



Strategic Plan

Approved by the Board on 11/15/2022

I. Introduction

In December of 2021, Lula Lake Land Trust embarked on a full-scale strategic planning process, contracting the professional services of the Conservation Consulting Group (CCG) to facilitate the work.

Over a ten-month period, the process to create the plan included:

- A review of current operations;
- An online self-assessment completed by staff and Board members (17 respondents);
- An online survey for members, donors, landowners, and conservation partners (81 respondents);
- Interviews with key stakeholders (18 internal & 17 external);
- Development of a Findings Report including an analysis of the organization's Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) based on all of the qualitative and quantitative data generated;
- A retreat of the full Board and staff to build consensus around a set of goals and strategies for achieving them; and
- The creation of this Strategic Plan, reflective of the consensus decisions made in retreat.

With this Plan, we are committed to being scientific and strategic in the pursuit and protection of new property, more effective in stewarding the land and easements we currently hold, and more deliberate in creating the organizational branding and infrastructure needed to professionally manage the property's educational and recreational use.

The Strategic Plan defines a renewed commitment to engaging local citizens as volunteers, ambassadors, advocates, members, and donors. Lula Lake Land Trust will increase investments

to engage and inspire the communities it serves and lead conservation efforts in collaboration with local cities and towns, other organizations, and landowners.

We are grateful for the time and energy everyone devoted to the planning process. We are especially grateful for the guidance and wisdom of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee:

Michael Love	Matt McLelland
Adelaide Naumann	Cody Roney

and for the work of the Goal Champions:

Brad Cobb	Patrick Kelly
Michael Love	Matt McLelland
Mike Pollock	

II. History

Lula Lake Land Trust (LLLT), established by the will of Robert M. Davenport, Sr. in January of 1994, seeks to protect and preserve the natural beauty and abundant resources within the Rock Creek watershed for the benefit of present and future generations by fostering education, research and conservation stewardship of the land.

As early as 1958, Mr. Davenport began to acquire pieces of property that would later form the core of the land trust project. These original acquisitions included two exquisite natural features, Lula Lake and Lula Falls. Mining, clear-cut timber harvests, garbage dumping and unrestricted public access had left much of the surrounding land denuded of its beauty and apparent value. Once closed to public access in the early 1980's, Mr. Davenport began rejuvenating the land by cleaning up the dump sites and replanting timbered areas. The conservation of the core property, and the opening of public access to Lookout Mountain's natural resources, are a tribute to his hard work.

From this solid foundation, LLLT began working to protect the properties now known as The Cloudland Connector, Five Points, and Moonshine Trail systems. These acquisitions, and others, have increased LLLT's land holdings from the original 750-acre Core Preserve to over 4,000 acres, adding 3,000 acres to Cloudland Canyon State Park and 2,000 acres in Johnson's Crook on Lookout Mountain.

III. Mission

Lula Lake Land Trust preserves the natural and historic landscapes surrounding Rock Creek and its tributaries through conservation, education, and low-impact recreation.

IV. Vision

The dedicated efforts of Lula Lake Land Trust (LLLT) in protecting the natural resources of its Core Preserve will inspire further land protection in the Rock Creek and Bear Creek watersheds as well as surrounding areas. What originated with the founding family's commitment to conserve Lula Lake and Lula Falls is now a protected land legacy which allows future generations to enjoy forever. We envision a future when both watersheds are fully protected and enjoyed by the greater Lookout Mountain and surrounding communities. LLLT will be at the center of this vision for land preservation, conscientious use, and conservation education. The organization is committed to establishing and maintaining a trail system not only connecting protected lands along Lookout Mountain but local communities as well. The land is also utilized for environmental education and scientific research with students and organizations visiting yearly, and universities assisting with Hemlock and Chestnut tree protection. Lula Lake Land Trust is an outdoor space for nature and for people – to recreate, learn, connect with one another, and leave feeling inspired.

V. Guiding Principles

A Legacy of Conservation

The conservation, preservation, and restoration at Lula Lake is a model for what may be possible elsewhere in the region and in the country. We strategically invest in conservation, with priorities based on current science and community needs including low-impact recreation, response to clear environmental threats, and the protection of adjoining properties, wildlife habitat and corridors, and riparian zones.

Nature Nurtures

We believe we are better people, better families, and better communities when we have access to natural spaces in which retreat and recreate. Our individual physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being is dependent upon access to and experiences in serene, natural spaces. Lula Lake Land Trust properties provide all people access to Nature and natural spaces for their physical and mental health.

Intrinsic Value

There is an intrinsic value in conserving habitat for plants and animals in addition to protecting land for people. The conservation and stewardship of natural spaces and watersheds is critical for wildlife habitats, clean water, fresh air, and the quality of life for the communities around Lookout Mountain and the Georgia and Tennessee valleys below. Land conservation also helps natural areas and communities adapt to climate change.

Commitment to Future Generations

Lula Lake Land Trust's founding family created a legacy of protecting land now from over-development and for the benefit of generations to come. This legacy includes using the land for outdoor and environmental education – to educate and nurture the next generation of land conservationists.

VI. Goals & Strategies

This Plan reflects a step up in our leadership of conservation in north Georgia. We intend to be present, relevant, and effective on this part of Lookout Mountain, with a professional staff, a strong Board of Directors, and dozens of trained volunteers. We will continue to protect land of the highest priority, forge strong new partnerships, support and leverage the work of other groups, and consistently bring a larger conservation vision to each task.

1. The land, water, and rural character around Lula Lake support clean water, healthy habitat, and quality natural experiences for people.

Five Year Outcomes:

- LLLT has a Strategic Conservation Plan in place that clearly identifies the selection criteria used to approve potential projects.
- LLLT has protected (fee and easement) at least 2,500 additional acres in the Bear and Rock Creek watersheds and/or properties with high conservation value and close proximity to other protected areas.

[Note that whereas LLLT will protect land using conservation easements as a tool, the land trust does not wish to retain ownership of conservation easements. Protected easements will be transferred to other responsible organizations for monitoring.]

- The water quality LLLT is testing downstream from the Core Preserve is at least as high as it has been, and preferably has improved.
- LLLT does not hold any conservation easements.

Strategies:

- Develop a Strategic Conservation Plan to better determine important areas for acquisition/preservation.
- Proactively engage with LLLT neighbors to build positive relationships and foster collaborative stewardship.

- Market and conduct landowner seminars to demystify the land protection process and create a pipeline for potential acquisition deals.
- Move all current LLLT easements to other conservation organizations.

2. LLLT properties provide natural, historic, and cultural education program opportunities for Lookout Mountain and surrounding communities.

Five Year Outcomes:

- The Master Plan has been updated and is guiding current work.
- Interpretive signage is updated and installed.

Strategies:

- Update the Master Plan to identify appropriate areas for interpretation.
- Evaluate need for a pavilion or similar structure to be used by groups visiting for education and recreation.
- Create (limited) interpretive signage around key features with QR code access to more information; potentially incorporate video and/or discovery stations.
- Develop strong partnerships with other non-profit organizations and schools to allow access and encourage use.
 - Invest in bi-lingual information where appropriate (e.g. website, signage, printed information).
 - Develop (contract for) curricula for teachers.
 - Proactively reach out to schools and teachers in Walker, Dade, Hamilton Counties and beyond to represent a broader geography than just Chattanooga.
- ❖ The development of a formal program for stewardship volunteers and property/trail docents (described in Goal 4) will also be a valuable strategy for this goal.

3. The natural assets, natural history, and visitor experiences on all LLLT properties are high quality, well-managed, and well-maintained.

Five Year Outcomes:

- Each property has a management, maintenance, and visitor engagement plan.
- Volunteers serve as ongoing caretakers & docents on all LLLT properties.
(See Goal 4)
- Assistant Land Manager hired.

Strategies:

- Create a management, maintenance, and visitor engagement plan template and apply it to each property or set of properties.

- ❖ The development of a formal program for stewardship volunteers and property/trail docents (described in Goal 4) will also be a valuable strategy for this goal.
- ❖ The redesign of the Key Steward Program (described in Goal 5) will also be a valuable strategy for this goal.

4. Lula Lake Land Trust is a strong, forward-thinking, and resilient organization.

Five Year Outcomes:

- Succession plans in place for staff and board.
- SOP's created for each position.
- Staff increased by at least one (e.g. Assistant Land Manager, Education, etc.).
- Structured volunteer/docent program in place.

Strategies:

- ❖ Develop a formal recruitment, training, deployment, and recognition program for stewardship volunteers and property/trail docents. Enhance the docent program for Open Gate Days and days when the preserve is being used by other groups.
- Develop and annually review a structured succession plan for staff and Board leadership.
- Develop an attribute matrix for Board recruiting.
- Annually budget for professional development/training for staff and board.

5. LLLT utilizes a broad range of partnerships within the region's emergent outdoor scene to offer supporters and like-minded businesses ways to engage, protect, enjoy, financially support (invest), and foster our long-term mission.

Five-Year Outcomes:

- The Key Steward Program is redesigned and gaining momentum as a fundraising program and a volunteer and docent recruitment program.
- LLLT's Planned Giving program is established and 20 individuals have informed staff that LLLT has been included in their estate plans.
- LLLT's ESG Corporate program is established and five businesses have signed formal agreements to participate.

Strategies:

- ❖ Reimagine the Key Steward Program and other volunteer education programs to increase the number of people knowledgeable about and engaged in LLLT property management priorities (environmental and human).
- Evaluate opportunities to expand internal and external recreational programming, new educational programming, and special events using LLLT properties to maximize return and minimize staff involvement and land disturbance.

- Design and implement a planned giving program.
- Grow LLLT’s ESG Corporate programs (carbon sequestration/ecosystem services/etc.).
- Create a robust low-key signage/marketing program to help grow our database.

6. LLLT has a strong brand identity and clear communication strategy.

Five-Year Outcomes:

- Number of new LLLT donors has increased by 10% each year (overall growth by 60% over the five years).
- Documented use of the Core Preserve remains steady while use of other protected properties increases.

Strategies

- Bring all publications, web materials, social media, and signage into compliance with an updated Visual Identity Guide.
- Review and update all communications materials as needed (i.e. website, social media, trail signage, and so on) through the lens of LLLT’s core marketing messages of “protect and enjoy” and ease of use.
- Explore and test other types of electronic communication (i.e. text-based communication for open gate reminders, race reminders, and event reminders).
- Evaluate platforms containing LLLT trail information (Strava, Alltrails, Trailforks, etc.) to address issues of inaccuracy, branding consistency, and use of other protected properties.

VII. Consolidated Strategies

Additional Planning Work

- Develop a Strategic Conservation Plan to better determine important areas for acquisition/preservation.
- Update the Master Plan to identify appropriate areas for interpretation.
- Using guidance from the Master Plan, evaluate the need for a pavilion or similar structure to be used by groups visiting for education and recreation.
- Create a management, maintenance, and visitor engagement template and apply it to each property or set of properties.

Program Development

- Develop strong partnerships with other non-profit organizations and schools to allow access and encourage use.
 - Invest in bi-lingual information (website, signage, printed information).
 - Develop (contract for) curricula for teachers.
 - Proactively reach out to schools and teachers in Walker, Dade, Hamilton Counties and beyond to represent a broader geography than just Chattanooga.
- Move all current LLLT easements to other conservation organizations.
- Develop a formal recruitment, training, deployment, and recognition program for stewardship volunteers and property/trail docents. Enhance the docent program for Open Gate Days and days when the preserve is being used by other groups.
- Reimagine the Key Steward Program and other volunteer education programs to increase the number of people knowledgeable about and engaged in LLLT property management priorities (environmental and human).
- Design and implement a planned giving program.
- Evaluate opportunities to expand internal and external recreational programming, new educational programming, and special events using LLLT properties to maximize return and minimize staff involvement and land disturbance.
- Grow LLLT's ESG Corporate programs (carbon sequestration/ecosystem services/etc.).

Proactive Outreach

- Proactively engage with LLLT neighbors to build positive relationships and foster collaborative stewardship.
- Market and conduct landowner seminars to demystify the land protection process and create a pipeline for potential acquisition deals.
- Create (limited) interpretive signage around key features with QR code access to more information; potentially incorporate video and/or discovery stations.
- Invest in bi-lingual information where applicable (website, signage, printed information).
- Develop (contract for) curricula for teachers.
- Proactively reach out to underserved populations, including those in Chattanooga and those in rural north Georgia.

Internal

- Develop and annually review a structured succession plan for staff and Board leadership.
- Develop an attribute matrix for Board recruiting.
- Annually budget for professional development/training for staff and board.

Communications

- Create a robust low-key signage/marketing program to help grow our database.
- Bring all publications, web materials, social media, and signage into compliance with an updated Visual Identity Guide.
- Review and update all communications materials as needed (i.e. website, social media, trail signage, and so on) through the lens of LLLT's core marketing messages of "protect and enjoy" and ease of use.
- Explore and test other types of electronic communication (i.e. text-based communication for open gate reminders, race reminders, and event reminders).
- Evaluate platforms containing LLLT trail information (Strava, Alltrails, Trailforks, etc.) to address issues of inaccuracy, branding consistency, and use of protected properties.