



Ridge and Valley Conservancy

2020-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Blazing a New Trail





MISSION STATEMENT

Ridge and Valley Conservancy is an accredited land trust that, in cooperation with strategic partners, permanently protects and stewards land in northwestern New Jersey for the benefit of natural communities.



VISION STATEMENT

A region that is abundant in natural beauty and biodiversity protected for the future.

"You and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor. A billion and a half years ago, the two of you parted ways. But even now, after an immense journey in separate directions, that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes."

RICHARD POWERS,
THE OVERSTORY: A NOVEL

Many thanks to the Board of Trustees and the Strategic Planning Committee for their vision and hard work in creating this plan:

Bob Canace, Margaret Schiller, Dennis Briede, Christine Hepburn, Jason Kurtz, Carla Lee Lewis, Robert Lewis, Joel McGreen, Liz Marshall, Roman Osadca, Lynda Towers, and Sharon Wander.

Special thanks to Board President Bob Canace, whose endless dedication, energy, and commitment to the organization from its inception in 1992 brought forth this mighty land trust.

Special thanks to Kate McGuinness for thoughtfully leading RVC through this process from beginning to end with her invaluable insight and energy.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the late 1980s, a small group of passionate people who wanted to protect a quarter-acre triangle of land in a historic district in Johnsonburg, New Jersey, got together to mark the beginning of land conservation in the Ridge and Valley Region. Ridge and Valley Conservancy (RVC) was incorporated in 1992 to continue the work of this first project. Most of the work was initially accomplished on a shoestring budget. Countless dedicated supporters, volunteers, members, and funding partners who understood the value of preserving the unique character of this area joined together as a force for change.

In 2016, RVC marked a milestone with the achievement of accreditation by the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Accreditation put RVC at the leading edge of land conservation and held it accountable to the highest national standards for meeting its promise to protect land in perpetuity.

In adherence to these standards, RVC built up its organizational reserves within a few years of accreditation. This growth allowed for the addition of staff for both operations and land stewardship. The creation of endowments, and growth in other funding sources, now allows RVC to ensure continuity of care for the lands it holds. Looking forward, RVC will continue its efforts to



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *continued*

increase funding for the protection and stewardship of land and to support organizational growth. To date, RVC has helped to protect more than 4,000 acres across northwestern New Jersey. In a region with water resources, plant and wildlife habitat, and vistas as sensitive and unique as the Ridge and Valley, this is vital work.

RVC board members, staff, and key stakeholders met on January 12, 2020, to envision and collaborate on a 2020-2025 strategic plan. We reviewed our vision, values, and mission. Our discussions revealed four areas of focus for RVC: stewardship, land protection, community, and organizational stability. Over multiple planning sessions, we authored a strategic plan that provides a blueprint for RVC to follow to realize its goals related to protecting and stewarding natural lands, increasing community engagement, and ensuring ongoing organizational health over the next five years.

Importantly, this new strategic plan highlights RVC's commitment to community conservation. We believe that preserved land must be accessible to all: rural and urban dwellers; the able-bodied and the physically challenged; and members of marginalized communities. Time spent in the natural world renews the soul, feeds the spirit, and provides much-needed solace in turbulent times. It invites the individual to commune and engage with nature. Hopefully, it brings forth the desire to preserve and steward land for future generations and for the health of this planet.

We look forward to the next five years as we continue our work to secure permanent land protection that benefits all.

With gratitude,
Susi Tilley
Executive Director



Ridge and Valley Conservancy

AREAS OF FOCUS

Stewardship

Land Protection

Community

**Organization
Stability**



Ridge and Valley Conservancy

GOALS

Stewardship

INCREASE CAPACITY TO MEET CURRENT AND FUTURE STEWARDSHIP GOALS AND NEEDS	MAINTAIN QUALITY OF PUBLIC ACCESS AS RVC'S TRAIL NETWORK INCREASES	PROVIDE ACCESS FOR LIMITED MOBILITY VISITORS AT ONE PRESERVE	EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS
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Land Protection

MAXIMIZE LAND PROTECTION ACCORDING TO PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA (PSC)	OPTIMIZE THE REACH OF RVC'S CURRENT FOOTPRINT	DEVELOP LAND SUCCESSION PLAN
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Community

DOUBLE VOLUNTEER BASE	INCREASE MEMBERSHIP BY AN AVERAGE OF 10% ANNUALLY	INCREASE RVC'S RELEVANCE AND VISIBILITY
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Organization Stability

GROW RVC FINANCES	ENSURE ADEQUATE STAFFING CAPACITY TO MEET GOALS	INCREASE BOARD EFFECTIVENESS
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Stewardship

STRATEGIES

INCREASE CAPACITY TO MEET CURRENT AND FUTURE STEWARDSHIP GOALS AND NEEDS

Ensure dedicated stewardship staff according to Board-approved plan (March 2020)

- Annual reassessment by Board of current stewardship staff

Ensure access to necessary equipment to meet all stewardship needs

- Appropriate budgeting for equipment needs and equipment maintenance

Build and maintain relationships with outside contractors to assist with stewardship fulfillment

Increase the volunteer stewardship base

Pursue strategic research relationships

Stewardship

STRATEGIES

MAINTAIN QUALITY OF PUBLIC ACCESS AS RVC'S TRAIL NETWORK INCREASES

Make trails at selected preserves hiker-friendly

- Post trail maps at trailhead
- Post green RVC preserve sign

Board members / staff each adopt a preserve for monthly checkup on preserve conditions (trails, maps, etc.)

Explore increasing access through more diverse language in key, promotional materials

Stewardship

STRATEGIES

PROVIDE ACCESS FOR LIMITED MOBILITY VISITORS AT ONE PRESERVE

Assess potential sites

Identify funders focused on serving this population and other project-specific partners

Stewardship

STRATEGIES

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Prioritize resource allocation for implementation based on Stewardship Committee assessment / recommendations

STRATEGIES

MAXIMIZE LAND PROTECTION ACCORDING TO PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA (PSC)

Continue to refer landowners to appropriate agencies and resources

Increase outreach to landowners

Position RVC as local conservation option available to take on projects for other conservation partners, e.g. TNC, State of NJ, and TLC-NJ

Land Protection

STRATEGIES

OPTIMIZE THE REACH OF RVC'S CURRENT FOOTPRINT

Review and update RVC PSC

- Update policy and procedure for accepting land and approving land acquisition projects
- Create rubric / measurement methodology for weighing the merits of the business side (i.e. willing seller, funding partner, stewardship and succession plan) against the land side

Analyze current holdings against PSC and current overall capacity

Land Protection

Land Protection

STRATEGIES

DEVELOP LAND SUCCESSION PLAN

Land Protection Committee to evaluate each holding and determine if there is an existing and willing partner

- Determine if there is a logical partner that meets all needs, i.e. geographical, protection focus, etc.

Community

STRATEGIES

DOUBLE VOLUNTEER BASE

Create virtual training for interested volunteers for self-directed work and supervised work

Target service organizations, special interest groups and corporate workgroups to recruit to volunteer base, e.g. scouts, service organizations, hiking clubs, corporate volunteer programs, etc.

Community

STRATEGIES

INCREASE MEMBERSHIP BY AN AVERAGE OF 10%
ANNUALLY

Focus on creating virtual opportunities/programming to engage a larger audience, e.g. webinars, book clubs, special interest groups, etc.

Maximize the capabilities of current database and explore other available technology related to membership management and fundraising.

Community

STRATEGIES

INCREASE RVC'S RELEVANCE AND VISIBILITY

Create self-guided recreational/educational programming for preserves, e.g. self-guided hikes, meditations, botany tours, etc.

Increase social media presence

Expand women-centered programming

Partner with other organizations who share complementary missions for educational programming and scientific research

Organization Stability

STRATEGIES

GROW RVC FINANCES

Accumulate one year of operational budget in reserve

Clearly define and grow planned giving program

Explore and outline major fundraising campaign

Raise adequate funds for transactional costs for land protection projects

Pursue institutional giving

Organization Stability

STRATEGIES

ENSURE ADEQUATE STAFFING CAPACITY TO MEET GOALS

Evaluate current staff capacity against goals

Develop and implement staffing plan, inclusive of succession planning, against goals

Organization Stability

STRATEGIES

INCREASE BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

Evaluate and update board roles and responsibilities

Conduct board training

Continue to grow and diversify the Board