Strategic Plan
2019-2021

Middlebury Area Land Trust
Addison County, VT
Our Team

Board of Trustees
Eben Punderson, President
Christy Lynn, Vice President
Michael Corbett, Treasurer
Ellen Cronan, Secretary
Jono Chapin
Tyler James
Kathleen Ramsay
Julia Anderson

Staff
Jamie Montague, Executive Director
Rachael Gosselin, Bookkeeper
Jennifer Smith, Trails & Stewardship AmeriCorps
Maurice (Mo) Bissonnette, Summer Camp
Katie McEachan, Summer Camp

Volunteers
John Derick, Trail Coordinator
Dave Hallam, Database Volunteer
Katherine Branch, Outreach and Office Volunteer
Haley Roe, Middlebury College Intern
What We Do

Our Vision

Thriving natural & productive lands sustaining vibrant communities

Our Mission

The Middlebury Area Land Trust works with our community to conserve natural and productive landscapes, and to enhance scenic, recreation, and educational opportunities.

Who we serve

The Middlebury Area Land Trust's service area is defined as primarily the towns of Middlebury, Bristol, Cornwall, Lincoln, New Haven, Ripton, Salisbury, and Weybridge, and secondarily the remaining towns of Addison County.
Our History

1987- the organization was created and incorporated under the name “Middlebury Land Trust.” Its creation was a consequence of a gap in the state’s farmland tax abatement program. The town of Middlebury valued the continued agricultural viability of farms within its borders, and, when the state program stopped, the Town of Middlebury adopted a local farm tax abatement program. When the state re-instituted a tax abatement program, it reimbursed the Town the approximately $150,000 the town had spent on the town program during the gap. Using this money from the state, the town established a Land Use Conservation Fund for the preservation of farmland and for other land conservation projects. The Middlebury Land Trust (MLT) was founded to advise the Town on its use of these funds and to pursue conservation projects. One-half of the income from the Conservation Fund is provided to the Land Trust for administrative support.

1989- the Land Trust began discussions on receiving its first conservation easement (i.e., development rights) on a parcel located on Cobble Road. In this same year, the idea of developing a recreational path around Middlebury was born, and the name “Trail Around Middlebury” (TAM) was chosen.

1990- the Land Trust purchased its first conservation easement, the development rights to the Seeley farm, a working farm. Funding came from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHC) and the Town of Middlebury Conservation Fund.

1991- the Land Trust received the conservation easement on the parcel on Cobble Road in Middlebury. The Land Trust, working with the Otter Creek Audubon Society (OCAS), initiated efforts to establish a “Green Belt” along the Otter Creek River between Middlebury Falls and the Pulp Mill Power Station. The first section of the TAM was established, running through Chipman Hill and the Means and Battell Woods town parkland.

1992- the Land Trust received easements on two small lots on Otter Creek as part of the “Candido property.” Conservation easements for several subdivided portions of the “Cornwall Farm” on Halladay Road were conveyed to the Land Trust.

1993- the Land Trust received a $6,000 donation from Willard Jackson to help support oversight of Wright Park, which had been donated by Mr. Jackson to the Town of Middlebury in 1988.

1994- the Land Trust, the Town of Middlebury, and OCAS received a conservation easement on a portion of the Marble Works’ property fronting the Otter Creek River. This conserved wetlands area is on the Creek west of the Marble Works’ office building and the “State Office” lot.

1995- the Land Trust received a conservation easement on the “Schley property” on Halladay Road. The northwestern section of the TAM, including a route through the Otter Creek Gorge, was also established.

1996- the organization’s name was changed to the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) to reflect a wider area of activity. The southwestern section of the TAM, traveling through Middlebury, Cornwall, and Weybridge from the Middlebury College – Ralph Myhre Golf Course to Route 23, was established.

1997- MALT received a donation of the Jeffrey Murdock Nature Preserve from Joan Wilson, which lies between Middlebury Union Middle School and Route 7 South. Following this donation, the
southeast “Murdock Preserve” TAM section was established, and the first map of the TAM was printed.

1998- Willard Jackson donated the Power House property to the Land Trust, along with $8,000 to be used for associated expenses. In addition, the Otter Creek Gorge trails were extended.

1999- Abbott Fenn established an annuity trust that gave MALT a $40,000 donation to use towards conservation of the Maple Manor Motel site or another Route 7 parcel. A MALT application to purchase a conservation easement on the Gagnon/Cloutier farm in Salisbury was approved by the VHCB. The purchased easement was transferred to the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) for stewardship and monitoring. MALT received the gift of the Otter Creek Gorge Preserve from Linda Johnson, Steven Rockefeller, and Willard Jackson along with a $20,000 endowment from the Arnold Family for property management and maintenance. MALT also received $1000 from the Walter Cerf Foundation to pursue a project on Pulp Mill Bridge Road, which became the Otter View Park Project. MALT received the first of four easements on the Ganley-Roper property in Weybridge. The first pedestrian bridge across Otter Creek, at Belden Dam, linking the New Haven and Weybridge sections of the TAM was completed and named the ‘Don and Peggy Arnold Bridge.’

2000- MALT received a $10,000 anonymous grant in support of the Otter View Park project (OVP), focusing on the undeveloped property at the corner of Weybridge Street and Pulp Mill Bridge Road. The second bridge across Otter Creek, the ‘Boat House Bridge’ at the Middlebury Union playing fields was finished to complete the TAM loop.

2001- MALT successfully advocated a one-cent property tax in Middlebury earmarked for the town’s Conservation Fund. MALT received a donation of a conservation easement on the Berthiaume property off Halladay Road, which completed the original plan for conservation of the “Cornwall farm.” Steven Rockefeller donated a conservation easement on the “Otter Creek Child Care” property bordering the Otter Creek, as part of the Greenbelt project. MALT also received the first permanent trail easement for a portion of the TAM from Jim and Elizabeth Robinson for the trail section from Route 23 and Hamilton Road in Weybridge across their property. The 2nd edition of the TAM Map was printed.

2002- MALT culminated a three-year effort to facilitate the purchase of a conservation easement on the Doris Eddy Horse Farm on South Street. Funding came from the VHCB, the Town of Middlebury Conservation Fund, and donations raised directly by MALT. The easement is held by VLT for stewardship and monitoring purposes. MALT received the last of four conservation easements on the Ganley-Roper property, conserving 30 acres in Weybridge. MALT joined a VLT and VHCB project conserving the Butterfield Farm and received a trail easement across the property. This project received $5,000 from the Town of Middlebury Conservation Fund. A successful hiking series along the TAM was initiated.

2003- a detailed three-year strategic plan was adopted and the organization made significant progress in solidifying its stewardship program and revamping many of its internal systems. MALT signed a purchase and sale contract for the Otter View Park, the New Haven Valley View, and the Salisbury Mill projects. It also began a complete management plan for Wright Park, which is owned by the Town of Middlebury.
2004- MALT purchased the New Haven Valley View property from Rick and Tina Quenneville working in partnership with CVGA and the Salisbury Mill property from the Peterson Family in partnership with VLT through funding from the Freeman Foundation. MALT also celebrated the 15th anniversary of the TAM in 2004 and began an annual event to fund trail maintenance called the TAM Team Trek.

2005- MALT closed on the purchase of Otter View Park, a project that saw its beginnings in 1995 and was actively pursued since 2001.

2006- MALT successfully advocated for a five-year renewal of the one-cent property tax in Middlebury. A trail easement was secured on the Elmer Farm, a 90-acre parcel near East Middlebury that was the first property conserved through the Vermont Land Trust Farm Access Program. MALT also partnered with the Foote family to preserve 117 acres of farmland and clayplain forest in Cornwall through a conservation easement.

2007- MALT completed the purchase of the 11.7 acre Sessions-Neil Property along the Middlebury River in cooperation with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources River Management Program. MALT also secured a trail easement on the Wright Property, a farm near East Middlebury that is conserved by a Vermont Land Trust Easement.

2008- the Otter View Park project was completed in Middlebury and Weybridge, opening 15 acres of diverse habitat to universal public access for wildlife observation and recreational opportunities. MALT granted a river corridor conservation easement to the Vermont River Conservancy on the Sessions-Neil Property. The 3rd Edition of the TAM Map was published.

2009- MALT partnered with VLT in the conservation of the Bingham Farm. The 100 acre farm contains tilled fields, woodlands and a 9.4 acre special treatment area of state-significant clayplain forest. MALT holds a trail easement along the eastern edge of the property.

2010- MALT completed the Dodge-Katz Conservation Easement. This Cornwall property is within the Beaver Brook watershed and boasts a variety of habitats, including clayplain forest, wetlands, and steep ravines. There is known beaver activity in the wetlands, frequent deer and bobcat signs, and substantial bird activity.

2011- MALT completed an easement for the Ripton Riverbank. There are three small easements along the Middlebury River in Ripton that are in place to protect the riverbanks from development. This will help the river to move naturally in its banks, and prevent the kind of flooding that occurs when rivers are too straight and deep. As the river heads straight down into East Middlebury behind numerous houses, this is a crucial first step to preventing flooding.

2012- MALT became a trail affiliate with the North Country Trail Alliance, completing another step in bringing the North Country National Scenic trail into Vermont. A 4.5 mile spur trail was built, connecting the TAM’s Jackson trail with the Snake Mountain Wildlife area. MALT completed the purchase of the Hamblin Farm, conserving 101 acres in the Beaver Brook Watershed, VLT holds the conservation easement.
2013- MALT received a trail easement from Middlebury College for a section of the Jackson Trail (TAM). In the future this trail will connect the Johnson Trail with the Class of ’97 O’Neil Trail to greater promote recreation and transportation along the south eastern section of our TAM.

2014- TAM’s 25th anniversary was an important year for MALT. This year marked the start of the TAM Endowment, and in September, MALT conserved the 103-acre Bob Collins Conservation Farm on Route 23. This project was made possible through generous community fundraising efforts, and Monument Farms with VLT now serve as the property’s easement holder. Along the TAM, gravel was added to chronically wet sections of the trail, and the boardwalk (inspected by DeWolfe Engineering) between Middle and Creek roads was rebuilt. Our board gained two new members, Eben and Ben.

2015- MALT released an updated map of the TAM. MALT also received a 42-acre easement from Charlie Kireker of Middle Road Ventures. This area, now called South Ridge easement, borders Murdock Woods and contains important Indiana bat habitat, forest and water resources. The hope is to someday connect this land to the North Country Trail south of Moosalamoo and the Long Trail. An independent contractor refurbished Boat House Bridge, and volunteers added more culverts and gravel on chronically wet sections of the TAM. MALT also gained a new and improved website, designed and created by Kathie Ross. MALT gained five new board members including Mike, Jeff, Laura, Will, and Don.

2016- MALT and Linda Johnson worked together to create an easement for the Johnson segment of TAM. With help from Vermont Audubon, Otter Creek Natural Resources Conservation District, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Partners Program, MALT revised its Wright Park Management Plan, adding a focus on the maintenance of young forests and open meadow habitats. The TAM map was also expanded to include an interactive digital version.

2017- MALT expanded its summer camp program, adding an additional program in Wright Park named Camp Terrahana. In order to better accommodate parking and increase accessibility, MALT built a new gravel lot on Hamilton Rd. MALT gained a new Executive Director, Jamie Montague, and Ellen joined the Board of Trustees.

2018- Staff, volunteers, and the Board of Trustees are working together to create a new, three-year strategic plan. MALT’s by-laws were also updated.
### SWOT Summary, Internal Reflections

#### Strengths
- TAM (Trail Around Middlebury) as incredible, physical asset
- Dedicated User Groups, especially youth, recreational enthusiasts, nature lovers
- Partner orgs - VLT, Town groups (Parks & Rec), school groups, camps, etc
- Programs - birding, camps, hikes, trail days, etc
- Strong and dedicated board of directors, staff, alumni
- Devoted volunteers (office, trail, events)
- Long history 1987
- Historical knowledge of area and expansion of conserved land
- Diverse landscapes (woodland, wetland, farmland, rivers, reservoirs, etc)
- Proximity and relations to and with College and Towns
- Consistent funding through Town Fund (annual $)
- Supportive group of major donors
- VLT and other supportive area land trusts

#### Weaknesses
- Lack of connection/association of MALT to TAM (branding and marketing)
- Low membership numbers (and falling)
- Weak commitment to increasing membership
- Perception of MALT as Middlebury centric
- Donor dependency - rely too heavily on donors, rather than grants, public funding, events, etc
- Parking and signage challenges
- Limited physical access to some properties
- Challenging to fill all seats on board of directors
- Not enough trail maintenance volunteers, or challenge connecting with them
- Limited paid staff/time resources
- No dedicated conservation fund within organization
- Communication plan needs revamping to reach broader audience
- Lack of succession plan(s), requiring starting over with new leadership
- Insufficient time dedicated toward outreach and communication
- Challenging to know what is reasonable to expect from voluntary board of directors
# SWOT Summary, External Reflections

## Opportunities

- Engage new users (bike clubs, trail runners, summer campus, hunters, farmers, anglers, snow mobilers)
- Foster school programs & youth environmental education
- Utilize social media channels to connect to new people (especially Facebook, Instagram, and front porch forum)
- Utilize survey results - engage more volunteers
- Maximize the value of an aging demographic - invite to volunteer and donate
- Rekindle relationships with VLT and other land trusts for organizational support
- Voluntourism - offer volunteering opportunities that could draw in visitors to the area
- Actively reach out to farmers to help understand how to conserve land
- New partnerships to achieve shared goals
- Utilize/expect board of directors engagement in fundraising
- Partner with work being done on town forests planning - seek out greater engagement
- Market trails as alternative transport network
- Link existing trail networks to other trail networks
- Build upon connection to college, CCV, UVM and Middlebury, including GIS work and free intern work

## Threats

- The next recession - macro-economic trends
- Recognize high local competition for fundraising with other organizations, especially those focused one social issues such as poverty alleviation that may seem more critical
- Facing less support at federal level for MALT’s work - uncertain tax policy
- Overdevelopment and overuse threatens trails
- Tendency for others to forge rogue or unsupported trails threatens our reputation, trail standards and ecosystems
- Challenging to keeping working landscapes preserved
- Under-appreciation about what it takes to maintain trails - people, equipment, etc
- Aging population leading to a change to user base
- Some funders don’t see value of smaller land trusts - want VLT to do it
- Climate change
### Action Agenda

#### A. Conservation

Goal: MALT is well poised to protect lands that align with our conservation values.  
*Connection to vision: Conserved lands ensure there will be natural spaces within which our community can connect and engage.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for Reaching our Conservation Goal</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What it looks like</th>
<th>Cross-connections &amp; Leverage Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Update internal tools and procedures for proposed projects.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Produce comprehensive, realistic, and useful rubrics for conservation planning and execution.</td>
<td>Stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Define the land we want conserved.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>Define MALT’s conservation priorities. Identify types of projects, important ecosystems, geography, etc.</td>
<td>Education and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understand Addison County’s priorities for conservation.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Produce a report, in collaboration with MALT’s conservation partners, outlining priorities and opportunities for Addison County conservation.</td>
<td>Stewardship, Education, and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Develop communication goals that share our updated conservation priorities and processes.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Develop plan to communicate conservation goals within MALT’s overall communication plan.</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
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B. Stewardship

Goal: MALT prioritizes responsible stewardship of our lands and commits to the alignment of our conservation initiatives with our stewardship capacity.

*Connection to vision: Upholding high and rigorous stewardship standards demonstrates our credibility in maintaining quality lands for our community.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for Reaching our Stewardship Goal</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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<th>Who</th>
<th>What it will look like</th>
<th>Cross-connections &amp; Leverage Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand and meet the requirements of each conservation easement.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2019-2021</td>
<td>Staff Cons. Comm.</td>
<td>All conservation easements evaluated for current compliance. MALT's stewardship practices will fulfill all easement requirements. Meet with all landowners.</td>
<td>Conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Update MALT’s stewardship procedures.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>MALT’s stewardship procedures will align with current best practices.</td>
<td>Conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Develop and implement a citizen science stewardship monitoring program.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>Staff Vols.</td>
<td>Recruitment and training for stewardship volunteers. A portion of stewardship monitoring will be shifted from staff to volunteers, creating time and resources for Stewardship Coordinator to focus on Strategies 1 and 2.</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Education

Goal: MALT reaches a widely diverse population with increased programming and prioritizes environmental education on MALT lands.

Connection to vision: Expand opportunities for people to engage and connect with MALT’s environmental ethic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for Reaching our Education Goal</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Identify resources for expanding our education programs.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Obtain MOUs with partners, hire/partner with education personnel, establish access to facilities, etc.</td>
<td>Garner support/public awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A. Expand summer camp program</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Staff Partners</td>
<td>Hire and/or partner with other educators who can help expand MALT summer camp openings</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B. Pilot after school and vacation programming</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Spring 2020</td>
<td>Staff Partners</td>
<td>Start after school programming with limited resources and risk to assess interest</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C. Expand after school and vacation programming</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Fall 2020</td>
<td>Staff Partners</td>
<td>Expand after school offerings assuming interest and resources exist</td>
<td>Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Complete market research to identify areas of additional growth.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>MALT will identify areas of need for increased programming. MALT will survey community (formally and informally) to understand areas of opportunity.</td>
<td></td>
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**D. Recreation**

Goal: MALT meets increasing demand for recreation through a sustainable operative plan, improving quality and accessibility of our trails.

*Connection to vision: The TAM and our trails introduce people to MALT in a physical and impassioned way. Prioritizing the sustainability of our trails ensures MALT’S visibility in the community.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for Reaching our Recreation Goal</th>
<th>Priority</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Adopt and implement a Trail Management Plan, including a TAM Management Plan.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2019-2021</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Trail Management Plan adopted by the Board. All current trail projects will be completed. All trails will meet standards outlined in Trails Management Plan.</td>
<td>Stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Implement a staffing plan that is sustainable to fund and capable of fulfilling the Trails Management Plan.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2019-2021</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>MALT will have a staff member who manages the trails and TAM and coordinates all trail volunteers.</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Garner more human and financial support for our trail networks.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2019-2021</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>MALT will build a robust trail volunteer network. MALT will increase trail-focused marketing efforts with tools such as events, strategic publicity, better branding, and trail-user survey.</td>
<td>Education Stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Strengthen MALT’s current trail network and lay groundwork for future trail expansions.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>The TAM will have trail easements wherever possible and the trails committee will envision a future trail network. A GIS intern will map our future trail goals.</td>
<td>Conservation Stewardship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>