NORTHEAST WILDERNESS TRUST

Strategic Plan
2020–2025
WHY WILDERNESS?

Wilderness is self-willed land, where nature directs the ebb and flow of life.

Wilderness is not simply a special kind of place; it’s a special kind of commitment we make to a place. That commitment is freedom—for the creatures at home there, and for the natural processes that create the integrity, beauty, and diversity of the land and its inhabitants.

Wilderness offers a range of benefits: wildlife habitat, climate regulation, clean air and water, scientific data, solitude, and spiritual renewal. Most importantly, these sanctuaries of wild nature simply have a right to exist for their own sake. (And the result is wildly beneficial to people!)
OUR VISION

Northeast Wilderness Trust envisions a landscape of connected, resilient wildlands shared by a human culture that recognizes the benefits of wild places.

Northeast Wilderness Trust has adopted a bold new five-year Strategic Plan to accelerate the pace of wilderness conservation and connect more people to wild places. This new strategic plan reflects the urgency to respond to the entwined crises of climate change and biodiversity collapse. Our densely forested and resilient home region is poised to play a critical role in mitigating the worst impacts of these crises if we give it the chance to do so.

Like two brooks coming together to form a river of change, Northeast Wilderness Trust will implement two parallel strategies to meet our overall goal of increasing the scale of wilderness conservation across the Northeast. First, we will continue to preserve forever-wild landscapes using traditional land trust methods. Second, we will strengthen our role as a champion of the wilderness message, in both the land trust community and the public sphere.

OUR VALUES

- Effectiveness
- Integrity
- Collaboration
- Inclusion
- Respect
- Perpetuity

Wilderness is not an extravagance or a luxury, it is a place of original memory where we can witness and reflect on how the world is held together by natural laws.

—Terry Tempest Williams
Accelerate and expand wilderness preservation for the benefit of all life.

Northeast Wilderness Trust will expand the scale, resiliency, and connectivity of wilderness across the Northeast through meaningful partnerships, while ensuring sound stewardship of all lands preserved by the Wilderness Trust.

**BY 2025 ...**

Northeast Wilderness Trust will preserve an additional 25,000 acres of wilderness and steward 60,000 total acres. (25 by ’25!)

**HOW WE’LL DO IT**

- Prioritize protecting connected habitats
- Accelerate forever-wild conservation
- Deepen existing partnerships
- Engage new partners across the Northeast
- Be a resource for other land trusts in exemplary stewardship
Wildlands Partnership

The Wildlands Partnership is an innovative new strategy to quantify, incentivize, accelerate, and celebrate forever-wild conservation across the Northeast. Through the Partnership, Northeast Wilderness Trust will leverage our expertise to engage more land trusts in forever-wild conservation. By working in partnership with others, we can drastically scale up and normalize wilderness conservation. Harvard Forest and its Wildlands & Woodlands study set a goal to have at least 10 percent of New England’s forests protected as wildlands by 2060. Today, with only about 3 percent of New England forestland protected as such, the land trust community must urgently execute a “natural climate solutions” agenda that protects biodiversity and mitigates the worst impacts of climate change. The Wildlands Partnership is our strategy to swiftly hasten the pace of this work across the Northeast.
To ensure wild places conserved today are cared for tomorrow, Northeast Wilderness Trust will help connect more people to wilderness. In fostering these connections, we will carefully weigh recreational access with the need to protect sensitive habitat and wild character.

**BY 2025 . . .**

Northeast Wilderness Trust will implement a new online experience and an on-the-ground ambassador land program, connecting people from all walks of life to the Northeast’s extraordinary wildlands.

**HOW WE’LL DO IT**

- Offer new ways to experience and love wilderness
- Create ambassador landscapes (see opposite)
- Monitor rewilding areas
- Host events that deepen respectful relationships between people and wilderness
- Launch “Friends of Northeast Wilderness Trust” groups

Strengthen our region’s collective wilderness ethic by connecting people with meaningful wildlands experiences.
Binney Hill Wilderness Preserve

The Binney Hill Wilderness Preserve is one of Northeast Wilderness Trust’s most visited properties. Sitting on the New Hampshire–Massachusetts state line, it is traversed by more than a mile of the historic Wapack Trail. This beautiful property is well positioned to become an “ambassador landscape,” where we place a bit more emphasis on public access. Ever since the Preserve was established in 2016, events held in partnership with the Friends of the Wapack have drawn community members to the land for trail workdays, tree plantings, nature hikes, and birding trips. In 2019, the Wilderness Trust began working to create a custom kiosk for the Preserve that seeks to educate the public about the rewilding process happening right before their eyes. The interpretive kiosk will be replicated across the Northeast at other ambassador preserves.

You have to love something before you are moved to save it!

—Sylvia Earle
Elevate the understanding of and support for wilderness.

Wild forests offer solutions to two great global crises: climate change and mass extinction. Rewilding the world’s natural habitats offers a hopeful path toward a brighter future. Northeastern wildlands can be the lungs of a healthier planet and bastions of biodiversity if we choose to protect them today, but there must be renewed public enthusiasm and commensurate philanthropic support.

BY 2025 . . .

Northeast Wilderness Trust will articulate and promote the importance of wilderness across the region by publishing Wild Works and other articles, giving presentations, and hosting gatherings.

HOW WE’LL DO IT

- Define a wilderness ethic for the 21st century
- Increase awareness of wilderness values
- Convene “Wilderness Gatherings”
- Present regularly across the region
- Facilitate conversations about the benefits of wilderness with partners and state and local governments
Wild Works

In 2019, Northeast Wilderness Trust published the first volume in a series exploring wilderness through various lenses including science and philosophy. The Wild Works series will highlight cutting edge science and other relevant disciplines by leading voices in the conservation community. Volume 1: Wild Carbon is a timely piece about the critical, and often misunderstood, role that old, wild forests play in sequestering carbon. Recent science is clear: wild forests, especially old ones, are unparalleled in their ability to store vast amounts carbon. They offer one of the most scalable, effective, and efficient natural climate solutions. In the coming years, Wild Works will feature topics such as biodiversity, landscape-scale connectivity, spirituality, and more.

The Adirondacks are perhaps the world’s greatest experiment in ecological recovery, a place hard used a century ago and now slowly recovering, slowly proving that where humanity backs off, nature rebounds.

—Bill McKibben
Through organizational excellence, build an enduring institution that can deliver on the promise of perpetuity.

To advance the strategies of Protect, Connect, and Champion, Northeast Wilderness Trust will employ a variety of tactics to build a deeper and wider base of support. Doing this will allow the Wilderness Trust to increase staff capacity and mission effectiveness.

**BY 2025 . . .**

Northeast Wilderness Trust will increase its capacity and elevate its reputation as an efficient, transparent, professional, and resilient organization.

**HOW WE’LL DO IT**

- Broaden volunteer opportunities
- Deepen relationships with supporters
- Cultivate new funding sources
- Ensure financial stability
- Continue using best practices
Stewardship Endowment

An indicator of a healthy land trust is the ability to maintain a six-month operating reserve (at a minimum) and a sufficient stewardship endowment. Over the past five years, our operating budget has grown by 50% and the operating reserve has expanded proportionally. Similarly, our stewardship endowment now sits above $3 million and we continue to add to it with every land conservation project. Combined with other benchmarks that we track closely, the financial health of Northeast Wilderness Trust has never been stronger. We will continue to intentionally maintain the financial resources necessary to flourish as an effective conservation organization and safeguard the lands we steward.

Wilderness puts us in our place. It reminds us that our plans are small and somewhat absurd. It reminds us why, in those cases in which our plans might influence many future generations, we ought to choose carefully.

—Barbara Kingsolver, Small Wonder
At Northeast Wilderness Trust, we do conservation differently. Every place we protect is a future old-growth forest. We accomplish this either by acquiring land or by holding forever-wild conservation easements on properties owned by other organizations or individuals. Beyond direct land protection, Northeast Wilderness Trust also champions wilderness in the public sphere through seminars, presentations, and media outreach.

From the Adirondacks to Maine to Connecticut, the Wilderness Trust secures wild places where nature can thrive, wildlife can wander, and people can find beauty and quiet. Northeast Wilderness Trust has conserved more than 35,000 forever-wild acres since its founding in 2002.