



## **Strategic Plan: 2015-2020**

### **Introduction**

In 1993, conservationists, educators, silent sport enthusiasts and research scientists created the Algoma Highlands Conservancy (AHC) as a private, bi-national, non-profit land trust organization. Their objective was to conserve the environmental and recreational attributes of the Algoma Highlands, a vast, semi-wilderness area just north of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. The programs and projects of the AHC are focused on our core values of conservation, silent-sport recreation, environmental education and research, and sustainable resource management. The AHC has a long history and a proven track record of successful fund raising campaigns, public relations events, sound land acquisitions, and productive partnerships within the community. The AHC's office is located at Stokely Creek Lodge, directly adjacent to our 1214 ha contiguous conservation forest in Goulais River, Ontario.

### **Environmental and Cultural Significance**

The Algoma Highlands Region lies wholly within the Canadian Shield and is characterized by rugged valleys and ridges of Precambrian rock with a thin soil layer, through which boulders are frequently exposed. Waterfalls, lakes and woodlands of incredible natural beauty, plus a diverse array of wildlife and plant species, including some which are provincially at risk, can all be found here.

The AHC currently owns over 1200 ha of land in the vicinity of King Mountain. Although the AHC's land holdings are mostly forested, the canopy is broken in places by openings formed by small meadows or wetlands, or by the artificial corridors resulting from power line rights of way, roadways, or larger trails. While historical logging operations for pulpwood and sawlogs have had an extensive and significant effect on the entire Lake Superior watershed, including the Algoma Highlands, the AHC forest is still intact and sound in its ecological integrity.

The King Mountain summit rises to over 400 m. From it, spectacular views of the region, including islands and bays of Lake Superior, the largest freshwater lake in the world, can be enjoyed through all four seasons. Remnant artefacts associated with both Aborigines and subsequent pioneers, all of whom lived, trapped, logged and mined in the area, may still be found here and on the nearby shores of Lake Superior. The AHC's conserved properties and the plants and animals they contain are representative of the forest type and inhabitants in wilderness areas between Sault Ste. Marie and Wawa.

### **Mission and Core Values**

The mission of the AHC is to conserve and protect the unique beauty and ecological integrity of key areas within the Algoma Highlands region. Through the work of passionate, dedicated staff, volunteers, and partner organizations, the AHC strives to understand and protect the ecological function and habitat requirements of native forest, plant and animal species, while encouraging human access and visitation through low-impact recreation, educational, and stewardship opportunities.



The AHC fulfills its mission through the advancement of four core values: conservation; environmental education and research; silent sport recreation; and sustainable forest management.

### **Conservation**

The AHC seeks to conserve and protect the biodiversity and ecological integrity of the Algoma Highlands Region while facilitating access in order to enhance awareness and appreciation of our natural heritage by the broader human community.

### **Environmental Education and Research**

The AHC is dedicated to further the understanding of natural systems and to transfer this knowledge to current and future generations. The Algoma Highlands are a living classroom and laboratory – a means of discovering, studying, and demonstrating the concepts of conservation biology, ecology, and sustainable forest management.

### **Silent Sport Recreation**

The AHC promotes access to the magnificent terrain and unique beauty of the Algoma Highlands through low-impact recreation and aesthetic opportunities, including: cross-country and backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, trail running, hiking, nature photography, painting, and bird-watching.

### **Sustainable Forest Management**

The AHC believes strongly in the concept of balancing environmental protection with the economic, recreational, and spiritual benefits human can derive from forests. Thus, the AHC supports sustainable forest management, which is the philosophy, science and art of maintaining or enhancing the long-term health of forest ecosystems while providing environmental, economic, and social opportunities to benefit current and future generations. Through a combination of protection and sound forest management, the AHC strives to enhance the long-term health and value of the diverse forests of the area. The AHC has committed to managing its land holdings primarily for nature conservation, in which natural processes of growth, succession, and species interactions are generally permitted to proceed without interference.

### **Governance / Board of Directors**

The Conservancy is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. The Board adheres to the AHC Bylaws and holds regular monthly meetings to discuss and make decisions on AHC business and receive project status updates from its Executive Director. The Board accepts the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices as ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of the AHC and commits to making continual progress toward implementation of these standards and practices.



## **STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

Over the next five years (2015-2020), the AHC will continue to follow its mission by focusing on key strategic and operational goals, and objectives that promote its core values. We also seek to implement more effective, efficient, and self-sustaining organizational practices. The goals and objectives will further AHC activity in areas of existing strength, particularly conservation and research, education, and silent-sport recreation, and will provide specific direction for addressing short-term organizational requirements, such as financial sustainability.

### **Strategic Directions**

- Operational Advancement
- Financial Sustainability
- Effective Governance
- Communication and Public Outreach

### **Core Value Advancement**

- Silent-Sport Recreation
- Environmental Education
- Ecological Research and Conservation

This plan details each of the above areas and outlines goals and objectives that the Board has set for the AHC. A detailed Action Plan will focus the actions of the organization. The Action Plan will include short timelines and benchmarks that will allow the organization to evaluate its success in a measured way. Half way through this five year Strategic Plan, the Board will have the opportunity to write a second Action Plan that will allow the organization to continue to thrive using what we have learned during the execution of the first Action Plan. A review of this five year plan will be undertaken near the end of the fifth year, at which time we will evaluate our success and develop a new Strategic Plan.

## **Strategic Goals and Objectives**

### **Silent-Sport Recreation**

**Goal:** Promote Silent Sport Recreation in the Algoma Highlands while ensuring the conservation of biotic, abiotic, and cultural resources on land owned or prospectively owned by the AHC.

**Objectives:**

1. Develop a Trails Master Plan to ensure that any activities related to trail development, maintenance, and access are completed with the express approval of the Board and are consistent with the environmental and aesthetic principals of the AHC (Target: end of year 3)
2. Develop and implement land use agreements with partners.



3. Advance the AHC's presence and success in the ecotourism sector, initially by establishing the new Norm's Cabin infrastructure and an Ecotourism subcommittee to oversee its use and operations, with a view to using the facility to promote all core values and be self-supporting through ecotourism rental revenues. (Target: end of year 2).

### **Environmental Education**

**Goal:** Provide educational opportunities, across all ages, which promote environmental understanding, stewardship, and wise forest land management.

**Objectives:**

1. Strategically seek partnerships with, and funding from, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to increase financial sustainability of educational activities (Target: 1-2 funded projects/year)
2. Raise the level of public (particularly youth) awareness and concern for environmental health, stewardship, and sustainability (Target: 1-2 partnership/year)
3. Identify, formalize and publicize partner programs and AHC projects (Target: 1-2/year)

### **Ecological Research & Conservation**

**Goal:** Actively engage in activities that enhance understanding of ecological processes and ecosystem health, stewardship, and sustainability.

**Ecological Research Objectives:**

1. Strategically seek partnerships with government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to conduct or facilitate scientific research and conservation projects on AHC lands (Target: 1-2 funded projects/year)
2. Identify and publicize programs and projects (Target: 1-2/year)

**Conservation Objectives:**

1. Develop a land use policy and decision support tools that guide the protection and management of AHC land (Target: end of year 3).
2. Develop conservation project selection criteria (including a land acquisition checklist to evaluate potential future acquisitions (Target: end of year 4)
3. Identify significant parcels of private lands within the AHC's focus area, such as ecological corridors, scenic landscapes, areas of natural diversity, endangered species habitat and recreational and cultural interpretive sites (Target end of year 5; annual review)



## **Operational Goals and Objectives**

### **Financial Sustainability**

- Goal: Obtain and manage funds to carry out AHC work in a fiscally responsible manner, while securing the financial stability and viability of the AHC over the long term. This will be accomplished through the development of strategies intended to strengthen funding support for three distinct purposes:
1. Eliminate mortgage debt
  2. Stabilize annual operational funding
  3. Ensure sustained staffing and volunteer base

#### **Objectives:**

1. Maintain an active Fundraising Committee of 3-4 Board members, 1 staff, and 2-3 volunteers to develop additional non-governmental sources of revenue, particularly corporate support (Target: end of year 2)
2. Develop a contingency plan for debt retirement (target: end of year 1)
3. Secure multi-year project funding through grants and other partnerships to achieve specific AHC program goals related to research, education, capacity building, silent sport recreation, and debt retirement (target: 2 / year)
4. Diversify annual operational revenue sources (target: end of year 2)
5. Enhance staff capacity to support financial tasks (target: end of year 3)
6. Establishing a business management internship position to assist in overall business management and development of ecotourism opportunities
7. Efficient documentation and management of membership and volunteer rosters
8. Timely, effective communication to our members, the public, and private enterprises about our fundraising efforts
9. Maintain an active Finance Committee of 1-2 Board members and 1 staff and continue a rigorous budgeting process to ensure fiscal responsibility (Target: end of year 1)
10. Develop a broader member and volunteer base that contributes to workforce and financial stability (Target: end of year 5)

### **Effective Governance**



**Goal:** Expand the administrative and governance infrastructure and capacity of the organization.

**Objectives:**

1. Develop and implement governance policies and procedures that support the mandate of the organization and the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices. (Target: end of year 4)
2. Identify long range staffing requirements (Target: end of year 4)
3. Assess Board structure against skills matrix to strategically add new/replace Board members to maintain a diverse skill set (Target: annually, as required)
4. Ensure the Board structure includes implementation of a two-year rotation and smooth transfer of Executive positions (Target: end of year 3)
5. Conduct annual staff reviews and semi-annual two-way feedback sessions to ensure the efficient operation of the Organization by providing staff with guidance and addressing staff concerns (Target: end of year 3)
6. Maximize the use of subcommittees to lead evaluation, discussion, and decision-making by the Board (Target: immediate; monthly Board meetings)

### **Communication and Public Outreach**

**Goal:** Raise the profile of, and public engagement with, the AHC in Sault Ste. Marie and the Algoma Region.

**Objectives:**

1. Build positive, proactive relationships with those likely to support AHC Core Values (Target: Year 3)
2. Organize events that will engage the community at large in our Core Values; e.g., The AHC Annual Bike and Hike, Photography/Art Events, Banff Mountain Film Festival showing (Target: Annual)
3. Disseminate research findings for the benefit of the general public (Target: annual, starting year 1)
4. Develop relationships with local media organizations (Target: 2-3 radio/TV; 2-3 print/web-based)



5. Continue to provide regular communication with members and other interested parties (Target: annual)
6. Utilize social media tools to increase the AHC's profile on a larger scale (Target: weekly updates to profiles/accounts such as Facebook and website) (Target immediately and ongoing)