



LOWELL PARKS &
CONSERVATION TRUST

Strategic Plan 2025 - 2030



Creating Community Through Conservation



Introduction and Planning Context

The impact of the Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust (LP&CT) extends far beyond the 50 acres that the organization has conserved. For over 35 years, LP&CT has been at the leading edge of innovation, defining what it means to be an urban land trust and truly create long-lasting, beautiful green spaces and special places for the residents of the greater Lowell region.

Through its work, LP&CT is addressing important systemic issues including ensuring equitable access to nature for enjoyment, health, and well-being, and addressing conservation challenges in the urban environment. LP&CT's programming is strong and covers a considerable amount of ground. From environmental education for all ages to land conservation to trail development to community science, there are innumerable ways in which the organization connects with the community and cares for the environment. LP&CT has created miles of trails, preserved historic places, planted thousands of trees, and connected thousands of kids, teenagers, and adults to nature and conservation through educational programming and volunteer opportunities.

The organization has grown considerably over the last few years. While other organizations saw their programming stall during the COVID pandemic, LP&CT was able to keep going strong. More and more people sought access to nature and programming in the outdoors, and LP&CT met the demand. LP&CT was selected as part of the Social Innovation Forum's Accelerator program in 2023, as their Environmental Justice Innovator, resulting in a prospectus laying out the case for scaling up as well as a refined theory of change, helping to distill the work of the organization into a clear and concise graphic. LP&CT has embarked on significant collaborative projects with partner organizations, such as the Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary (PFWS), which will create even more educational opportunities and green spaces for generations to come. Lastly, LP&CT has brought on new staff members to manage operations and development, important investments for the future.

The next chapter for LP&CT will be one of steady, stable growth, allowing the organization to broaden impact, optimize internal operations, and continue to meet the financial obligations far into the future. The goals and priorities outlined in this strategic plan are indicative of the love and care this organization has for the community and the environment and a desire to build upon the amazing foundation that has been established over the last 35 years.



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Core Identity

Vision

We envision a Lowell where:

- Everyone, regardless of their age or background, feels comfortable in the outdoors
- Anyone can improve their health, connect in nature with friends and family, meet new people, and travel along trails and paths to their heart's content
- All generations find joy in caring for our shared green spaces, special places, and the species we live alongside
- All the elements of nature (plants, animals, habitats, waterways, and air) thrive for future generations to enjoy

Mission

To improve the quality of life for the people of Lowell through education and through the creation, conservation, and preservation of parks, open spaces, and special places.

Tagline

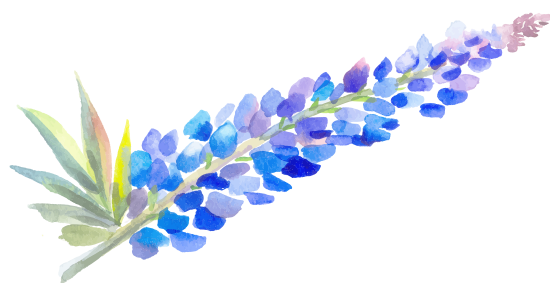
Creating community through conservation

Values

Welcoming: Our parks, programs, and volunteer opportunities are open and inviting to everyone of differing abilities, race, gender, ages, and income levels.

Stewardship: We take the long view, engaging people of all ages in caring for special places so they endure into the future.

Innovation: We are continuously seeking new ways to spark curiosity and positive change within the community, protect our natural resources, and help people create connections to nature.



Theory of Change

Creating Community Through Conservation



This graphic serves as LP&CT's theory of change and demonstrates the transition from lack of access to nature to everyone benefiting from and feeling a sense of belonging in nature. The four distinct quadrants in the center of this graphic are the primary strategies through which LP&CT creates impact in the community and environment: 1) Protecting Places, 2) Conserving Nature, 3) Activating Stewards, and 4) Connecting People.



Theory of Change (Cont.)

Protecting Places



LP&CT is one of the few urban land trusts in the United States. A key focus of the organization is establishing and safeguarding special places, parks, and open spaces. LP&CT has protected over 50 acres of land in Lowell, including: Hawk Valley Farm, Donahue Park, Jollene Dubner Park, and West Meadow. In addition, LP&CT is working with key community partners to develop the PFWS, a network of trails and facilities for recreation, education, and community agriculture.

Protecting places also means preserving places associated with the rich history of Lowell. The Spalding House is one of those such places. The Spalding House is a historic house museum that LP&CT uses as an urban environmental education center to convey how the decisions people make impact the environment.

In this next chapter, LP&CT will continue to protect and expand green spaces and special places, work towards connecting PFWS to the Lowell-Dracut-Tyngsboro State Forest, and close the gaps in the Concord River Greenway and other trails.

Conserving Nature



LP&CT's conservation efforts go beyond land conservation to include engaging community scientists as volunteers who monitor Lowell's unique plants and animals and help care for the urban tree canopy.

One example of these efforts, the Blanding's Turtle Conservation Project, includes a turtle headstarting program in partnership with Zoo New England, local schools, and community volunteers. This program allows turtle hatchlings to be raised in captivity (short-term) to increase their chances of survival into adulthood.

Another LP&CT conservation effort, the anadromous fish monitoring program, engages volunteers in monitoring the passage in Lowell of river herring (alewives) and other species in the Sudbury-Assabet-Concord River (SuAsCo) Watershed. These efforts enable LP&CT to better understand what kind of modifications are needed to allow for upstream fish passage at Centennial Falls in Lowell and the Talbot Mills Dam in Billerica. Opening up fish passage at the Talbot Mills Dam will allow a variety of species to access the entire SuAsCo Watershed – the largest untapped acreage of riparian (river-adjacent) habitat in all of New England.

LP&CT's impact is not limited to protected acreage; it also includes protecting the tree canopy. LP&CT, the City of Lowell, and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation have partnered to plant trees where they are most needed in the city. In 2024, 657 large caliper trees were planted that provide much-needed shade and other benefits in vulnerable neighborhoods. Tree equity work will continue during the implementation of this strategic plan.

In this next chapter, LP&CT will continue to engage volunteers in species-specific conservation work, foster tree equity across the city, spearhead ecological restoration projects along the river corridors, and reconnect fragmented waterways.

Theory of Change (Cont.)

Activating Stewards

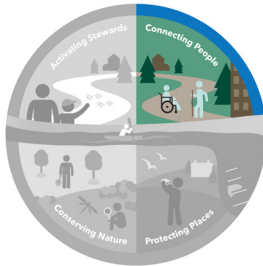


Through a great diversity of programming, hands-on experiential learning, volunteer, and community science opportunities, LP&CT connects kids, young adults, and older adults to nature, community, and each other. For example, the after-school program Lowell Leaders in Stewardship (LLIS), a STEM-based environmental education program offered in partnership with Mass Audubon and the Lowell Public Schools, engages future generations in the stewardship of Lowell's natural resources. In 2024, LP&CT supported 1,157 students in its after-school programs. In addition, LP&CT offered over 50 programs for people of all ages and had 579 volunteers. This work will continue during the implementation of this strategic plan.

Some of LP&CT's volunteers include land stewards who are constantly monitoring properties, as well as collecting data on flora and fauna and issues with invasives.

In this next chapter, LP&CT will emphasize educating the broader community about the environment, including on the topic of climate change and ways to mitigate it, and finding new and exciting ways to engage the community in science education and hands-on stewardship activities throughout the city.

Connecting People



LP&CT makes room for community members to connect with one another and with nature by engaging them in protecting special places and conserving nature in our City. This process of engaging people activates life-long conservation stewards and builds community through hand-on conservation action. LP&CT's work with the Concord River Greenway illustrates its capacity to be a catalyst in improving the quality of life in Lowell.

The Concord River is a scenic, natural, cultural, and historical resource of national importance. By completing the Concord River Greenway, LP&CT will reconnect Lowell's largest open spaces, preserve the historic corridor that once divided neighborhoods, and create a multi-use recreational asset and vital transportation alternative to get downtown. The Greenway will also fill a missing link in the 200-mile Bay Circuit Trail and connect to the 25-mile Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. Closing gaps in the regional trail network is a priority, as well as protecting under-appreciated assets, including the aerosol art corridor under the Lowell Connector.

In this next chapter, LP&CT will help people make connections to green spaces and special places by tailoring programs to community needs, increase awareness that anywhere in Lowell is close to a Trust property, demonstrating the benefits of nature on mental, public, and physical health, and expanding programming to work with new partners.



Goals and Priorities

	Goals	Priorities
Protect Places	1. Continue actively building towards a greener Lowell, expanding connectivity, closing gaps, and protecting special places in neighborhoods with less access to open space	<p>Priority A: Continue to protect and expand green spaces and special places</p> <p>Priority B: Connect PFWS to the Lowell-Dracut-Tyngsboro State Forest</p> <p>Priority C: Close the gaps in the Concord River Greenway and other trails</p> <p>Highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2026: Connect PFWS to Lowell-Dracut-Tyngsboro State Forest • 2027: Complete a single contiguous route all along the Concord River Greenway • 2028: Open the educational facilities and farm at the PFWS to the public
Conserve Nature	2. Engage the community in new conservation initiatives and existing stewardship, scientific research, and monitoring efforts	<p>Priority A: Expand involvement in species-specific community science projects</p> <p>Priority B: Continue to spearhead efforts to foster tree equity across the city</p> <p>Priority C: Conduct ecological restoration projects along river corridors and expand on newly launched invasive species pilot projects</p> <p>Priority D: Reconnect fragmented waterways, especially through local and regional dam removal efforts</p> <p>Highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025: Continue the new invasive species program that is up and running with a core set of volunteers committed to the project • 2026: Add spotted turtles to the turtle monitoring efforts • 2027: Plant an additional 1,000 “equity trees” across the city
Activate Stewards	3. Inspire the current and next generation to love being outside and to take action for the environment now and into the future.	<p>Priority A: Educate people on the issue of climate change and encourage them to take action</p> <p>Priority B: Continue providing excellent programming in schools during after-school programming</p> <p>Priority C: Engage the community through innovative environmental educational programming</p> <p>Highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2026: Provide staff training on integrating content related to climate change into programs for all ages • 2027: Identify new partners and sources of funding after-school programming • 2028: Provide a part-time staff at PWFS for more consistent on-site LP&CT programming

Goals and Priorities (Cont.)

	Goals	Priorities
Connect People	4. Create strong, enduring connections to the trails and spaces that make Lowell special--and connect people to each other	Priority A: Deepen understanding around community needs and create, modify, or wind down programs accordingly
		Priority B: Help people feel connected to LP&CT spaces by increasing awareness that anywhere in Lowell is close to a Trust property
		Priority C: Amplify messaging related to mental, public, and physical health
		Priority D: Expand programming to include work with new partners
		Highlights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2026: Enhance external communication efforts • 2027: Expand storytelling through video and other media • 2028: Complete an assessment of community needs regarding programming
Sustain the Organization	5. Grow staff capacity and strengthen internal operations for greater efficiency	Priority A: Bring in new staff for education and outreach support
		Priority B: Continue to strengthen staff connections across programs
		Priority C: Optimize internal systems
		Highlights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2025: Ensure new database is up and running smoothly • 2026: Hire new education and outreach staff member • 2027: Build regular Professional Development and team-building sessions into the yearly calendar
		6. Continue to meet the financial obligations of the organization far into the future
Priority B: Continue with PFWS fundraising for capital plan		
Priority C: Shift the mix of funding, given the changes at the national and state levels		
Highlights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2026: Identify alternative funding sources for education programs • 2027: Secure \$150,000 challenge match for operational support funding • 2028: Ensure financial resources to protect current conservation properties into the future and to meet national accreditation standards in 2029 		



Goals and Priorities (Cont.)

	Goals	Priorities
Sustain the Organization (Cont.)	7. Enhance board development and engagement	Priority A: Find ways to integrate the board more in programming
		Priority B: Support board involvement in fundraising
		Priority C: Continue to diversity the board
		Highlights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2026: Increase board member attendance at events • 2027: Establish clear fundraising goals and workplans for the board • 2028: Ensure the board composition more closely reflects the demographic of the community

Gratitude

This strategic plan results from hours of work from the LP&CT board and staff. Thank you to everyone who helped envision and plan LP&CT's future.

- Sheila Kirschbaum, Ed.D, President
- James O'Hearn, Vice President
- David M. Braslau, Treasurer
- Jonathan Geer, Clerk
- Amanda Flores, Board Member
- Dr. Jon Regosin, Board Member
- Dr. Mark Romanowsky, Board Member
- Sopheap Theam, Board Member
- Diane Nichols Tradd, Board Member
- Laura Watts, Board Member
- Lily Chhun, Associate Board Member

- Jane Calvin, Executive Director
- Leigh Cameron, Membership and Volunteer Coordinator
- Michael Frederick, Development Director
- Dioris Guerrero, Operations Manager
- Kathy Hirbour, Environmental Educator
- Antonio Trinidad Martinez, Community Conservation Coordinator

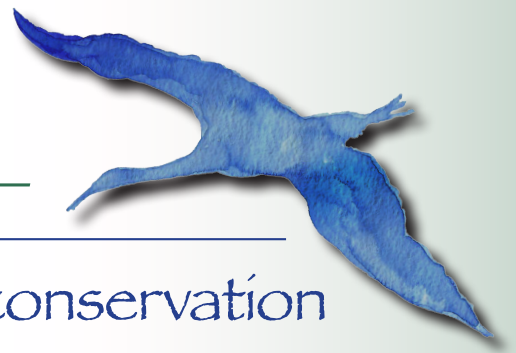
Strategic Planning Facilitator

- Erin Allgood, Liberation Nexus Lab



Get Involved

Our impact is visible everywhere –



Help us create community through conservation



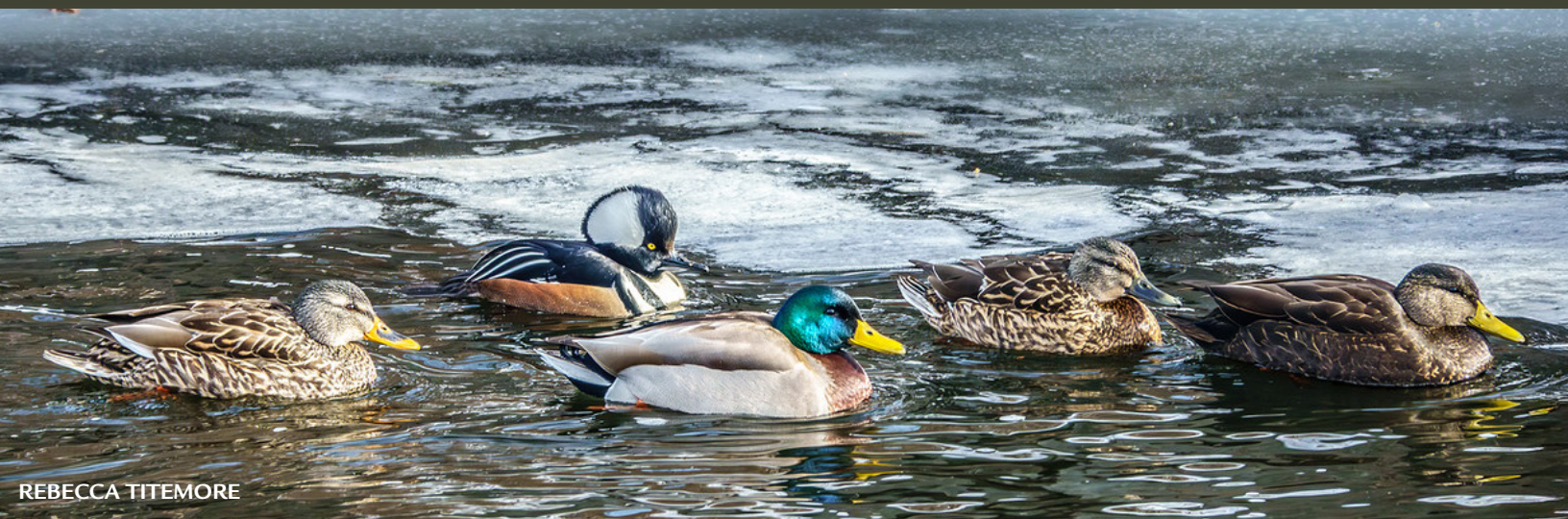
Get involved by becoming a member, joining us at our events, volunteering, or being a steward for one of our properties. There are many ways for you to join our conservation community. For more information please contact us at: info@LowellLandTrust.org



Invite us to an event near you!

Our Mission:

To improve the quality of life for the people of Lowell through education and through the creation, conservation, and preservation of parks, open spaces, and special places.



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