



# Haliburton Highlands Land Trust

Protecting the land we love for future generations

## 2023 to 2026 Strategic Plan

Option of Extension to 2028

Approved by the Board of Directors April 2023

## Introduction

Following a meaningful engagement and planning process, the Haliburton Highlands Land Trust (HHLT) has developed a new strategic plan that outlines our priorities for the next three years, from 2023 to 2026. Recognizing that this is an ambitious plan, the Board may opt to extend the term of the plan to 2028, after a review of progress to date.

Driven by a re-defined set of statements outlining our vision, purpose, and values, we have established three strategic priorities to guide our decision-making.

Our strategic plan is an aspirational document that provides a roadmap to how we will realize our desired future. Our vision – ***A Haliburton County with an abundance of protected lands and waters, where healthy, connected ecosystems allow wildlife and people to thrive, and help in the fight against climate change*** – is critically important as we think about the world we want to live in and help to foster.

Our purpose as an organization is to bring this vision to life through a set of crucial activities, which will require our passion, energy, skills, and dedication. It will mean that we spend some of our time strengthening the foundation of our organization, while continuing our current programs and partnerships, and further expanding our reach and connections throughout the community.

As a relatively small land trust, we have already achieved a great deal for our community. We own, manage, and protect five properties, representing 1,200 acres in Haliburton County. However, we recognize that it is not only about the lands we steward as ecosystems are connected. We are now also focused on conservation at a broader level and are committed to supporting the protection of significant wildlife corridors. By embarking on this next chapter of our journey, we re-commit ourselves to this important work.

## Planning Context

This is a significant update from our last strategic plan, which was approved in 2012. It has been made possible thanks to the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, through the 2022-23 Resilient Communities Fund.

The HHLT has made great strides forward since the last plan, and there is much to celebrate. As a relatively small land trust, we protect an impressive number of acres and waters, have received global recognition for some of our research projects, and have been at the forefront of visionary initiatives such as the Highlands Corridor.

The organization is led by a strong and knowledgeable Board, supported by a very capable part-time staff member, and benefits from the skills of a broad and dedicated volunteer base.

Sustainability for the organization, in terms of its financial position, its staff and Board capacity, and the need for future succession planning is top-of-mind. Although the HHLT has developed a very positive reputation and strong communications, there is still work to do to raise awareness in the community about the organization and opportunities to get involved.

There is also a great urgency to this work. The pressures on our natural areas and their important functions continue to escalate at a significant pace, especially as our local population experiences rapid growth and demographic shifts, and the threat of climate change evolves.

We are inspired and motivated by these opportunities and challenges. We will use them to fuel us in the months and years ahead.

# Engagement

As part of a strong engagement process, we invited the Board, our staff member, volunteers, land and financial donors, members, event participants, and the broader community to share their insights and perspectives.

Board members and our staff member participated in a Reflection & Visioning session, as well as three strategic retreat sessions. Other stakeholders were invited to share their thoughts through focus group sessions, interviews, and an online survey. Results of engagement were summarized in an Engagement Report, which was provided to the Board of Directors and staff to inform their decision-making.

We are thankful for the participation of the 132 individuals who provided their valuable insights and perspectives to the process.

## Engagement Methodology



## Plan Implementation and Monitoring

To ensure the successful implementation of our strategic priorities, the Board of Directors commits to the following actions:

1. Create annual operational plans that identify annual objectives, key progress measures, and roles and responsibilities.
2. Monitor and measure effectiveness of the operational plan quarterly.
3. Communicate progress to stakeholders on an annual basis.
4. Complete an annual review of the strategic plan, amend objectives and strategies as needed, and ensure these are reflected in annual operational plans and budgets.
5. At the end of the initial term of this plan (2026), determine whether to extend the plan for another two years to 2028 as part of the annual review process.

# Our Vision, Purpose, and Values

As part of this planning process, we have defined new vision, purpose, and values statements. These statements are intended to both guide and inspire our work, while acting as the deep roots from which our future successes will grow.

**Our Vision**      A Haliburton County with an abundance of protected lands and waters, where healthy, connected ecosystems allow wildlife and people to thrive, and help in the fight against climate change.

**Our Purpose**      To protect the lands and waters we love for future generations.

We do this by:

- Taking care of the properties entrusted to us
- Identifying additional significant natural areas for conservation
- Promoting good stewardship of private lands and waters
- Increasing knowledge of the natural heritage of Haliburton County through research and education
- Encouraging strong environmental protection policies and decision-making

## Our Values

### Stewardship

At the core of our work is the conservation of the lands and waters that we all rely on as part of a healthy, thriving community. We are focused on the long-term care of the lands and waters under our protection and the preservation of important ecological corridors.

### Respect for the Environment

We believe that a healthy environment is profoundly connected to a healthy economy and human well-being, and that fostering a love of nature through education is central to this. We value working with others to protect natural spaces, maintain biodiversity and build resilience to climate change.

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### Trust

We work hard to create respectful, engaging, and appreciative relationships with our staff, volunteers, and donors, as well as land owners, partner organizations, government, and the broader community.

### Integrity

We strongly believe in evidence-based decision-making. We diligently manage the properties and resources entrusted to us and provide a credible local voice on issues of conservation and the environment.

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### Inclusivity

We welcome everyone who has an interest in our work to join our organization as members, volunteers, donors, and supporters. We regularly offer diverse, accessible opportunities to learn more about our work, get involved, and play a meaningful role in fulfilling our vision and purpose.

### Innovation

We are forward-thinking in the ways we explore solutions and understand our current context. We are passionate about nature-based options to help address the big challenges of our times and we take a leadership role when needed to move forward.

## Our Strategic Priorities

Driven by our vision, purpose, and values, we have identified three strategic priorities to guide our work over the next three years.



### **Healthy Organization**

Our goal is to be a sustainable, resilient organization with sufficient funding for our operations, an achievable workload for our team, and a vibrant membership and volunteer base.

### **Strong Programs & Partnerships**

Our goal is to continue and expand our conservation, education, and research work, and broaden our partnerships with key stakeholders.

### **Broad Awareness & Communications**

Our goal is to keep our community and policy makers informed about our work, help them to understand the importance of land and water protection, and remain a trusted source of information on environmental issues.

# HHLT Strategic Priorities and Objectives 2023 - 2026

Priority	Healthy Organization	Strong Programs & Partnerships	Broad Awareness & Communications
Goal	Our goal is to be a sustainable, resilient organization with sufficient funding for our operations, an achievable workload for our team, and a vibrant membership and volunteer base.	Our goal is to continue and expand our conservation, education, and research work, and broaden our partnerships with key stakeholders.	Our goal is to keep our community and policy makers informed about our work, help them to understand the importance of land and water protection, and remain a trusted source of information on environmental issues.
Our Objectives	<p>Strengthen our financial position through <b>increased fundraising and the pursuit of other funding opportunities</b>.</p> <p><b>Increase staffing</b>, informed by discussions about staff funding with other Land Trusts and identification of key job responsibilities.</p> <p><b>Create a succession plan</b> for the Board and staff, with a strong focus on knowledge transfer.</p> <p><b>Increase our membership</b>, while ensuring strong retention of current members.</p> <p><b>Conduct a governance review</b> focused on Board committee structure, responsibilities, and activities.</p> <p>Continue to <b>support and empower volunteers</b> to become more engaged in the work of the organization.</p> <p>Finalize the development of the policies and procedures required to <b>meet the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices</b>.</p>	<p>Continue to <b>protect and maintain current HHLT properties</b>.</p> <p>Continue to <b>pursue new land acquisition opportunities</b>.</p> <p>Continue to <b>lead the research, recognition, and protection of the Highlands Corridor</b>.</p> <p><b>Build the Partners in Conservation</b> program by deepening the engagement of current partners, broadening the approach to attracting new partners, and integrating the program throughout our other activities.</p> <p>Continue to <b>build meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities</b> to learn more about Indigenous knowledge and uses of the lands and waters within the Highlands Corridor, explore how we can work together, and how our work at HHLT may contribute to reconciliation.</p> <p><b>Offer specific and targeted opportunities for youth</b>, including those in secondary school, post-secondary, and early in their careers.</p> <p>Continue to <b>pursue new research projects</b> that increase knowledge of the natural heritage in Haliburton County, and disseminate the results to key stakeholders and through our education programs.</p>	<p><b>Continue to raise community awareness</b> about the work of the HHLT and how to support the HHLT through robust communications and outreach efforts.</p> <p><b>Conduct outreach to specific groups</b> including a diversity of age groups, seasonal residents, and cottage associations.</p> <p><b>Share key messages</b> about HHLT's protection of water, the connection between a healthy economy and a healthy environment, and the importance of nature-based solutions to climate change and maintaining biodiversity.</p> <p><b>Communicate the value of HHLT's work</b> in the face of climate change, loss of biodiversity and shifting government policies.</p> <p>Support the development of more nuanced and impactful environmental protection policies through <b>evidence-based advocacy</b> with relevant levels of government.</p> <p><b>Publicly recognize local champions</b> of the HHLT and conservation, including politicians, partners, and individuals.</p>