

Wild Rivers Land Trust Strategic Plan, 2022-2026



Elk River © Tim Palmer

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Wild Rivers Land Trust Strategic Plan 2022-2026

Executive Summary

Wild Rivers Land Trust 2022-2026 Strategic Plan sets broad goals to ensure the Trust's work is consistent with its vision, mission, and commitment to land protection in perpetuity. The plan's goals and strategic actions were designated to guide organizational development.

An active adaptive management process will be utilized to keep the plan current and effective. In this process, managers design practices that discriminate between alternative models and thus reveal the "best" management action. At times this involves testing practices that differ from the norm in order to determine how indicators respond over a range of conditions.

Keeping a consistent set of standards and practices will allow the Land Trust to thrive and be successful in perpetuity. This document is prepared in accordance with *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, a national guideline for ethical performance by land trusts developed by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), the national umbrella organization of 450 accredited land trusts. Wild Rivers Land Trust holds a seat on the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts governing board.

Organizational History

Founded in 2000 Wild Rivers Land Trust has evolved from the efforts of a passionate man with an office in a truck, to the only land trust focusing on southern Oregon's coastal region. In 2018 the Land Trust expanded its service area to encompass two million acres of this region. In 2019 the Land Trust received accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, the nationally-recognized body that accredits and reviews land trust actions, standards and practices. This accreditation has strengthened the Land Trust; new partnerships and land acquisitions have happened as a direct result. It also provides landowners, funders, conservation partners and communities the assurance that Wild Rivers Land Trust operates under state-of-the-art land conservation standards and practices.

Service Area

WRLT's two million acre service area stretches from the Ten Mile Lakes basin in Douglas County to the Oregon/California border. Service area map: <https://www.wildriverslandtrust.org/conserved-land/protected-places/>

Our Vision

We envision a future where clean water, abundant salmon runs, sustainable working lands, and prospering rural communities forever define Oregon's southern coast.

Our Mission

To keep the irreplaceable lands and waters of the southern Oregon coast forever wild and abundant.

Our Guiding Principles

1. Provide conservation leadership, innovative strategies to meet land owners' objectives, and service to the community in a changing environment
2. Implement the Land Trust Alliances' Standards and Practices
3. Promote diversity, inclusivity, and reliability in its dealings as an employer, partner, and service provider
4. Base relationships on trust, respect and mutually beneficial outcomes
5. Support voluntary land conservation endeavors and recognize private property rights
6. Promote environmental stewardship and manage protected lands in perpetuity

Opportunities for Land Conservation Success

Current opportunities for success include:

- A service area that retains a large percentage of its natural condition/ecological function
- The opportunity to demonstrate whole-watershed protection in Elk River watershed
- Participation in regional partnerships that accomplish conservation milestones
- Work with partners to expand existing protected areas or provide corridors between protected areas
- Engagement with local Tribal Nations

Current Challenges to Success

Sustaining a nonprofit organization in a rural area is the Trust's greatest challenge. The amount of conservation work Wild Rivers Land Trust can accomplish is hindered by the difficulty of obtaining a stable flow of operational and project funding. Voluntary private land conservation is not yet a well-known concept to many members of the general public.

Current challenges to success include:

- Growing and sustaining a nonprofit organization in a low income/low population area
- Obtaining adequate private and foundation funding to support the organization's mission
- Capturing irreplaceable conservation opportunities before they are squandered

During the planning process to establish organizational goals and strategies we ask ourselves three important questions:

1. What are the most important issues to which we need to respond?
2. How shall we respond?
3. Are we doing the right thing?

The following Program Goals and Organizational Goals, and their associated strategies were selected to best meet the Land Trust's current opportunities for success and to best respond to our current challenges to success.

PROGRAM GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal #1 Protect the Diverse Habitats and Working Lands of the Wild Rivers Land Trust service area

1a. Identify high-priority geographic areas and land uses based on best available data

- Use GIS data (ecological, climate resilience, development pressure, other data) to refine focus areas, especially where multiple objectives can be achieved
- Use focus areas to proactively identify potential projects

1b. Prioritize work on conserving lands in concordance with the WRLT Conservation Plan and emerging conservation opportunities

- Conservation committee will continue to use and adapt project scoring spreadsheet to evaluate projects.
- Conservation committee will prioritize projects based on threat and opportunity

1c. Respond to promising conservation projects proposed by community partners and landowners -

- Evaluate proposed projects with communication, site visits and project scoring
- Increase capacity for field visits with additional staff

1d. Cultivate partnerships that support land conservation and protection

- Where appropriate participate in regional collaborative planning efforts
- Increase capacity for participation and service income with additional staff
- Proactively meet with potential partners to discuss shared goals and opportunities

1e. Seek funding for projects with exceptional conservation value

- Identify additional grant programs and donors to support project fundraising
- Increase capacity for grant application and administration with additional staff
- Tell conservation stories as a fundraising tool (demonstrating value)
- Build relationships with current and new donors and funders

1f. Implement permanent protection on conservation lands

- Ensure adequate stewardship and legal defense funding and staffing capacity
- Continue to refine easement drafting

Goal #2 Restore and Maintain the Ecological Function of our Protected Lands in Perpetuity

2a. Monitor and maintain the conservation values of Wild Rivers Land Trust properties and easements and undertake appropriate action to address issues -

- Establish best practices for outreach and orientation for new landowners
- Increase outreach to landowners and others about conservation easement terms
- Review and add to existing management plans for fee properties and easements
- Develop organizational succession plan

2b. Restore ecosystem health of Wild Rivers Land Trust properties when required

- Build partnerships with restoration experts as needed to respond to issues
- Stay informed of emerging threats
- Incorporate disaster planning into management plans
- Explore establishing disaster fund to respond to needs of fee properties

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal #3 Grow the Capacity of Wild Rivers Land Trust

3a. Implement the WRLT Fund raising plan to increase support for the Wild Rivers Land Trust

- Revise/update fundraising plan annually
- Expand Funding Committee with at least two additional board members or volunteers with appropriate expertise
- Implement one new funding mechanism annually

3b. Establish a secure financial function for WRLT with the necessary systems and personnel to manage the finances.

- Assess use of financial officer contract position semiannually

3c. Maintain professional skills and proficiency of staff and contractors with appropriate training

- Provide training opportunities for staff/contractors

3d. Maintain/augment relationships with foundations and grantors

- Make new grantor or foundation relationships adding one per year
- Invite major donors to visit properties

3e. Expand staffing to meet the needs of a growing organization

- Look into multi-year funding opportunities
- Explore opportunities for internships to increase capacity and/or develop specific projects

3f. Grow capacity with strategic partnerships

- Develop a plan using outcomes from participation in the COLT Learning Journey to engage Tribal entities
- Strengthen partnerships with Tribal Nations, Watershed Councils, State and Federal organizations and other NGOs

Goal #4 Engage the Community in Land Conservation Endeavors

- 4a. Provide avenues for the public to learn about and participate in voluntary land conservation
 - Expand outreach programs to regions of the service area that have not had presentations about WRLT
 - Expand use of web site and video projects to reach more audiences
- 4b. Improve volunteer opportunities to help with WRLT projects and fundraising
 - Assess capacity for using volunteers
 - Develop needs assessment for volunteers
 - Host one event /year at a WRLT property to recruit volunteers
 - Solicit five active volunteers a year
- 4c. Have representation on the board from each region and land use of the WRLT service area.
 - Assess board needs including skillsets and geographic representation annually
 - Expand board to twelve members
 - Expand board training opportunities
- 4d. Explore educational opportunities to enhance WRLT activities
 - Develop and present outreach programs for professionals who interact with landowners to inform them of WRLT opportunities