

# 2018-2021 Strategic Plan



Pacific Crest Trail  
Association

## Update and Acknowledgement

### January 2022

This Strategic Plan was originally developed in 2017 to cover the period of **2018-2021**.

At that time, PCTA did not include two focus areas that we now understand to be of vital importance to the PCT, the trail community, and the organization:

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), and  
Climate Change.**

The Board has decided to extend this plan through **the end of 2022**.

During 2022, PCTA will be engaging in a new strategic planning process, to result in a new plan that will start **at the beginning of 2023**. In this new plan, these two focus areas will be prominently featured.

Notwithstanding our efforts to develop this new strategic plan for 2023 and beyond, we are continuing to put time and resources towards both DEI and Climate Change program areas throughout 2022.



Rick Thalhammer  
Board Chair



Liz Bergeron  
Executive Director and CEO

## An Essential Plan for a Rapidly Changing World

Dear PCTA Members, Partners, Volunteers and Supporters:

We're proud to present our Strategic Plan for the next four years.

To develop the plan, we updated our goals for the future and defined continuing progress on current achievements. The result of collaboration and hard work by our board and staff, along with input from our partners, the Strategic Plan guides us in our mission to protect, preserve, and promote the Pacific Crest Trail.

We're in fast-changing times. Some might suggest that long-range planning has questionable value when it is so hard to predict what the next four years may hold. But the accelerating pace of change makes a clear strategic plan essential. And while the world changes, our vision and values remain constant.

In the time since we introduced our last Strategic Plan in 2014, natural and human pressures on the PCT have increased. As the trail has become famous around the world, the number of trail users has risen steadily. 2017 was perhaps one of the most challenging years in PCT history: record snowfall made summer passage through the Sierra Nevada difficult and dangerous, and record wildfires closed the trail at various times through much of its northern half.

While we couldn't have known four years ago what we know today, our last Strategic Plan was a clearly visible path through the challenges. And as important as it is to look forward, it's also worthwhile to look back:

- In 2014 we committed to accelerating the pace of land protection along the PCT. Today we have a full-time director of land protection, and in 2016 permanently protected 2,612 acres of land along the trail.
- In 2014 we committed to maintaining the PCT experience through proactive involvement with federal agencies that manage land along the trail. Today we have a deeper working relationship at all levels with our government partners and provide expert input that influences management plans impacting the PCT.
- In 2014 we committed to increasing awareness of the PCT and PCTA, especially in arenas where our interests and concerns are being discussed. Today we have our first full-time director of marketing and communications, a strengthened identity, and a focus on advocacy for the PCT with elected officials and decision makers.

In every way that our PCTA community's work benefits the trail—whether by members, donors, partners, or trail volunteers—our Strategic Plan has shown us the way forward. While there is much work to do, we can all be proud of what we have accomplished together to ensure the Pacific Crest Trail remains an extraordinary experience for generations to come.



John Crawford  
Board Chair



Liz Bergeron  
Executive Director and CEO

# The PCTA Community





## PCTA Mission, Vision, and Values

### **Mission:** *Our Purpose*

The mission of the Pacific Crest Trail Association is to protect, preserve and promote the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail as a world-class experience for hikers and equestrians, and for all the values provided by wild and scenic lands.

### **Vision:** *The Future We Hope to Achieve*

PCTA has a vision for the future of the Pacific Crest Trail and a vision for the future of our organization. Our vision includes:

- The entire PCT corridor is permanently protected, well maintained and effectively managed. The trail is world renowned for offering a rare opportunity to travel through exceptionally scenic, remote, primitive landscapes.
- The PCTA, widely recognized as the trail's champion and steward, achieves its work through the strength of its partnerships, staff, volunteers, and the rest of the PCT community.

### **Values:** *The Principles That Guide Our Work*

We emphasize the following values as core to our efforts:

- **The Passion and Leadership of People** – The great work of the trail is a result of past visionaries who took a dream and made it happen. Passion for the trail experience continues to spread, inspiring the remarkable contributions from our volunteer leaders, professional staff, partners, and the rest of the PCT community.
- **Collaboration** – We work in positive and cooperative partnerships to make the most of resources available to the organization. We are committed to mutual trust and respect with our partners, and we strive to resolve differences when they may emerge with respect and civility.
- **Integrity** – We understand that our success and reputation depends on our integrity as an organization, and therefore will endeavor to use consistent, reliable decision-making to guide our efforts. We apply common sense and good judgment to our work, and recognize our essential responsibility to use contributions and resources to best support the needs of the trail.
- **Stewardship and Philanthropy** – We have a responsibility to steward the resources of the trail and the organization for the benefit of all, including future generations. The PCT belongs to all citizens. Through volunteerism and philanthropy, individuals can invest in the programs that keep the trail wild and accessible for hikers and equestrians. We recognize that we could not achieve our mission without the generosity, commitment and philanthropic support of our volunteers, members and donors who share these values.



**GOALS** represent our expected long-term outcomes, over 30 years or more.



**PRIORITY OBJECTIVES** state our expected outcomes by 2021.



**SUCCESS MEASURES** show progress toward achieving the 2021 Priority Objectives.



**STRATEGIES** articulate how the objectives will be achieved, or where resources will be concentrated to implement the objective.



**PROGRAMS** represent steps toward implementation of a Priority Objective—some short term and some longer term, some active and some “on hold” until resources become available. *(Program information is not included in this document.)*



## Goals Overview

### **Trail Protection Through Land Acquisition**

The Pacific Crest Trail, trail corridor and viewshed are permanently protected, with the last private parcels of the trail corridor placed primarily into public ownership through fee title acquisitions or conservation easements that ensure permanent public access and protect the trail experience.

### **Trail Protection Through Land and Trail Management Planning**

The Pacific Crest Trail, trail corridor and viewshed are protected from relevant threats, including but not limited to land use threats.

### **Trail Maintenance, Construction, and Infrastructure**

The entire Pacific Crest Trail is designed, constructed and regularly maintained, to a level that meets standards agreed on between the PCTA and our agency partners, in a way which minimizes the impacts of concentrated visitor use. The goal for annual trail maintenance is 300,000 volunteer hours, which does not include backlog.

### **Awareness of the PCT and PCTA**

The Pacific Crest Trail and PCTA are well-known nationally and internationally among outdoor enthusiasts as a significant natural and recreation/health resource for hikers and equestrians, and an economic benefit for trail towns.

### **Fundraising**

The Pacific Crest Trail Association has the financial resources needed to accomplish its mission.

### **Staff and Volunteer Resources**

The Pacific Crest Trail Association continues to maintain an efficient and effective infrastructure and staff, to support our objectives and programs.

### **Partnership and Relationship Development**

The Pacific Crest Trail Association fully supports and coordinates enough partner organizations to contribute meaningfully to all facets of PCTA's important work.



## Trail Protection Through Land Acquisition

The Pacific Crest Trail, trail corridor and viewshed are permanently protected, with the last private parcels of the trail corridor placed primarily into public ownership through fee title acquisitions or conservation easements that ensure permanent public access and protect the trail experience.



### Priority Objectives 2018-2021

1. Understand the ownership and characteristics of the trail's unprotected parcels well enough to identify and prioritize:
  - a) Where Optimal Location Reviews (OLR's) will be required
  - b) Which parcel owners might be approached for land donations
  - c) Those areas to be managed as focal areas
  - d) Parcels with willing sellers ready for acquisition
2. Strategically acquire land when it will facilitate eventual public ownership
3. Demonstrate success for our land acquisition program by building and maintaining a \$5 million LandProtection Fund to support a pipeline of active land acquisition projects



### Success Measures

To measure success we will look at cumulative statistics over time for:

- Number of parcels or easements and number of acres protected
- Investments made, from all sources, for land acquisition or easements



### Strategy

- Develop strategic partnerships with land trusts. Our unique role in this partnership is to advocate for the PCT and to have current knowledge of the special protections required, working with relevant partners to facilitate the eventual transfer of properties into ownership and management by Federal agencies
- Establish Southern California PCT segments as a priority focal area for research and planning due to urban encroachment and the many development threats to the trail
- Maintain the PCT Land Inventory to track potential land acquisition opportunities and develop our pipeline of active land acquisition projects



## Trail Protection Through Land and Trail Management Planning

The Pacific Crest Trail, trail corridor and viewshed are protected from relevant threats, including but not limited to land use threats.



### Priority Objectives 2018-2021

1. Participate collaboratively and proactively in all relevant planning processes with the Forest Service, National Parks Service and Bureau of Land Management
2. Complete the Whitewater and Southern Terminus OLRs, and pertinent agreements for Tejon Ranch
3. Initiate additional relationships with state and local government officials whose authority includes sections of the Pacific Crest Trail corridor and provide input to their planning processes when appropriate
4. Participate in agency planning efforts that address acceptable levels of use and impacts within the PCT corridor
5. Collaborate with agencies to ensure permit systems address trail capacity issues



### Success Measures

- Number of trail miles where OLRs are completed.
- Number of unit plans where PCT specific direction includes protection of the nature and purposes of the trail.
- Completion of Whitewater and Southern Terminus OLRs
- Progress on Tejon Ranch project

We will report our **activities** and tangible **outcomes** achieved on the national policy level, the unit planning level, and for proposed projects which might impact the hiker's or rider's experience.



### Strategy

- Recommend establishing a PCT management corridor as a required planning element in agency unit plans, such as U.S. Forest Service forest plans. Then, apply these minimum standards and guidelines within all agency planning processes within the PCT management corridor
- Use the Statement of the Trail Experience (see appendix) as the guide for all concerned to understand the ideal outcome.
- Develop a suite of trail management policies as guidance for protecting the PCT experience.



## Trail Maintenance, Construction and Infrastructure

The entire Pacific Crest Trail is designed, constructed and regularly maintained, to a level that meets standards agreed on between the PCTA and our agency partners, in a way which minimizes the impacts of concentrated visitor use. The goal for annual trail maintenance is 300,000 volunteer hours, which does not include backlog.



### Priority Objectives 2018-2021

1. Trail condition information: By 2021, 1,600 miles of the trail will be adopted by volunteers for assessing trail conditions, with a reliable information platform in place to consolidate and report conditions for users; and to update our priorities for maintenance, reconstruction and relocation according to trail conditions.
2. Trail maintenance: Grow our total maintenance and construction ability by increasing our capacity to manage volunteers, and by recruiting and supporting stewardship groups, with priority on annual maintenance by local volunteers. Increase our trail maintenance volunteer hours from 98,000 in 2016 to 150,000 annually by 2021.
3. Visitor Use Management: Develop a program to address the physical and social impacts associated with campsites along the PCT corridor. Develop and expand the Crest Runner and Trailhead Host programs.



### Success Measures

- Miles of trail open to hikers and equestrians
- Number of trail maintenance volunteer hours
- Miles of trail adopted by community-based volunteer groups
- Miles of trail maintained annually by all programs
- Miles of trail adopted for assessing trail conditions
- Status of visitor use management program development



### Strategy

- Match 1,600 miles of the trail with a regional volunteer organization or other program for maintenance and construction, using a partnership model appropriate to the geographic area
- Determine how physical incentives and disincentives on and near the trail can minimize impacts from visitor use. Take into account impacts and improvements for overnight use that effectively reduce impacts that are a result of all PCT users
- With agency partners, prioritize trail construction needs, both trailwide and regionally, beyond routine maintenance for opening closed sections of trail, correcting unsafe conditions for hikers and equestrians, repairing resource damage, enhancing trail for user convenience



## Awareness of the PCT and PCTA

The Pacific Crest Trail and PCTA are well-known nationally and internationally among outdoor enthusiasts as a significant natural and recreation/health resource for hikers and equestrians, and an economic benefit for trail towns.



## Priority Objectives 2018-2021

Our awareness activities will develop three capabilities:

1. PCT Users: Improve communication channels with trail hikers and equestrians before, during and after their hikes or rides to solicit/provide trail information and to offer *Leave No Trace* education and foster a culture of respect for the trail and the wilderness experience
2. PCTA and its broader community: Promote PCTA as a membership community; increase opportunities for deeper member involvement in our work, and refine our ability to target messaging to specific segments of the PCTA community
3. Decision makers: Attain a level of awareness among agency partners and regional, state, federal and partner decision makers, including Congress, to ensure our interests and concerns are being discussed and addressed



## Success Measures

- Total membership is 18,500 by 2021
- Three certified trail communities by 2021
- 45 members of Congress from PCT states sign the bipartisan letter of support for LWCF funding related to National Scenic and Historic Trails



## Strategy

- Work with the Partnership for the National Trails System to create a bi-partisan “Dear Colleague” letter supporting Capital Improvement and Maintenance for Trails (CMTL) funding for federal agencies with at least 50 signers
- Expand our membership and the role of members well beyond dues contributions to engage them in our work. Recruit all PCTA stakeholders (volunteers, affiliated groups, donors, trail users) to become members, even if it requires new member categories or dues structure. Develop strategies for lifetime relationships
- Improve content production processes, digital asset collection and management, and create more modular, reusable messaging—all to enable faster, more efficient marketing and communications across a broad range of audiences
- Strengthen relationships among trail towns, the PCTA and trail users to build support for all three groups
- Develop a robust advocacy program to engage elected officials at the Congressional level



## Fundraising

The Pacific Crest Trail Association has the financial resources needed to accomplish its mission.



### Priority Objectives 2018-2021

Continue to build momentum on fundraising:

1. Growing operating funds from \$3.2 million in 2017 to \$5 million in 2021 by focusing on increasing individual support
2. Soliciting private donations for all active land acquisition projects



### Success Measures

- Total operating budget
- Private dollars raised



### Strategy

- Link membership recruitment, awareness messaging and fundraising strategies to significantly increase major, annual and first-time private gifts to PCTA
- Strengthen ongoing relationships with donors by developing more meaningful connections, articulating the need for private support and inspiring donors through compelling stories
- Increase stakeholder and donor engagement with PCTA and our mission by reaching into trail communities and West Coast metropolitan areas for support and advisory group members
- Develop a fundraising metric in order to evaluate the most efficient sources for new/increased funding
- Identify new sources of revenue, including fee for service opportunities
- Establish a planned giving outreach program for long-term sustainability

### Staff and Volunteer Resources

The Pacific Crest Trail Association continues to maintain an efficient and effective infrastructure and staff, to support our objectives and programs.

### Priority Objectives 2018-2021

1. Grow our pool of staff, volunteers and board members to meet the scope of our mission. We anticipate this will require growing total volunteer hours, with commensurate increases in staff.

|                                   | 2016     | 2021 (Goal) |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| Organization-wide volunteer hours | 104, 269 | 160,000     |
| Trail Maintenance volunteer hours | 98,721   | 150,000     |
| Staff FTE's                       | 27.5     | 37          |

2. Regional Representative in all six PCTA regions.

### Success Measures

- Add new staff prioritized as follows:
  - Southern Sierra Regional Representative
  - GIS Analyst
  - Trail Crew Technical Advisors or Associates Regional Representatives
  - Support staff as needed to support the growth of programs
- Number of organization-wide volunteer hours

### Strategy

- Develop a structure similar to what we use in the trail maintenance program, to systematically facilitate volunteerism in other areas of our work (fundraising, advocacy, trail town relationships, forest planning, etc.)
- Integrate our software and cloud technology to improve system efficiency, make it easier for staff and volunteers to work remotely and for those in the PCTA Community to access and share information
- Maintain staffing and volunteers at an appropriate level to implement strategic programs and to provide quality customer service to our growing community
- Explore the feasibility of expanding the board and advisory groups, possibly by making structural changes



## Partnership and Relationship Development

The Pacific Crest Trail Association fully supports and coordinates enough partner organizations to contribute meaningfully to all facets of PCTA's important work.



### Priority Objectives 2018-2021

We will nurture the partnership relationships already in place and we will develop new partnerships with organizations to:

1. Provide capacity for trail operations maintenance and projects
2. Accelerate the pace of trail protection through land acquisition
3. Raise awareness of PCT visitor use impact and *Leave No Trace* practices



### Success Measures

- Strategic partnerships in each program area



### Strategy

- Develop a distinctively "PCTA" approach to managing partnerships in a way that is appropriate for each partner category. One common characteristic for partnerships may be regular, scheduled dialogues. These will provide a platform for a deeper understanding of the successes and challenges of each other's work, while allowing for clarifying conversations and an opportunity to overcome potential points of conflict
- Make explicit decisions about which partners we support with which resources, and what benefits flow to partner organizations in return for their collaboration, even if benefits are not quantifiably measurable



## Statement of the Trail Experience



***The PCT, in its vision and reality, is more than just a trail. It is a trail experience. That is, the PCT provides the setting for certain rare and wonderful experiences. This document explains the history of the vision, facets of the experience, and the basic conditions required to provide it.***

### Background

“In the Cascade Mountains of Washington and Oregon and the Sierra Nevada of California is found some of the earth’s most sublime scenery ... For the recreationist they offer a lifetime of inspiration and adventure.” Thus begins the description of the proposed Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) in the 1966 federal study *Trails for America*, the study that became the basis for the National Trail System Act (NTSA). Crafted alongside the Wilderness Act and other significant environmental and social legislation of the 1960s, the NTSA reflects deep American impulses, such as love of outdoor recreation, desire to protect natural landscapes, and devotion to iconic journeys<sup>1</sup>. *Trails for America* elaborates the vision for National Scenic Trails:

The spirit of adventure springs ever anew in the hearts of Americans, young and old. In no way is it better satisfied than in the exploration of unfamiliar terrain or in the discovery of the beauties of nature. Long distance trails can provide unparalleled opportunities for such adventure and such satisfaction.

Importantly, the study acknowledged that such a vision could not be realized unless landscapes were protected: “The entire length of each national scenic trail, together with sufficient land area on both sides to safeguard adequately and preserve its character, should be protected in some form of public control.” This was in keeping with the original vision of the PCT. In the 1930s, Clinton Clarke envisioned a path linking the high ridges of the great Pacific mountains “traversing the best scenic areas and maintaining an absolute wilderness character.” Clarke’s vision inspired scores of young volunteers, who mapped the route in the late 1930s. The deep citizen involvement in the viability of the PCT and other eventual National Scenic Trails caught the attention of Congress, evidenced in that an opening clause of the NTSA states volunteer citizens should continue to be integral to trails’ planning, development, maintenance, and management.

<sup>1</sup>Elkinton, S., Caproni, L., Hoeflschweiger, J. (2008). *The National Trails System: A Grand Experiment*. Washington, D.C.: USGPO.

### Statement of the Trail Experience (continued)

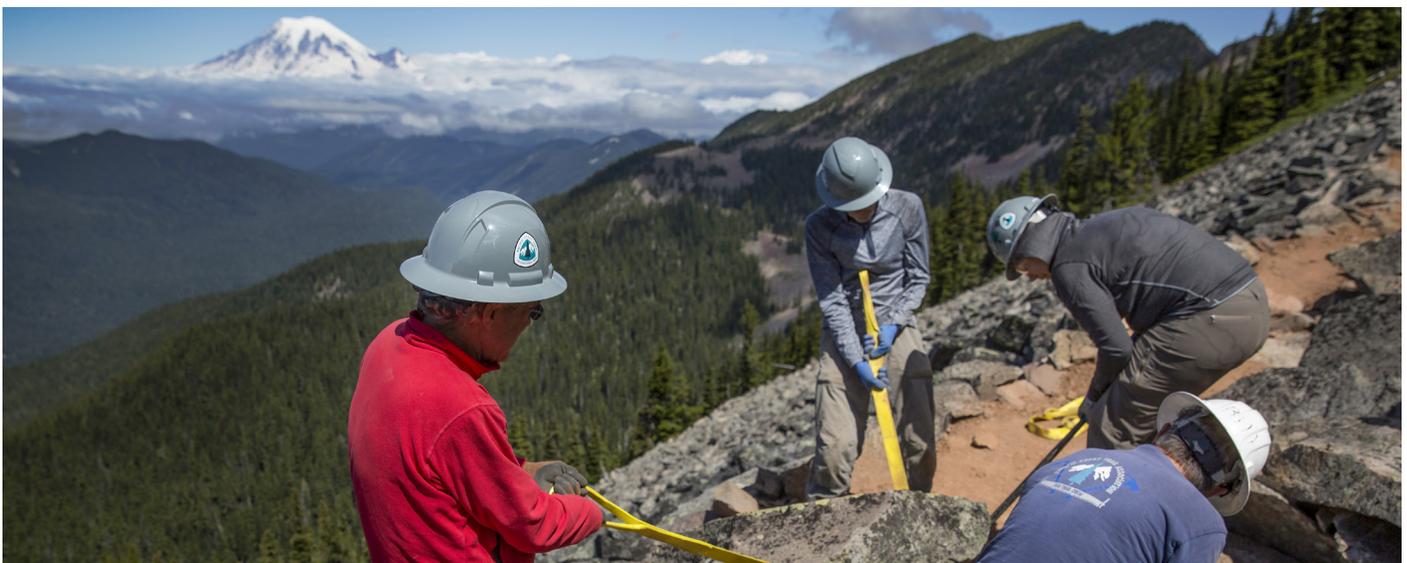
Over 2,600 miles in length, the PCT is the longest continuously developed hiking and equestrian experience in the United States. The PCT is renowned as the most remote of our National Scenic Trails and passes through more miles of designated Wilderness than any other National Scenic Trail. As such, it takes a good deal of its character as a world-class hiker and equestrian resource from the opportunities it provides to experience landscapes that appear pristine, wild, and free from development by humankind. The PCT also boasts the greatest elevation changes of any of America's National Scenic Trails, allowing it to pass through six out of seven of North America's ecozones, including high and low desert, old-growth forest, and alpine country.

The PCT Comprehensive Plan states that the Trail should be routed to "display a great variety of natural beauty and expanse of panoramic scenery from a position of height." The Trail was intentionally routed through as many protected areas as possible, envisioned largely as a showcase of diverse and untrammeled ecosystems. From desert to glacier-flanked mountain, from meadow to rain forest, the PCT symbolizes everything there is to love—and protect—in the Western United States.

The PCT user's experience can be significantly impaired if, along the Trail in between protected areas, they encounter harshly clashing land uses. This was acknowledged early on by a federal interagency task force who interpreted the NTSA by developing these guidelines, which also appear in the PCT Comprehensive Plan:

The routes of national scenic trails should be so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass. They should avoid, insofar as practicable, established highways, motor roads, mining areas, power transmission lines, existing commercial and industrial developments, range fences and improvements, private operations, and any other activities that would be incompatible with the protection of the trail in its natural condition and its use for outdoor recreation.

Protection of the unique resource the PCT represents is particularly challenging because, along its 2,650 miles, hundreds of developments are proposed each year by an array of different land management agencies, private owners, and industries. However, the original vision was reaffirmed in the 21st century via executive order to the federal agencies: "Corridors associated with national scenic trails . . . [should be] protected to the degree necessary to ensure that the values for which each trail was established remain intact".<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup>Exec. Order No. 13195, 3 C.F.R. 743 (2001).

## Statement of the Trail Experience (continued)

### Principles

It is not enough for us to protect the Trail, if by that is meant merely the tread itself. We must protect the Trail experience. Trail users seek the tangible and intangible benefits of wandering amongst the exceptionally scenic, wild, natural, and historic landscapes along the crest of the Pacific ranges of the United States. The Trail experience, as used in this context, represents the sum of experiences available to the traditional and intended user traveling along the PCT. This sum includes opportunities to experience:

1. The Trail as an invitation into nature. An established route showcasing significant features of natural landscapes for the user's edification.
2. Wild scenery of the highest caliber and integrity. Extolled as spiritual by many classic advocates of wildlands (Bob Marshall said wildlands afforded "pure aesthetic rapture"<sup>3</sup>), these landscapes inspire awe for their immensity, timelessness, and self-organized complexity.
3. Refuge from industrialized civilization and its sights, sounds, and smells.
4. Non-mechanized travel on foot or horseback. Simpler locomotion from simpler times, a more natural pace that allows all our senses to work.
5. The freedom of an unconfined type of recreation.
6. Therapeutic effects of elevated "crest" views and naturally open landscapes, dwarfing human concerns within the perspective of a larger framework. Self-forgetting and humility, along with a sense of belonging to the natural whole.
7. Solitude and detachment from routine social pressures and distractions, providing the setting for inward reflection and self-discovery.
8. An extended retreat. National Scenic Trails were conceived as long-distance trails providing rare opportunities for extended backcountry trail travel, stretching for days, weeks or even months.
9. Physical challenge and personal accomplishment. Self-reliance, honing one's primitive travel and survival skills.
10. Taking part in an iconic journey. Reminiscent of pilgrimages, vision quests, or the struggles of early American explorers and pioneers to find new beginnings in the landscapes of our nation.
11. Forming meaningful bonds with fellow travelers and the rest of the trail community. Discovering beauty in how the trail affects people.
12. Cultural resources reaching into the history of the American West, including sites sacred to Natives, landmarks for prospectors, sheepherders, and pioneers, historic lodges and lookouts, and, in many areas, the engineering wonders of the treadway itself.
13. Citizen ownership of, and investment in, resources of national significance. The pride and passion of citizen stewardship of the Trail and its landscapes.
14. The satisfaction of bequeathing to future generations wild lands and their riches. Clean water and air, thriving wildlife, and healthy ecosystems—the value of their economic services.
15. Vicarious journeys and option value. Countless people who never set foot on the PCT nonetheless derive satisfaction from experiencing it through photos and accounts by others. For them, there is value simply in knowing it is possible to walk from Mexico to Canada on a continuous primitive trail.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall, R. (1930, February). The Problem of the Wilderness. *Scientific Monthly*, 30 (2), 145.

### Nature and Purposes and Desired Condition

*The National Trail System Act states that each National Trail is designated for its unique nature and purposes. Specific conditions are necessary to realize the PCT's purposes.*

Favoring landscapes that appear wild and free from development by humankind, the Pacific Crest Trail's nature and purposes are to provide for unparalleled journeys on foot or horseback along the high and spectacular spine of the Pacific mountain ranges. Primitive forms of travel hearken back to simpler and more rugged times. The trail's protected corridor offers a sense of solitude and closeness with nature, evoking extended retreat from civilization, even if venturing out only for a day.

To ensure the conservation of the PCT's nationally significant wild, scenic, natural, and heritage resources, and to maximize its intended recreation opportunities, the trail's entire length, together with sufficient land area on both sides to safeguard and preserve its character, should be publically owned, permanently protected, and managed as a single entity across jurisdictions. The investment of citizen stewards offers another critical thread of continuity from Mexico to Canada.

The PCT experience should favor panoramic views of undisturbed landscapes in an un-crowded, non-mechanized, tranquil, and predominantly natural environment. It should feature diverse, untrammelled ecosystems and historic high country landmarks while avoiding, as much as possible, road crossings, private operations and other signs of modern development. Trail facilities such as campsites, water sources and other amenities for hiker and pack-and-saddle use should be simple. Such conditions will provide for the nature and purposes for which the PCT was established.

