



2017-2021 STRATEGIC PLAN

ACTION + NETWORKS + ORGANIZATION = IMPACT

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**Finding beauty in a broken world is creating
beauty in the world we find.**

-Terry Tempest Williams

A TIME OF CHALLENGE

For nearly a quarter century, the Western Environmental Law Center has proven itself one of our country's strongest public interest environmental law firms. Shaped by the rugged American West that is our home, we have used the power of the law to build a strong legacy championing public lands, defending wildlife, challenging fossil fuel projects, and working collaboratively with communities.

Today, our mission is more important than ever. We find ourselves in a time of dynamic and unprecedented challenges, with climate change looming as an existential threat to the West and indeed the world. This reality compels steady, strategic, and bold legal advocacy to turn the wheels of power at all levels of government in service of a thriving, resilient American West.

In the coming years, we will achieve this aim consistent with the following elements that are central to the logic and implementation of our strategic plan:

Action: We will uphold the rule of law with a commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice. We will defend public access to the courts and safeguard our shared climate and the West's public lands, wildlife, and communities through place-based advocacy. We will take creative offensive and necessary defensive action, including at the state and local level, to build precedent and power for change. Our advocacy will seek to achieve proactive, long-term, and grassroots-driven solutions and a durable legal framework to achieve our mission that achieves our mission in a time of uncertainty, change, and political shifts.

Networks: We will reinforce and build networks essential to achieve long-term change. We will exercise leadership to advance strategies aligned with the vision and goals of our partners and allies, and to build campaigns that integrate law, policy, and legal advocacy with communications, outreach, and organizing action. We will seek new partners and allies that amplify our impact and, with our full network, we will assert ourselves as thought leaders shaping the future of the West.

Organization: We will fortify our organizational resilience. Success is only possible if we have the internal resources, systems, and capacity to effect positive change. We will therefore expand, support, and empower staff, strengthen our board, and improve the efficacy of the internal team-based structures and systems.

By combining these elements—steady, strategic, and bold action; strong networks working together for change; and fortified organizational resilience—we will magnify our impact and strengthen our capacity to achieve our vision of a thriving, resilient American West.

ONE CANNOT BE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE WEST. THIS IS THE NATIVE HOME OF HOPE. WHEN IT FULLY LEARNS THAT COOPERATION, NOT RUGGED INDIVIDUALISM, IS THE QUALITY THAT MOST CHARACTERIZES AND PRESERVES IT, THEN IT WILL HAVE ACHIEVED ITSELF AND OUTLIVED ITS ORIGINS. THEN IT HAS A CHANCE TO CREATE A SOCIETY TO MATCH ITS SCENERY.

-Wallace Stegner

VISION, MISSION, AND PRINCIPLES

I. VISION

We envision a thriving, resilient American West, abundant with protected public lands and wildlife, powered by clean energy, and defended by communities rooted in an ethic of conservation.

II. MISSION

We use the power of the law to safeguard the public lands, wildlife, and communities of the American West in the face of a changing climate.

III. CORE PRINCIPLES

To achieve our vision, advance our mission, and to inform our goals and strategies, we will be guided by the following principles:

Principle 1: Safeguard Democracy and the Rule of Law. We foster healthy civic and democratic institutions by defending and building a legal framework to safeguard public lands, wildlife, and communities, to defend public access to public resources and the courts, and to enforce transparent and accountable government decision-making.

Principle 2: Use A Complete Set of Tools in the Right Place, at the Right Time. We use a complete set of legal advocacy tools—including legislative and administrative engagement, litigation, and collaboration—in the right place and at the right time to achieve our vision and mission. We support these tools through powerful communications that speak truth to power.

Principle 3: Provide Visionary, Solutions-Oriented, and Adaptive Leadership. We provide visionary leadership and advance solution-oriented campaigns to catalyze national, regional, state, and local action that protects the public lands, wildlife, and communities of the West. These campaigns creatively and deftly adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities and emphasize the essential role of grassroots, place-based organizations and communities as a complement and driver of broad-scale advocacy objectives and strategies.

Principle 4: Promote Science-Based Solutions. Our actions are informed by science and the critical need to leverage science as a driver of effective government decision-making in the public interest.

Principle 5: Respect Communities and Ensure Equity, Inclusion, and Justice. We acknowledge and adhere to our moral and ethical imperative to respect and consider the communities we serve or impact with our advocacy, and we commit ourselves to ensuring equity, inclusion, and justice for all members of those communities.

Principle 6. Build Power for Change With Our Partners and Allies. We advance our mission hand-in-hand with our partners and allies, leveraging our individual capacities in support of aligned long-term visions, goals, and strategies. With our partners and allies, we build power for solutions commensurate with the scale of the problems we face.

**AT SOME POINT WE MUST DRAW A LINE
ACROSS THE GROUND OF OUR HOME AND
OUR BEING, DRIVE A SPEAR INTO THE LAND
AND SAY TO THE BULLDOZERS,
EARTHMOVERS, GOVERNMENT, AND
CORPORATIONS, 'THUS FAR AND NO
FURTHER.' IF WE DO NOT, WE SHALL LATER
FEEL, INSTEAD OF PRIDE, THE REGRET OF
THOREAU, THAT GOOD BUT OVERLY-BOOKISH
MAN WHO WROTE, NEAR THE END OF HIS
LIFE, 'IF I REPENT OF ANYTHING IT IS LIKELY TO
BE MY GOOD BEHAVIOR.'**

-Edward Abbey

PROGRAM GOALS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

I. LONG TERM PROGRAM GOALS

The following long-term goals are designed to achieve our vision for the American West. Given our vision's ambition, these goals necessarily transcend the life of this strategic plan. Progress towards these goals will be assessed on an ongoing basis as this plan is implemented with the intent to adjust them as necessary and appropriate in our 2021-2025 strategic plan.

These goals reinforce and build upon our longstanding advocacy to safeguard our shared climate and the West's public lands, wildlife, and communities. These goals also more deeply embed the concept of resilience into our strategic advocacy as a central organizing principle. Defined as the capacity to withstand and adapt to changing conditions while retaining core identity, resilience provides a lens for us to better account for the increasingly complex and uncertain social, cultural, economic, political, and ecological dynamics we face as well as the interplay between these dynamics and the intensifying impacts of climate change.

Goal 1: Ecological and Community Resilience: Landscape-scale resilience sustains the capacity of public lands, wildlife, and communities to: (a) protect intact waters and wildlife habitat; (b) withstand or adapt to climate impacts and other stressors; and (c) maintain healthy, thriving human communities through the sustainable provision of ecological goods and services.

Goal 2: Climate, Fossil Fuels, and Clean Energy: Fossil fuels are no longer produced from public lands and the capacity of public lands to sequester carbon is strengthened to better align the U.S. with the Paris Agreement's goal to constrain warming to no more than 2.0°C (and ideally 1.5°C). Western U.S. energy use speeds its transition away from fossil fuels and towards the responsible and efficient use of clean, renewable energy.

Goal 3: American Democracy and Governance: Our civic and democratic institutions: (a) develop and enforce durable public interest laws, rules, and policies; (b) foster equity, inclusion, and justice; (c) provide responsible public access to public resources; (d) ensure essential public access to the courts; and (e) guarantee transparent and accountable government decision-making.

II. STRATEGIC PROGRAM PRIORITIES 2017-2021

The following four strategic program priorities are designed to make progress towards our long-term goals during 2017-2021. These priorities reflect the moment we find ourselves in—a moment of highly dynamic and uncertain challenge where we must be nimble and effective in our defensive responses, seek state and local opportunities to achieve our goals, and advance arguments and positions that build power, precedent, and momentum for change.

These priorities will guide our case selection process during the 2017-2021 time frame. These priorities are intentionally expansive and flexible, enabling us to swiftly adapt to changing dynamics. Strategic discipline will be ensured by emphasizing high-impact results, prioritizing cross cutting advocacy cases and projects, and nesting specific cases and projects within expansive, forward-looking campaigns with our partners and allies that articulate defined objectives and a clear theory of change.

Strategy 1: Champion a Resilient Public Lands System. We will defend the integrity of our public lands system. Public lands deserve protection as places of intrinsic beauty, for their biological, ecological, and cultural value, and as the foundation of landscape-scale resilience in the face of climate disruption. Our public lands also provide sustainable ecological and cultural goods and services to communities, including clean air and water, carbon sequestration, places to recreate, and an undeniable sense of place. Accordingly, we will:

- a. Engage in public lands planning, management, and decision-making such that public lands provide a foundation for landscape-scale ecological resilience, with a focus on:
 - Watershed health and integrity to foster landscape-scale capacity to withstand or adapt to disruption and to tighten the linkage between terrestrial and aquatic systems and between public lands and downstream communities.
 - Connected and functioning wildlife refugia to avoid or mitigate stress caused by human activity and to provide species with the capacity to adapt to the magnitude and pace of anticipated climate-driven impacts and biological shifts.
 - The provision of sustainable ecological and cultural goods and services (e.g., clean air and water, places to hunt, fish, and recreate) to urban, rural, and tribal communities, and the linkage between natural infrastructure on public lands and built infrastructure in communities.
- b. Protect and increase the capacity of public lands to serve as carbon sinks by protecting and restoring terrestrial and aquatic systems that sequester and regulate carbon consistent with our overarching goal to foster landscape-scale ecological resilience.
- c. Integrate climate considerations into the fabric of public lands planning, management, and decision-making through place-based action. Use place-based legal precedent and authority to set the stage for legislative, regulatory, or policy action to durably integrate climate change into the public lands legal framework once the political context improves.

- d. Advance strategies to retain public lands in public ownership and to ensure that public lands are accessible to the public and managed in the public interest.
- e. Defend and set the stage for new special public lands designations and protections, whether legislative or administrative, including National Monuments, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Geographic or Management Areas, or mining and mineral withdrawals.
- f. Position and assert WELC as a central leader and authority on public lands protection across the Western U.S. and at the confluence of public lands, watershed protection, wildlife conservation, and fossil fuel issues.

Strategy 2: Defend Western Wildlife. We share the lands and waters of the West with wildlife, and we hold the responsibility to conserve and restore wildlife and their habitat. Wildlife also play critical ecological roles essential to or dependent on landscape-scale ecological resilience. Accordingly, we will:

- a. Explore intensified action to conserve and restore the West’s native species that: (i) are vulnerable to extirpation or significant harm; or (ii) play critical ecological roles that foster resilience to anthropogenic stress, in particular climate change.
- b. Prioritize species whose existing or projected range overlaps with public lands, waters, or communities we are working to protect or restore in accord with other strategies.
- c. Continue advocacy to conserve legacy species: wolverines, Canada lynx, northern spotted owl, wolves, and wild salmon and trout.

Strategy 3: Challenge Fossil Fuels and Speed the West’s Transition to Clean Energy. To align Western U.S. energy production and use with the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C/2.0°C warming guardrails, we must phase-out all fossil fuel production on public lands, transition energy use away from fossil fuels and towards the responsible and efficient use of clean, renewable energy, and prevent the export of domestic fossil fuels. To do this, we will:

- a. Use litigation, legislative and administrative engagement, and coalition building in the 2017-2021 timeframe to set the stage for a comprehensive review of BLM’s oil and gas program and the legislative and regulatory reforms necessary to secure a managed phase out of the oil and gas program. Specifically, we will:

- Secure a federal commitment to initiate the review by 2021 and to conclude it by no later than 2024.
 - Use the review as the basis for law and policy reforms necessary to phase out all new oil and gas leasing by no later than 2026 and the approval of new drilling permits by no later than 2036.
- b.** Safeguard priority landscapes and watersheds. We will determine priorities annually based on need, opportunity, and capacity. Initial priority areas include New Mexico’s Greater Chaco region, New Mexico and Colorado’s Southern Rockies national forests, Colorado’s West Slope, and Colorado’s North Fork Valley. In these landscapes, we will engage at all levels of BLM and Forest Service planning and decision-making with the intent to:
- Prevent a net increase in the acreage of lands leased and under production for oil and gas.
 - Integrate climate change into the fabric of public lands planning, decision-making, and environmental reviews.
 - Implement and enforce BLM’s November 2016 methane waste rule and leverage BLM’s complementary planning and management authorities to deepen methane waste cuts consistent with a “zero waste” ethic.
 - Impose timing and location constraints on oil and gas development to protect local ecological and cultural resources and public health.
 - Build power for change through coordinated place-based campaigns with our clients, partners, and allies.
- c.** Prevent or mitigate impacts caused by coal mining, combustion, and transportation operations with the intent to phase out coal operations and to ensure that federal and state agencies account for climate change through planning, decision-making, and environmental reviews.
- d.** Prevent fossil fuel infrastructure along the Western U.S. coast, with an emphasis on infrastructure intended to transport, process, and market fossil fuels produced on public lands.

Strategy 4: Cultivate Thriving Western Communities. Communities, as the building block of our country, play an outsized role in determining the fate of ecological systems. Communities also operate as laboratories of democracy and action despite political ossification at the national level. Natural elements of ecological systems (e.g., public lands, watersheds) are also connected to built elements of these

very same systems (e.g., stormwater management systems) that communities should consider holistically. To advance our advocacy with communities, we will:

- a.** Continue to engage with rural, public land-dependent communities in eastern and central Oregon through collaborative conservation. As appropriate, translate this work to select, new regions.
- b.** Explore deeper engagement with communities in the West to build mutual trust, respect, and credibility.
- c.** Evaluate and expand our client and partnership network to better reflect Western U.S. population demographics and to shape advocacy that integrates and advances our commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice.
- d.** Prioritize engagement with communities connected with the public lands, waters, or wildlife habitat we are working to protect or restore in accord with other strategies.
- e.** Protect sustainable ecological goods and services for communities that are provided by protected or restored ecological infrastructure, in particular public lands and watersheds.
- f.** Explore opportunities to transition communities away from fossil fuels, in particular those fossil fuels produced on public lands, and towards clean, renewable energy, with a focus on communities where we are have existing program investments.
- g.** Assess opportunities to research, advocate for, or support “just transition” strategies for resource-dependent communities.

**INDIVIDUALLY, WE ARE ONE DROP.
TOGETHER, WE ARE AN OCEAN.**

-Ryunosuke Satoro

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

I. FOUR-YEAR ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

We have achieved an amazing legacy in our quarter century history, but challenges persist and, indeed, have intensified. Our continued success—and ability to achieve success commensurate to the scale of the challenges we face—depends on our capacity to make steady, strategic, and bold progress towards our vision and goals. This requires fortified internal organizational governance and management by the board and staff, team-based coordination, and a strong, empowered staff. We must, in short, work well together, support each other and the organization, and commit to the organization’s 2017-2021 strategic plan. These elements are reflected in the following organizational goals to be achieved in the next four years:

- Goal 1:** WELC is a central leader and authority regarding climate, environmental, and conservation law and policy issues in the American West, with a focus on public lands and the confluence of public lands with watershed protection, wildlife conservation, and fossil fuel production.
- Goal 2:** Staff capacity is expanded, supported, and empowered to ensure strategic plan implementation and conformity.
- Goal 3:** Annual revenue is increased 50% to \$3 million annually by 2021, to support growth in capacity necessary to achieve strategic goals, and to support organizational resilience.
- Goal 4:** WELC’s board plays an important role assisting and supporting strategic plan implementation and conformity and, in particular, provides significant assistance and support to achieve our 2021 revenue goal.
- Goal 5:** WELC’s operations support and advance strategic plan implementation and conformity.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

The following strategies are designed to achieve our four-year organizational goals:

- Strategy 1: Cultivate strategic client and partner networks.** Networks are essential to the efficacy of our strategies. We will strengthen client and partner networks by: (a) evaluating opportunities to achieve our objectives in conjunction with current partners and clients; (b) identifying new partners and clients necessary to achieve our goals; and (c) working with both to strengthen and expand WELC’s influence. These opportunities will include closer, more explicit alignment of

objectives and strategies and a commitment, with select, strategic partners, to build joint advocacy, communications, and funding approaches.

Strategy 2: Incorporate commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice into organizational structure, operations, and programs. Recognizing that we have much to learn and that it is critical to do right, we will explore opportunities to meet our commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice through our internal organizational structure and operations, our relationships with communities, and our program vision, mission, goals, and strategies.

Strategy 3: Expand, support, and empower resilient staff.

- Cultivate staff leadership, responsibility, and resilience through team-based dialogue and approaches and by crafting job responsibilities that create opportunities for professional growth.
- Provide competitive and increasing salaries and benefits, including by identifying a yearly goal for new revenue to be allocated towards strengthened compensation and benefits.
- Support staff participation in leadership, skills, and resilience training, including by expanding budget line items available for such training.

Strategy 4: Intensify communications advocacy. To better realize our vision for the West, we will expand and strengthen our communications advocacy through earned and social media, cultivation of media contacts, and more powerful integration of communications advocacy into program strategies. Communications needs will be assessed and incorporated into program-based fundraising budgets to justify and secure increased funding and to reduce the pressure on discretionary funds. Furthermore, WELC communications staff, where appropriate, shall build and maintain relationships with communications counterparts in partner and ally organizations, and will serve as lead points of contact on communications for campaigns. Communications will be designed to: (a) convey a strong, distinct, public-facing voice; (b) provide compelling, fact-based stories that articulate the importance of our advocacy; (c) build trust, credibility, and respect with communities and political leaders; and (d) build power for change through coalitions, partnerships, and alliances.

Strategy 5: Increase Revenue and Organizational Capacity. We will continue and improve our diversified and adaptive fundraising approach centered on foundations, individual donors, and legacy gifts. This approach will be designed to meet our goal to increase revenue to \$3 million annually by 2021. Fundraising approaches will be necessarily opportunistic, but will seek to emphasize priority program strategies, achieve balanced support for all strategies, and consider long-term strategic direction and organizational positioning.

Strategy 6: Build Staff Capacity. Retain new staff capacity contingent on revenue growth and our forthcoming review of our organizational structure to strengthen:

- Organizational leadership and team-based advocacy and operations.
- Development capacity to attract national and regional funding support and to deepen cultivation of local funders.
- Litigation capacity to support near-term defensive needs.
- Non-litigation advocacy capacity to support long-term intent to secure proactive law and policy reforms, to build political and strategic networks, and to better coordinate place-based advocacy across the broader West.
- Communications capacity to support “thought leader” and campaign-oriented advocacy strategies.
- Administrative capacity to support program, development, communications, and finance teams.

Strategy 7: Develop our board. We will review, refine, and as necessary articulate board criteria to identify and cultivate new board members and to set targets for board growth consistent with the strategic plan’s vision, mission, and goals. Emphasis will be placed on building board capacity to support our 2021 revenue goal while providing for continuity of fiduciary responsibilities.

Strategy 8: Focus on building capacity through internal growth. We will focus on building capacity internally to ensure continuity of our organizational culture and achievement of our vision. If mergers or acquisitions are proposed, we will assess those proposals in accord with the following criteria:

- The merger or acquisition would improve bottom-line conservation impact consistent with our vision, mission, goals, and strategies.
- The merger or acquisition would not compromise our near-term financial position and makes sense from a long-term financial perspective.
- The merger or acquisition would not negatively impact our organizational culture and would guarantee fair and equitable treatment of all staff.
- The merger or acquisition accounts for and avoids negative impacts on the vision, mission, goals, and strategies of partner and allied organizations and communities.

Strategy 9: Foster program innovation. We will allocate at least 80% of our program capacity towards core strategies. The balance of our capacity will be available to take on cases or projects that fall outside the scope of our core program strategies so long as consistent with our vision, mission, and long-term goals and they would: (a) achieve a high impact; (b) present an opportunity to build or expand an important partner or ally relationship; or (c) test an idea that could blossom into a core strategy consistent with our emphasis on cross-cutting impact and campaign-oriented advocacy.

Strategy 10: Review and refine the new matter approval process. We will review our case selection process to align it with our 2017-2021 strategic plan, with special attention paid to improved ways to evaluate whether a proposed case or project provides opportunities to advance multiple, cross-cutting organizational strategies and is part of a forward-looking campaign that has defined objectives and integrated advocacy, communications, and fundraising strategies.

**VISION WITHOUT EXECUTION IS
HALLUCINATION.**

-Attributed to Thomas Edison

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

- 1. September 2017:** Approve 2017-2021 Strategic Plan.

Lead Responsibility: Strategic Plan Revision Committee
Decisionmaker: Board
- 2. September 2017:** Develop criteria to guide board growth, with a focus on: (a) ensuring alignment with vision, mission, goals, and strategies; and (b) supporting organizational growth and brand.

Lead Responsibility: Board Development Committee
Completion date: December 2017
Decisionmaker: Board
- 3. September 2017:** Develop 2017-2021 Strategic Plan rollout strategy to public, supporters.

Lead Responsibility: Communications & Development teams
Completion date: November 2017
Decisionmaker: Executive Director
- 4. October 2017:** Review of new matter process to align case and project approvals with 2017-2021 Strategic Plan program goals and strategies.

Lead Responsibility: Board Program & Communications Committee
Completion date: December 2017
Decisionmaker: Board
- 5. October 2017:** Review staff organizational structure to strengthen organizational leadership and team-based advocacy and operations, including by considering opportunities to grow capacity and to locate it in new geographies.

Lead Responsibility: Board Executive Committee & Executive Director
Completion date: Rapid assessment by December 2017, full assessment by October 2018.
Decisionmaker: Executive Director
- 6. October 2017:** Consider: (1) adoption of formal equity, inclusion, justice principles; (2) formation of an equity, inclusion, and justice board and staff committee; and (3) need for a plan to advance equity, inclusion, and justice principles.

Lead Responsibility: Board & Executive Director
Completion date: December 2018

Decisionmaker: Board

- 7. January 2018:** Develop vision, objectives, and strategies to guide and implement democracy and governance elements of the Strategic Plan, with a focus on assessing community-level engagement and opportunities to follow through on our commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice.
- Lead Responsibility:** Executive Director
Completion date: October 2018
Decisionmaker: Board
- 8. January 2018:** Develop mechanisms to track allocation of program capacity across strategies and between core and non-core cases and projects.
- Lead Responsibility:** Finance Director
Completion date: March 2018
Decisionmaker: Executive Director
- 9. February 2018:** Evaluate and adjust program docket in light of the Strategic Plan with an intent to foster team-based understanding of advocacy and to reposition capacity as appropriate.
- Lead Responsibility:** Executive Director, Program Directors, Development Director, & Communications Director
Completion date: March 2018
Decisionmaker: Executive Director
- 10. February 2018:** Evaluate existing partner and client list; identify opportunities to build new partner and client relationships; and assess opportunities to identify strategic partners with which to align goals and strategies and to build joint advocacy, communications, and funding approaches.
- Lead Responsibility:** Executive Director, Program Directors, Development Director, & Communications Director
Completion date: March 2018
Decisionmaker: Executive Director
- 11. January 2017:** Revise and update personnel policy.
- Lead Responsibility:** Board Governance Committee
Completion date: October 2018
Decisionmaker: Board
- 12. November 2018:** Assess strategies in wake of November 2018 elections and refine strategies as necessary and appropriate.
- Lead Responsibility:** Executive Director, Program Directors, Development Director, & Communications Director.

- 13. March 2020:** Complete strategy assessment in anticipation of November 2020 national/state elections and identify opportunities to educate political candidates and public regarding challenges and opportunities.
Lead Responsibility: Executive Director, Program Directors, Development Director, & Communications Director.
- 15. August 2020:** Develop strategic plan revision to govern WELC strategy and operations from October 2021 through October 2025. Initial steps to include review of existing strategic plan's strengths and weaknesses consistent with strategy assessments and need to re-calibrate strategies in light of foreseeable political shifts resulting from November 2020 elections.
Lead Responsibility: Strategic Plan Revision Committee
Completion Date: October 2021
Decisionmaker: Board
- 16. November 2020:** Complete strategy assessment in wake of November 2020 elections and refine strategies as necessary and appropriate.
Lead Responsibility: Executive Director, Program Directors, Development Director, & Communications Director
Completion date: December 2020
Decisionmaker: Executive Director