



Introduction to Current Priorities & 2009 Strategic Plan

Background:

The Board of Trustees convened the ad hoc Futures Committee to institute a planning process in 2015 that came up with a series of working Strategic Priorities for The Wild Center in 2016. Those are the attached dynamic working document “**Future’s Committee Strategy Overview**

With Assignments to Committees and Staff,” that informs current Center operations and decision making. As you will see, there are a series of notes and mark-ups on this document, indicative of a working draft.

Also, in this section is the 2009 **Wild Center Strategic Plan** which expired in 2014, but still contains valid operational priorities and direction.

In 2017, The Wild Center implemented several of the Strategic Priorities which resulted in additional studies, an Impact Planning Workshop, a Persona Study, a Development Analysis and a new Case Statement for Support (see Section 13), all of which will inform an upcoming comprehensive master site planning process and future strategic planning process.

Strategic Plan

July 2009



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Introduction

The Wild Center's strategic planning process began in July of 2008 with staff and board work sessions throughout the summer. In the fall, several work groups were formed to further assess different aspects of the museum and develop more detailed visions and work plans. This plan represents that collective group work.

Special thanks to the Strategic Planning Committee, which consists of Co-chairs Lynn Birdsong and Stephanie Ratcliffe, and committee members Tom Aydelotte, Obie Clifford, Howard Fish, Rick Godin, Dave Gross, Jen Kretser, and Claire Leonardi.

Part One—Section One

Who We Are and Our Place in the World

Mission of The Wild Center

*Ignite an enduring passion
for the Adirondacks
where people and nature can thrive together
and set an example for the world.*

Our Place in the World

The Wild Center exists in response to and celebration of its unique place in the world. The following acknowledges the roots of this history and describes the current context on which we build our work. Please refer to Institutional History in Part Two, Section Four for more detail on the development and history of the museum.

- The Wild Center (TWC) deeply engages people of all ages and immerses them in nature in ways that are personally meaningful. Although a select number of other organizations offer powerful experiences, what makes TWC vitally important is the specific location it helps people understand.
- The museum exists in a place of profound importance to the world. The Adirondacks are the site of the biggest, oldest experiment on Earth: How can people best coexist with natural systems? While there has been over 100 years of progress, the experiment is by no means over. The Wild Center will play a critical part in determining whether this effort to create a viable model can succeed.
- The Adirondacks have a unique history. Because of a geology that made the area difficult to traverse, it was largely unpopulated when extensive lumbering and mining began to damage the region's ecosystems in the 1800s. The park was created in 1892 by people who realized that better coexistence between nature and people was important. They looked at the Adirondacks as an opportunity to save a still-strong natural system and protect New York's water resources. Today, others from around the world come to study this example of how people can live in and around a protected natural area. If we are going to do well on this planet, then the United States and its Adirondack region have tremendous potential to show the rest of the world a path.

- The effort to model successful coexistence of people and nature has five keys. The first, already in place in the Adirondacks, is laws that protect important ecological areas. The second key is economic opportunities for local communities that allow them to thrive without harming the region’s natural diversity. The third is a private sector deeply invested in protecting natural resources and creating jobs. The fourth key is education so people can better experience and appreciate the natural area. The fifth key is ongoing research so people can learn more about how the natural area can prosper. The Wild Center concentrates on three aspects of these key efforts—what we call the Three Es: Education, Environment, Economy.
- The Adirondacks have a great history. But they can have an even better and globally important future. The Wild Center works every day, on multiple levels, to ensure that the best days for the Adirondacks are not in its past, but in its future as it becomes a model for the world.

Who We Are: Our Defining Attributes

The following describes The Wild Center’s defining attributes.

- We are world-class, a model of what a museum can be and can accomplish in a world that requires new leadership and citizens who can think critically and use science-based decision making in their daily lives. Our goals are achieved because we connect and reconnect people of all ages with nature and with one another. We take a multifaceted and innovative approach to doing so, inspiring people in **active, alive, deeply emotional, relevant, and personally empowering** ways.
- We **create significant transformative life experiences. To create a sustainable future requires that we change the way people see nature and their part in nature.** The most effective work that we do leads to enduring changes in people’s attitudes and values. We strive to develop multiple interconnected experiences through participation in on-site programs, expeditions, and virtual media-based experiences. Experientially, we **facilitate learning, not teaching.**
- We are a **visitor-centered organization** and strive to **exceed expectations** through excellent customer service, creating the environment for a positive learning experience. We do this by actively listening and committing to learning more about our audiences.
- We conceive, promote, and professionally **host productive gatherings where people work toward defined progress on critically important issues** that affect the future of the Adirondack model. We often provide the impetus for these gatherings, as well as structure and facilitate them. By professionally serving this role of trusted partner, The Wild Center plays a critical part in shaping a working Adirondack model.

- We are a strong **voice** for, and funder of, scientific research on the natural world of the Adirondacks and the Adirondack model. Through our world-class facility, innovative programming, media, and website, we:
 1. Provide a significant platform for a broader audience to understand current scientific research and dialogue.
 2. Provide and facilitate citizen science experiences that not only serve the scientific community but also connect people with nature in deep and satisfying ways.
 3. Showcase the Adirondack region as a model for sustainable communities.
 4. Fund and participate in important new efforts to understand Adirondack species and systems.
- We **model environmental sustainability and personal responsibility** by investing in, practicing, and promoting awareness of sound environmental practices, green building design, and commitment to action throughout the organization. We take a leadership position among museums and in the region in our actions on this front.
- We **work in partnership** and with a collaborative spirit with external stakeholders, partners, the Adirondack Park community, and others. We form a selective number of long-term important strategic partnerships to allow us to accomplish more than we could alone. We seek strategic partnerships that are more than the sum of their parts—collaborations that help us achieve something unique and special. Strategic partnerships are those partnerships where each partner invests in the success of the other.
- Through building **internal capacity**, we empower staff to plan, evaluate, and learn new skills to expand their capabilities and develop innovations for the museum. We execute goals in a well-planned and coordinated fashion throughout the organization, consistent with TWC’s brand and quality that directly reflects TWC’s mission and goals. To move forward with established goals, sufficient and appropriate resources must be in place.
- **We consciously and proactively promote diversity and accessibility.** The Wild Center encourages the involvement of all people in its mission and activities. Our goal is to be a community that is inviting and accessible to all.

Part One—Section Two

Strategic Directions and Initiatives

The following outlines strategic directions that we plan to pursue for many years to come. These directions flow from the ideas articulated in the previous section, Who We Are. The listed initiatives describe current project-based work that may last from one to three years. In developing the current initiatives, we considered the following big questions:

- How can we create a sustainable business model given our highly seasonal nature?
- How do we secure a national audience of donors for a museum that is regional in its primary focus?
- How do we communicate to others our impact and change the public's perception that TWC is a *nice* addition to the Adirondack community to a perception that it is a *necessary* and essential part of the region's future?

The answers to the questions above are addressed through the following strategic directions.

The Eight Strategic Directions

1. **The Wild Center Experience.**
2. **Be a leader on the place where science and society intersect.**
3. **Focus on the next generation.**
4. **Spread the word about the Adirondack model.**
5. **Move the perception from "nice" to "necessary."**
6. **Broaden and deepen our donor base.**
7. **Build a Wild Center community online.**
8. **Operate with fiscal responsibility and operational effectiveness to optimize the use of our resources.**

A Description of the Eight Directions and Their Current Project-Based Initiatives

1. The Wild Center Experience.

The Wild Center provides innovative and exceptional learning experiences that inspire a lifelong connection between people and nature. The museum experience at our main campus is the core

of who we are—it is our heart and soul. It is the place that serves our primary audience. The experience in the museum is our main tool for connecting people to nature. It is also our living laboratory for trying new methods and ideas. To remain fresh, contemporary, and relevant, we must continually renew our core. This will both retain our current audience and attract new audiences.

A. INITIATIVE—Emphasize excellent customer service

The knowledge and friendliness of TWC personnel is often cited by customers as the museum’s greatest asset. The visitor experience is greatly enhanced by a friendly, knowledgeable group of staff and volunteers who present a consistent image and a customer-first attitude. We will ensure that high levels of service and expertise continue to be a hallmark of The Wild Center.

B. INITIATIVE—Maintain our facility in world-class condition

We will ensure that our facility is well maintained, comfortable, friendly for visitors to use, and aesthetically pleasing in order to facilitate a positive learning experience.

C. INITIATIVE—Expand our offerings

The Bird Skywalk and Sky Tower project will represent a major new addition to our campus. This novel experience and architectural structure will offer a great reason to visit us on a sunny day; the project is expected to extend the average visit by two hours. This project takes advantage of one of the fastest-growing leisure activities in the U.S.—bird watching.

D. INITIATIVE—Ensure that programs are refreshed and scientifically accurate

We take special care to involve outside experts in our interpretive development to make sure programs, exhibit labels, and any other interpretive material reflects current scientific information and understanding. We openly acknowledge that not all scientists agree, that scientific knowledge evolves over time, and that the nature of scientific debate is one of the strengths and enduring qualities of science. We will avoid absolutes and focus on communicating concepts rather than simple “facts.”

E. INITIATIVE—Expand the live animal collection

One of our principal goals as a world-class museum is connecting people with nature. What better way of making this connection than via our “animal ambassadors”? We will also use our live animals to pursue a secondary goal, providing new ways of looking at nature. The message to visitors: “If you pay attention in the museum, then your experience outside is much more meaningful.”

F. INITIATIVE—Expand otter exhibit

To execute top-notch animal care, the otter exhibit and “back of house” areas will be renovated to not only offer new exhibit viewing but also improve the quality of life for our otters.

G. INITIATIVE—Create a consistent image

Our image communicates our brand identity. It symbolizes who we are to each visitor who enters the building. We will strengthen the consistency of our branding and image in order to facilitate connections to our facility and mission.

H. INITIATIVE—Use technology to enhance customer service

To serve customers in a world-class manner, we will provide them with the opportunity to connect to us wherever they are. We will provide tools to assist them with their visit and extend them the opportunity for learning and exploration beyond our walls.

I. INITIATIVE—Operate excellent ancillary services

The retail store and the café represent opportunities to enhance the visitor experience. TWC will integrate mission “themes” into these operations that will enrich customers’ experiences and provide additional opportunities for learning.

2. Be a Leader on the Place Where Science and Society Intersect.

People and nature coexist in the Adirondacks. Human-caused disruptions, however, are in conflict with that coexistence. The Wild Center will continue to be the regional leader in bringing people together to find ways to lessen human impact on natural systems. The steps taken to form positive solutions in a rural environment can be replicated. We seek to be a model for rural leadership.

A. INITIATIVE—Lead the ADKCAP (Adirondack Climate Action Plan) and climate change education efforts and continue to develop related programming

A series of conferences in 2008 initiated this long-term programmatic emphasis. ADKCAP represents work we are doing to serve the entire Adirondack Park. No one else is fulfilling this leadership role. We strive to lead without advocating by convening a wide representation of community members to create a consensus plan. The park-wide effort will help us become known to potential donors who may not know us now. These goals transcend the direct museum experience and demonstrate our necessary role. This effort has the potential to raise our profile on the state and national levels.

3. Focus on the Next Generation of Stewards.

We will equip the youngest generation to do a better job than we have in coexisting with nature. We are focused on this vital demographic, which needs to connect to nature on an individual, personal level. A connection to nature is the bedrock understanding that inspires positive action and personal responsibility. We recognize that we will also reach out and touch the hearts and minds of older generations. They will support our work because we reflect their own beliefs and because they too believe we need to reach the next generation of stewards.

A. INITIATIVE—Develop and implement “No Child Left *Inside*” series of programs

We will provide direct experiences and resources to The Wild Center community to promote the philosophy that spending time outdoors and in nature is a necessary part of our lives. Parents and caregivers will gain the philosophy, experience, tools, and confidence to make the outdoors an active part of their children’s lives.

The museum is participating in a national grassroots movement (led by Richard Louv) to encourage children to spend more time outdoors and develop a deeper relationship with nature. This will involve an effort to benefit rural youth (those who will be future stewards of the Adirondacks) and urban and suburban youth.

B. INITIATIVE—Connect with schools in multiple ways and explore new methods of facilitating learning

We want to provide on-site experiences that facilitate learning, not teaching, using a variety of instructional strategies and experiential interpretive methods. These efforts will also move off-site and directly into schools as staffing and funding permit. The museum is committed to systemic change and experimenting with a new teaching method called VTS (visual teaching strategies) that is designed to improve observation skills (visual literacy) among school-age children. This method involves a long-term, deep relationship with teachers and students, including both classroom outreach and museum visits.

C. INITIATIVE—Student Climate Change Summit

Supporting both our strategy of focusing on children and ADKCAP/climate change work, we will collaborate with several partners to sponsor a Student Climate Change Summit in November 2009 and subsequent years if possible. The purpose of the summit is to support students in their desire to work within their school setting to reduce its carbon footprint.

4. **Spread the Word about the Adirondack Example.**

For The Wild Center to have deeper meaning, its subject—the interplay between people and nature in the Adirondacks—needs to be understood, and the region needs to deliver on the promise of the example. The Wild Center will work to help people see the potential of the Adirondack example and the part they play in making the Adirondacks a globally important example for wild and rural places. Promoting the Adirondack example promotes the museum.

A. INITIATIVE—Promote the example

We will promote the Adirondack example through public relations efforts and infuse this story in all of our communications.

5. **Move the Perception from “Nice” to “Necessary.”**

We want to change the public’s perception of The Wild Center. People think of the museum as being a great destination; we want them to think of it as a noble effort housed in a great destination. This is a nuanced branding effort that moves us away from centering our work on the notion of our Tupper Lake location and away from the idea of the museum as an “attraction” whose value comes only from a visit. We need to be considered a necessary component of the Adirondack Park and its global lessons related to health and human survival, and we need to be a wonderful place to visit at the same time.

A. INITIATIVE—Develop the “Belong” campaign and integrate it into all communications

We will create a tone and voice through our communications that makes people feel they are part of our community. The “Belong” campaign will borrow lessons from other successful causes and organizations. Our communications will emphasize our long-term work and outcomes, not project outputs.

B. INITIATIVE—Build The Wild Center’s convening role within the community

We will continue to serve as a facilitator for environmental conversations within the community. This helps support the notion that we are a necessary part of the Adirondack Park model and helps the working model work better. To date, we have convened community conversations about climate change solutions. Other topics and issues that are informed by science may be pursued in the future.

C. INITIATIVE—Demonstrate and publicize our contributions to the local and regional economies

The Wild Center promised to deliver the three Es: Education, Environment, and Economy. In

the coming years we will begin to find ways to document and promote our contributions to the Adirondack community.

6. **Broaden and Deepen Our Donor Base.**

The Wild Center relies heavily on donations. Other revenue streams, such as admissions fees, retail sales, and café sales, are not expected to significantly increase, given the highly seasonal pattern of Adirondack tourism. The most promising opportunity for the museum to sustain current operations and work toward expanding its reach and influence is by broadening and more deeply engaging the donor base. To broaden the donor base, we will focus on projects that extend our reach and talk more about how our work touches the entire Adirondacks and beyond.

A. INITIATIVE—Walk the walk and be a regional resource for green practices

For The Wild Center to play a productive role in the community, it needs to be a beneficial part of everyday life in the Adirondacks. Whether this takes the form of demonstrating green building practices, helping local farmers increase their business through serving local food and hosting farmers' markets, or showcasing energy-saving technologies, we will demonstrate our commitment toward a less carbon intensive economy.

B. INITIATIVE—Create off-campus exhibits

Placing new exhibits in locations beyond our campus will help new audiences see the Adirondacks more clearly and manifest our vision of spreading our work connecting people to nature throughout the park. Typically through partnership projects, we will utilize our distinct interpretive style and take it beyond our 31-acre site. This helps demonstrate that we are serving the entire Adirondacks.

C. INITIATIVE—Support new science research

As a science center, The Wild Center supports research aimed at better understanding the current condition of the natural world of the Adirondacks. The Wild Center is not a research organization; we strategically partner to further this goal. To date, we have funded a report outlining projected climate change effects on the Adirondacks, research on the status of the Adirondack moose population, and loon research. Continuing this work will help demonstrate that we are serving the entire Adirondack region.

7. **Build a Wild Center Community Online.**

In the 21st century, online communities form around important issues. The Wild Center concerns a vital and globally important issue and needs to harness the evolving power of the Internet to

help people all over the world become engaged in our work. We need to have a rich relationship with this community. This will allow us to transcend the constraints of traditional seasonality.

A. INITIATIVE—Develop internal capacity and explore new communications methods

We will build internal skills in using the Internet to build communities. We will communicate more regularly and consistently with our extended community through Convio (a sophisticated software package that allows web visitors to customize their online relationship with TWC). We will also explore developing e-philanthropy methods and campaigns to raise funds and attract new pools of donors. All three efforts are interrelated and support each other.

B. INITIATIVE—Provide interactive content on Wild Center website

We will provide our stakeholders with opportunities to engage in The Wild Center experience in a personal, interactive mode utilizing the Internet. We will continue to evolve our website with top-quality content so that over time it becomes a trusted and rich resource for information related to our mission.

8. Operate with Fiscal Responsibility and Operational Effectiveness to Optimize the Use of Our Resources.

All organizations operate with a finite level of resources. We will ensure that we are excellent stewards of the resources entrusted to us and operate in a manner that prioritizes our use of these resources to best carry out our mission. We will consistently examine how we operate, exploring ways to be more efficient and effective in our operation of programs and services.

A. INITIATIVE—Recruit and retain the best people

We will maintain a positive work environment that attracts high-quality staff and volunteers, aids in their retention, and maintains high morale among current staff.

B. INITIATIVE—Provide employees with tools necessary to maximize effectiveness

The Wild Center's performance is highly dependent on the quality of its staff's judgments and actions. We will ensure that employees are adequately trained and informed in a way that enables them to make the best decisions.

C. INITIATIVE—Build development department infrastructure

The Wild Center must implement best practices in fund raising. We will move toward being able to predictably raise 50% or more of operating capital needed from contributed income by building the infrastructure of the development department to support the institution as it matures.

D. INITIATIVE—Formalize partnership relationships

As long-term partnerships and relationships are formed, we will move toward establishing written agreements to clarify and solidify the relationship and ensure clear communication and expectations.

E. INITIATIVE—Increase bottom-line contribution of ancillary operations and services

The retail store, café, and events operations are important aspects of the experience we provide our visitors and the community. These operations can enhance and extend visitors' experiences and should contribute to the financial performance of the museum. We will strengthen such operations to increase that contribution.