



## **2023-2030 Strategic Plan Update**

As was the case for many aspects of our lives, COVID-19 upended and delayed our strategic planning process. Rest assured, the AHC Board is working diligently to formalize and implement a 7-year plan that will be centered on the following priorities:

### *1. Marketing of the AHC brand*

The AHC suffers from a relatively low community profile even though our prime asset, the iconic Robertson Cliffs, are widely known as a premier outdoor adventure destination. We are developing and starting to implement a plan to market the AHC brand with the goal of increasing our community profile and enhancing community engagement in AHC activities. The AHC brand will be promoted through increasing our social media presence, conducting direct email campaigns, participating in community events, improving partnerships and synergies with local business partners, and developing co-branding agreements with third parties (such as Stokely Creek Lodge) that use our lands for their outdoor-recreation or (eco)tourism business goals. The overarching objective is to engage the broader community in AHC activities through a membership program that will generate annual revenues.

### *2. Land acquisition for conservation and stewardship*

Our mission is to protect the lands associated with the entire King Mountain formation as a unique and spectacular component of the Algoma Highlands. Our current 1180-ha holdings conserve the western half of King Mountain. Our priority for land acquisition over the next 7 years is to expand those holdings to the eastern half. This will secure conservation of the biodiversity contained within the maple-birch-oak forests and cliffs, creek valleys and wetlands of the King Mountain formation as an ecological entity.

Our second priority for land acquisition is to secure access and implement conservation buffers. Over the next 7 years we will focus on building relationships with neighbouring landowners and position ourselves for future land acquisitions that will enhance access for stewardship activities and recreational use and provide opportunities for ecological restoration, for establishing a physical presence (office, garage, visitors centre, parking), and for creating conservation buffer zones.

A capital fundraising campaign is in progress to obtain funds for planned land acquisitions.

### *3. Endowment funds for sustained operation and stewardship*

Our mandate for conservation of the acquired lands **in perpetuity** demands the establishment of financial mechanisms that will secure our operation and land stewardship **in perpetuity**. Over the next 7 years, we will focus on putting in place the foundational framework necessary for the establishment of an endowment fund that will generate sufficient interest income to cover annual operational and stewardship expenditures. The framework includes the development and implementation of governance and financial provisions that follow the 2019-Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices, investigating possible funding sources, and raising seed funds. As a first step in the critical path, we will establish a small Stewardship Endowment Fund that will secure the most essential stewardship activities in perpetuity.

### *4. Environmental education*

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the loss of our highly regarded environmental education program that engaged up to 2000 elementary school students each year in a day of outdoor education at Stokely Creek Lodge. We will explore other opportunities for engaging youth in natural environment experiences with the goal of grooming the next generation of conservationists, including participation in annual events such as Envirothon and the Science Festival, and offering adventure camps for youth.

### *5. Environmental research*

We initiated a collaboration with the Sault Naturalists to inventory and monitor the biodiversity of AHC holdings, which is being documented through the iNaturalist platform. We conduct environmental research to obtain a better understanding of our land's ecology. In 2021 we initiated a 3-year collaborative research project on wolves and their prey in our region. The collaborative study (with HydroOne and Evolgen as corporate funders and Garden River First Nations, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Natural Resources Canada, and Guelph University as key partners) uses trail cameras, satellite tracking and DNA analyses in five 400-km square study areas between Lake Superior and Iron Bridge. One of the main questions we hope to shed light on is how human activity in those areas affect the distribution, movement and activities of wolves and their prey species. After completion in 2024, we intend to use the data to focus further studies on the impact of silent-sports recreation on biodiversity and ecological values of the AHC holdings.

### *6. Silent Sports Recreation*

AHC lands are open to the public for non-motorized recreation. The iconic Robertson Cliffs have become a well-known destination for residents and visitors alike. As part of the Voyageur Trail

system, the Robertson Cliffs-King Mountain trail was incorporated into the Trans Canada Trail and attracted more than 6000 visitors in 2021. The growing popularity of the trail underscores the need to balance recreation with conservation. We have imposed a moratorium on expansion of the current trail network on King Mountain and Robertson Cliffs, while trail development on newly acquired properties will require a Board-approved trails plan. Over the next 7 years, electronic counters will be used to monitor trail use and use patterns. The effect of recreation on trail conditions will be tracked in an array of permanent monitoring plots. Data will be used to counter negative impacts by improving or rerouting affected sections. An annual trail audit is being implemented in collaboration with the Voyageur Trail Association to secure a safe and rewarding trail user experience.