



# **STRATEGIC SUSTAINABILITY PLAN 2020**

**CATAMOUNT  
TRAIL  
ASSOCIATION**

**Catamount Trail Association  
Strategic Sustainability Plan  
Term: January 2020-December 2024**

Submitted to the CTA Board November 16, 2019 by the  
Strategic Planning Committee: Michael O'Leary, Larz  
Barber, Hilary Coolidge, Isabel Caldwell, Adam Piper,  
Peter Cottrell (volunteer), Jay Stearns (volunteer),  
Matt Williams (staff)



## Introduction

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The Catamount Trail Association has a long and storied history and has accomplished an extraordinary amount in its 35 years, but there is still much to do in order to ensure the organization is able to continue its important work in the coming decades.

As we began the work of creating a new Strategic Plan for the organization in the spring of 2019, the primary aim of our work became immediately clear: chart a course that would help the CTA evolve into a mature and sustainable organization.

While we cannot predict the future of the organization 35 years from now, we have worked to outline a comprehensive vision for the CTA, and the steps we need to take to ensure the CTA is fiscally and organizationally sustainable in the future. For that reason, we have chosen to call this plan a Strategic Sustainability Plan rather than a Strategic Plan, a framing that we hope will inform board members and staff as they work to execute this plan over the course of its four year implementation period.

## How It All Began

The Catamount Trail began as an idea in the minds of four young Vermont men: Steve Bushey, Paul Jarris, Jim Painter, and Ben Rose. As a graduate student in the Department of Geography at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, Steve Bushey researched the route and proposed an “end to end” nordic ski trail that linked together ski centers, existing ski trails, and trail-less stretches as a thesis project. With Jim providing planning and logistical support, Steve, Paul and Ben, skied the proposed route on the first End-to-End Tour in 1984, and the Catamount Trail was born. The trail was named after a mountain cougar, referred to in Vermont myth and lore as the Catamount. To this day, the Catamount Trail shares with its namesake a preference for wilderness and highlands.



The last stretch of the Catamount Trail was connected in the Fall of 2007, making the trail 100% complete. The CTA is now focused on improving and conserving the entire corridor. To date, just over 70% of the Trail is protected on public lands, privately conserved lands, or via individual trail easements. Approximately 72 miles of the CT located on private lands remain unprotected.

## An Evolving Organization

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The CTA's goal, through the implementation of this plan, is to facilitate the expansion of sustainable and equitable access to Vermont's backcountry, with a particular emphasis on ensuring our work has a statewide impact. We take a comprehensive view of backcountry access, and believe it includes adding trails and terrain, conserving the mountain lands that outdoor recreation depends on, and pioneering programs to ensure everyone has access to backcountry skiing, regardless of their income or background. We believe this is a proactive vision that addresses the challenges facing the CTA while staying true to the organization's roots and ensuring the organization is stronger in the long run.



The CTA's Board of Directors are a reasonably effective working board helping the CTA's small staff to operationalize its strong portfolio of programs—winter tours, conservation work, Ski Cubs, and maintaining the trail with a legion of volunteers—while also providing oversight to keep the CTA strong both financially and programmatically. However, the committee wants to underscore that there is always room for improvement, and that the Directors need to recognize that one of their primary goals is to continually build a stronger, more effective board.

In closing, the Strategic Sustainability Plan Committee realizes this is a very ambitious four-year plan. As we listened to the discussion at the board retreat, and reviewed the notes from that meeting, we came to believe that the board was calling for some change and we sought to deliver a plan that reflected that imperative. We may not accomplish 100% of the goals and their related strategies in just four years, but our perspective is that setting the mark high will challenge us to be the best that we can be.

- *Strategic Planning Committee*

## Why We Exist

The Catamount Trail Association is a passionate group of backcountry skiers and outdoor enthusiasts. We've been breaking trail since 1984, creating North America's longest backcountry ski trail and pioneering innovative recreation projects throughout Vermont.

**Our mission is to expand access to Vermont's backcountry** because we believe days spent in the mountains with friends are powerful, and that those experiences should be open to everyone. We are advocates, volunteers, supporters, and trailblazers working to steward the Catamount Trail, manage backcountry ski terrain, permanently protect mountain lands, and expand equitable access to skiing. By building trails, community, and opportunity we connect people to Vermont's mountain landscape.

*- Adopted by the CTA Board of Directors, March 2020*



# Our Guiding Values

## The CTA Believes...

- » That the Catamount Trail provides a unique recreational resource, which must be conserved, managed, and protected so as to remain broadly accessible to the public.
- » That the Catamount Trail and associated backcountry trails and zones are an important economic resource for Vermont communities.
- » That the organization must continue to provide access, opportunities, and education to a broad demographic of outdoor enthusiasts, regardless of income, through the Ski Cubs youth program and other initiatives.
- » That the organization must be aware of and responsive to changes in our environment, both physical and cultural.
- » That promoting the Catamount Trail and connecting people with the Trail and the backcountry instills healthy lifestyles and an ethic of respect and care for the natural world.
- » That the organization must be financially sound and must exhibit traits of responsible leadership, open and honest communications, and inclusiveness and



accountability in all that we do.

- » That the organization is prepared to lead and follow, partner with our allies and collaborate with other organizations to continue Vermont's legacy as a haven for winter outdoor activities.
- » That the organization must maintain a membership-driven organizational culture and a commitment to volunteerism.
- » That the organization must play an active role in supporting work throughout the state to conserve mountain lands.

# Goals & Strategies For The Next Four Years

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## Goal #1: Improve Trails and Terrain

The CTA's goal is to improve the Catamount Trail and backcountry terrain to make it safer, more secure, and more attractive to skiers. This work is evolving to encompass opportunities for year round use of the trail for activities that are not dependent on deep snow coverage. Internally, the CTA will continue to work on identifying trail sections that can be leveraged for year round use, and will continue to support Trail Chiefs in their maintenance programs for the trail. Outward facing initiatives include collaborations with other organizations and increased involvement with CTA Chapters to reach a wider audience.

1. Harden the trail tread where possible and pursue year-round use where appropriate.
2. Continue to expand the chapter program.
3. Collaborate with VT Huts and others on expanding overnight opportunities on the trail and near backcountry zones.
4. Continue to support Trail Chiefs through annual trail chief meeting, addition of electric tools for tool caches, and help improving signage along the trail.
5. Create a universal design for signage in backcountry zones.
6. Identify different section types for the trail (i.e. high use/year round/remote backcountry with few improvements/beginner friendly) with input from users, trail chiefs, and trail counter data. Use this plan to help identify key sections of the trail and to help set priorities for trail work and conservation efforts.





## **Goal #2: Increase The Rate of Trail Protection Projects**

The CTA's long-term goal remains protecting 100% of the trail and backcountry zones via easements and placement on public land.

1. Develop an active project pipeline for conservation easements, trail easements, and public land acquisitions.
2. Expand the CTA's mapping capacity to assist with trail protection work.
3. Develop an easement acquisition policy for the CTA.
4. Continue collaboration and communication with conservation partners across the state to advance projects along the trail and backcountry zones.
5. Acquire three new conservation or trails easements along the Catamount Trail.

## **Goal #3: Expand Ski Cubs As a Philanthropic Program to Increase Access to Skiing**

Work to offer additional opportunities for youth to participate in Ski Cubs programs throughout Vermont by expanding the school and incubator programs. Maintain Ski Cubs' focus as a free program working to get kids outside, engaging in a healthy activity and connecting to the winter environment. Expand participation in Ski Cubs to 500 skiers/year over the course of this plan.

1. Expand the geographic reach of Ski Cubs statewide. Focus on starting incubator programs in areas where few opportunities for youth skiing are present, and where the CTA can identify interested community partners with the facilities to offer free nordic skiing opportunities.
2. Maintain focus within Ski Cubs on first time skiers, and on using skiing as a way to build skills, confidence, and a connection to the winter landscape in Vermont.
3. Identify key community partners to facilitate expansion.
4. Collaborate with Vermont Huts Association and other interested partners on potential overnight programs.
5. Develop Ski Cubs as a philanthropic program, and create a Ski Cubs fund with a dedicated revenue source.
6. Assess need to rename and rebrand incubator program.

## **Goal #4: Increase Organizational Revenue and Endowment Assets**

Foster a culture of philanthropy linked to all activities at the CTA, and increase operational revenue and endowment assets to support its missions. Operational revenue should be increased at a rate of 3% per year. The long term target for endowment assets is \$1,000,000.

1. Implement and refine the March 2019 Development Plan.
2. Develop a prospective donor list and deploy the Case for Support.
3. Develop an annual winter event for the 2020 ski season with an initial revenue goal of 1% of the annual budget expanding to 4% by 2024.
4. Support the Ski Cubs program with an appropriately targeted fund.
5. Develop a strategy to increase endowment assets including evaluation of a capital campaign.
6. Improve corporate sponsor revenue via non-event opportunities and additional sponsored events. Continue to work on increasing revenue from Race to the Top.



## **Goal #5: Increase Membership**

Increase membership by gaining members from a wider geographic region and by attracting skiers of all ages and abilities.

1. Reestablish the Membership Committee as a CTA Board committee.
2. Create programs or events to encourage college and high school ski teams to engage with the CTA.
3. Seek out partnerships with social mapping tools (i.e. Trail Forks, Gaia, etc).
4. Explore Vermont chapters in areas without major terrain opportunities (i.e. Burlington, Norwich, etc).
5. Have over 2,000 yearly members.
6. Develop initiatives to encourage tour participants to become CTA members.

## Ongoing Work

While the committee did not feel the two action items below fit logically into the goals of this plan, they are nonetheless important to the success of this plan. The committee has chosen to include them here to affirm their importance to the CTA's success, and to identify the entities responsible for ensuring their completion.

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### Action Item #1

Revise the mission and vision of the CTA to better reflect the direction articulated in the Strategic Sustainability Plan and the CTA Case for Support.

To Be Completed By: The Strategic Planning Committee.

Status: Completed

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### Action Item #2

Develop a CTA communications plan reflecting the priorities articulated in the Sustainability Plan and the Case for Support.

Key elements will include:

- a. New website
- b. Social Media plan
- c. New CTA brochures
- d. Exploring advertising in Montreal & major NE cities
- e. Integrate Ski Cubs promotion into communications strategy
- f. Create metrics for monitoring effectiveness

To Be Completed By: CTA Staff. Greg Maino and Matt Williams.

Status: Target Completion Date - June 2020





Matt Williams - Executive Director  
Catamount Trail Association  
[mwilliams@catamounttrail.org](mailto:mwilliams@catamounttrail.org)  
1 Mill Street Suite 350  
Burlington, VT 05401  
o: 802-864-5794  
c: 802-735-3187

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**TR**  **IL**  
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