



Strategic Plan

2023 - 2026



FIVE RIVERS
CONSERVATION TRUST

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Photography

Cover: Huckins Maple Farm, Northfield, protected by the Conde-Bean Hill Farm conservation easement, Northfield (photo by Jeff Evans)

p.1 Annual Celebration at Canterbury Shaker Village, Meadow Pond (photo by Aaron Baker)

p.2 Janeway Conservation Area, Webster (photo by Aaron Baker)

p.6 The Vegetable Ranch, Warner (photo by Jeff Evans)

p.9 Blue Moon Berry Farm, Warner (photo by Jeff Evans)

FIVE RIVERS CONSERVATION TRUST

10 Ferry Street, Suite 311-A | Concord, NH 03301 | 603-225-7225 | 5rct.org

INTRODUCTION – SHAPING OUR FUTURE

Five Rivers Conservation Trust's Board of Trustees and staff embarked in 2022 on two significant and influential projects to shape the organization's future:

- **Strategic planning** to identify and inform the high-level objectives the organization will pursue in the next three years (adopted April 2023)
- **Conservation planning**, the first of its kind for the organization, which will lay out priorities and opportunities for Five Rivers' conservation work in our 17-town service area (underway).

We undertook these efforts with the recognition that Five Rivers and the wider community have experienced considerable changes in recent years, including heightened development pressure, greater urgency about climate change, and a growing focus on considerations of diversity and inclusion. Our plans respond to and are informed by these important contextual factors.

The objectives of Five Rivers' strategic planning work were to:

- set a clear course for the next three years
- effectively convey the organization's purpose and goals
- prioritize key programmatic and operational activities and improvements.

In doing so, the organization seeks to:

- increase its relevance and impact in the community
- build awareness about conservation and the work of Five Rivers
- increase financial support over time.



CAPTURING COMMUNITY VOICES

Five Rivers engaged in a seven-month process to better understand the organization and its constituents, as well as its place in New Hampshire's conservation landscape, in order to arrive at the goals set forth in this strategic plan.

This work was supported and facilitated by Brightspot Consultants and included a variety of research and data collection activities – including interviews with 11 board members and volunteers, two focus groups with 16 community members, and an electronic survey to the Five Rivers community resulting in 194 responses – followed by two planning retreats with Trustees and staff.

See Appendix A for a full list of stakeholders engaged in this process.



MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

As a result of the strategic planning process, we revised our mission and crafted a vision statement and organizational values which will collectively inspire and guide our efforts in the years to come.

OUR MISSION

The mission of Five Rivers Conservation Trust is to sustain healthy communities by connecting people to nature and conserving land forever.

OUR VISION

We envision productive farms and forests, clean water, thriving wildlife habitats, and climate-resilient landscapes throughout our region. We envision communities where people access the outdoors near home, feel connected to nature, and understand and advocate for the benefits of land conservation.

OUR ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Connections between Land and People – We recognize that the interdependence between humans and the natural world is essential to sustain healthy lives and communities.

Collaboration – We seek partnerships with a robust network of volunteers, landowners, community members, public agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions.

Inclusion and Access – We strive to expand equitable access to the outdoors. We value the inclusion of all community members and diverse partner organizations.

Lasting Commitment – We conserve land in service to future generations. We commit to caring for conserved lands now and forever.

Integrity – We maintain the highest ethical standards for governance, financial management, land transactions, and responsible stewardship.

OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Through this process, we identified three key areas of work (pillars) we undertake to fulfill our mission. As summarized in the strategic framework graphic shown here ([click to view the graphic in a larger size](#)) these pillars rest on a foundation of operational excellence in finance and fundraising, marketing and communications, staff and volunteer support, and governance.

OUR VISION

We envision productive farms and forests, clean water, thriving wildlife habitats, and climate-resilient landscapes throughout our region. We envision communities where people access the outdoors near home, feel connected to nature, and understand and advocate for the benefits of land conservation.

OUR MISSION

Five Rivers' mission is to sustain healthy communities by connecting people to nature and conserving land forever.

KEY PILLARS OF WORK WE UNDERTAKE TO FULFILL OUR MISSION

Conserve Land Important to Our Region

Protect lands important to our region, with a focus on farms, forests, water resources, and recreational access

Contribute to sustaining healthy and diverse ecosystems, enhancing climate resilience, and promoting healthy communities and strong economies

Ensure Effective Stewardship

Provide responsible management of conserved properties

Comply with all legal obligations and adhere to conservation best practices for effective stewardship

Build Strong Community Connections

Bring local perspectives to bear in our decision making

Extend the benefits of conservation to the wider community

Engage more people to care about the land

Cultivate support for conservation and for Five Rivers Conservation Trust

SUPPORTING OPERATIONS THAT PROVIDE THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR EFFORTS

Effective fundraising and strong finances

Compelling marketing and communications

Dedicated staff and volunteer support

Sound governance

THREE-YEAR PLAN (APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2026)

Our strategic plan specifies measurable goals for each of the key pillars of work, as well as strategic priorities for each pillar and each area of supporting operations. Our Board of Trustees and committees will use a detailed work plan – which includes action items, responsible parties, and timelines – to guide our work (not enclosed).

KEY PILLAR	GOAL	STRATEGIC PRIORITY
<p>Conserve Land Important to Our Region</p>	<p>Close four projects per year, one of which is a larger project, and have a mix of projects that reflects priorities established in the Conservation Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the Conservation Plan and expand capacity to execute on plan goals. • Build local relationships, particularly with town Conservation Commissions.

The forthcoming Conservation Plan will shape the types of projects that Five Rivers pursues and prioritizes in the future and when that is complete, the Board is dedicated to ensuring expanded capacity (staff, volunteer, and financial) to support the plan’s implementation. In aiming to set the organization on a path to be closing four projects per year by 2026, the Board is taking an aggressive stance on increasing the pace of conservation. “Larger” projects as referenced in the goal above are ones that are characterized by size (number of acres) and/or involve significant fundraising from public and private sources. Additionally, to play to Five Rivers’ unique position and role among the towns in the region, the relationships with town conservation commissions are of renewed importance. These bodies are instrumental in building Five Rivers’ pipeline of projects and have knowledge that can be shared with and across the regional players to elevate all community efforts.

THREE-YEAR PLAN (CONTINUED)

KEY PILLAR	GOAL	STRATEGIC PRIORITY
Ensure Effective Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide responsible administrative management of all conserved properties.• Cultivate all landowners with a service-oriented approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Execute existing stewardship responsibilities.• Enhance and build a pool of volunteers for the monitoring program.• Create a service-oriented landowner engagement program.• Develop plans for the Janeway Conservation Area.• Utilize a new database for responsible stewardship management.• Hire a Stewardship Director.



THREE-YEAR PLAN (CONTINUED)

KEY PILLAR	GOAL	STRATEGIC PRIORITY
<p>Build Strong Community Connections</p> <p><i>(supported by compelling marketing and communications)</i></p>	<p>Increase the number of community members and partners who are aware of and engaged with Five Rivers by 50%.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance signage on conserved properties. • Cultivate partnerships for programming and events to expand awareness of conservation and Five Rivers. • Create a marketing plan and budget to coordinate and focus activities. • Revitalize brand and digital/online presence for better reach to audiences. • Create a communications plan and outreach calendar to streamline efforts to engage the community.

Building connections to the community has been an unspoken goal of Five Rivers throughout our history, but in this plan, there is an intentionality around increasing public awareness of properties that have been conserved thanks to Five Rivers' work.

Additionally, by seeking out strategic partners to host programming and/or events on conserved properties, our intention is for community members to feel a deeper connection and relationship to the land and - by extension - to Five Rivers. This planning process brought into focus the essential role of community engagement as a starting point for conservation.

THREE-YEAR PLAN (CONTINUED)

OPERATIONAL AREAS OF WORK

The following are operational areas of work with their own strategic priorities. Success in these areas is necessary to advance the mission-related goals above.

OPERATIONAL AREA	STRATEGIC PRIORITY
<p>Fundraising</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise and refresh the annual development plan with an emphasis on major donors and increasing the number of all donors. • Utilize a new database to track constituents. • Build capacity and plan for estate planning. • Increase stewardship and legal defense fund reserves.
<p>Staff and Volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Five Rivers workforce competitiveness and sustainability. • Attract and retain a robust pool of volunteers.
<p>Governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in Board development. • Align policies with all elements of the strategic plan.

IMPLEMENTING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Our strategic plan is a “living document” — it is and will continue to be referred to, revised, and enhanced as the work unfolds. Committees comprised of staff, Trustees, and volunteers will play a critical role to advance and complete action items according to the plan's details and timelines.

The Board and Executive Director will have a shared responsibility for monitoring and evaluating progress on the Strategic Plan. As work progresses, Board and staff will be evaluating the plan's pace and success – both in terms of activity completion, as well as gut checking whether the right work is being done or if adjustments should be made. This will be especially important to examine in cases where new efforts are underway — for example, connecting in new ways with community members, investing in new marketing and fundraising strategies, and creating a new model for landowner engagement. We expect our Board and staff will continue our culture of asking good questions and bringing an analytical eye to assess if changes need to be made.



APPENDIX A –STAKEHOLDER INPUT

A special thank you to the following stakeholders who provided input to inform the strategic planning work:

BOARD OF TRUSTEES (AS OF STRATEGIC PLAN ADOPTION, APRIL 2023)

Maura Adams | Kelly Buchanan | Brad Cilley | Tim Fleury | Mike Lynch | Cathy Menard | Beth Moore | Jamie Robertson | Sarah Thorne | Katy Ward

INTERVIEWEES (* STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER)

***Maura Adams:** Board, Development Committee

Kathy Barnes: Conservation Leaders Society, Volunteer, Former Board

***Jeff Evans:** Director of Conservation

Jeanne Herrick: Board, Development Committee Chair

Lucia Kittredge: Conservation Leaders Society, Volunteer

Cathy Menard: Board, Treasurer, Finance Committee

***Jamie Robertson:** Board, Land Protection and Stewardship Committee

Mike Shearin: Finance Committee, Former Board

***Liz Short:** Executive Director

Ken Stern: Land Protection and Stewardship Committee, Former Board

***Sarah Thorne:** Board, Land Protection and Stewardship Committee Chair

FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS

Rich Cook: Former Board, Land Protection & Stewardship Committee, Warner resident

Pam Young: Events volunteer, Concord resident

Julianne Gadoury: Kimball Jenkins' Executive Director, Concord resident

Beth Fenstermacher: City of Concord, Assistant City Planner

Lucy Karl & Steve Gordon: Hopkinton residents

Mukhtar Idhow: Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success, Executive Director

Stacy Luke: Merrimack County Conservation District, District Manager

Aubrey Nelson: NH Energy Education Project, Concord resident

Steve Murray: Finance Committee, Concord resident

Charlie Niebling: Consulting forester, Boscawen resident

Patrice & Steve Rasche: Conservation Leaders Society, Canterbury residents

Sarah Wrightsman: New Hampshire Housing, Community Engagement Coordinator

Sheila Vargas: The Nature Conservancy, Community Partnerships Manager, Concord resident

Mark Zankel: Former Board, Former NH State Director of The Nature Conservancy, Hopkinton resident

APPENDIX B – NEW FIVE RIVERS LOGO

As part of the strategic planning process, Five Rivers Board and staff expressed a desire to refresh the organization's logo to:

- strengthen our brand and digital presence,
- represent the organization's work by visually expressing connections to community, working lands, and conservation within the logo; and
- include our name more prominently in the logo design.

The previous Five Rivers logo was created in the early days of the organization's 35-year history (beginning as Concord Conservation Trust) and presents several challenges for modern day use.

To create a simple, straightforward, yet distinctive logo, we engaged with professional graphic designers to target our key audience of all people between the ages of 9 and 90 who love being outside, enjoy nature, and want it protected forever.

Our new logo accurately represents Five Rivers' new mission and the work to be accomplished within the 2023-2026 strategic plan. It presents an opportunity for Five Rivers' board, staff, volunteers, and supporters to connect with the visual representation of our conservation work and to expand our marketing and outreach efforts with signage and a more recognizable digital presence.

