



INTRODUCTION

Mission

Capitol Land Trust's (CLT) mission is to strategically conserve vital natural areas and working lands in the South Puget Sound and Chehalis Basin watersheds, for their ecological and community benefits.

Vision for the Future

We envision a future for our region in which nature and community thrive because CLT and our partners have invested in conservation of and education about our natural places and resources.

Through our conservation work and against the backdrop of climate change, we help ensure that our quickly growing region is a place with clean water to drink and clean air to breathe, healthy populations of native fish and wildlife, and natural open spaces that help define our communities. By creating broader opportunities to learn about and experience our natural environment, we build a stronger and more diverse community that cares about conservation. This also ensures ongoing support for our conservation mission for years to come.

Trust and collaboration characterize our community's shared work. We choose conservation opportunities that strategically align with our unique aspirations and capabilities. We commit to stewardship and education about our region's distinctive natural features. These treasures, which are the traditional lands and waterways of Salish peoples, co-exist with vibrant urban areas and a healthy rural landscape.

Our history in this region has proven the value of partnership. CLT continues to bring together those who have different interests to identify and achieve shared conservation goals.

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We expand our partnerships, because they sustain us and ensure that our work meets the needs of our diverse community.

Values

Recognizing and respecting diverse values and interests, we identify common ground and shared community goals, make the most of limited funding, solve problems, and build partnerships to accomplish these goals. Our work adheres to high standards indicated by our national accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. We continually strive to maintain and improve effectiveness, efficiency and accountability.

These aspirations are built on a foundation of organizational values, which include:

- Integrity – We act with honesty, transparency, fairness and respect in all aspects of our operations.
- Collaboration – We actively seek diverse partners and perspectives as we develop programs and projects. This collaboration includes communities that have not traditionally been part of the conversation.
- Listening – We genuinely listen to each other, valuing different opinions.
- Continuous improvement – We offer and seek personal and professional development to advance our skills and stay current with trends in conservation.
- Strategic investment – We use our broad expertise to make the most strategic investments of CLT's time and money, looking for conservation projects which have lasting impact.

GOAL 1

Use strategic property transactions and stewardship to conserve networks of essential natural areas, including working lands.

Over the last five years, CLT has continued to conserve essential natural areas in South Puget Sound and the Chehalis Basin. As a result, an additional 697 acres of essential habitats and working lands have been conserved in perpetuity. In addition, we have worked with partner organizations to broker purchase of properties that are now conserved by others. We have been an active partner in the Aquatic Species Restoration Program for the Chehalis Basin, with conservation successes in 2020 that will help restore salmon habitat in several Chehalis Basin watersheds.

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Even as those successes enhance natural areas, changes to the landscape are taking place that will affect our quality of life forever. These changes do not just affect humans, but fish, wildlife, and plants as well. We will take long-term, collaborative and regionally focused action to ensure the future we want by protecting the habitats that are important to sustaining so many species. CLT will achieve this goal by protecting key lands, waters and habitats within the south Puget Sound watersheds and Chehalis Basin. Recognizing that these are the traditional places of Salish peoples, CLT will work collaboratively with local tribes as we seek to protect and steward our shared home. We will work with other public and private partners to better connect conserved landscapes for future generations.

We protect essential natural areas not only for the habitat they provide to fish and wildlife, but also for the ecological functions they support, such as water purification, flood mitigation, and climate regulation, as well as for their cultural and community values. Most importantly, we are committed to caring for all our conserved lands for generations to come. As part of each strategy, we will pursue funding from public and private sources and work with partners to secure new sources for conservation funding.

Strategy 1. Strategically Conserve Lands Within Our Service Area

CLT will focus its conservation efforts on the highest-priority properties hosting estuaries, marine shorelines, wetlands, rivers and riparian areas and associated forests, because of the crucial role these habitat types play in our landscape.

South Puget Sound's estuaries are transition zones where freshwater rivers and streams mix with saltwater, filtering pollutants and improving water quality. Acre for acre, estuaries are among the most biologically productive ecosystems on Earth. Many uniquely adapted plants and animals rely on estuaries to live, feed, and reproduce.

Marine shorelines support a dynamic system of sediment and wood debris transport and deposition, as well as kelp and eelgrass beds, and habitat for diverse communities of animals, including salmon species. They also support shellfish production and provide an essential aspect of South Sound's iconic natural beauty.

Wetlands provide freshwater habitat for waterfowl, migratory and resident birds, as well as for fish, amphibians, mammals, insects, and an array of distinctive plant species. Wetlands reduce the impacts of flooding and erosion by slowing and absorbing storm-water runoff. Wetlands also filter out sediments and pollutants, helping to provide clean water to streams and aquifers.

Riparian areas are the strips of land that border saltwater bodies and freshwaters – creeks, rivers and lakes. Healthy, functioning riparian areas and associated upland forests stabilize

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soils, filter out sediment and pollution, reduce runoff, improve water quality and moderate water temperatures. They also provide habitat and food for birds, fish, mammals, and other animals, and support distinctive plant communities.

South Puget Sound's extensive timberlands, farms, and ranches often have high-quality fish and wildlife habitat, and provide ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water storage, in addition to timber and food products that sustain local economies. Working lands can provide connectivity between important habitats and help maintain the rural character of the landscape.

While we continue to protect oak woodlands and prairies under our stewardship, CLT will collaborate with other conservation partners who can deploy greater resources than ours to ensure the high level of active management these areas require to maintain their characteristics.

Desired Outcomes

- Ninety percent of conserved properties meet the criteria for conservation efforts on strategic properties within our service area: parcels with high-habitat value for threatened and endangered species; that add to, connect or complement previous conservation successes, or are adjacent to other lands managed for long-term natural resource values; and are of sufficient size and condition to provide significant, functional wildlife habitat and climate resilience.
- CLT collaborates on long-term plans with conservation partners and seeks partnership opportunities with other conservation organizations to better leverage our limited resources and be part of the creation of larger, contiguous blocks of land for habitat conservation and climate change resilience.
- CLT develops a strategic acquisition plan for the Chehalis Basin watershed, working in collaboration with the state, local partners and tribes.

Strategy 2. Steward Conserved Lands in Perpetuity

Conserving important lands is only the beginning of CLT's responsibilities to those lands. A core aspect of our mission is a long-term commitment to managing, maintaining, and restoring lands owned by CLT, and actively protecting conservation values on properties protected with conservation easements. To meet our land management responsibilities, CLT administers a stewardship fund that is used for work at all our properties. CLT also relies heavily on our committed volunteers who make up our land and trail steward programs to help us monitor and maintain our preserves and conservation easements.

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CLT has opened several of its preserves for public access and educational purposes to directly connect our community to some of the varied and rich lands and ecological functions we work so hard to conserve. CLT develops trails, signage and infrastructure to ensure those visiting our public-access preserves have a safe and inspiring experience. CLT seeks to involve community partners to supplement our skills and abilities and strengthen our commitment and capability to best serve the lands -- and the visitors who come to learn about and enjoy them.

Management

CLT manages and monitors its properties to ensure the conservation values and habitat features are protected and nurtured in perpetuity. CLT has management tools to guide its work to maintain and enhance conservation values on its fee-owned properties, and to perform required monitoring of its conservation easements. These management tools provide information to improve annual and long-term work planning. CLT manages its public-access preserves to emphasize the quality of the visitors' experience of the conservation values being protected.

Desired Outcomes

- CLT develops property maintenance and enhancement plans for 90% of all fee-owned properties that inform and document annual and long-term need, budgets, staffing and work completed.
- CLT develops a volunteer-based preserve steward program to monitor, manage, and maintain these properties, expanding our land and trail steward programs. On the public-access preserves, a docent program is established to interpret the landscape for visitors. All public-access preserves and 75% of the fee-owned properties have a Preserve Steward team.

Habitat Restoration and Enhancement

Conserved properties often need restoration work or enhancement to re-establish natural processes, desired ecological values, habitat for rare and endangered species, or to promote climate resilience. Such restoration and enhancement regularly occur on CLT properties and can occur on conservation easements with permission from and in partnership with the landowner. Restoration and enhancement include a range of treatments, such as planting native vegetation, removing human structures, re-establishing natural water-flow patterns, adding large woody debris to streams, creating more structural diversity in over-crowded young forests, or removing invasive species and noxious weeds. Ecological restoration and habitat enhancement provide opportunities to connect people to our lands, engage community experts in our work,

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and create a new generation of conservation leaders with hands-on experience in creating positive changes in the landscape.

Desired Outcomes

- All restoration and habitat enhancement projects promote ecological resilience to climate change, and factor in long-term maintenance needs.
- CLT works with local experts to incorporate the best available science and engineering into the design and implementation of all significant restoration and habitat enhancement projects.
- CLT monitors all significant restoration and habitat enhancement projects for effectiveness against planned outcomes and reports outcomes to inform future project design.

GOAL 2

Engage a broader range of the South Puget Sound and Chehalis Basin communities in our conservation efforts and enhance our full community's feeling of connection to the lands we conserve.

In our previous strategic plan, we challenged ourselves to expand our conservation mission and look outward to our greater community. We developed publicly accessible properties and established K-12 education efforts and a variety of outdoor programming through collaboration with local school districts and public and private partners in Thurston and Mason counties. Over the next five years, we will expand on these successes in several key ways to deepen our community connection.

We will use our public-access preserves to strengthen existing partnerships, develop robust volunteer opportunities, enhance membership and fundraising, and connect with a wider swath of the communities we serve. Our programs will support K-12 education and outdoor opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds. The investment we are making at these properties will enhance our community's enjoyment of nature in our corner of the world, and understanding of the benefits of conservation.

CLT's community engagement work includes an intentional commitment to equity and social justice. Colonization and systemic racism are a part of our country's history. CLT preserves are on lands stewarded by Salish peoples, who were forcibly removed. This hard truth is a legacy that we acknowledge. The conservation movement has much work to do to be truly inclusive to

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all races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, beliefs, and abilities. As we challenge ourselves to do better, we will seek counsel from community leaders who can help guide us along the way.

Listening is one of our core organizational values. As we engage with new members of our community, listening with intention and sincerity will be a vital part of our success. We will look to our partners for this guidance and support to bolster our communication and outreach efforts. Now more than ever, people are embracing the value of local conservation and recreation access. We look forward to meeting this need and strengthening the partnerships that are vital to achieving it.

Strategy 1. Increase community connection and support through hands-on engagement with CLT properties and activities.

Our preserves support community involvement in conservation and restoration up close in some of our area's most special places. Public-access preserves offer exceptional opportunities for direct public engagement, including hiking, trail running, wildlife viewing, nature studies, and participation in scientific and restoration projects. Guided experiences on other conserved lands give people a closer connection to place and a stronger sense of the benefits of strategic conservation. These on-the-ground opportunities benefit our local community in tangible and intangible ways. Our community, in turn, is invested in their maintenance and continued improvement.

Desired Outcomes

- Interpretive tools, such as signs, interactive maps, and learning stations, are developed for visitors to use at all public-access preserves.
- Volunteer docents are active at Darlin, Bayshore and Inspiring Kids preserves.
- We offer guided experiences on our conserved lands that are tailored to people with a variety of interests and knowledge about these environments.
- Construction starts for the next phase of public access guidance and education infrastructure improvements at Bayshore Preserve and Inspiring Kids Preserve.

Strategy 2. Leverage existing partnerships and build new ones to develop new conservation leaders, strengthen CLT's value to our community and improve programmatic offerings.

We must help develop the next generation of conservation leaders. Partnerships are a powerful means to achieve this goal. We currently enjoy strong partnerships built on trust with teachers and school districts, as well as multiple education and science organizations that add depth to

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our expertise in conservation. Over the next five years we will expand our outreach to seek new mutually beneficial partnerships, and deepen the ones we already have. Building new partnerships will require listening to our community and being responsive to what we hear so that we can work together to achieve shared goals.

Desired Outcomes

- We deepen long-term relationships with our core partners to build complementary strengths and capacity as evidenced by joint annual planning and shared resources.
- We develop new partnerships focused on K-12 education, early learning programming, and youth development--including local communities of color and those with less outdoor education opportunities.
- We continue investment in conservation job-creation programs like Northwest Youth Corps and AmeriCorps.
- Local tribes view us as a trusted partner and collaborator in stewarding our region's natural resources, and engage with us in projects to cultivate the next generation of conservation leaders.

Strategy 3. Broaden community awareness of our work.

Local opportunities for outdoor activities are more important than ever. In the next five years, we will help our visitors, partners, and the community at large understand the value land conservation and the work of land trusts brings to the community. By broadening our community presence through increased storytelling, social media, events, and property tours, visitation to our preserves and understanding of CLT's work in the community will increase.

Desired Outcomes

- Community members feel a connection to our lands through the stories we tell through a variety of mediums, highlighting diverse voices from the conservation and environmental sectors. Interaction with our digital content and opportunities for collaboration with individuals and organizations all increase.
- We develop and implement a robust and focused communications strategy to support the goals of the strategic plan.
- Trail counters installed at our public-access preserves indicate increased visitation and preserve docents report a diversity of trail users, including a variety of organized groups.
- Support for our work strengthens as evidenced by increased membership and

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volunteer participation.

Strategy 4. Incorporate equity and social justice into our conservation mission.

Locally and nationally, there are deep systemic social and racial inequities that result in many people feeling unwelcome and unsafe in outdoor spaces. CLT recognizes that the well-being of nature and people cannot be separated, and that conservation is inextricably connected to racial equity and social justice. Therefore, CLT will consider equity when changing the policies, programs, and practices that could perpetuate inequities and when developing new policies and programs.

Desired Outcomes

- A permanent Equity Committee composed of staff, board, and community members provides organizational guidance and accountability.
- An organizational equity statement publicly communicates our commitment to this work, setting our long-term vision and actionable next steps to incorporate equity and social justice into our organizational decision making.
- Equity and social justice work are understood and valued within the organization as inherently valuable to our mission. We foster a culture among staff and board that encourages feedback, dialogue, humility, and pushes ourselves to question our assumptions and biases.
- CLT invests in training opportunities for staff and board members that focus on social justice and equity in the environmental and conservation sectors.
- Land acknowledgments referencing the indigenous peoples whose land we now occupy to conserve are a standard CLT practice in our communications.
- We further diversify our board and staff to ensure a variety of voices are heard from our community.

GOAL 3

Ensure long-term organizational and financial sustainability.

Community financial support for local conservation actions and organizations like CLT is an expression of priorities and of the legacy we seek to leave future generations. We deliver on the intentions of donors through tailored on-the-ground conservation results. As community engagement broadens and deepens, so will financial support for the organization, leading to greater long-term sustainability for our mission.

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The financial impact of the 2020 pandemic will change the mix of government grants, contributions from private foundations, businesses, and individuals we can hope to receive. Future financial sustainability will require that we adapt our traditional engagement strategies, such as the Summer Gala and the Conservation Breakfast, to reflect new opportunities and limitations.

Our aim is to secure stable funding to support our programs, to maintain a healthy operating reserve, and to grow our stewardship fund to match our needs and aspirations. We will strive to respond to time-sensitive critical conservation and education opportunities. Board members, staff, volunteers, organizational members, major donors, sponsors, and community partners can take on effective roles in securing financial sustainability by exercising skills matched to their interests. Strengthened organizational capacity for core conservation work and high-quality results will inspire increased community support from those who see conservation as integral to their quality of life.

Strategy 1. Strengthen and adapt fundraising efforts and sources to match the current environment and our mission.

Over its history, CLT has relied on federal, state, local, and tribal grants, member donations, sponsorships, and estate gifts to fund its conservation work. Although the mix of these funding sources may change depending on the long-term financial impact of the pandemic, these sources will continue to play a major role for land and conservation easement acquisition. Other opportunities exist to help support our work. Like CLT, many foundations and charitable institutions exist with a kindred purpose of conservation, education, and access to nature. These sources will further diversify support and may become more important, along with gifts from individuals, as state and federal budgets constrict.

Desired Outcomes

- A diverse suite of durable funding sources provides the necessary revenue to meet strategic plan goals.
- Annual commitments from individuals continue to sustain our vision and programs.
- Planned-giving pledges through our Legacy Member program increase, ensuring the permanence of our conservation efforts while honoring the memories of our most committed supporters.
- By practicing the ethical fundraising principles of honesty, respect, integrity, transparency, and responsibility, we build community enthusiasm, evidenced by a

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growing membership.

- Our development program adapts to unanticipated circumstances in order to maintain financial stability.

Strategy 2. Manage financial assets prudently according to their specific purposes.

The operating reserve, endowment and stewardship funds are important assets that respectively contribute to our operating fund and ensure stewardship of conserved lands. A strong financial position is necessary to fulfil our responsibility to steward lands in perpetuity, and will improve our capability to react nimbly to new conservation opportunities. Assets will be prudently managed following the recommendations outlined in the investment and fund policies, and will grow to meet our new goals for conservation.

Desired Outcomes

- The stewardship fund balance grows to a level that can support stewardship activities in perpetuity.
- With each new acquisition, funds are added to the stewardship fund at a level needed to cover anticipated stewardship costs.
- We maintain and manage a four-month operating reserve, which makes CLT more resilient in case of major unanticipated revenue shortfalls, costs, or losses.

Strategy 3. Ensure a high level of safety for staff, volunteers, and visitors in all CLT activities.

The safety of our employees, volunteers, and contractors is always a top priority in the field as well as in the office. And as more people visit CLT's conserved properties, we must pay careful attention to their safety as well.

Desired Outcomes

- Everyone involved with CLT understands that safety is a top organizational objective, because of regular discussions of safety and adherence to safety procedures.
- Public-access preserves are routinely monitored to identify and address potential or emerging safety risks.
- Staff and volunteers with responsibilities for leading groups on our properties have up-to-date first aid training.
- No major incidents occur involving serious injury or fatality.

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Strategy 4. Maintain a high-quality work environment for employees, and retain an excellent staff that is proficient in using modern conservation management tools to meet our organizational objectives.

Our updated strategic plan will require additional revenues, staff capacity, partnerships, cost-sharing measures, and a commitment to efficiency if we are to meet our expanded conservation and outreach goals. We also want to build on CLT's reputation as an excellent place to work.

Desired Outcomes

- Staff are trained in conservation leadership and technology to improve efficiency and productivity.
- An up-to-date training and succession plan is in place for all staff positions.
- Employment benefits for staff are maintained, or improved if needed, to be at a competitive level.
- Annual staff evaluations indicate high job satisfaction.
- Additional volunteers/hours are secured to increase capacity and help maintain low overhead for outreach, event planning, GIS analysis, stewardship, legal analysis, fundraising, etc.

Strategy 5. Ensure strong and functional leadership by the Board of Directors to meet our five-year strategic goals.

No organization succeeds without visionary and dedicated leadership. CLT's Board of Directors plays a key role in making sure that we carry out the vision of the organization, that we maintain and live by the values that have been the hallmark of the organization, and that the organization is on a sound, sustainable financial footing.

Desired Outcomes

- A plan for board member succession is in place and followed, such that a large pool of committed and qualified candidates has been recruited in advance and is available for board vacancies. This results in a board with a diversity of opinions, perspectives, and skills.
- New board member and officer candidates, who are or have the potential to be skilled and visionary leaders, are initially recruited six months in advance, and plans are in place for smooth leadership transitions.

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- Continue the Board Fellowship program to provide personal development opportunities for students and further diversify the board.
- Board members receive timely and relevant orientation and training in conservation trends and tools, nonprofit fiscal management, and fundraising.
- Board members have a deep knowledge of our conservation work, and create a welcoming atmosphere for members, partners, each other, and staff.
- The board ensures that the integrity of the organization is never compromised and that the organization is on a sound financial footing.

Strategy 6. Maintain accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission

Desired Outcomes

- Re-accreditation in 2024 is achieved on schedule, demonstrating that CLT meets the highest standards of sound finance, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship.
- Internal operations are reviewed on a continual basis by the Executive Director and Executive Committee and reported regularly to the board.