

GEORGES RIVER LAND TRUST  
Strategic Plan

MISSION

Adopted by Board 7/26/11

The Georges River Land Trust's mission is to conserve the ecosystems and traditional heritage of the Georges River watershed region through permanent land protection, stewardship, education, and outdoor experiences.

VALUES

Adopted by Board 9/27/07

***WE value the diverse and vital connections among land, water and people in the Georges River watershed from Montville and Liberty to Port Clyde and Cushing***, and we strive to maintain a strategic balance between natural lands and waterways, working landscapes and human communities.

***WE respect local conservation priorities***, and we are dedicated to working in partnership with communities to achieve lasting conservation and stewardship results in the watershed.

***WE recognize the high concentration of exemplary plant and animal communities, as well as the occurrence of rare and endangered species, large habitat blocks and significant wetlands*** and we prioritize their conservation.

***WE recognize that natural resource-based economies such as farming, forestry and fishing are essential to the traditional character and economic vitality of the region***, and we prioritize conservation action that helps ensure their sustainability.

***WE are committed to voluntary land conservation with willing landowners***, using donations of conservation easements as our preferred tool and responding to increasing development threats using purchase of fee title or easements with willing landowners.

***WE are dedicated to responsible stewardship of conserved lands*** as a primary obligation both now and in the future. We monitor and defend properties, as well as develop lasting relationships with easement property owners, to ensure adherence to the protected values.

***WE seek to engage with communities to nurture a conservation ethic by connecting people with the natural world***, and we provide experiential and educational opportunities to inspire volunteer land protection and long-term stewardship.

***WE believe in working collaboratively*** with board, staff, donors and landowners to achieve conservation goals and we partner with other local, regional, state and national organizations to define shared conservation objectives and leverage results.

***WE are dedicated to high ethical and professional standards*** that earn us respect and trust among all our constituents, including donors, landowners, communities and partners throughout the watershed.

***WE celebrate the support we receive from individuals, foundations and corporations*** and fully embrace standard fundraising ethics including confidentiality, acknowledgment and proper use of restricted gifts.

## VISION 2014

Adopted by Board 12/16/08

It is the year 2014. The Georges River watershed is recognized statewide, regionally and at the local level as one of the most effectively conserved ecosystems in the state of Maine. The watershed is thriving with healthy water resources, a diversity of high quality natural habitats, traditional land uses and a broad appreciation for conservation among the public. Local communities, citizens and conservation groups are working together to achieve land conservation and build a lasting stewardship ethic in the region. For its leadership role in effective community-based conservation, and for its emphasis on the dynamic connection between land, water and people, the Georges River Land Trust is widely celebrated as a prominent, well-respected partner throughout the watershed. This past year, the Land Trust won the Land Heritage Award at the Maine Land Conservation Conference.

Between 2008 and 2014, in response to increasing threats to the ecological integrity of the region, the Land Trust rallied a groundswell of support for strategic conservation results. With backing from its partners, GRLT protected an additional 1,500 acres of the most important and at-risk landscapes in priority conservation focus areas along the St. George River corridor and in the Weskeag Marsh, bringing the total acreage protected to 3,500 acres. The newly conserved properties represent a mix of fee-owned lands and easements. Donated easements remain GRLT's preferred conservation tool although development pressures are such that purchase of easements and fee-owned land is increasingly necessary to preserve high priority lands. The Land Trust has been successful in securing funds for this purpose when required. While development pressures continue to impact the region - the six coastal towns in the watershed are now classified as urban-suburban by the Maine State Planning Office - GRLT is recognized for successfully leading the effort to protect the most threatened conservation values, including water quality, habitat diversity and the traditional use of natural resources.

GRLT's participatory, community-based approach to strategic land conservation is based on two important assumptions: that we must be proactive if we are to conserve the most significant landscapes before it is too late; and, that the future of the watershed lies in the hands of local citizens. The Land Trust works with all 14 watershed towns to support conservation efforts. Specifically, GRLT works with town leaders in the Land Trust's focus areas to define land conservation objectives, strengthen comprehensive plans and ordinances, and support proactive initiatives. In the last five years, the Land Trust has reached out to more than 100 landowners with important holdings in GRLT priority areas to discuss land conservation options, with a focus on outreach to farmers, foresters and fishermen, to increase the rate at which resource-based lands are conserved through easements and to increase involvement by these

constituencies. The Land Trust is well respected for involving diverse partners in its efforts and is viewed as an effective conservation leader in the watershed.

Complementing its local approach, GRLT is recognized as a regional presence, taking the lead to coordinate with other conservation organizations that also have a stake in the future of the watershed, such as U.S. Fish & Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Trout Unlimited. Cooperative efforts have helped leverage land conservation results, with a federally funded project success in the Weskeag Marsh. In addition, the Land Trust is a member of a steering committee to explore the pros and cons of regional consolidation with neighboring conservation organizations, including Medomak Valley Land Trust, Oyster River Bog Association, Sheepscot Wellspring Land Alliance and Coastal Mountains Land Trust. In partnership with other organizations, GRLT has advocated for local and statewide land conservation measures, such as the Land for Maine's Future program, and has participated in regional planning efforts.

With the increase in lands conserved more than doubling in the last five years, the Land Trust has responded by setting up a professional and robust stewardship program. GRLT's approach is based on a belief that local community involvement and individual commitment to caring for the land and water are essential to the long-term sustainability of the region. The Land Trust acts as catalyst for community-based stewardship, with local landowners, towns and citizens actively carrying out the on-going monitoring and management of GRLT's conservation areas. Furthermore, the Land Trust continues to work through the Georges River Coalition with partners such as Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited and Georges River Tidewater Association, to identify priority stewardship initiatives and engage local community members in hands-on projects related to water quality and terrestrial and aquatic habitat protection. Through these collective efforts, GRLT tracking has shown a 50 percent increase of volunteer participation in watershed stewardship activities.

Building an enduring stewardship ethic at the community level has also been achieved through the expansion of the conservation trails program. The GRLT values of voluntary participation, exemplified both by landowner willingness to provide voluntary access to the trail and by voluntary stewardship by users on the Georges Highland Path, are reflected in the 55 miles of hiking trails in the Georges Highland Path system, with increased participation by landowners and trail adopters. The Path now extends throughout the watershed, providing low-impact access for the community throughout the region. Education programs have been expanded on the trails with interpretive stops and expert-led learning events. User surveys at trailheads have documented an increased appreciation of the vibrant and healthy watershed and an increased commitment to taking action to ensure a balanced future. GRLT's conservation trails program now includes the St. George River Water Trail, with towns and citizens taking the lead role in its creation.

In 2014, GRLT's educational efforts reflect the value of providing opportunities for people to get out on the land and the water, to directly experience the watershed, as a means of increasing awareness and appreciation of the diversity and connectedness of the watershed, in all its parts, from Cushing to Owl's Head, from Montville to Port Clyde. GRLT is viewed and utilized as an educational resource by a diverse range of constituents, including town leaders,

landowners, educators, user groups and citizens. The Land Trust hosts focus groups, neighborhood gatherings and other outreach meetings to raise public awareness regarding land conservation issues. In addition, the Land Trust has utilized its easements and preserves as ideal interpretive learning sites for visitors of all ages. Through its intensified outreach efforts, GRLT has succeeded in expanding constituencies, including engaging the region's youth in stewardship, and attracting new members to the Land Trust.

The success of GRLT in 2014 is due to skilled leadership at the board level, a professional staff, effective employment of contract professionals, a new intern program and an extensive network of volunteers. Staff expansion has been driven by the need to fulfill the organization's strategic objectives and an incremental growth model has resulted in moving key staff positions to full-time and expanding capacity in land conservation and outreach efforts. All staff are treated as professionals, responsible for implementing effective programs, with opportunities for professional development, and compensated in line with industry standards. With increased board and staff capacity, GRLT has increased the participation of volunteers by 50 percent, with active involvement in board committees, field work and office support.

The Land Trust's growth in human resources is made possible by substantial growth in financial resources. In 2014, GRLT is financially stable and fiscally sound as a result of a strong major donor program, a newly established endowment, effective and conservative financial practices, increased membership and an increasingly diverse revenue base. The Board serves as a model of giving leadership in the community, and through its committed efforts, the Land Trust has successfully raised \$4 million over the last five years. GRLT's donor base has increased by 50 percent and represents demographic, geographic and economic diversity. The Land Trust's supporters are engaged as partners, and the board and staff have a personal relationship with all major donors. While grants have been de-emphasized for program operations, they remain a primary strategy for land acquisition and GRLT has been successful in securing a major federal grant for the protection of the Weskeag Marsh.

Over the last five years, the Land Trust has made governance a top priority to ensure that its ambitious and visionary goals are backed by sound policy and effective leadership. The board of directors now consists of 15 members, representing diversity in expertise, geography, demographics and philanthropic capacity. All board members receive effective orientation and training and have a clear understanding of their governance, fiduciary, planning and policy-making responsibilities and roles as GRLT ambassadors. The full board embraces its fundraising responsibility and works with staff to reach GRLT financial goals. A succession plan ensures that the organization is guided by skilled volunteer leadership in 2015 and beyond. The board and staff have dedicated substantial time and energy to complying with the national Land Trust Alliance's Standards and Practices, and GRLT has celebrated accreditation.