



Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028

Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust Strategic Plan 2023-2028

I. Introduction

The Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan sets a direction for the years ahead. It articulates a mission statement that reflects the full breadth of our work, a vision for conservation and preservation, and three key objectives outlining how we will both continue and enhance our efforts.

The Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust (CPNHT) has preserved forest, wetlands and fields to create an extensive natural area in Southern Calvert County. Currently these properties are only accessed by guided tours and structured events such as camping. Over the next five years, CPNHT will build hiking trails as well as two visitor centers with parking, meeting and restroom facilities, opening natural areas to the public including the Hemlock Nature Preserve. Researchers utilize the Hemlock Preserve and other Trust properties to address the health of hemlock stand, analyze water quality, conduct blue bird and horseshoe crab population studies, as well as multiple other efforts. We anticipate that over the term of this plan, the CPNHT preservation properties will continue to grow in size. Recent acquisitions in 2022 added additional protected property, increasing the amount of land managed by the trust. This plan also calls for expansion of the trust's outreach programs to engage and educate members of the community including: 1) continue to support the network of conservation-oriented organizations working together towards a sustainable future for Calvert County; 2) continue to staff information tables at various local events as well as school outreach programs; 3) develop a volunteer program to increase the number of people supporting CPNHT mission and vision; 4) Establish a Friends of Hellen Creek organization; 5) continue to provide grants to research programs that support our mission; 6) continue to provide scholarships to students who exhibit qualities and skill that support CPNHT vision and mission; and 7) continue to manage our current properties as well as acquiring additional properties that further our conservation and preservation efforts.

It is anticipated that CPNHT will need to grow its human resource and financial capacity in order to accomplish these land management and outreach goals. CPNHT currently relies almost entirely on funding from the Cove Point LNG plant. Over the course of the next five years, CPNHT will undergo an analysis of its current funding and staffing, its plans to expand in the future, and the human resources and funding required to achieve CPNHT's mission.

The Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust (CPNHT) strives to shape positive change in Southern Calvert County and pursue a sustainable and resilient future. We monitor trends in policy, economics, and social change, while working with the local community.

Now and moving forward, Southern Calvert County faces a set of challenges and opportunities. State and federal funding for farmland protection, clean water and land preservation, provide opportunities to accelerate land conservation and restoration efforts.

To address these challenges and act on new opportunities, our Board of Trustees and staff developed this 2023-2028 Strategic Plan to guide our course.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael E. Gardner", is written over a horizontal line.

Michael Gardner, President

II. Strategic Intent

Vision

We utilize our land preservation and management expertise to build a preservation ethic in the community and with other conservation organizations. We are attentive stewards for the watersheds, striving to encourage land preservation throughout Southern Calvert County by means of alliances and partnerships with other nonprofit organizations, governmental entities, businesses, and a broad segment of the Calvert County community.

Mission

The Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust is organized and shall be operated exclusively for educational and scientific purposes. We promote land conservation throughout Southern Calvert County, Maryland. We provide environmentally sustainable public access to preserved properties for educational, scientific, recreational and cultural purposes. We conduct various activities for the purpose of preserving and protecting the Chesapeake Bay, its shoreline, wetlands, and other ecologically sensitive areas, with special focus on Southern Calvert County including buffer zones, in the vicinity of Cove Point and the Hellen Creek Watersheds for the benefit of this and future generations.

Goals

Our goal is for Southern Calvert County to be a model for environmental stewardship balanced with a healthy economy. We will work to ensure that our landscape will be characterized by forests, fields and farms and well-planned and diverse communities, surrounded by a healthy Patuxent River and a healthy Chesapeake Bay. Additionally, we envision a future where citizens are educated and active stewards of the land and their daily living is enhanced by the abundance of natural area.

Core Values

- **Calvert County is our home.** We value this region's people and lands, its history and culture, its beauty and its future. Work we do beyond our county and at the state and federal levels is guided by our broad perspective on land uses, watersheds and ecosystems that ultimately affect this region.
- **We value collaboration and partnership.** Our success depends on long-term trust, mutual respect and strong relationships with others at the local, regional, state and national level. We are proud to lead when appropriate

and take a supportive role when others are better suited to the issue at hand.

- **We value public access to nature.** Fresh air, clean water, and outdoor recreation are critical to the health and well-being of individuals and communities. Access to nature also fosters a deeper appreciation for the earth and its systems, and is critical to achieving a widespread conservation ethic.
- **We value a strong rural economy.** Agriculture, fisheries, forestry and tourism are paramount for a resilient, healthy Southern Calvert County.
- **We value smart growth that respects natural and cultural resources.** Well-planned towns, cities and villages are characterized by diverse housing options, nature-filled outdoor spaces, and walkable and bike-friendly connections to services, recreation and work. We believe that decisions about housing, water, waste treatment, energy, transportation and economic development must be made with an eye toward sustainability as well as addressing concerns regarding climate change.

III. Objectives

Objectives

Our objectives derive from our mission, vision and core values setting forth specific interim or ultimate time-based action items needed to achieve the objective. We strive to make our objectives quantifiable, consistent, realistic, and achievable.

We also define action items or specific tasks (tactical in nature) used to achieve the objectives. Each objective includes performance metrics to identify measurable outcomes and sourcing decisions to identify the sourcing options that provide the participants with the foundation for accomplishing the goals.

Objectives

Objective 1: Conserving and restoring Southern Calvert Counties lands and waters

Calvert County natural lands strengthen our quality of life and sense of place, contributing immeasurably to overall human health and well-being. Full of trees and vegetation, wetlands, streams, the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay, the region's natural lands filter pollution from the air we breathe and the water we drink. They absorb carbon from the atmosphere, produce oxygen, and provide natural protections against flooding and storm events. They are also the foundation for functioning ecosystems and a refuge for biodiversity. Southern Calvert County farmland promotes local food security, and the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay sustain the fisheries on which commercial and recreational fishing industries depend.

Tactical Actions:

- **Accelerating Land Conservation**
 - Purchase Additional Land
- **Ensuring Clean Water**
 - Establish Monitoring Stations on Hellen Creek and other CPNHT properties
 - Establish a Friends of Hellen Creek Organization
- **Enhancing Wildlife Habitat**
 - Control Invasive Species
 - Reduce Deer Population

Objective 2: Expand Public Access, Education Events and Scientific Programs

We prioritize protection or enhancement of the properties' natural, cultural or historic value. As a landowner, we use our properties as a showcase for sustainable land management practices, such as native habitat restoration, soil health improvement, buffer zones between agriculture and waterways for water quality improvements, and enhancing wildlife corridors. Whenever feasible, we facilitate or provide public access, inspiring a greater conservation ethic in our region and fostering an appreciation of nature and all of its virtues. We want our properties to have significant visitation and provide platforms for our work, demonstrating our vision, values and practices.

Tactical Actions:

- Provide state of the art visitor centers that highlight the mission of CPNHT including the specific actions being taken to promote land conservation throughout Calvert County. Optimize our facilities to support our land management and outreach activities.
 - Turner Road Barn - Renovate the existing CPNHT barn on Turner Road to create a visitor center with restroom facilities, meeting space, kitchenette, educational display area, office, and storage space.
 - Clifton Road Visitor Center - Demolish and Replace exiting visitor center on Clifton Road to create a new visitor center with restroom facilities, meeting space, kitchenette, education display areas, office, and storage space.
 - Build new and expand current trails providing public access to the Hemlock Preserve and Hellen Creek Watershed.
 - Build new and expand current kayak and canoe access points to Hellen Creek.
- Review the current Education Outreach, Scholarships as well as scientific research programs to determine if we should stop, continue or expand each of these efforts.

Objective 3. Become a model conservation organization.

Maintain and enhance good governance practices to become a model for environmental stewardship inspiring citizens to become educated and active stewards of the land enhancing their daily lives by the abundance of natural area.

Tactical Actions:

- **Issue the first CPNHT Strategic Plan and annually review it and CPNHT policies and make adjustments, as necessary**
- **Operate the CPNHT in accordance with Land Trust Alliance Standards & Practices with a goal to obtain national accreditation**
- **Review the By-Laws and make any necessary changes.**
- **Review current financial investment strategy and determine if changes would be beneficial.**
- **Create a volunteer program to obtain expertise and workforce to accomplish CPNHT objectives.**

IV. Traceability Matrix

A Traceability Matrix helps stakeholders associate each tactical item with related objective, action items, and status. The traceability matrix provides a tool to allow stakeholders to track progress and determine where to focus resources to meet the CPNHT objectives.

Lead	Objective	Action Items	Status with Dates
Mike Gardner	2	Turner Road Barn Renovated	Awaiting Permits
Mike Gardner	2	New Clifton Road Visitor Center Completed	Awaiting Permits
Mike Gardner	2	Hire Assistant Business Manager	Advertise / Recruit at local colleges and other
Bob Boxwell	3	Create Business Manager Transition Plan	Contacting Potential Candidates
Ralph Eshelman	1	Establish Friends of Hellen Creek Group	Coordinating with ACLT
Gary Rassing	2	Design and Build Trail System on Turner Rd	Coordinating with ACLT experts
Gary Rassing	2	Design and Build Kayak and Canoe access points on Hellen Creek	Examining Potential sites
Ralph Eshelman	2	Review current trail system at Clifton Road with goal of expansion	Coordinating with hunters to upgrade current trail system

Ron Klauda	1	Establish Water Monitoring program for Hellen Creek Watershed	Purchase of equipment and coordination with Chesapeake Biological Lab and ACLT
Ralph Eshelman	2	Create and deploy signage for CPNHT properties	Signs purchased
Gary Rensing	3	Implement LTA standards and practices	Reviewing LTA process
Bob Boxwell	2	Review the current grant program and create a Grant Matrix listing all current grants	Creating Matrix
Bob Boxwell	2	Review the current scholarship program and create a Scholarship Matrix listing all current and past recipients	Creating Matrix
Bob Boxwell	2	Review the current outreach program and create an Outreach Matrix listing all current and past outreach efforts	Creating Matrix
Bob Boxwell	2	Review the current invasive species program and create an Invasive Species Matrix listing all current and past efforts	Creating Matrix
Gary Rensing	3	Review By-Laws and make any necessary changes	By-Laws revised and signed 15 OCT 2023

Gary Ressing	3	Review current financial investment strategy and determine if changes would be beneficial	Setting up meeting with investment firm
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V. Conclusion

We understand that this is an ambitious strategic plan. The objectives that the Board of Trustees established are directly focused on supporting our vision, mission, and core values. Specific interim or ultimate time-based action items needed to achieve the objective are set forth in the traceability matrix to ensure we make progress on each objective. While ambitious, we crafted our objectives to be quantifiable, consistent, realistic, and achievable. We believe that these actions will conserve and restore Southern Calvert Counties lands and waters, expand our public access, education events and scientific programs, and make CPNHT at model conservation organization. As detailed in this plan, over the next five years, we will continue to build a preservation ethic in the community, act as stewards for the watersheds, and serve as a catalyst for effective land preservation throughout Southern Calvert County.