

Wild Rivers Land Trust
Conservation Plan, 2020-2024

Protecting Natural Treasures and Working Lands on Oregon's Wild Rivers Coast



Mouth of Elk River © Joshua Duplechain, Trout Unlimited

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Introduction to Wild Rivers Land Trust

Vision Statement

Clean water, world-class salmon runs, sustainable working lands and prospering rural communities are once again keystones of Oregon's Wild Rivers Coast.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to protect the natural treasures and working lands on Oregon's Wild Rivers Coast in perpetuity. Partnering with landowners, we safeguard a rural way of life Americans cherish.

Service Area

WRLT's 2.2 million-acre service area stretches summit to sea stacks, from the Tenmile Lakes at Lakeside to the California border south of Brookings and from the Pacific Ocean to the headwaters of most of our region's coastal rivers. The area we serve encompasses vast seascapes, multi-generation ranches, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, ancient forests and numerous town sites within Coos and Curry counties, the Service Area Map on Page 3 shows our service area and the twelve watersheds within it.

Organizational History

In 2004 the Land Trust completed its first acquisition, creating Keystone Nature Preserve on Elk River. In 2015 we enacted our first Conservation Easement at Camp Myrtlewood near Myrtle Point, Oregon. Since the creation of Keystone we have continued to increase our conservation easements and land holdings through purchases and donations from willing land owners, who join us in promoting our region's ecological and economic land base through sustainable stewardship.

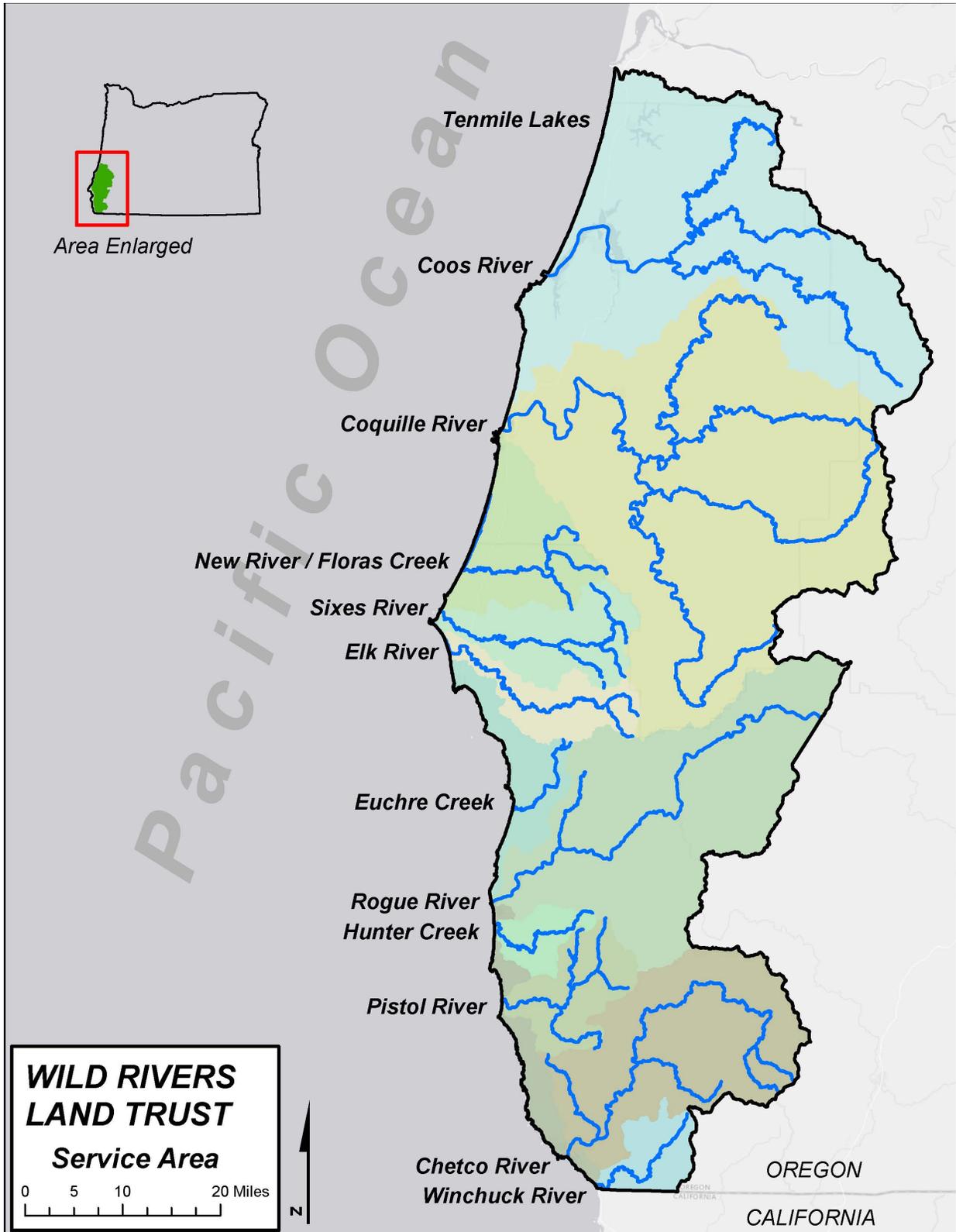
Land Trust Affiliations

As a member of Land Trust Alliance (LTA) and the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT), Wild Rivers Land Trust is committed to remaining a strong, trustworthy and effective organization. In September 2019 WRLT received accreditation from the national LTA Accreditation Commission. The seal of accreditation demonstrates that a land trust has fully implemented *LTA Standards and Practices*.

More information on the *LTA Standards and Practices* can be found at:

<https://www.landtrustalliance.org/topics/land-trust-standards-and-practices>





Priorities

With our large service area and limited capacity, the Wild Rivers Land Trust recognizes that we need to focus our work on conserving lands that offer the greatest opportunity to protect natural treasures and working lands. To maximize our impact and efficiency, we strive to find projects that accomplish multiple objectives simultaneously. The work of the Wild Rivers Land Trust focuses on the following priorities:

1. PROTECTION OF KEY HABITATS, SPECIES AND ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES

Humans have had an impact on the ecology of our region for several thousand years, but land use changes following the arrival of Euro-American settlers in the mid-1800s have severely impacted sensitive habitats and species as well as the important ecological processes on which they depend. We know that **estuaries, waterways, riparian areas, wetlands** and **mature forests** have all been reduced by human impacts, and we prioritize opportunities to protect and restore these habitats and the species that depend upon them, such as the endangered **Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Coho Salmon and Western Lily**. We prioritize opportunities to protect and restore habitats and populations of these and other threatened and endangered species, especially opportunities that will protect **large blocks of habitat**. Additionally, conserving **diverse habitats** and **sources of clean, cold water** will help us to sustain the ecological processes that we all depend on for survival.

2. BUILDING RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

As a changing climate causes shifts in our social, ecological and economic systems, we prioritize projects that mitigate the impacts of climate change. We emphasize the protection of **climate refugia**, areas that provide a buffer from climate change impacts, especially in larger blocks of intact habitat. Areas with high potential as climate refugia include **old growth and intact forests on north facing slopes, riparian areas, wetlands**, properties at **lower- and middle-elevations, wet coastal mountains** and properties that include pronounced **elevation gradients**. We will also prioritize refugia that help establish **habitat connectivity** and **migration corridors**. Due to our proximity to the Pacific Ocean, we must consider the impact that **sea level rise** will have on our coastal ecosystems and communities.



There is also a significant role for **working lands** to play in mitigating the impacts of climate change. Progressive agricultural practices increase water and soil carbon storage on grasslands. Ecological forestry techniques help reduce the loss of topsoil, the release of carbon and multiple impacts to streams and riparian areas. The conversion of these working lands into residential or industrial uses significantly complicates managing for both carbon storage and wildlife habitat.

3. STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY

Public involvement is essential to preserve the natural and cultural resources cherished by the communities we serve. Properties that **preserve cultural resources** and **tell a story about our past** or have a potential to **educate people** and help to build an ethic of stewardship in our community are prioritized. **Working lands** are the economic backbone of our communities, directly providing a living for many people who live here, supporting natural resources-dependent industries like tourism, fishing and other outdoor recreation activities, and preserving open space and a rural setting essential to our quality of life. Preserving family ranches, farms and forests will preserve the rural way of life that our communities cherish. We strive to include **diverse perspectives** in our work by reaching out to the community we serve to ensure that we are doing work that is important to them.

4. INCREASING OUR EFFICIENCY AND REACH

With a wide array of potential projects, it is necessary for us to focus our work on the most important projects – allowing us to leverage investment in conservation to serve multiple goals simultaneously. We work to realize a **triple bottom line** with our projects: to achieve social, environmental, and economic objectives. Our work has the potential to demonstrate alternative management techniques and novel solutions to complex problems, and we prioritize projects that **showcase innovation** and **build new partnerships**. Additionally, while each property will be evaluated on its own merits, **anchor properties** that serve as key "footholds" in areas of critical importance will be given additional consideration. Finally, we will work to incorporate the best science and the values of the communities we serve in a **long range plan** for our work.



Focus Areas

Focus areas are places that the Wild Rivers Land Trust has identified as areas with a disproportionate need or opportunity for our work. While we will weight potential projects within focus areas higher when deciding which projects to pursue, our use of focus areas does not preclude pursuit of promising projects outside of these focus areas.

The Oregon Conservation Strategy is a statewide strategy that identifies areas on the landscape that are optimal for working across ownership boundaries to conserve fish and wildlife. The goals identified in the Strategy are closely aligned with many of WRLT's conservation goals.

"The goals of the Conservation Strategy are to maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations by maintaining and restoring functioning habitats, preventing declines of at-risk species, and reversing declines in these resources where possible.

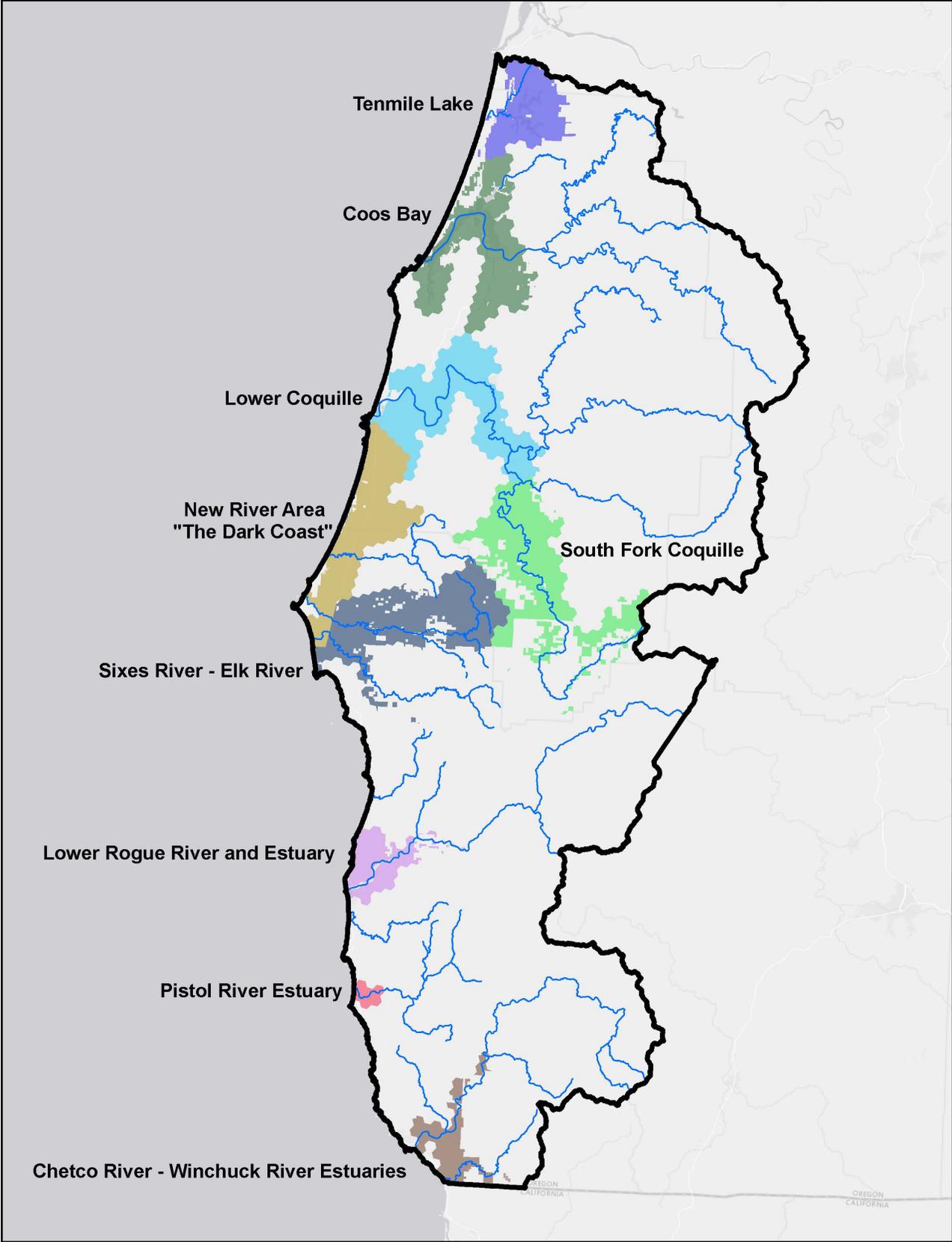
Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) are places where broad fish and wildlife conservation goals would best be met. Focusing investments in these prioritized areas can increase the likelihood of long-term success, maximize effectiveness over larger landscapes, improve funding efficiency, and promote cooperative efforts across ownership boundaries."

- ODFW's Oregon Conservation Strategy

While completing an in house data-driven GIS analysis for selecting focus areas is a goal, adopting selected Conservation Opportunity Areas in the Oregon Conservation Strategy as focus areas allows us to align our work with the statewide strategy for conserving fish and wildlife in our service area.

Nine of the fifteen Conservation Opportunity Areas from the Oregon Conservation Strategy were selected as places that have been identified by WRLT as good opportunities for us to advance the priorities identified in the previous chapter. Four Conservation Opportunity Areas were excluded because they contained mostly public land, which would limit our ability to apply our set of conservation tools in that area.





Evaluating Projects

Conservation proposals can present unexpected opportunities, so screening criteria must represent a set of realistic and adaptable filters leading to disciplined and strategic decision making. These scoring criteria are an effort to capture the Conservation Committee's initial thoughts on a project in order to help the board understand the opportunity and risk presented by a potential project.

When evaluating a potential project, the Conservation Director will gather information to present to the Conservation Committee. This may include a site visit, mapping, discussions with the landowner and a review of relevant literature. The Conservation Committee will use scoring criteria to determine whether the potential project appears to be in line with WRLT's mission and stated goals. Using these criteria, the Conservation Committee will determine whether or not to grant Preliminary Approval for the Conservation Director to conduct a feasibility assessment on the proposed project.

The Conservation Committee will score a potential project using a numeric scoring system that may change from time to time in specifics, but will generally use the following determinants. Notes from the Conservation Committee's deliberations will be reported to the WRLT board along with the outcome of the scoring at a WRLT board meeting. Throughout this process, the WRLT will follow the procedures outlined in its board-adopted *Real Property Transactions Policy*.

1. PROTECTION OF KEY HABITATS, SPECIES AND ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES

Ecological Determinants

Ecological determinants are used to evaluate the ecological significance of a proposed project.

- Priority species and habitats
 - Species
 - Coho Salmon
 - Marbled Murrelet
 - Northern Spotted Owl
 - Western Lily
 - Other ESA / species of concern on state, local, federal level
 - Indicator Species



- Habitats
 - Estuaries
 - Waterways
 - Riparian areas
 - Floodplains
 - Wildlife corridors
 - Wetlands
 - Mature forests
 - Intact forests
 - Ocean shorelines / headlands
 - Fish bearing streams
 - Coastal plain
 - Cold water refugia
 - Woodland savannahs
 - Unique features
- Diversification of habitats
- Potential for restoration
- Intact habitat, providing habitat connectivity
- Considered in context with surrounding parcels
 - Enables more projects
 - Proximity to public or conserved lands

Vulnerability Determinants

Vulnerability determinants are used to evaluate the immediacy of hazard and the ecological sensitivity to disturbance.

- Riparian areas
- Wildlife corridors
- Wetlands
- Estuaries
- Steep slopes above streams
- Development pressure
- Immediacy of other hazards
- Wildland urban interface



2. BUILDING RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Climate Change Determinants

Climate Change determinants are used to determine the significance of the proposed project in building our region's resilience to a changing climate.

- Ecological Resilience
 - Old growth and intact forests
 - North facing slopes
 - Riparian areas
 - Wetlands
 - Lower and middle elevations
 - Wet coastal mountains
 - Pronounced elevation gradients
 - Habitat connectivity
 - Migration corridors
- Community Resilience
 - Working lands

3. STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY

Social Determinants

Social determinants are used to evaluate the value of protecting a property for the human communities we serve.

- Preserves cultural resources – tells a story about the past or the interaction between cultural and natural aspects of a place.
- Collaboration among landowners, public agencies and the public
- Community support
- Economic value
- Educational value
- Buffer from disturbance or management impacts
- Working Lands
- Potential to enhance well-being of surrounding communities



4. INCREASING OUR EFFICIENCY AND REACH

Unique Opportunities

Unique opportunities determinants are used to highlight projects that provide new and innovative ways to accomplish WRLT's goals.

- Triple bottom line
- Innovative approach
- Builds new partnerships
- Anchor properties
- Long range plan

Feasibility Determinants

Feasibility determinants are used to evaluate liabilities associated with a potential project and whether WRLT has the capacity, direction, means and experience to achieve our goals.

- Willing sellers or donors
- Clearly identified goals
- WRLT Risk: financial
- WRLT Risk: legal liabilities
- Impact on perceptions: WRLT board
- Impact on perceptions: community
- Impact on perceptions: partners
- Complexity of management needs
- WRLT involvement is necessary
- Within urban growth boundaries
- Size of parcel / return on investment
- Probability of controversy: community
- Probability of controversy: WRLT board
- Probability of controversy: partners



Additional Goals

1. PROTECTION OF KEY HABITATS, SPECIES AND ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES

- Maintain a steady pipeline of projects.
- Pursue projects in the northern and southern reaches of our Service Area.
- Incorporate best available science into our planning and management.
- Diversify our project funding base.

2. BUILDING RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

- Use GIS tools to incorporate climate change into our conservation planning.
- Better educate our staff and board about climate science.
- Identify how our work can mitigate the negative impacts of climate change.

3. STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY

- Become better educated on various working lands easement programs.
- Become better educated on best management practices on agricultural lands within our service area.
- Work to understand how our conservation program can better serve the communities we work with.
- Become better educated about generational transfer of agricultural lands and how we may assist in this process.

4. INCREASING OUR EFFICIENCY AND REACH

- Continue to run our Conservation Program to the Land Trust Alliance guidelines.
- Focus on Partnerships
 - Find intersection points with regional and local partners' goals.
 - Participate in regional planning efforts.
 - Develop relationships with new partners.
- Invest in infrastructure to ensure that our work is accurate, thorough and safe.
 - Develop a GIS tool to inform more detailed conservation planning and identify our highest priority projects.
 - Upgrade our monitoring processes, software and hardware.
 - Order and post custom boundary signage on all properties.
 - Invest in equipment to keep our staff safe in the field or office.



Evaluation and Tracking

The following questions will serve as an outline for an annual review of the conservation program. This review will serve to keep the WRLT board abreast of annual progress toward our broad conservation goals as well as progress toward objectives identified in the "Additional Goals" section. This review will be summarized in a report by the Conservation Director and presented to the full WRLT board for review.

1. PROTECTION OF KEY HABITATS, SPECIES AND ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES

- How many projects has the Conservation Committee evaluated per year? Is the number increasing, decreasing, or remaining steady? Are there changes we need to make to affect a change in the number of projects we are considering? Is the size and scope of our projects appropriate?
- Do we have active projects in the northern and southern reaches of our service area?
- Do we have a reference library for cataloguing the best available science for our planning and management practices? Are we using this information to inform our work?
- Have we forged relationships with new funding entities to support our Conservation Program?

2. BUILDING RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

- Are we using GIS tools to inform how we are incorporating climate change into our conservation planning? Do these tools include the best available science?
- Does our board and staff have a working knowledge of what the major impacts of climate change are to our region, and how our work can mitigate them?

3. STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY

- Does our staff have a working knowledge of what the various programs to support working lands easements are and how to use them?
- Does our staff have a working knowledge of the best management practices on agricultural lands in our service area?
- Do we understand the priorities of the communities we work in and how we may incorporate them into our conservation planning?



- Do we understand how generational transfer happens on agricultural properties?
Are we prepared to assist with this process?

4. INCREASING OUR EFFICIENCY AND REACH

- Did we correct all issues identified in our initial Accreditation process? Are there changes in the LTA Standards and Practices that we need to adapt to? Are we anticipating any areas we will need to improve on before our first Accreditation renewal?
- Have we met with each of our local and regional partners to discuss ways that we can work together to accomplish shared goals?
- Are we learning about and tracking changes in foundation, state and federal funding opportunities that align with our work?
- Are we participating in appropriate regional planning efforts?
- Are we actively seeking out and engaging potential new partners?
- Are we using GIS data to inform our conservation planning?
- Are we limited by the capacity of our equipment or software in monitoring our conservation properties?
- Are all of the boundaries of our conservation properties marked with signage?
- Is there any equipment that would help our staff stay safe in the field or office?

