



## PCTA 2024-2026 Strategic Plan: Community Feedback Acknowledgement

### Introduction

Having heard from various communities for years that we needed to slow down and listen to them, we partnered with a consultant group to overhaul our entire strategic planning process.

The **PCTA Strategic Plan Development Process Task Force** first met in **August 2022**, soon after engaging the PCT community in a fall listening tour. This began **months of engagement, discussion, meeting, listening, survey, and understanding with over 100 members of the PCT community**: volunteers, trail users, community members, scientists, writers, PCTA members and donors, business members, and agency partners. This document intends to **acknowledge and address some of the comments, feedback, and suggestions that influenced our new strategic plan**—we believe that you are our most crucial stakeholders and deserve to know what changed because of your efforts.

First, it's important to note that **feedback was incorporated through three separate rounds of community involvement**. The task force initially identified five major themes, or **strategic pillars**, to help organize the input. The successive fall listening tour helped define the **status quo state, ideal future state, and work that might be considered to achieve the ideal future state**. The Task Force developed these into strategy pillars with long-term outcomes defined, bringing them then to PCTA staff and board to affirm the outcomes and more specifically define the progress actions.

This brought us to the **Spring of 2023**, where **additional community input was sought through a Planning Development Tour**. This tour identified strategies within the pillars and goal topics to help group the assorted actions. Based on this second round, staff and board continued to define, develop, and prioritize these ideas in a series of **strategic pillar workgroups**. The workgroups proposed their refined goal language, which the Task Force reviewed and used to create the draft strategic plan.

That **draft version of the plan** was **released for public feedback in June 2023**. From that survey we received hundreds of responses, affirmations, challenges, questions, and suggestions. **Each one was considered in the creation of the Final 2024-2026 Strategic Plan.**

### Acknowledgement and Thank You

As we share our responses and acknowledgements to the feedback, we would like to pause and **celebrate** that there were so many responses. **We know that you care deeply about the trail,** and we celebrate that this process had a **wide diversity of thought representing many backgrounds and perspectives.** Some of the feedback we received had opposing perspectives, some of it pointed out logical errors, some affirmed that our community engagement got us on the right track, and some challenged us to refine our goals and messages. **All of it was helpful, so thank you.**

### Responses to Feedback



#### Climate Change

- **We acknowledge the realities of climate change** that are already impacting trail users, the trail corridor ecosystem, and communities living near the trail, and are committed to playing our part to **mitigate negative impacts.**
- We understand that **not everyone feels the same as we do on this topic** and **understand if you choose to not engage with us as a result.** We are not alone among trail and conservation peers in our commitment to mitigate and combat the impacts of climate change and are prepared to do our part.
- We also recognize that it is important to do our part and **plan to reduce our organizational impacts to climate change over time,** just not as a specific strategy in this plan.



#### Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)

- **Our commitments to DEIB come from listening to those who have had painful experiences on the trail, in trail towns, and as volunteers.** This has pushed people off the trail, out of volunteer crews, and away from our communities. We will not stand for racism, sexism, and other forms of exclusion. Our intent is to offer training, storytelling, and experiences for those who would invite them. But we also understand that not everyone wants this type of training or culture change, and you do not have to engage with us.
- We also heard from a few people that **PCTA needs to diversify opportunities for volunteers to engage** as not everyone can/wants to do trail maintenance. We agree and plan to build more types of volunteer opportunities, as well as to recruit for them. This feedback made it into the plan and will be referred to often in implementation.

## PCTA 2024-2026 Strategic Plan: Community Feedback Acknowledgement

- **DEIB is for all.** That being said, we have **limited capacity** and cannot build meaningful relationships with every type of community group during this strategic plan period. Instead, we have decided to move forward with a select few as **a first step on a long path and ongoing practice**. If we begin to be successful with these community groups, we hope to translate that success into working meaningfully alongside others as well. In fact, **our intent is to learn to be more inclusive by working first with those who have been historically most excluded**.
- A number of respondents urged us to **consider including other/more/different identities** in our **Pillar 3** (Inclusive and Equitable Trail Experience). We appreciate these suggestions and believe that **our efforts to focus on our selected groups will help to create inclusion with others**, but we are committed to learn and develop these strategies as we get involved in this work.
- A footnote was added to the strategic plan describing our need to **focus on providing quality engagement over quantity, and in no way limiting our engagement to these identity groups** in the future.
- **DEIB is foundational for long-term trail corridor health.** Bringing more people and communities into volunteering, trail use, and love of the PCT is how we will succeed, and what better way than to create safe, welcoming conditions for all?
- **Discrimination exists even if you haven't experienced it.** We have conducted surveys and seen results from other surveys; we have listened to individuals, groups, and organizations; **we have heard from various sides and can confidently say that discrimination exists on the trail, in trail communities, and in volunteer spaces**. Much of our commitment to affecting change and creating inclusion comes from deep listening and analysis.
- Furthermore, we acknowledge that the PCTA cannot solve discrimination. However, **we can and will do our part to influence or change that which is within our power to reduce discrimination**. Our communities have asked and demanded it of us, and this is a crucial step in both saying "yes" and acting on it.
- Regarding **Indigenous nations**, we know **we have a long way to go and a lot to learn**, while also recognizing that our value in a formal relationship (compared to governmental or land management) is limited. That being said, we do believe that we have a part to play and need to put in an effort to learn how to be good partners.

*(continued on next page)*

### Volunteers

- Our work with volunteers appears throughout the document. Our intent is to **take new approaches to expand the PCTA volunteer base**, particularly by improving the system and **recruiting from a broader network**.
- We received a tremendous number of suggestions for implementing these strategies and will make sure that the implementation teams consider them. We are very excited that the community care so passionately about improving and growing our volunteer programs.

### Permits

- We received a number of responses about our strategic goals around the permit system, some of which is in conflict; all perspectives have very good points and will go to the implementation team for consideration.

### The Strategic Plan as a Document

- The **Mission and Vision statements** were not yet completed by the time we shared the draft version of our plan for feedback this summer. This was a result of the Task Force deciding to conduct internal work with staff and board to make these updates. Ultimately, we are grateful for the delay as **the survey feedback heavily influenced the language and intent of our newly revised Mission and Vision statements**.
- This document is fairly large for a strategic plan, intending to offer **high-level strategic guidance for the implementation process** while also providing succinct clarity about our strategies. For the latter, **we are using the introduction as the executive summary** which paraphrases our new plan in a shortened format. We received conflicting requests from different respondents, some asking for more details, others asking for less.
- We received wonderful feedback about **wording, organizing of information, and the flow of the document**. All of it was considered, and **much of it was implemented**. Our consultant vendors, **Civic Consulting Collaborative**, helped us navigate and make sense of most of those changes. We appreciate the partnership from vendors who have done extensive high order strategic planning across the country. Some examples:
  - **Lifting up volunteers and dues-paying members** as necessary to our success and honoring the crucial work they've already done.
  - **Added suggested references** in a number of places.
  - **Clarify** meanings, jargon, and acronyms.
  - **Emphasize** certain sections, such as "core strategies" to illustrate that **this plan is about building upon what we do well, not replacing it**.

## PCTA 2024-2026 Strategic Plan: Community Feedback Acknowledgement

- Defining the **distinction** between a singular PCT community and several PCT communities.
- A **copy editor** cleaned up mistakes, inconsistencies, and generally improved the writing quality.
- **Better defined goals and timelines**, including interim progress reporting.
- The Strategic Pillars in this plan were developed through an **iterative process** involving PCTA staff and board and PCT community members and stakeholders. Based on this process it was clear that creating a more inclusive trail experience (Pillar 3), working with partners and communities (Pillar 4), and internal PCTA work (Pillar 5) were **indeed distinct and warranted their own section and goals**.

### Visitor Use Management and the Increasing Popularity of the PCT

- **The PCT is for all** and for this reason we expect and encourage an increased use of the PCT. The trail is popular and opportunities such as “Wild” (the book and the movie) and social media are still increasing its popularity. However, with this popularity comes an **ever-increasing need for education** of those that utilize the trail for the variety of activities that are encouraged. This will be a **lifelong discussion and celebration of its use**; it will not be full of band-aid fixes or acting without listening to the communities impacted.

### Trail Maintenance, Trail Improvements

- **Trail maintenance is a core part of our work and will continue.** It is deliberately included in the first strategic pillar. That said, the plan is focused on **new initiatives**. We also understand that we must strive to accomplish our **full mission** of which trail maintenance is a major part.
- We recognize there is a **maintenance backlog** that needs to be worked through, and that **deferred maintenance presents safety issues on the trail**. Though the trail is meant to have wild sections, **we will continue our work to keep the trail passable and clear of major dangers**.

The new plan **reflects our community's encouragement to accomplish more trail maintenance** by **adding to our volunteer base** for the next few years. We need to make sure that we are creating a volunteer culture where we can expand the number of volunteers and therefore the trail improvements that need to be made.

- It is not the focus of the plan to create **new physical trails to reach other communities**. We do want to make the current trail a more inclusive experience, **including for those communities near the trail**.

## PCTA 2024-2026 Strategic Plan: Community Feedback Acknowledgement

- Our process included the **voices of people across our landscapes**. This of course comes with an overwhelming amount of ideas. We strategically limited the scope of the PCTA to what was most doable to staff and had an impact on the future of the PCT.

### Staff and Next Steps

- We **deeply appreciate the outpouring of care and support for our staff** from community feedback. Our staff truly are incredible and are passionate about the Pacific Crest Trail. We celebrate that our staff has grown to match the PCT's increased needs, and recent efforts have brought in **many new perspectives** to both our staff and board. This includes **different forms of trail use experience**, since **long-distance hiking is only one way that people experience the PCT**.
- For our staff, this plan helps to **set expectations and permissions for starting to do this work**. We will now begin **implementation planning**, though it should be said that this strategic plan is designed to **point PCTA in the direction we need to go while leaving room for adaptive implementation as we learn and grow**. The Implementation section has been expanded to more explicitly describe next steps, including empowering staff, establishing annual metrics, and building team trust and effectiveness.

### Partnership With Agencies

- The trail exists primarily on and through **federal lands and federal easements** and therefore **requires partnership with agencies** such as the USDA Forest Service. We are fortunate to work with **excellent agency partners who care deeply about the trail, responsible forest management, and coordinating with us for care of the PCT**. The public lands which the PCT passes through are vast and complex, requiring a trusting and well-aligned partnership.