



GREEN MOUNTAIN CLUB

2023-2028 Strategic Plan

Introduction

Mission and Inclusivity Statement: The mission of the Green Mountain Club is to make the Vermont mountains play a larger part in the life of the people by protecting and maintaining the Long Trail System and fostering, through education, the stewardship of Vermont’s hiking trails and mountains. We are committed to ensuring the GMC and Long Trail System are places that are inviting, safe, and open, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

Strategic planning serves a critical purpose of “checking in” on where the club is and the directions it is taking and involves building a work plan for the upcoming years. As we do this, we assess the changes in our funding context, our demographic environment, and the uses and pressures on the trails that we work to maintain and protect.

The club is coming out of a significant period of accomplishment but is also operating in a time of increased costs and global economic uncertainty. This plan aims to stabilize the gains we have made over the past five years while building on existing systems and operations needed to meet the organization’s longer-term goals. The five-year strategic plan is a living document that guides our work. While much of our mission is set and not bounded by time, our priorities and activities do change based on the changes we see around us. **The Plan will involve annual review and measurement of achievement versus aspirations.**

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The 2017-2022 plan: A look back

The 2017 plan set out **and achieved** many long-term goals for GMC

- Adding \$2 Million to the endowment including a \$1 Million Caretaker fund
- Improving the condition of the northern Long Trail
- Completing the Bluff Mountain Trail in the Northeast Kingdom
- Taking steps to become an employer of choice
- Funding to replace the old Herrick office building
- Protecting key pieces of the Long Trail
- Sustainably managing the Camps program

This work was completed during a time of change in Vermont and the World.

- The COVID-19 global pandemic impacted everyone and changed how we run the organization and how people use the resources we manage.
- The death of George Floyd and protests over racial and social injustice led organizations, including GMC, to strengthen work necessary to address diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) at the club and on the trail.
- A recession economy, high Inflation, and lack of affordable housing constrained the Club's ability to hire and retain staff and made the normal cost of doing business more expensive.

The 2023-2028 Strategic Plan

Situating the Plan's Key Themes

The Trail Resource

Vermont is becoming warmer and wetter. Storm events are happening more frequently and at higher intensity. To manage these climate change impacts, the club and its partners need to invest in improved trail infrastructure and operations. It costs more money to do the same work we did five years ago. And in some cases, the work we did five years ago is not sufficient to meet the needs of the trail today.

Full protection of the Long Trail remains a high priority but is under additional pressure and urgency due to competing uses and a tight real estate market.

COVID-19 changed the way people access the outdoors and created a new generation of outdoor recreationists. Engaging and educating trail users and managing impacts is a year-round responsibility and the club's staff and volunteer systems need to adjust to meet today's trail needs.

People and Demographics

GMC's membership is aging. The average age is 65 which is an increase of 60 percent since the year 2000. Proactively addressing the generational shift of GMC members must be a top priority for the club and reinforces the importance of engaging current and future generations of hikers.

The club's members are a small fraction of Long Trail hikers. More than 300,000 people visit the Long Trail every year. Less than 10,000 are members of the Green Mountain Club. Investing in outreach and engagement efforts that help close this gap supports membership growth, Section vitality, and annual fundraising.

The club has begun addressing issues of equity and inclusion but will need more capacity and resources to make the club and the trail places that are truly open, inclusive, and accessible.

The high cost of living and lack of affordable housing impacts the ability to hire and retain staff. To compete for and retain employees, the club needs to provide competitive pay and benefits, flexible work, and professional development.

Funding and Operations

The Long Trail Legacy campaign was a huge success and while it achieved many long-term goals for the organization, it also created new financial expectations.

Most of the club's human and financial resources are allocated to support the organization's existing programs. Our ability to add or expand programming will depend on how much additional investment and capacity can be secured.

We are in a period of stock market weakness, high inflation, and an unstable economy. It is projected that the club will face stiff financial headwinds for the next 2-3 years.

Building off the success of the Long Trail Legacy campaign the plan includes strategies to grow the club's unrestricted, corporate, and planned giving revenue which represents the best opportunity to sustainably increase the club revenue to meet the plan's goals.

This plan was developed by GMC Board, staff, and standing committees with input from the membership and is designed with three key themes: Protecting and Managing the Trail Resource, Operational Excellence, and Prioritizing People.

Theme: Protecting and Managing the Trail Resource

1. Goal: Protecting, maintaining, and improving the Long Trail and GMC-managed trails in the face of climate change and increased use.

1. Outcome: Deploy a field program (volunteer and staffed) able to respond to evolving needs in trail maintenance.
 - a. BY 2026 GMC volunteers are adequately trained, distributed, and equipped to perform their volunteer duties to a quality expected on the Long Trail.

- b. By 2025, evaluate and assess and revise staff and volunteer trail maintenance duties to ensure we are fielding a program that adequately addresses the system needs and most efficiently utilizes the resources at hand.
 - c. By 2025, formalize a trailhead ambassador program based off Barnes Camp volunteer engagement with trained volunteers stationed at high-use sites.
- 2. Outcome: Trail and shelter infrastructure provides high quality hiking experience and accommodates use.
 - a. By 2026, implement a shelter and privy maintenance and capital improvement plan that ensures facilities remain fully functional and in good condition.
 - b. By 2027, GMC has developed management plans for all overnight caretaker sites.
 - c. By 2027, develop a trailhead parking capacity and transportation plan that identifies public transportation options to GMC-managed trailheads.
 - d. By the 2025 hiking season update trail signage at overnight sites and information kiosks within the trail system to clearly inform the hiking public about the work of GMC and how to volunteer or provide financial support.
- 3. Outcome: Waste management facilities function properly and have the staffing/volunteers needed to manage them.
 - a. By 2025, assess the function and effectiveness of ADA moldering privies and consider alternative designs.
 - b. By 2027, establish a program to monitor pathogen levels across the system that demonstrates the effectiveness of GMC's compost human waste management methods and if there are any changes needed.
- 4. Outcome: GIS technology is used to collect, manage, and share data on trail management and use.
 - a. GMC utilizes a GIS-based trail assessment system to monitor trail segments/facilities and create trail and facility improvement priorities.
 - i. By 2024, GIS technology utilized by full staff
 - ii. By 2025 GIS technology utilized by section volunteers, and adopters to report on, view, and share information on trail management and use.
 - b. By 2026 have a public web-based trail status map and use data to inform GMC's trail-related public messaging.
- 5. Outcome: GMC is an industry leader in trail construction and maintenance.
 - a. Evaluate new methods of trail building and maintenance including imported materials, construction techniques (mechanized) and labor resources.
 - b. Monitor effectiveness/longevity of trail structures and construction methods and materials through the creation of a database of trail implementation projects/types/dates.

2. Goal: Pursue full protection of the Long Trail System

- 1. Outcome: A strategic conservation plan is finalized and implemented.

- a. By 2024, finalize a strategic conservation plan that is aligned with GMC’s internal capacity and external land conservation partnerships.
 - b. Pursue permanent protection of the Long Trail, prioritized side trails and corridor lands through acquisition of fee or easements.
- 2. Outcome: Relationships with state and local elected representatives are built and maintained to support legislative appropriation opportunities and town support for conserved lands.
 - a. Annual testimony at appropriate legislative committees on the work of the Long Trail Protection Campaign.
 - b. Ongoing communication with town officials in key communities.
- 3. *Goal: Manage annual land stewardship work for industry best practices and inclusive access.*
- 1. Outcome: The Land Conservation program is managed to Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices.
 - a. Annually maintain sufficient staff and volunteer capacity to meet land monitoring responsibilities and provide regular and consistent leadership support to active corridor monitors with trainings, field visits, and annual recognition.
 - b. By 2028, finish implementing the recommendations of the boundary line inventory to mark, maintain, and resurvey priority boundary lines.
 - c. By 2026, funding assessment for surveying priority boundary lines on GMC fee lands submitted to the Board.
 - d. By 2025, develop and keep up-dated land management records, specifically by digitizing all stewardship and land protection files, developing fee land management plans for every GMC property, and updating baseline documentation reports with addendums as needed.
 - e. By 2028, research, discuss, and formalize GMC's Land Acknowledgement commitment to support Indigenous efforts for land and water access on GMC-owned lands for ceremonial and cultural purposes.
 - f. By 2028, enhance and manage the publicly accessible information about GMC fee lands, through GMC’s website and online GIS web map.
- 4. *Goal: Operate a high quality and financially viable camps program.*
- 1. Outcome: Program is sustainably managed for camp facilities and a diverse user base.
 - a. By 2028, address deferred maintenance needs at each camp and stabilize organization’s maintenance capacity.
 - b. Manage cabins for affordability, and accessibility by a diversity of users.
 - i. By 2025, evaluate program and launch at least three initiatives or partnerships, as identified through the Camps Program DEI Assessment.

Theme: Operational Excellence

- 1. *Goal: GMC communicates effectively internally and with the public.*
- 2. Outcome: Continue GMC’s efforts to promote and highlight the work of the Green Mountain Club across all communications platforms and create brand consistency to establish GMC’s visual identity.

3. Deploy brand awareness campaigns targeting the hiking community to increase public awareness about GMC's work and increase public engagement with GMC.
 - a. By 2023, create and implement general brand awareness campaign using social media and traditional advertising mechanisms to promote GMC as the source for hiking information in Vermont.
 - b. By 2024, create and implement a GMC ambassador training to be used by staff, board members, and volunteers to effectively and consistently communicate who GMC is and what we do.

2. *Goal: GMC grows and expands its corporate and individual donor base to fully fund its programs.*
 1. Outcome: Major donor programs build on the success of the Long Trail Legacy Capital Campaign to have greater impact and generate increased revenue.
 - a. By 2023, have an updated annual donor stewardship calendar that includes donor communications, and in person and virtual events.
 - b. By 2024, create growth targets for the remaining years in the strategic plan based on data and success of post-capital campaign giving.
 2. Outcome: Fundraising events generate increased revenue and attract members.
 - a. Hold an annual Long Trail Day fundraising event with a goal of growing the program to \$100,000 in unrestricted revenue by 2027. Increase corporate involvement in fundraising efforts.
 - b. By 2025, assess potential for additional fundraising events to meet annual fundraising goal.
 3. Outcome: GMC has a strong corporate sponsorship program that supports core budgetary needs
 - a. By 2024, create a 5-year corporate sponsorship strategy including staff/volunteer roles and annual growth targets.
 - b. By 2023, create a clear mechanism for financial contributions and sponsorship from business that participate in GMC run volunteer service efforts.
 4. Outcome: GMC's planned giving program is vibrant and supports the long-term financial security of the organization.
 - a. By 2023, develop a planned giving program structure complete with an annual calendar of growth targets, stewardship details, and funding needs to manage the program.

3. *Goal: GMC Membership is vibrant and supports the mission of the club.*
 1. *Outcome: Membership supports the organization financially and through volunteering.*
 - a. Form a working group to assess GMC's membership model including governance to better account for demographic changes, leadership development, volunteerism, diversity, and revenue generation. By 2025, submit recommendations to the Board of Directors.
 - b. By 2024, create annual membership engagement strategy with associated work plan that includes indicators of success.

- c. By 2024, update membership benefits to be in line with industry standards.
 - d. Increase opportunities for members to become more deeply engaged with the Green Mountain Club through events, outings, and community gatherings.
 - e. By 2024, survey younger members to gain insight on trends and interests that impact member recruitment and retention.
4. *Goal: Support Section membership growth and retention goals.*
- 1. Outcome: Provide ongoing communications and membership support through monthly meetings and direct outreach.
 - a. Provide sections support and content for communications and marketing mediums (e.g., email templates, content for websites and newsletters).
5. *Goal: GMC provides trail resource education and information, while cultivating the next generation of members.*
- 1. Outcome: GMC effectively operates the Waterbury Center, Barnes Camp, and Mt. Mansfield visitor centers.
 - a. By 2024, open and operate the new GMC Visitor Center in Waterbury Center.
 - b. By 2023, hire a Visitor Center manager who has an interpretive background and will coordinate operations across all visitor centers.
 - c. By 2024, create a Visitor Center and User Engagement Strategy that will guide offered programming.
 - 2. Outcome: GMC's education program supports the mission and meets the needs of members.
 - a. By 2024, form an education working group to review the effectiveness of the current program and make recommendations that will guide education programming at GMC.
 - 3. GMC produces print and electronic maps and publications to inform users of the Long Trail System.

Theme: *Prioritizing People*

1. *Goal: GMC and the Long Trail System are places that all staff, members, and visitors feel welcome and belong.*

- 1. Outcome: GMC is committed to making the organization more just, equitable, and inclusive and actively supports minority and marginalized populations in trail use and outdoor engagement.
 - a. Create an organization wide DEI workplan and identify funding and human resource capacity to support elements of the plan.
 - b. Engage with affinity groups via partnerships, financial assistance, and other requested organizational support to provide access to and use of the Long Trail system by minority and marginalized populations.
 - c. Plan for Inclusion of diverse voices in our communications (LTN, blog, website, publications, etc.).
- 2. Outcome: GMC proactively addresses issues of discrimination and harassment on the trail and within the organization.
 - a. By 2024, have clear statements and messaging about diversity, equity, and inclusion for staff and volunteers to use in public settings.

- b. Provide DEI trainings and learning opportunities for staff and volunteers as part of orientation and continuing education.
 - c. By 2023, have a volunteer code of conduct.
3. Outcome: Parts of the trail system are available to people regardless of ability.
- a. With partner organizations, e.g., Vermont Adaptive, build understanding of what actions can be taken to support more access to the Long Trail System by the adaptive community.
 - b. GMC assesses Long Trail System infrastructure that can meet ADA accessibility standards by 2028.
2. *Goal: Build and maintain a high functioning, supported, and empowered staff that strives for results and works as a team.*
1. Outcome: Provide industry leading wages and benefits to attract and retain high-quality staff
- a. Benchmark GMC's staff wages and benefits against regional and industry employers.
 - b. GMC attracts, hires, and retains experienced seasonal staff leaders.
 - c. GMC provides professional development and advancement opportunities for staff to grow and thrive.
 - d. By 2023, review and update GMC's employment policies to be in line with industry standards.
2. Outcome: Reduce barriers to employment for seasonal and full-time staff
- a. By 2028, in partnership with corporate sponsors provide clothing and gear needed for field staff to work a full season in the field.
 - b. By 2027 expand GMC's staff transportation options to eliminate the need to use personal vehicles for work.
 - c. By 2025, develop a capital plan to improve the use and functionality of the Back 40 field staff housing complex.
 - d. By 2025, develop a capital plan for southern staff housing.