIONALITY** Successful outcomes are based upon research and careful planning. We are pragmatic and use a strategic approach to accomplish our mission.
- JOY** We find joy in the pursuit of our mission and the hope this work generates.

APPENDIX A

Community Listening Session Feedback



What We Heard

Throughout our community conversations, we heard balanced feedback from participants that the Land Trust needs to prioritize its focus on mission critical work – conservation, community engagement, and land stewardship while also carefully exploring ways to creatively bring the skills and the strengths of our conservation work to partnerships that benefit broader community needs.

We heard about the many evolving challenges faced by our communities in a post-pandemic period characterized by an inflationary real estate market, a changing climate, increasing political polarization, social inequality, and increasing stresses upon the community's physical and mental health. Further, we heard about the increased pressures of residential development on local open space, forests stressed by invasive pathogens, and local infrastructure being impacted by increased storm damage due to climate change.

We heard about the importance of preserving land to support clean water, biodiversity, and habitat, while also facilitating public access for people to explore and enjoy the outdoors. There were discussions about what types of recreation we should support and how many trails we should build. We heard about the value of our work as it relates to health and wellness. Many felt that a top priority should be educating our community about how our work addresses climate change issues. We were asked what we could do to address affordable housing, transportation, and food insecurity. Additionally, we heard about the need to support under-resourced communities and members of the Wabanaki community. There was universal support for continuing to engage kids and schools and encouragement to create more educational opportunities for youth and adults, all the while recognizing that our work is driven by a commitment to land protection.

These listening sessions reinforced the value of our work and reminded us of how many ways the Land Trust and our staff engage with and touch our community. We were honored to hear that we

are respected members of the community and were often asked if we could do more. This plan helps to define what that might mean in relation to our mission and our capacity as a multi-local land trust.

Who We Heard From

The Land Trust engaged over 300 people through more than 20 community listening sessions that included representatives from the following organizations:

Bangor Savings Bank	Maine Sea Grant
Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition	McNEMBA
Belfast Soup Kitchen	Megunticook Watershed Association
Blue Hill Heritage Trust	Midcoast Conservancy
Camden Hills State Park	Midcoast Regional Housing Trust
Camden-Rockport Elementary School	Oryx Works Yoga
Camden Snow Bowl	Penquis
Captain Albert Stevens School	Prospect Planning Board
Town of Camden	Rockland Public Library
Coastal Opportunities	Searsport District Middle and High Schools
Georges River Land Trust	Stewardship Education Alliance
The Green Store	TRoMM
Homeworthy	Volunteers of America
Hurricane Island Outward Bound	Waldo County Bounty
Knox Clinic	Waldo County Conservation Initiative
Maine Coast Heritage Trust	Waldo CAP Maine Health
Maine Community Foundation	Waldo YMCA
Maine Farmland Trust	Waterfall Arts
Maine Public Health	

NOTES FOR BEN

GLOSSARY OF COASTAL MOUNTAINS LAND TRUST TERMS

To be used as footnotes

Advisory Council: A select group of members invited to meet three times a year to receive updates on the Land Trust and provide strategic insights and advice.

Conservation Partner: A leadership donor group recognizing those who give between \$1,000-\$4,999 annually. This is the entry-level tier for leadership donors.

Focus Area: Using rating scales that assess ecological significance, wildlife corridors, trail feasibility, and more, these are specific identified areas that the Land Trust will focus and prioritize conservation efforts. Our focus areas include: The Ducktrap River, Bald and Ragged Mountains, Passagassawakeag Greenway, Hurds Pond, and Mt. Tuck.

Leadership Donor: Leadership donors is an umbrella term used to describe a donor contributing \$1,000 or more annually. There are three categories of leadership donors: Conservation Partners (giving between \$1,000-\$4,999), Megunticook Society (giving between \$5,000-\$24,999), and Norumbega Society (giving \$25,000 or more) in a given year.

Megunticook Society: A leadership donor group recognizing those who give between \$5,000-\$24,999 annually.

Member: A person who makes a gift of any amount to the Land Trust.

Norumbega Society: The highest-level donor group, recognizing those who contribute \$25,000 or more annually.

Service Region: Coastal Mountains Land Trust manages land and seeks to conserve land in 16 towns: Rockport, Camden, Hope, Lincolnville, Northport, Belmont, Belfast, Morrill, Waldo, Knox, Brooks, Swanville, Searsport, Stockton Springs, Prospect, and Monroe.

Summit Circle: A recognition group honoring individuals who have included the Land Trust in their estate plans, or who have donated land.