



We envision a future that connects our communities through conservation – where physical, ecological, recreational, and economic interconnections are embraced – enriching the unique character of each community.

OUR HOME

North central Massachusetts is an ecologically and demographically diverse area that lies between the Gulf of Maine and the Berkshire mountains - defined to the west by glaciated hills and an abundance of water resources, and to the east by the sandier lowlands of the Northeast Coastal Plain.

Our region includes forested communities and sparsely populated small towns as well as urban centers with increasing cultural diversity and boasts the highest concentration of manufacturing jobs in Massachusetts - supporting a large working-class population. NCLT is currently working with 14 towns surrounding the urban hubs of Fitchburg, Gardner and Leominster serving approximately 180,000 people.



OUR CHALLENGES

North central Massachusetts is home to some of the fastest growing communities in the state, and development pressures are high where exurban sprawl threatens natural resources and the quality of life. At increasing rates, we are losing forest and farmland to residential and commercial development which also fragments large tracts of land among multiple owners, making conservation more difficult and costly.

Our changing climate is threatening all living things. Despite this upheaval, experts agree land protection is, and will remain, a key strategy for ensuring that natural systems, and the species and humans that depend upon them, will continue to thrive. If we are to be resilient in the face of an uncertain climate, we must urgently preserve the natural ecosystems that support life. Our work to protect wildlands, farmland and watersheds is vital for the region's resilience.

OUR RESPONSE

The single greatest challenge to land conservation is funding for the purchase of land and easements on private lands to ensure they remain undeveloped.¹ Despite widespread public support for conservation, state and federal funding has fallen by 50% over the past 10 years. If we are to preserve the ecological resiliency of this region, we need to up our game immediately.

NCLT wants to continue to serve as a leader and a catalyst for conservation, by acting directly to protect the nature of north central Massachusetts and by stimulating individual and institutional action through conservation, collaboration and education.

A brief summary of our 2019 strategic plan is below.

NCLT STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

In this dynamic political and economic environment, there are many distractions. Our mission keeps us focused on the goal of conserving land critical to a resilient environment that will combat climate change, address community needs, and support species survival.

ROLE

We intend to increase NCLT's impact on the pace of conservation as a leader and catalyst for land conservation in the region by:

- Exploring collaborative relationship models with regional partners to amplify our conservation impact
- Applying an equity lens to our conservation decisions, our operating practices and our organizational model
- Educating town leaders and the public about existing and emerging land-use pressures and positioning ourselves as a resource for them

CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Based on NCLT's Strategic Conservation Plan (2019)

- Prioritize land that has the most impact on the resilience, health and well-being of our region
- Increase outreach to landowners to support and advise them on long-term, conservation-based decisions to help them reach their desired outcomes

¹ Wildlands and Woodlands, Harvard University

- Proactively connect with conservation partners to support and refine conservation efforts on critical landscapes and habitats

EFFECTIVE TEAM

NCLT is advancing a growth mindset and we must continue to build an NCLT team with the leadership and skills we need to fulfill our mission. We will:

- Optimize our resources and staff capacity, and identify meaningful metrics to evaluate our success
- Cultivate opportunities for deeper engagement and advocacy with local communities

FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND SUSTAINABILITY

NCLT has no debt. We have an unrestricted endowment of \$550,000 and reserve funds designated for land stewardship and legal defense. We will fund the future of NCLT by increasing revenue while maintaining a healthy diversity of funding. Our focus for the coming year is to:

- Substantially increase all revenue streams and utilize partnerships to access new funding for conservation
- Prepare a 5-year financial plan that reflects the growth mindset of our strategic plan regarding funding, staffing levels and sustainability including building accessible reserves, fee- for-service revenue streams and a capital campaign.

We welcome all input that prompts creative thinking and soundly advances the pace of conservation in our region and throughout New England.

Contact executive director, Anna Wilkins, at Awilkins@northcountylandtrust.org

