



DELAWARE
HIGHLANDS
CONSERVANCY

2025 - 2028 Strategic Plan EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON SEPTEMBER 18, 2024



Delaware Highlands Conservancy

2025-2028 Strategic Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mission:

To conserve the forests, farmland, clean waters, and wildlife habitat of the Upper Delaware River region for present and future generations and to foster environmental stewardship through community engagement.

Vision:

As a leading conservation organization working in the Upper Delaware River region in Pennsylvania and New York, the Delaware Highlands Conservancy protects working farms and forests, clean waters, and wildlife habitat for present and future generations. The Conservancy's work enhances the quality of life for all who live in or visit the region, and all who benefit from the river. By providing engaging and inclusive educational programs, sharing resources, and demonstrating sustainable land management practices, the organization fosters informed environmental stewardship and empowers people to realize their conservation goals. The Conservancy reflects and responds to the local community and its needs, working in partnership to achieve shared goals and make connections with nature and with each other.

Tag Line:

Conserving nature together, forever.

Commitments:

The following Commitments guide what we do at Delaware Highlands Conservancy.

Commitment to Nature

Delaware Highlands Conservancy exists to protect natural and working lands in the Upper Delaware River region in Pennsylvania and New York. We recognize that environmental disruptions, including climate change, represent a significant and imminent risk to plants, animals, and people. In our region, we observe negative impacts to the health and diversity of our forest, water, and farmland resources. We also see new and increased threats, such as flooding, erosion, and water quality issues. The Conservancy is committed to acting in response to climate change by using our resources and expertise to:

- Encourage actions that mitigate the pace and impacts of climate change;
- Promote and conserve the biodiversity, long-term viability, and essential functioning of the ecosystems that make up our natural world;
- Incorporate sustainability into everyday practices; and
- Protect and increase the resilience of our natural systems.



Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Belonging

Delaware Highlands Conservancy will continually evaluate and refine our programs, communications, and organizational practices in search of opportunities to help us create a more inclusive environment where people are valued and represented, feel a sense of belonging, and share the benefits of conservation. The Conservancy recognizes that these opportunities will arise from actions borne out of a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging. We also recognize that it is important to understand what these concepts mean in our specific organizational and regional context:

- We will respect the differences in people and ensure that our mission-focused programs are designed to be engaging, accessible, and welcoming.
- We will pursue opportunities to enable more people in our region to conserve their land, access environmental education, and implement best practices for land management.
- We will recognize the importance of environmental justice in our work.
- We will work with a broad constituency of individuals, groups, and information sources, including those who have been historically excluded from the conservation movement. This includes researching and sharing information about traditional ecological knowledge and management techniques.

Delaware Highlands Conservancy is committed to ensuring that everyone feels valued and represented at our events, in nature, and as members of the conservation community.

Commitment to Ethics and Responsibility

Delaware Highlands Conservancy is committed to continuing to meet the highest level of ethical and professional standards. The Conservancy's Staff and Board demonstrate this commitment by:

- Maintaining our National Land Trust Alliance Accreditation through adherence to its rigorous standards and practices;
- Ensuring that Conservancy representatives act in good faith when working with landowners, partners, contractors, and in all other aspects of the Conservancy's operations;
- Treating the community, our partners, and each other with respect and appreciation; and
- Acting as responsible and effective stewards of the land, donations, grants, and other resources entrusted to the Conservancy to advance our mission.

The First Thirty Years



In 1994, the Delaware Highlands Conservancy began with an initial \$250 donation and a small but enthusiastic group of volunteers meeting around our founder Barbara Yeaman's kitchen table. In the thirty years since, the Conservancy has grown into a nationally accredited organization with a full-time staff of nine and offices in Pennsylvania and New York. Working in partnership with private landowners, municipalities, local businesses, hunting and fishing clubs, and other nonprofit groups, we have permanently protected nearly 19,000 acres of working farms and forests, clean waters, and wildlife habitat across the Upper Delaware River region.

In 2021, we opened our first nature reserve and permanent headquarters at the 144-acre Van Scott Nature Reserve in Beach Lake, PA—a welcoming and accessible space for people of all ages to learn about, explore, and enjoy nature with three miles of walking trails through the woods, wildflower meadows, and wetlands. Residents and visitors enjoy attending our year-round educational workshops and programs, and a strong cohort of volunteers continues to guide our activities on our Board of Directors and committees.

As we reflect on the past thirty years and look ahead to the future, we are inspired by the continued support and dedication of our members, friends, partners, and volunteers, and by the increasing efforts throughout the region to protect and conserve our precious natural resources now and for future generations. The Conservancy's 30th anniversary isn't just a milestone—it's a testament to a shared vision, collective action, and the enduring legacy of conservation we are creating alongside the community of supporters who have made it possible.

Strategies Over the Next Three Years:

- 1) Delaware Highlands Conservancy will work with landowners and partners to permanently protect and steward land to conserve wildlife habitat, water quality, and forest and farmland resources through conservation land transactions and our commitment to promoting and implementing best practices in stewardship.

Our land protection and stewardship programs work collaboratively with landowners and partners to conserve the environment and promote sustainability, nature-based climate mitigation, and resiliency in the Upper Delaware River region.

- 2) Delaware Highlands Conservancy will advance an environmental education program designed to foster a love and respect for nature across generations and to equip people with the tools to turn knowledge into action through a focus on wildlife, habitat improvement, and land management.

Our environmental education program focuses on wildlife, natural systems, agriculture, silviculture, and effective conservation tools, including land protection and land management practices, that are accessible to landowners and all members of the community.

- 3) Delaware Highlands Conservancy will foster stronger community collaboration and strategic partnerships to provide expanded services and communications designed to advance our mission and maximize the shared benefits for our local communities and the environment.

Our Staff work in collaboration with, and are responsive to, our community and partners. We provide mission-aligned services, communications, programs, and resources that benefit the people and environment in our region.

- 4) Delaware Highlands Conservancy will operate and enhance the Van Scott Nature Reserve as a living laboratory and community destination that connects people to nature and inspires conservation action.

The Van Scott Nature Reserve provides a space for community building and action, an opportunity to demonstrate best land management practices, and an outdoor classroom for shared learning, research, and celebration of our region's diverse landscape.

- 5) Delaware Highlands Conservancy will invest in and expand our capacity to advance our mission through financial sustainability, operational efficiency, and a strong commitment to our Staff, Board, and volunteers.

The Conservancy diversifies our funding base, explores and employs new practices and technologies, and maintains the human resources necessary to fulfill our mission.

Thank You

The Delaware Highlands Conservancy thanks the volunteer community advisors who generously shared their time, ideas, and insights during the planning process. Their contributions were invaluable in shaping our Strategic Plan and in reflecting the needs and aspirations of our community.

