

Pacific Crest Trail Association 2024-2026 Strategic Plan

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Introduction

The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) was designated as a national scenic trail in 1968 and traverses 2,650 miles from the United States-Mexico border through California, Oregon, and Washington to the United States-Canada border. Considered a world class outdoor recreation experience and landscape-scale conservation project, people come from all corners of the globe to experience the PCT in some capacity. “Thru-hiking,” or hiking the trail from end to end in a single attempt, is popular and the most well-known way to hike the PCT due to the sheer length and difficulty of the journey and the incredible stories that come from the hiking community. However, most people experience the trail in a variety of other ways:

- Weekend, week-long, or day-hiking.
- Volunteer and Corps Crew trail maintenance.
- Section and other long-distance hiking.
- Equestrian and pack animal recreation.
- Other non-hiking recreation or outdoor activities such as photography, birding, fishing, hunting, running, skiing, snowshoeing, painting, etc.
- Supporting trail users, including as a trail angel, business owner, or trail town community member.
- Advocating for, learning about, and/or appreciating the trail and its surrounding habitats as a natural landscape and ecosystem.

The Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) was incorporated in 1977 and is the only nonprofit organization tasked with conserving and connecting the PCT for the recreational enjoyment and benefit of all people, as well as working to protect wild and scenic lands along the trail. We accomplish our work in partnership and collaboration with federal land management agencies (primarily the United States Forest Service) and many other organizations, nonprofits, individuals, and business partners who help support our work. The PCTA is comprised of over 40 skilled and passionate staff, a dedicated Board, hundreds of volunteers, and 14,700 members who are committed to the work of conserving the trail and supporting its communities.

As an organization, PCTA undergoes regular strategic planning efforts to guide our work and ensure ongoing alignment with our mission, vision, and values. The previous strategic plan covered the period from 2018-2021 and was extended for the duration of this planning process. This new strategic planning effort is more than a simple update to the previous plan. PCTA engaged our communities¹ throughout the process, resulting in the largest, longest, and most community-led planning process the PCTA has ever undertaken. We took this opportunity to also evaluate and update the organization’s mission, vision, and values. Finally, this is our first

¹ We recognize that PCTA does not have a singular or monolithic community, but rather a multitude of different *communities* that engage with the trail in different ways, who have a wide diversity of lived experiences, and who come from places near the trail and from across the world.



plan that elevates the need for climate change resiliency and adaptation, and directly addresses the need to build trust with marginalized communities. This plan points the PCTA in the direction we want and need to go.

The varied context surrounding this plan is important to consider. PCTA has made strides in building out our technology tools to better support the Association, trail users, and volunteers. Management of the PCT's surrounding landscapes is changing as evidenced through the establishment of the first three Forest Service "PCT Management Areas" in the Southern Sierra Forests Revised Plans. Volunteers continue to be the lifeblood of the Association, logging over 67 thousand hours of trail maintenance and reconstruction in 2022. PCTA underwent an internal leadership transition during the development of this plan, and the United States Forest Service (USFS) recently hired a new PCT Administrator. Maintaining the partnership throughout the transitions required additional efforts.

In addition to areas of growth, PCTA is faced with new challenges and areas in need of improvement. Impacts from past land management practices (e.g., suppression of natural fire) are culminating in large scale management challenges. Hotter and drier conditions due to climate change have led to more frequent and severe wildfires, drought, and other natural events, requiring rapid and long-term adaptation for trail users and the Association. The growing population and changing demographics of our 3-state region create the need to ensure that the PCTA can connect with the next generation of trail users, donors, and volunteers. Issues of racial justice and equity rapidly entered the public dialogue in 2020, and PCTA is continuing to reevaluate, learn, and transform our culture in response to an open letter calling out our missteps in this space.

The Civic Consulting Collaborative (CCC) was contracted in the fall of 2022 to support PCTA as we underwent this strategic planning process. The CCC facilitation team and PCTA engaged a Staff & Board Task Force to outline the primary aspects of the plan and determine the best approach to the process. The Task Force worked through the summer of 2023 to develop and finalize a strategic plan that represents the needs and goals of the PCT, the Association, trail users, and the environment.

PCTA's Role

To understand this strategic plan, it is important to consider PCTA's role. PCTA is just one part of a complex system supporting the Pacific Crest Trail. Federal, state, tribal, and private landowners manage the land the trail crosses. Numerous laws and regulations govern how the trail is protected and can be used. PCTA is a nonprofit organization primarily powered by volunteers that works in this complex system to conserve the trail and connect its community to the PCT. We do not have unilateral power over the trail.

In this system it is helpful to think about what PCTA can *directly control*, what PCTA can *influence*, and what is *beyond our control*. PCTA can *directly control* what our staff and volunteers



do – things such as trail maintenance, public communications, information, and what projects our staff work on. PCTA can *influence* (but not control) what other stakeholders in the PCT system do – such as ensure that USFS management plans carry out the intent of the National Trails System Act, seek federal funding for trail protection and maintenance, influence hiker behavior and safety (e.g., Leave No Trace education), and garner public support for the PCT. What is *beyond PCTA control* are broad conditions and trends that affect the PCT – things such as climate change, population growth and demographic changes in our region, and development pressures on the trail. In this final category, PCTA must be ready to react and adapt to these trends to best carry out our mission to conserve the PCT and connect our community to the trail. PCTA can use its direct efforts and influence to shape responses to these broad trends and conditions. This strategic plan works within the context of what PCTA can directly control, influence, or respond to.

Strategic Plan Development Process

The PCTA Task Force first met in August 2022, and soon after engaged the PCT community to be part of the planning process.² A fall 2022 community listening tour explored the status quo state, or what the PCT and PCTA will look like in five years if nothing changes, and the ideal future state, or what the PCT and PCTA will look like in five years in an ideal world. Based on community input, the Task Force identified five major themes, or **strategic pillars**, to organize the work ahead. After identifying key aspects of the status quo state, the ideal future state, and the pillars to organize the work, the Task Force developed a **long-term outcome** for each pillar. PCTA staff and board affirmed the outcomes, defined potential actions to make progress toward them, and then sought further input from the community through a planning development tour in the spring of 2023. This tour identified new **strategies** and **goal** topics. Based on the second round of input, staff and board continued to refine, develop, and prioritize these ideas in strategic pillar workgroups. After the Task Force reviewed this work and approved a draft strategic plan, the

Strategic Pillars: Strategic Pillars are the overarching topic areas that organize this strategic plan. They emerged from discussions about the status quo and the ideal future state of the PCT and PCTA.

Long-Term Outcomes: These refer to the impacts the plan aims to achieve. Each outcome reflects an ideal state for the trail, communities, and/or the PCTA.

Goals: Goals represent what we are going to accomplish over the next three years. They are predictive of long-term outcomes and are expressed as time-bound actions with measurable results.

Strategies: These are specific actions taken to make progress toward a goal and ultimately the long-term outcome the goal serves.

² The COVID-19 pandemic and socially driven demands of our communities in 2020 and 2021 taught us an important lesson: slowing down and listening. Though it posed a challenge for a busy nonprofit to take such time, we learned it was necessary to listen deeply to understand our communities' perspectives and create authentic change. By doing so, we hope that we've centered our communities respectfully.



community was asked to provide feedback on the draft. See the Appendices for additional detail.

Plan Components

This strategic plan outlines the most important *new* initiatives PCTA will focus our efforts on over the next three years, addressing the challenges and building upon the opportunities in front of us. It's important to note that these new initiatives *will not* mean abandoning PCTA's essential core strategies, including trail maintenance, land acquisition and conservation, advocacy, fundraising, communications, and trail user information and support.³ Rather, they indicate areas for PCTA to focus on so that we can more effectively deliver on our core work in the short- and long-term.

The following sections are organized as follows:

1. **Mission, Vision, & Values Updates** reviews the updates staff and board made to PCTA's mission, vision, and values.
2. **The Current State of PCT & PCTA** summarizes the biggest challenges and barriers PCTA and the PCT face, as well as key assets to build upon.
3. **The Strategy** is the heart of the plan and describes the seven new initiatives PCTA will focus on in the next three years.
4. **Organizing for Successful Implementation** outlines how PCTA will operationalize this plan, including the balance between continuing ongoing core work and initiating new efforts.

³ A simple way to think about this is that approximately 80-85% of our effort will still be devoted to these core tasks while the remaining 15-20% will address the new initiatives outlined in this strategy.



PCTA's Core Strategies

The design of this strategic plan is future focused. The five Strategic Pillars encapsulate the breadth of PCTA's work, and particularly how our work needs to adapt to current and emerging conditions on the trail and in our communities. Given the focus of this plan, it's important to acknowledge that **PCTA's core work as an organization has not fundamentally changed**. Below are eight aspects of our work that will continue.

Trail maintenance, construction, and infrastructure. Continue to work with volunteers to maintain and conserve the PCT, and provide new tools to assess and report trail conditions and maintenance needs; continue to support local volunteers to maintain the PCT at a level that meets standards agreed upon between PCTA and our agency partners; support the Crest Runner and Trailhead host programs, as well as partner with agency staff and researchers to understand and address the physical and social impacts associated with trail use along the PCT corridor.

Land acquisition for conservation of the PCT corridor. Continue to strategically acquire land to ensure that the PCT corridor and viewshed are permanently protected, including completing Optimal Location Reviews to inform strategies on these acquisitions.

Working with volunteers. Continue to support regional volunteer groups. Volunteers are the lifeblood of trail maintenance activities, and the PCTA would be unable to do our work without their support.

Land and trail management. Collaborate with the agencies on relevant USFS, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management planning processes to ensure the PCT is protected from threats that could negatively impact the trail user experience, viewsheds, and/or natural resources along the PCT that are integral to the trail experience.

Partnerships. Continue to grow our work in partnership with others to expand the ability to care for the trail with our partners.

Communication and education. Continue to provide storytelling about the trail, the volunteers, and trail users to increase engagement with PCTA and the PCT. Continue to provide educational opportunities for trail users and volunteers to protect the trail and its resources.

Fundraising. Continue to expand and target our fundraising to best meet the needs of the organization and build capacity needed to implement this strategic plan.

PCTA's staff and infrastructure. Continue to support and improve our technology systems to sustain the work of staff and volunteers; maintain staffing levels and provide staff training opportunities to support our core programmatic work and strategic initiatives. Continue ongoing efforts to increase organizational diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.



Mission, Vision, & Values Updates

Mission & Vision

As part of the strategic planning process, staff and board members evaluated PCTA's mission, vision, and values to ensure they accurately reflect the culture shift the organization is undertaking. **PCTA's core mission hasn't changed through this process** – we are still here to work with our volunteers and community to ensure that the trail is well cared for today and for future generations. However, we have updated the wording in our mission and vision to better reflect our current work and align with our updated values.

UPDATED MISSION

The Pacific Crest Trail Association's mission is to advocate for the Pacific Crest Trail as an inspirational outdoor experience, to create belonging and access, and to care for and conserve the trail and the lands through which it passes.

UPDATED VISION

A Pacific Crest Trail for all that:

- Connects land, people, and communities;
- Supports healthy ecosystems;
- Inspires and heals; and
- Welcomes current and future generations.

Values

PCTA's values are the guiding philosophy for the work we do. The following statements describe how the PCTA staff, board, and volunteers will live out these values through organization-wide commitments.

Connected

- We believe that the PCT provides connections between all people, communities, land, and ecosystems.
- We facilitate these connections between people and the natural environment.

Caring

- We care for the Pacific Crest Trail as a vital natural resource that significantly contributes to ecosystem resilience in the western United States.
- We care about the wellbeing of all PCT communities (staff, volunteers, partners, community at large), and act accordingly.
- We care for the trail, the trail experience, and the people who encounter it.
- We strive to create a better future while recognizing historic injustice and harm which requires healing and nurturing.



Cultivating Belonging

- We center marginalized voices in our work so that we can transform into a place where everyone feels like they belong.
- We whole-heartedly listen to the community. We eliminate barriers to access.
- We create an inclusive environment where everyone can enjoy the trail safely.
- We acknowledge that there are those who have been excluded from outdoor spaces and we will make an effort to engage their participation.

Courageously Authentic

- We are intentional and transparent in our actions and decisions.
- We respectfully give and receive honest feedback.
- We actively seek out and incorporate feedback and input from others whose work is impacted by our decisions.
- We have the courage to act from our values, even when it's hard.
- We respectfully challenge ideas when we disagree, even when doing so is uncomfortable.
- We embrace the growth that comes from both successes and failures.
- Trusting a decision was made in line with these values, we will commit to it.

The Current State of PCT & PCTA

Why this Plan is Necessary: The Cost of Doing Nothing

The cost of not proactively facing the PCT's future challenges is a declining trail where users won't be able to fully enjoy the experience, and in many cases may not be able to use parts of the trail at all. In the last decade, total permits have gone up four-fold, meaning a busier trail that must accommodate users with a wider array of skill levels. While increased use isn't inherently negative, it puts additional pressure on trail maintenance, management, and safety all while conditions due to climate change are becoming more extreme and unpredictable. The realities of climate change will lead to situations where users may not have alternative or safe routes when faced with fire, flood, mudslides, extreme heat, and lack of water. Communities adjacent to the trail will experience these same climate challenges but may lack the ability to put on their boots and walk away down the trail. At the same time, women, trans and non-binary folks, Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and other people of color, those with different physical abilities, and many others with marginalized identities continue to experience and report a lack of safety and belonging on the trail and in trail-side communities. The volunteer population is aging, and many younger potential volunteers are prioritizing work with other organizations because of PCTA's lack of an inclusive volunteer culture. The resulting costs play out not only in the experience of hikers but also on the trail itself. In short, the cost of doing nothing means the PCT risks its status as a crown jewel among national and international long-distance trails.



Challenges & Barriers

After the first round of public engagement in the fall of 2022, PCTA staff met to review the community input and integrate it into their work.⁴ Part of this effort was to identify some of the biggest **challenges** currently facing the PCT and PCTA, which they identified as:

- **Climate Change:** Climate change is happening faster than we can keep pace with, negatively impacting both the land and people.
- **Inclusivity:** Historically marginalized communities are not authentically engaged and often do not find a safe, equitable, welcoming trail experience.
- **Management, Maintenance, & Conservation:** There is a need for more conservation and maintenance as our pace is falling behind what is needed.
- **Public and Political Support:** Lack of cohesive standards, policies, funding, and public support across land management boundaries negatively impact trail protection.
- **Aligned Systems:** Major systems that structure either PCTA's work (e.g., internal management systems) or trail users' experience (e.g., the permit system) are not aligned with one another, current/future priorities, and lack flexibility in the face of a changing world.

These challenges range from things within PCTA's sphere of influence (e.g., inclusivity) to things that PCTA must remain aware of as we move into the future (e.g., climate change). In addition to large scale challenges, smaller scale **barriers** were also identified through a second community engagement process. These barriers help to expand upon and provide nuance to the challenges listed above, including how they might affect different regions of the PCT or aspects of global issues that are within PCTA's influence.

Challenge: Challenges are large-scale items in the status quo scenario that could hold PCTA back from achieving the ideal future state or are an area of unmet need. They are what the strategic plan is solving for.

Barrier: Barriers are the things that are not working, are in the way of progress, and/or are causing problems. They are smaller in scale than Challenges and may only impact a specific region or group.

***Barriers related to public communication:** Inconsistent and/or narrowly focused communications from PCTA and others have led to a public perception of PCTA's role, what the organization can accomplish, and trail experiences that don't align with reality.*

- **Inconsistent Trail Information:** Trail users need accurate and up-to-date information to safely navigate the trail. As climate events continue to change the ways that people can experience the PCT, reliable and consistent information is vitally needed. Currently,

⁴ All the Challenges, Barriers, and Assets content was derived from an analysis of input from both rounds of community engagement and subsequent meaning-making with PCTA staff and board. For more, see the [Interim Report](#) summarizing input from the fall 2022 Listening Tour.



either trail users don't have easy access to this information, information may come from unofficial or unreliable sources, and/or the information is out of date or not relevant to specific users. Some user groups (e.g., thru-hikers and long-distance hikers) receive more consistent communication and/or have better access to reliable sources of information.

- **Limited Narrative of the Trail Experience:** People can experience the PCT in a wide array of ways, but thru hiking has been overemphasized and stories of endurance hiking reinforce the idea that certain types of trail use are more welcome than others. Not only are these stories limited in scope, the identities of the people telling the stories are not representative of the broad PCTA community. If individuals can't see themselves, or the ways they might use the trail, represented in descriptions about the trail experience, it's unlikely they will feel part of the community.
- **Lack of Knowledge About the PCTA:** The PCTA plays a critical role in supporting the long-term conservation of the Pacific Crest Trail, but many people are unaware of what that role is. This misunderstanding has led to over expectations of what PCTA can accomplish; challenges in developing new partnerships; and a limited appreciation for the important work being accomplished by the organization every day.

Barriers related to PCTA's culture: Until recently, PCTA struggled to create and maintain an internal culture for staff, board, and volunteers that was safe, equitable, and welcoming for diverse identities. Changes to the culture to better align with our newly adopted values are already underway but will take time to become integrated throughout the organization.

- **Shortage of Inclusive Trail Crew Leaders:** PCTA relies on our incredible volunteers to carry out trail maintenance and other important activities every year. Trail crew leaders are the bridge between PCTA and the rest of the volunteers, but not all leaders have received (or are open to receive) critical training on how to create and lead an effective and inclusive crew. A lack of crew leader consistency in inclusive practices has created a situation where volunteers' experiences are dictated more by their individual crew leader, rather than the fact that they're engaging in work on the PCT. In the face of declining volunteer recruitment, there is a tension between losing ineffective leaders in the short-term to develop stronger leaders for tomorrow and retaining all current volunteers to keep up with already backlogged maintenance needs. The Columbia Cascades and North Cascades regions face these same challenges but are somewhat buffered by strong and inclusive trail volunteer culture in regional organizations separate from PCTA.
- **Shifting Internal Landscape:** Internally, PCTA is going through a leadership and culture shift alongside the development of this strategic plan. We are already working to create more internal trust between staff and leadership, staff and board, and between the different program areas, as well as building a strong internal culture of diversity,



inclusion, equity, and belonging. This work is critical to the long-term health of PCTA, but in the short term we will likely experience growing pains.

Barriers related to limited capacity: PCTA and our volunteers sometimes lack the necessary capacity and skills to address these challenges, as well as the ability to fully cultivate the necessary partnerships.

- **Limited Partner Capacity:** PCTA carries out much of our work in partnership with other conservation organizations, volunteer groups, land management agencies, and others. Many of these entities have experienced a decline in both human and financial capacity. Even those that may not be faced with limited staff or volunteers may instead have a high turnover rate, making maintaining partnerships more challenging. Limited financial capacity impacts the ability to acquire land for conservation, hire additional staff, and support management of users on the trail.
- **Shortage of Skilled Volunteers or Staff:** The PCT traverses 2,650 miles between the United States borders with Mexico and Canada. Some stretches of trail are more remote, hazardous, or technical to navigate than others. When these areas require maintenance, especially if that maintenance is technical in nature, PCTA and our partners sometimes lack the skilled volunteers or paid staff needed to address it.

Assets

In addition to identifying barriers, the second round of public engagement also focused on identifying important **assets** that the PCTA can utilize to make progress on this plan. Three overarching assets relevant to all of PCTA's work were identified:

- **Strong Existing Trail Conservation:** Roughly 90 percent of the 2,650-mile long PCT is permanently protected.

- **Knowledgeable and Passionate**

Volunteers: Volunteers are one of the strongest PCTA assets – they are the lifeblood of trail maintenance activities. Internally, PCTA supports 12 regional volunteer groups covering a large percentage of the trail length. Externally, PCTA collaborates with many conservation corps and trail maintenance groups. Regardless of which group(s) people choose to participate in, there is an overriding sense that they are built from strong, knowledgeable, and passionate individuals who care deeply about the trail and the PCT community.

- **Experienced and Knowledgeable Staff:** There is a deep level of knowledge among staff about the PCT and what PCTA can do in support of trail conservation.

Asset: These are the things that are working, can be built upon, and/or have potential to do good. They come in many categories including natural, built, social/institutional, human/community, and economic/financial.



Assets related to PCTA's network: PCTA is part of a broad, strong network of people and organizations/agencies that support conservation of the PCT.

- **Strong Trail-User Networks:** Trail user networks are a critical asset to PCTA, the most prevalent of which is currently among long-distance hikers of the PCT. This and related networks are already built out and can be more effectively engaged in the future.
- **Strong Relationships with Existing Partners:** Given the massive length of the PCT, regional partner networks focused on specific trail segments are critical building blocks that support the overall health of the trail corridor. PCTA has strong relationships with state and federal agencies and local organizations where the trail overlaps with other protected and high-use areas (e.g., John Muir Trail, Lake Tahoe area). These decades-long networks have barriers to overcome, but their strengths can be used as examples to strengthen weaker relationships and develop new partners.

Assets related to existing plans, processes, and tools: PCTA has developed or has access to a variety of plans (e.g., Forest Plans, General Management Plans); processes (e.g., fundraising, land acquisition); and tools (e.g., PCTA Communicator, FarOut app) that can be built upon and/or made more effective.

- **Internal & External Communication Assets:** PCTA has a robust, internally managed system of communication in place for thru- and long-distance hikers, and for others that have few barriers in getting to the trail and comfortably recreating on it. While this current system lacks efficacy for many trail users (e.g., day hikers, inexperienced/new users, people with limited mobility, etc.), it can be improved upon to increase information accessibility and relevance for all. In addition, many trail users already use digital communication tools external to PCTA, such as Garmin Inreach and the FarOut app. Integrating PCT communications into digital tools can increase PCTA's reach.
- **Land Management Plans & Processes:** The collaborative management system of our national scenic and historic trails, established by the National Trails System Act, provides the PCTA the foundation to engage with federal and state land management agencies in the collaborative management and maintenance of the PCT and surrounding landscapes. PCTA actively engages with land management partners as they develop management plans and project level decisions, providing input about how those plans and projects may affect the PCT and surrounding corridor. In addition to management plans, many of these partners have established processes that PCTA may adopt or use. For example, the Bureau of Land Management's Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) Strategy is an established process to understand landscape conditions and trends, which is critical information for PCTA's land conservation and political advocacy work.

Assets related to PCTA's changing culture: PCTA is striving to cultivate a culture that integrates learning, self-reflection, and growth into the foundation of the organization.

- **Recent Progress:** We at the PCTA have started the process of changing our internal culture to one that celebrates the diversity of the PCT community, demands inclusion



and equity through our actions, and ultimately becomes a place where anyone can feel they belong. New stories written from a broader variety of perspectives and about different kinds of trail experiences are starting to be told in the Communicator and in other PCTA materials. We recently onboarded a new cohort of Board members that bring new expertise and identities to the leadership of the organization. PCTA staff and board members have expressed a desire to continue learning and improving their practices. Much of this work is still ahead, but there is an established foundation for us to build upon.

The Strategy

The core of this strategic plan is made up of five strategic pillars. Each pillar focuses on one large aspect of PCTA's work, describes a long-term outcome to work toward, and lays out one to two specific goals and related strategies describing what PCTA will focus on in the next three years. The core aspects of PCTA's work aren't fundamentally changed by these strategies, but these strategies do help us become adaptable to current and emerging conditions on the trail and in communities (Table 1). In addition to continuing core work, key to this plan's success are two important enabling conditions that describe *how* PCTA will do our work:

1. **Trail Conserved and Managed as a Corridor:** The PCTA aims to ensure that private lands are acquired and conserved and the PCT is managed to prioritize the trail experience, scenery, and biodiversity along the whole corridor.
2. **Mechanism for Community Feedback and Input:** PCTA is committed to engage and work with our communities in support of the PCT. As part of this, we will continue to build our capacity to use proven social science methods to engage and understand community feedback.



Strategic Pillars	Core Strategies	New Strategies
Pillar 1. Trail Maintenance, Management, & Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trail maintenance, construction, and infrastructure. Land acquisition for conservation of the PCT corridor. Volunteer support. Land and trail management. 	<p>Develop a more inclusive and engaging volunteer program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate training for a more inclusive volunteer experience. Diversify volunteers and volunteer opportunities. Support with technical or hazardous maintenance. <p>Recommend permit improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine PCTA role in permitting. Understand permitting interface with user management. Explore alternative permitting models.
Pillar 2. Climate Adaptation and Preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for and respond to disasters, such as wildfires. Support on the ground communication, closure, and evacuation. 	<p>Climate adaptation & resiliency to a new normal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a comprehensive climate adaptation plan. Engage in a continuous improvement process. Implement the plan w/ adaptation and resiliency projects.
Pillar 3. Inclusive & Equitable Trail Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with members of the PCT community. 	<p>Build trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentically engage w/ diverse partners and communities. Build meaningful relationships with organizations serving historically marginalized communities. Expand the ways in which people can volunteer with PCTA.
Pillar 4. Community-Centered Partnerships & Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with partners, including federal, state, and local land managers. Educate and communicate about the PCT & its users. 	<p>Think globally, act locally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand federal, state, and local advocacy. Conduct an economic impact study for the PCT. Provide advocacy options for communities along the PCT.
Pillar 5. The Pacific Crest Trail Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundraise to meet the needs of the organization and the strategic plan. Improve technology systems for staff and volunteers. Increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging among staff and board. 	<p>Align organization structure and capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify organization priorities. Align PCTA's organizational structure and culture to priorities. <p>Gain public and financial support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand marketing and communication program. Diversify fundraising approaches.

Table 1. Summary of the Strategic Pillars. Continued Work indicates the ongoing activities PCTA will continue as relevant in each pillar. Strategic Initiatives indicates the new work outlined in this plan.

Pillar 1. Trail Maintenance, Management, & Conservation. The trail, corridor, viewshed, and healthy surrounding landscapes are maintained and conserved for current and future generations.

Key Challenges and Barriers being addressed:

- Lack of crew leaders and effective training. *Goal 1.1 focuses on changing the volunteer culture to better cultivate good leaders, and Strategy 1 explicitly calls for additional leader training and accountability.*
- Limited technical maintenance capacity. *Goal 1.1, Strategy 3 focuses on developing additional capacity via paid staff to address technical and/or hazardous maintenance needs.*
- Challenges with recruiting & retaining volunteers. *Goal 1.1 overall and Strategy 2 specifically focus on changing the volunteer culture to be more inclusive of individuals with a diversity of identities.*
- Ineffective permit system. *Goal 1.2 focuses entirely on reviewing PCTA's role in the permit system and making recommendations to the USFS to improve it.*

Goal 1.1. Develop a more inclusive and engaging volunteer program. By the end of 2026, we will effectively partner with volunteers to shift the culture of the volunteer program, making it more inclusive, with an increased reported sense of belonging that encourages more volunteers to work with us in fulfilling PCTA's mission.

Strategy 1: Develop and train effective, inclusive volunteers committed to our values, and create a system of accountability to resolve incidents when they occur.

Strategy 2: Expand the PCTA volunteer model to recruit, train, and retain a more diverse group of volunteers.

Strategy 3: Support maintenance crews by hiring and retaining highly skilled staff to better address technical or hazardous maintenance needs.

Strategy 4: Further engage volunteers through a variety of mechanisms to expand direct communication and partnership with PCTA.

Goal 1.2. Recommend permit improvements. By the end of 2024, the PCTA will collaboratively examine our role in administering the PCT Long Distance Permit; and by the end of 2026, PCTA will collaborate with the USFS to recommend improvements to reduce natural resource impacts, improve trail user safety and experiences, adapt to climate events, and support equitable access.

Strategy 1: Conduct internal PCTA conversations about our role in permitting.

Strategy 2: Conduct research into travel patterns, use levels, and resource impacts.

Strategy 3: Explore other models for the future of the PCT Long Distance Permit system.



Pillar 2. Climate Resilience, Adaptation, and Preparedness. A resilient Pacific Crest Trail system and surrounding landscape.

Key Challenges and Barriers being addressed:

- Climate change is happening faster than we can keep up with. *This goal focuses on building resiliency, which can help to mitigate the impacts of sudden climate events.*
- Challenging management across agencies. *Strategy 1 sets a path to improve how PCTA works with partners on climate resiliency to ensure any outcomes operate seamlessly across jurisdictional boundaries.*
- Slow to adapt and outdated management practices. *Strategy 2 includes the creation of a continuous improvement process, which over time will decrease the lag time needed to learn from events and increase the relevance of management activities.*
- On-Trail Safety. *Strategy 3 includes restoration and trail infrastructure projects that will support a higher baseline of trail user safety.*
- Lack of authentic engagement with Indigenous nations. *This proposed plan will be built from multiple knowledge sources, including Western science and traditional ecological knowledge bases. Doing so provides an opportunity for PCTA to intentionally begin building relationships with Indigenous people and communities, which is foundational for any future success.*

Goal 2.1. Climate adaptation & resiliency to a new normal. By the end of 2026, we will collaborate with partners and experts to develop a PCTA climate resiliency and adaptation plan for the PCT and begin plan implementation by initiating three high-priority, on-the-ground projects that address trail user and/or biodiversity needs. This plan will incorporate science and other knowledge bases, such as traditional ecological knowledge. For example, these on-the-ground projects could address infrastructure needs like bridges, water systems, pit toilets, or land acquisition needs for conservation of the trail.

Strategy 1: Collaborate with partners to develop a comprehensive PCTA plan to address climate resiliency and adaptation on the PCT, including identifying project opportunities, best practices, education, user behavior change, research, and monitoring.

Strategy 2: Develop a continuous improvement process where at the end of each trail season, PCTA documents climate-related trail closures, trail town impacts, and lessons learned, such as from high snow year or large wildfires. This internal report will inform our trail operations planning, advocacy, and communications efforts, as well as fundraising.

Strategy 3: Begin plan implementation by conducting high-priority active restoration, connectivity across jurisdictional boundaries, trail infrastructure, and proactive habitat



improvement projects with partners and volunteers to build a more resilient trail corridor.

Pillar 3. Inclusive & Equitable Trail Experience. A more welcoming, safer, and accessible trail experience where all people belong.

Key Challenges and Barriers being addressed:

- Lack of trust between PCTA and diverse communities. *This goal explicitly focuses on building trust with organizations that support communities that PCTA historically has not engaged with.*
- Internal PCTA culture challenges. *Strategy 1 focuses on developing internal practices and ongoing learning to support PCTA's culture shift.*
- Lack of authentic engagement with diverse communities. *This goal focuses on a handful of specific identity groups to ensure that any engagement can be deep and meaningful, rather than cursory and transactional. Additionally, Strategy 2 describes meeting communities where they are rather than asking they meet PCTA on the organization's terms, and Strategy 1 calls on us to consider what we can offer before engaging.*
- Unwelcoming trail experience. *Strategy 3 calls for an expansion of what it means to volunteer, and explicitly expanding volunteering to include activities other than trail maintenance. Additionally, in the mid and long term, building trusting relationships with community organizations and the people in those communities will increase the sense of belonging they feel while on the trail.*

Goal 3.1. Building trust. By the end of 2026, PCTA will build at least five trusting partnerships that are intended to increase trail inclusion and equity with organizations that support Black, Indigenous, AAPI, Latine/a/o/x, and LGBTQ+ communities.⁵

Strategy 1: Develop internal PCTA strategies for authentic engagement⁶ to build trusting relationships, including improving our ability to do so through ongoing learning. As part of this, evaluate what PCTA can offer to partners.

⁵ PCTA recognizes that we need to authentically engage with these organizations to become an organization capable of completing this plan, but to do so we first need to build trust with groups asking "what can we do for you" while we learn how we can best do work together. These five communities were selected because we need to focus our efforts to provide *quality* engagement over *quantity*. In no way are we limited to engaging just these identity groups in the future.

⁶ See [10 Foundations of Authentic Community Engagement](#). PCTA has already begun to do internal work to learn about authentic engagement practices and identify potential next steps to engage with communities often marginalized in the outdoors and will continue to deepen our understanding and practices of authentic engagement.



Strategy 2: Build relationships with historically marginalized communities by engaging organizations, seeking to understand their needs, and tailoring the approach to support those needs.

Strategy 3: Collaborate with existing and potential volunteers to redefine how people can support the PCT by determining the activities most relevant to them (e.g., advocating to leaders, educating trail users, conducting trail maintenance, posting on social media).

Pillar 4. Community-Centered Partnerships & Engagement. PCTA is a trusted and valued partner.

Key Challenges and Barriers being addressed:

- Limited PCTA and partner capacity. *This goal focuses on developing advocates for the trail at the local level, which can alleviate some of the capacity issues, especially in the mid and long term. Strategy 1 works to improve advocacy through funding and planning.*
- Lack of authentic engagement. *The PCT is a route that connects many local communities across the west coast. Having cared for the trail and surrounding lands, these communities have a unique connection to the area in which they live. The overall goal and Strategies 2 and 3 focus on engaging communities by meeting them where they are, acknowledging their expertise, and identifying the potential economic benefit of the PCT.*

Goal 4.1. Thinking globally, acting locally. By the end of 2026, we will identify and build up local trail champions to advocate for the PCT and connect communities to its benefits.

Strategy 1: Develop sustainable program funding and a staff plan for our advocacy work at the federal, state, and local government levels.

Strategy 2: Complete an economic impact study for the PCT to help us better communicate with elected officials, communities, and constituents.

Strategy 3: Through our advocacy and volunteer programs, engage local communities along the PCT through meaningful volunteer opportunities to share their knowledge and advocate for their local trail resources.



Pillar 5. The Pacific Crest Trail Association. The PCTA is an effective, sustainable, inclusive, and equitable organization that supports its staff, board, and volunteers.

Key Challenges and Barriers being addressed:

- Limited capacity of PCTA. *Both goals focus on expanding PCTA's capacity to carry out our work, including aligning available capacity to the organization's priorities to ensure that staff have an achievable workload that includes these new initiatives.*
- Ineffective organizational structure and unclear purpose. *Related to the above, goal 5.1 focuses on clarifying the organization's priorities and re-aligning our structure and practices. This can also help mitigate challenges related to a culture that never says no to a good idea. Instead, leadership will help staff and volunteers focus on strategies and goals.*
- Internal PCTA culture challenges. *Strategy 2 and 3 under Goal 5.1 both focus on building a stronger internal culture, which goes hand-in-hand with earlier goals/strategies for showing this culture shift to external partners and communities.*
- Limited sense of belonging for diverse staff and board. *Related to the culture shift, doing so will move us toward all staff and board feeling an increased sense of belonging.*

Goal 5.1. Organization structure and capacity are more than sufficient to achieve a clarified and focused purpose. By the end of 2026, PCTA will clarify our priorities and align our organizational culture, structure, and management practices to achieve our mission.

Strategy 1. Clarify organizational priorities at the management level and effectively communicate them to staff and board.

Strategy 2. Assess PCTA's organizational structure and management practices to determine any gaps in its ability to effectively meet the clarified priorities.

Strategy 3. Align PCTA's organization structure and culture to clarified priorities, including capacity, decision making, roles, and mutual supports.

Goal 5.2. PCTA is a trusted organization that can gain public and financial support. By the end of 2026, we will double our communications capacity to better build trust and support the exciting work of the PCTA.

Strategy 1: Build a stronger Marketing and Communications program to inform, educate, and excite the public about the PCTA's work.

Strategy 2: Broaden opportunities for diverse approaches to fundraising.



Tier 2 Goals

In addition to the goals and strategies above, PCTA staff and board developed several preliminary “Tier 2 Goals” to keep in mind as the organization moves forward. Some of these include creating an improved access and safety portal to provide up-to-date and relevant information to all trail users, further exploring the feasibility of a trail or gateway community program, and developing an internal guide to more effectively structure partnerships. Tier 2 Goals were similarly based on the input from the PCT community and will be revisited and updated at a time when PCTA has sufficient capacity to take them on.

Organizing For Successful Implementation

The strategic plan provides overarching direction on new PCTA initiatives. However, strategic plans are only as good as their implementation. In many ways, the breadth of responsibilities carried forward by staff, board, and volunteers will remain the same. These duties are critically important, but they draw staff time away from achieving the goals outlined in the plan. Because of this, it is important to operationalize the work. To ensure successful implementation, PCTA will:

1. **Operationalize the plan by empowering staff** to work together to implement the strategic plan within capacity. This will include:
 - Identifying a convenor for each strategic pillar.
 - Ensuring capacity is aligned with plan implementation. This could include getting more efficient by streamlining processes for some aspects of work and in some cases reprioritizing the work. It also may mean saying no to new ideas, even if they are good ones, because they are outside of the strategic plan. In other cases, it may require expanding how PCTA works with partners.
 - Providing staff with any needed tools and knowledge to do the work. This may include training, mentorship, and other support.
 - Reinforcing plan implementation. This may include group celebrations, team rewards when a key aspect of a strategy is accomplished, job descriptions that include working on the strategic plan, and performance being evaluated, in part, on strategic plan success. Another key aspect to reinforce plan implementation is mutual accountability systems.
 - Meeting on a regular basis for each strategic pillar, ideally at least monthly. Individuals may need to be limited to actively participating in a single group.
2. **Establish annual metrics.** One of the first duties of staff will be to identify what measurable aspect should be accomplished by the end of 2024 for each goal. This annual metric should be predictive of achieving the longer-term goals and pillar outcomes identified in the plan and be within the control of the PCTA.



3. **Adaptively implement the plan.** Staff will work to identify next steps that move toward the annual metric. Subsequent conversations will check in on progress, capture what was learned, and identify the next set of actions. Tracking this work over time will help ensure continuous improvement in plan implementation.
4. **Build team trust and effectiveness.** Through this work, not only can the strategic plan be accomplished and adapted over time to meet the outcomes, but team trust and effectiveness can also be built. These meetings provide opportunities to practice the five key elements of building trust and team effectiveness together: strong communication, proactive compassion, reliability, competence, and collaborative orientation.

Conclusion

This plan is not just a 2023 update. It is the first PCTA Strategic Plan that listens to community first, that elevates the need for climate change resiliency and adaptation, and directly addresses the need to build trust with marginalized communities. It works to focus the strategic efforts of the organization by identifying tier one priorities and establishes an adaptive implementation structure to allow for flexibility into the future. It establishes a new set of values that are guideposts for how PCTA staff and board work with each other and the PCT community. In short, this plan marks an exciting turning point for PCTA. We are eager to get busy over the next several years to positively impact the trail, the corridor, and all trail users.



Appendix A. Glossary of Terms & Acronyms

Acronyms

AAPI – Asian American & Pacific Islander

PCT – Pacific Crest Trail

CCC – Civic Consulting Collaborative

PCTA – Pacific Crest Trail Association

LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, & Queer

USFS – United States Forest Service

Strategic Planning Terms

Assets: Things that are working, can be built upon, and/or have potential to do good. They come in many categories including natural, built, social/institutional, human/community, and economic/financial.

Barriers: Things that are not working, are in the way of progress, and/or are causing problems. They are smaller in scale than Challenges and may only impact a specific region or group.

Challenges: Large-scale items that could hold PCTA back from achieving the ideal future state or are an area of unmet need. They are what the strategic plan is solving for.

Goals: Goals represent what we are going to accomplish over the next three years. They are predictive of long-term outcomes and are expressed as time-bound actions with measurable results.

Long-Term Outcomes: The impacts the plan aims to achieve. Each outcome reflects an ideal state for the trail, communities, and/or the PCTA.

Strategic Pillars: The overarching topic areas that organize this strategic plan. They emerged from discussions about the status quo and the ideal future state of the PCT and PCTA.

Strategies: The specific actions taken to make progress toward a goal and ultimately the long-term outcome the goal serves.

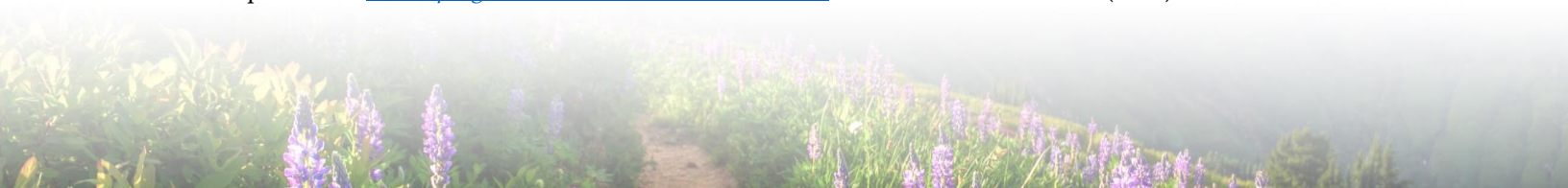
Other Terms

Historically Marginalized Community: Groups of people who face discrimination and exclusion from social, political, cultural, and/or economic life because of their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, language, class, immigration status, and other identities due to unequal power relationships between social groups.

Trail Corridor: The landscape on both sides of a trail's centerline which contains the travel surface and the aesthetic (viewpoints, wildflower areas, etc.) and functional (switchbacks, stream crossings, etc.) control points. It may also include land that must be acquired to protect or buffer the trail from adverse influences, and to protect scenic viewsheds.⁷

Viewshed: The area visible from a certain location or vantage point.

⁷ Adapted from [Developing Sustainable Mountain Corridors](#), National Parks Service (1991).



Appendix B. Resources & Supporting Documents

Documents Linked in the Strategic Plan

[PCTA Strategic Planning Interim Report](#)

[10 Foundations of Authentic Community Engagement](#)

Additional Resources

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 184 pp., doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_Full_Volume.pdf

National Trails System Act of 1968, 16 U.S.C. § 1241 *et seq.* (2019). <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationaltrailssystem/upload/National-Trails-System-Act-Amended-2019.pdf>

USDA Forest Service. (2022). *Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Foundation Document*. https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1025060.pdf



Appendix C. Strategic Planning Process Details

1. **Aug – Sept 2022: PCTA begins working with CCC to develop the strategic plan**
 - a. Task Force comprised of staff and board formed and convenes for first time. They work to define three important aspects of the work ahead: the Current State (where are we now?), an Ideal Future State (where do we want to get to?), and potential Strategic Pillars (what areas of work will get us there?).
 - b. Community notified of planning process and potential opportunities to engage.
2. **Oct – Nov 2022: Engagement with PCT community and PCTA staff to further develop and refine the Current State, Ideal Future State, and Strategic Pillars.**
 - a. Task Force engaged staff and board members to provide feedback on these 3 items, and to begin developing ideas to be used later to update PCTA's mission, vision, and values.
 - b. CCC, in collaboration with the Task Force, engaged 80 stakeholders in seven listening sessions on the initial work of the Task Force. An additional 13 stakeholders engaged via an online survey for a total of 93.
3. **Dec 2022 – Jan 2023: CCC analyzed input gathered as part of the listening tour in an interim report and worked with the Task Force to plan for all-staff retreat in Feb 2023.**
4. **Feb 2023: All staff retreat**
 - a. Trust Building Workshop: CCC led staff through a workshop to brainstorm potential actions PCTA can take to begin building trust with their diverse communities.
 - b. PCTA Values: Building upon earlier discussions, staff collaboratively identified a draft set of values that a working group further refined, including creating specific actions and behaviors for how staff, board, and volunteers can live these values in their work with PCTA.
 - c. Meaning making and strategy work: Building upon earlier staff discussions and the interim report summarizing stakeholder input, staff developed several foundational aspects of this strategic plan, including primary challenges facing PCT(A), long term outcomes for each of the strategic pillars, and goal topics.
5. **Feb – Mar 2023: Task Force refined goal topics, drafted goal statements, and drafted 1-3 strategies per goal statement.**
6. **April 2023: Engagement with PCT community region-by-region to identify important assets, barriers, and strategies via a Plan Development Tour.**
 - a. CCC, in collaboration with the Task Force, engaged 52 stakeholders over six regionally based listening sessions to build upon earlier work. The outcome from this process was a set of barriers, assets, and potential strategies for workgroups to use and consider.

- 7. May 2023: PCTA Staff Workgroups focused on developing a final draft of the goal(s) and strategies within a single pillar to be approved by the Task Force.**
 - a. Workgroups used a few information streams, including draft goal topics/statements and related strategies from the Task Force, information about regional and trail-wide assets and barriers, and potential strategy ideas from the community.
 - b. Workgroups each met twice to develop draft goals and strategies, the Task Force then met to review and provide feedback, and workgroups reconvened for a third and final meeting to finalize.
- 8. June 2023: Feedback and draft Strategic Plan revision**
 - a. Core Team met to approve a draft for public review.
 - b. Community was given 3 weeks to read the draft, provide feedback via online form, and/or meet with Task Force members during “office hours.”
- 9. July 2023: Strategic Plan Finalization**
 - a. CCC reviewed and incorporated feedback in collaboration with the Core Team and Task Force.
 - b. Task Force met for a final time on July 17 to review and approve the plan, pending final revisions, Mission and Vision work and integration into the plan, and Board adoption at their September 2023 meeting.
- 10. August 2023: Editorial Process and Mission/Vision Work**
 - a. Strategic Plan went through a copy edit review with CCC’s copy editor.
 - b. PCTA staff and board developed updated Mission and Vision statements to be included in the final draft of the strategic plan.
- 11. September 2023 and Beyond: Implementation**



Appendix D. Photo Credits

Location in Document	Photo Description	Credit
Cover (top R)	Students from Environmental Charter High School in trail crew attire.	Sammy Lyon, 2017
Cover (top L)	Silhouette of two hikers with large packs as the sun sets.	Rob Thwaites, 2019
Cover (bottom R)	Equestrian thru-rider crosses through the Kern River with her horse and pack mule.	Dylan Gordon, 2023
Cover (bottom L)	Sunrise and wildflowers near Iceberg Lake.	Thomas Piekunka, 2017
Footer (incl. page i)	Lupine at White Pass, Washington.	Ryan Weidert, 2021
Page 21	Purple flowers overlooking Sky Pilot col.	James Townsend, 2022

All photos were sourced from PCTA's annual photo contest, used with permission.

