AMERICAN LITTORAL SOCIETY
2014-2016 STRATEGIC PLAN

Overview

Over the course of the last several years, the American Littoral Society has dug deeply into the history, the philosophy, and the vision of the organization, in anticipation of the need for a strategic plan to guide our efforts in years to come. With guidance and input from outside consultants, the hard work of staff and trustees has generated a wealth of understanding about who we are and why we do what we do.

The discussion that follows is designed to guide the organization into its future, with specific goals and objectives targeted to the next three years.

The plan addresses four areas of organizational development.
Specifically, we aim to pursue the following goals:

1. Develop all programs to promote the Mission and Vision of the Organization;
2. Diversify funding sources to promote mission driven programs and sustainable administration;
3. Operate at optimum staffing capacity and alignment; and
4. Create a comprehensive and active board.

While every staff member and every trustee has had a hand in generating the ideas reflected in this document, the drafting of its final form has fallen to the members of the Executive Committee, designated by the Board as the de facto strategic planning committee.

Specific recognition must go to Kathleen Gasienica, President, for her tireless pursuit of this process; and to Tim Dillingham, Executive Director, for his dauntless efforts to clarify the important role of the Society.
Mission

We promote the study and conservation of marine life and habitat, defend the coast from harm and empower others to do the same.

Who We Are:

The Society was founded in 1961 in Highlands, New Jersey, by marine scientists, divers, naturalists, and citizen scientists eager to share their passion for the littoral zone. Habitat degradation, polluted water, and fish kills soon revealed the need for crusaders for the coast, and led to a refined mission for the organization. Since then, we have grown to include members in 49 states, and have worked through conservation, education, and advocacy to empower people to care for the coast.

Over the past 50 years, we have restored significant dune and marshland habitats stretching from Jamaica Bay to Delaware Bay, and have reached out to involve local communities in ongoing stewardship of these precious coastal resources. In every project, we look for opportunities to provide citizens with the knowledge and tools they need to raise their voices with us.

- Our advocacy efforts have brought the plight of the red knot to light and have championed the horseshoe crab’s vital role in a vast and complex ecosystem.
- We have helped focus the attention of residents, legislators, and regulators on the control of stormwater runoff into Barnegat Bay, and have demonstrated effective means of retrofitting municipal stormwater systems to reduce eutrophication in the estuary.
- We successfully opposed further expansion of Kennedy Airport into the wetlands surrounding Jamaica Bay, and in the years since have removed countless tons of marine debris from the shoreline, with the help of hundreds of volunteers from neighboring communities.
- We have encouraged fisherman to become citizen scientists by tagging their catch, and to contribute tag data to the National Marine...
Fisheries database for use by scientists and policymakers. Our fish tagging program is the largest and longest-running saltwater fish tagging program in the nation, and is the only volunteer program certified by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Council.

- Through our education programs, we have shared our love of the coast and marine life with scores of children and families, many from inner-city areas, with little awareness of their own connections to the shore.

With more than 50 years of experience behind us, we are fine-tuning our programs and upgrading the tools we need to carry us into the next half century.

**A Vision for the American Littoral Society in its Next 50 Years**

To achieve positive change in our nation’s approach to the protection and restoration of coastal habitat and to the well-being of estuarine and marine life, The American Littoral Society will lead in developing science-based policies and best practices on regional and national scales. Working closely with the scientific community, we will draw upon our experience in those areas of the mid-Atlantic region, where most of our members live, that pose the greatest problems and present the greatest potential for developing innovative coastal protection strategies. We will focus our efforts on specific projects that invite widespread application and replication.

We will develop broad-based support for our work by involving our members and others in stewardship and advocacy efforts, connecting people to the coast through our education and habitat restoration programs. Through a wide range of recreational and educational activities, we will expand the community of people with the physical, intellectual, and emotional connections essential to the development of a sustainable and resilient coastal zone.

We will build an organization worthy of the widespread support of the
philanthropic community, making best use of a variety of media to tell compelling stories about our past, our present, and our future. We will hire and nurture top-quality coastal scientists, educators, and policy experts, and provide the organizational support and working conditions necessary to their efforts.

**Background and Impetus**

This strategic plan seizes upon the opportunities facing the Society at an extraordinary moment in its history. As an organization, we have contributed to the steady growth of this country’s increasingly sophisticated and complex discussion of environmental health. Our voice has attracted a small but loyal base of supporters who share the goals of the Society and have affirmed our standing in the debate. Our work has garnered the admiration of scientists and policymakers on many levels. As recent events have raised public concern about vulnerable coastal and estuarine ecosystems, a broad community has turned increasingly to the Littoral Society for guidance toward successful implementation of conservation and restoration science and the crafting of policy required to establish resilient coastlines.

Our unique focus on upstream estuarine health puts us at the nexus of marine and land-based conservation. Our local presence in critical environments -- Jamaica Bay, Raritan Bay, Barnegat Bay, and Delaware Bay -- gives us boots on the ground, working on the most pressing problems with the people most affected. The confidence of long and successful experience encourages us to speak out and to act in timely and effective ways for the benefit of diverse coastal communities.

In order to capitalize on our experience, we must take full advantage of present circumstances to build breadth and depth in our organization. Our program staff deserve a full range of administrative, back-office services to give them the support they require in the field. Optimal impact in our programs, in turn, can only result from cooperation and communication
among program staff. A critical goal to be achieved during this planning period focuses on the infrastructure and operation of the functions of the organization.

Growth can only result from a broader support base. At present, the Littoral Society enjoys favored status with grantmakers specifically addressing coastal resiliency issues made critical by Superstorm Sandy. We must develop additional revenue streams supporting the full range of our program, and funding the unavoidable overhead costs associated with a fully functioning organization. Active participation in development and stewardship by an engaged Board of Trustees underlies many of the initiatives articulated in this plan.

The ambitions of this plan face challenges. We work in a crowded market, and we seek support from a limited pool of resources. We must broadcast the excellence of our approach to solving real-world problems by clarifying our public image, fine-tuning our message, and promoting the success of signature programs and achievements. In a world of overstimulation and information overload, we must distinguish ourselves with increasingly creative and sophisticated communications and outreach strategies to connect the organization to broad audiences and to engage them in all aspects of coastal stewardship.

Above all, the growth of the Littoral Society demands integrated effort from all key players. Board and staff must work together in mutual support of the organization envisioned by this plan.

**Present Circumstances, Present Pressures**

A review of revenue funding over the previous five year period reveals a dramatic increase in project related support in the last two to three years (see Appendix 1). Staff deserves recognition for having established the Littoral Society as a “preferred vendor” of design and management for restoration and remediation projects throughout our program area. While
this growth creates opportunity for organizational and program development, such growth also underscores the importance of sophisticated administrative infrastructure to respond to the obligations taken on with these projects.

During this planning period, the Littoral Society seeks to leverage growth of our core program upon the experience and exposure resulting from large-scale restoration efforts. As articulated in the vision statement, we must take advantage of the opportunity each project offers to broaden our educational efforts and to extend our expertise in conservation, restoration, and policy.

Recent turnovers in key staff positions have given rise to rethinking the organizational structure so as to better accomplish our goals (Appendix 2), and to designing a Board committee structure directly linked to the governance and program needs of the organization (Appendix 3).

**Goals, Objectives, and Activities**

Appendix 4 includes a full matrix specifying objectives, activities, projected time horizons, and responsibilities associated with each goal of this plan.

**Monitoring and Evaluation of Plan**

The Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees will assume responsibility for monitoring progress on the plan. Working with the Executive Director and relevant staff members, the Committee will review progress twice annually, at its June meeting, and again in preparation for presentation to Trustees at the January Board meeting.

The Goals matrix (Appendix 4) will provide the criteria for evaluation of progress in each category. The matrix is intended to be a working document, updated continually by the parties responsible for the activities identified under each goal.
**Communication of Plan**

This plan will be submitted to all Trustees prior to April 2014, and will become effective upon adoption of the plan. The Executive Committee will work with the Executive Director and the staff Communications Director to design the most effective means of disseminating the plan to the staff, and of sharing relevant initiatives with the membership and the general public.

In order to encourage full implementation of the plan, all committees of the Board of Trustees will be asked to consider the ways in which the plan guides each committee’s work, and to report progress toward plan goals and activities to the Executive Committee, according to the schedule discussed under “Monitoring and Evaluation of Plan.”

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
APRIL 12, 2014
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Revenue Trend Analysis

![Revenue Trend Analysis Chart]

Appendix 2: Organizational Structure

![Organizational Structure Diagram]
Appendix 3: Board Committees

Executive Committee
Finance Committee
   Audit Committee
Governance Committee
Stewardship Committee
Program Committee
   Conservation and Restoration Program
   Education Program
   Policy Program

Appendix 4: Goals and Objectives Matrix
(Google Docs)