

Sheridan Community Land Trust Strategic Plan

FY 2019-2023 (Begin July 1, 2018 - End June 30, 2023)

Mission

SCLT preserves agricultural landscapes, open space, wildlife habitats, historical sites, and promotes and provides recreational opportunities in Sheridan County, these interests being complementary and essential to the quality of life and economic stability in Sheridan County.

Vision for SCLT in Ten Years

SCLT will be well recognized as the entity in Sheridan County that is focused on what the landscape will look like 100 years from now ensuring that, throughout the County, there will be adequate and available open space, a variety of convenient outdoor recreational opportunities, intact riparian and wildlife corridors that offer secure habitat for the species present today, and that there is a common understanding of the value of preserving significant historic resources. SCLT's work will perpetuate its region's unique and vibrant character and high quality of life and add value and stability to the economy of Sheridan County. We envision a future in which healthy population growth and related development are paired with responsible conservation that pays credence to sustainable agriculture and family ranching and ensures a balanced landscape for current and future generations.

In addition:

1. SCLT is known and respected for its partnership with public and private owners to protect Sheridan County's landscapes and vistas, and provides recreational access opportunities.
2. SCLT is known and respected for its partnerships that have preserved historic properties across Sheridan County.
3. SCLT is recognized for a small staff of bright, energetic, team players with complementary skills in land planning, natural resource values, negotiation, fundraising and project management.
4. SCLT is known for its high standards. Through partnering with landowners, SCLT helps to develop responsible land stewardship which promotes the benefits of private land conservation.
5. SCLT secures conservation, historic preservation, and trail and access easements on a mix of important and strategically located properties throughout the County based on strategies that are consistent with public policy and approved by the board of directors.
6. SCLT works with a community of partners to foster the next generation of supporters.
7. The board and organization operate according to best management practices with written policies governing how the work is done. Written materials are known for simplicity and clarity. SCLT is eligible for LTA accreditation even if it elects not to seek such accreditation.
8. SCLT works with multiple public and private partners to identify opportunities to foster support, achieve its mission, and maintain financial sustainability.

9. SCLT will participate in land use planning and zoning processes to retain open space, agricultural landscapes, wildlife habitat, recreational access, and historic preservation.

10. SCLT staff is supported by a diverse corps of volunteers and a committed, engaged board focused on fundraising, outreach and strategic direction. SCLT staff is committed to working with the highest ethical standards and operating with open communication and close collaboration.

11. SCLT maintains sufficient funding from private donors, a broad membership base, the County and City one-cent tax, foundations, and distributions from a \$2 million endowment. Donor retention is high and SCLT's outreach efforts support fundraising and education about the relevance of SCLT's mission.

Five-Year Strategic Plan

GOAL 1 – Landscape Conservation: Work with public and private landowners to permanently conserve areas that have high conservation, agricultural, and / or open space values that will enhance the ecosystems and economies throughout Sheridan County.

Strategies

- a. Consistently identify and prioritize the most important landscapes and parcels that qualify for potential protection by SCLT in coordination with local plans and growth policies.
- b. Systematically evaluate options for protecting these landscapes and take action to achieve protection based on assigned priorities and funding opportunities.
- c. Increase the geographic distribution of projects across its service area.
- d. Acquire conservation easement or fee-title ownership on prioritized properties to ensure their perpetual protection.
- e. Find and cultivate funding sources and partners specific to conservation projects.
- f. Ensure that the conservation values of lands protected by SCLT are maintained permanently.
- g. Develop, implement, and evaluate effective methods of outreach to potentially interested landowners for conservation easement education and establish a database for retaining and tracking this information.
- h. Stay informed and current with conservation initiatives and strategies throughout the country and those specific to the region.
- i. Be a resource to local governments tasked with developing plans and policies that relate to landscape conservation.

Benchmarks

- a. Annually develop one purchased conservation easement project and submit for funding to state and federal programs.
- b. Annually develop and close at least one donated or purchased conservation easement.
- c. Annually cultivate at least 2-3 future potential projects.
- d. Continue to leverage the Tongue River Initiative for landscape-level conservation for 1 – 2 projects / year.
- e. Annually deliver 1 - 2 community education pieces on conservation easements.

GOAL 2 – Recreation: Create, develop, and maintain diverse outdoor recreation opportunities in areas convenient to population centers and for visitors to the area.

Strategies

- a. Develop, implement, and evaluate effective methods of outreach to potentially interested landowners for recreation projects.
- b. Work closely with Sheridan County, City of Sheridan, local municipalities, state and federal agencies and other partners to identify a role for SCLT in meeting long-range recreation planning goals.
- c. Identify and cultivate funding sources for recreation-themed projects through state and federal funding programs.
- d. Consistently identify and prioritize the most important recreation opportunities for potential projects, with emphasis on projects that combine conservation easement projects with recreation projects.
- e. Ensure board allocates adequate resources to maintain and operate existing recreation projects.
- f. Develop a program for the annual assessment of the condition of existing recreation projects.

Benchmarks

- a. Annually develop or partner on at least one recreation project.
- b. Every two years create or enhance at least one additional public recreation access.

- c. Maintain and review annually a list of potential recreation opportunities that articulate the recreation component of SCLT's mission.
- d. Annually assess the condition of existing recreation projects to ensure they are maintained or improved.

GOAL 3 – Historic Preservation: Work with public and private property owners to permanently preserve and/or interpret significant historic structures and sites to maintain and enhance the region's character and economy.

Strategies

- a. Provide leadership for the Certified Local Government – Historic Preservation Commission.
- b. Develop, implement, and evaluate effective methods of outreach to potentially interested landowners for historic preservation easement education and establish a database for retaining and tracking this information.
- c. Be aware of important historic properties and structures for potential protection, with emphasis on projects that combine conservation easements with conservation of historic sites and structures.
- d. Cultivate funding sources for purchased easement funding through state and federal funding programs.

Benchmarks

- a. Every two years complete or partner on at least one historic preservation project.
- b. Keep a record of historic easement inquiries and related landowner visits to ensure that they remain level or increasing.
- c. SCLT maintains an active board presence on the Certified Local Government – Historic Preservation Commission.

GOAL 4 – Stewardship: Maintain a stewardship program that demonstrates SCLT's commitment to its historic, access and trail, and conservation easements.

Strategies

- a. Maintain and evaluate an annual stewardship process that provides consistency and transparency for both the landowner and / or property owners as well as SCLT.
- b. Develop materials that explain SCLT's stewardship role, responsibility, and costs to educate potential easement landowners and / or property owners.

- c. Raise stewardship endowment for every project either through landowner donation or funds raised from other sources.
- d. Maintain and ensure staff capacity for annual easement stewardship.

Benchmarks

- a. Stewardship Endowment is funded at a level commensurate to cover annual stewardship expenses associated with SCLT easements.
- b. All easements are in full compliance with easement terms.
- c. Monitoring is performed annually and fully documented.
- d. Guarantee that title companies are updated annually on all easements and agreements and their implications for the property.

GOAL 5 - Funding: Secure sustainable and diverse funding to support SCLT's perpetual mission.

Strategies

- a. Identify and cultivate relationships with private foundations and public organizations in order to secure funding for SCLT programs and operations.
- b. Identify and cultivate relationships with private individuals who share SCLT's mission.
- c. Attract and retain strategic members and donors by highlighting SCLT projects.
- d. Identify and execute opportunities to attract support from local businesses.
- e. Develop Outreach and Marketing plan to gain a broad-based membership.
- f. Develop and implement a strategy to steward all donors commensurate with their giving level.
- g. Review and align the Fundraising Plan with the current 5 year Strategic Plan.
- h. Seek to continue and increase the Optional 1-cent Funding.
- i. 100% of board members donate to SCLT and assist in annual fundraising efforts.
- j. Develop a true operating reserve that is 50% of annual fixed cost until an operational endowment can be realized.
- k. Consider establishing a need-based Project Acquisition fund.

- l. Ensure all endowments have a current endowment plan including an investment strategy.

Benchmarks

- a. Secure funding from public organizations including local, state, and federal sources for at least 30% of the annual operating budget.
- b. Secure funding from individual members and foundations for at least 35% of the annual operating budget.
- c. Increase number of business supporters to 50 by July 2019 and increase number by 5% annually.
- d. Increase annual donors to 300 by July 2019 and increase number by 5% annually.
- e. Increase number of major donors (over \$1k) 5% annually.
- f. Retain 90% of annually contributing members and move at least 10% of donors to a higher level each year.
- g. Increase the number of people who have identified the land trust as a beneficiary in their estate plans or in some other manner of future planned giving.
- h. Increase Optional 1-cent Funding from the City of Sheridan to \$20,000 / year and from Sheridan County to \$20,000 / year.
- i. Maintain 50% operational reserves until the Operation Endowment is fully funded.
- j. Investigate the advisability of a Project Acquisition fund.
- k. Fully fund existing Operation Endowment by 2023.
- l. Annually revise and update endowment plan(s) including an investment strategy for all endowments.

GOAL 6 – Marketing and Outreach: Convey the tangible value of SCLT’s work to the community in a way that is easily understood, can be communicated to others and builds consistent community support.

Strategies

- a. Generally, increase community awareness of SCLT in Sheridan County and effectively emphasize and convey the public and private benefits of SCLT’s mission.

- b. Establish SCLT as a reliable source for conservation, preservation, and recreation information in its region.
- c. Identify and prioritize key audiences and the best tools with which to reach them.
- d. Participate in public events and activities that reach target audiences.
- e. Provide information focused on landowners, landowner advisors and other relevant professionals.
- f. Seek diverse opportunities to publicize successful projects.
- g. Collaborate with conservation and cultural groups to help connect people to the land.
- h. Advocate for public policies and programs that support effective conservation, recreation, historic preservation, and growth that is consistent with our mission.

Benchmarks

- a. Maintain consistent contact with local elected officials.
- b. Contact target audiences through four appearances per year to local service organizations.
- c. Participate in local media opportunities at least quarterly.
- d. Maintain talking points on how to be effective SCLT ambassadors.

GOAL 7 – Best Practices: Improve and protect SCLT’s professional reputation by excellence in all SCLT undertakes.

Strategies

- a. Operate under LTA’s current Standards and Practices.
- b. Position SCLT to pursue formal accreditation starting in calendar year 2019.

Benchmarks

- a. Consult LTA Accreditation Commission annually to report progress on standards and practices and to ascertain any changes to the accreditation program.
- b. Complete and implement current LTA standards and practices.
- c. Pursue accreditation-related preparation grant in 2019.

GOAL 8 – Organizational Capacity: Ensure that an efficient and effective team of people is working at the highest sustainable level to accomplish SCLT’s mission.

Strategies

- a. Ensure that the Board and Committees are composed of members with strong and diverse backgrounds, capable and ready to leverage relationships and experience for SCLT's mission.
- b. Develop a leadership succession and retention strategy for Board and Staff.
- c. Build and support a professional staff that is commensurate with SCLT needs, opportunities, and can be adequately funded.
- d. Build and grow a volunteer force that understands SCLT's mission and is excited to share this passion.
- e. Establish partnerships that build rapport with communities and their leaders while bringing focused and tangible public benefits.

Benchmarks

- a. Annually review and maintain adopted governance policies and calendars.
- b. Annually review and update SCLT committees and workgroups for effectiveness and connection to Strategic Plan.
- c. Continue board development (recruiting, orientation and training) including adding a process for leadership succession.
- d. Establish a Volunteer Ambassador Program to aid with trails, such as ensuring trail upkeep and advocacy.