



WILD CENTER 2030: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



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PART TWO OPERATIONAL PLANS & DETAILS

Message from our leaders

"Focusing on real solutions to the major challenges of climate change will help foster positive action and a better future for all."



**Stephanie Ratcliffe,
Executive Director**



**Karen K. Thomas,
Board of Trustee Chair**

May 30, 2024 - The Wild Center has an opportunity to sharpen its mission to focus on the science of nature to inspire awe, understanding and action. Specifically, we will focus on the four natural systems of air, water, earth and living things - how they work, how they are interconnected, how we humans are part of that system and how our actions - small, large, positive and negative have impact on that system.

The Wild Center's location offers a unique capability of teaching from a natural classroom and ability to use the Adirondacks to provide an enduring example of how natural systems can restore themselves in the face of climate change. Focusing on real solutions to the major challenges of climate change in this way will help foster positive action and a better future for all.

A newly expanded mission will reach an audience broadly interested in conservation and global sustainability but are not necessarily invested in the Adirondacks as a place. They will see the Adirondacks as a globally applicable case study in nature's restorative capability and The Wild Center as the innovative educational resource for all its visitors.



PART ONE
EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

About The Wild Center

The Wild Center is a science museum and outdoor nature center in Tupper Lake, New York but there is so much more to our story. The Wild Center is a new type of science museum. Rooted in the Adirondacks The Wild Center has the unique capacity to deliver engaging experiences and inspire understanding of the natural world. It is a cultural anchor, helping to improve the educational opportunities, economy, and sustainability of the Adirondack region. The Center's Youth Climate Program, recognized nationally and internationally as providing leadership in climate education, models our focus on education, science, action and solutions.

The Center opened to the public in 2006. As New York State's first Silver LEED certified museum, its buildings and campus are a demonstration site for sustainable design. The region is a desirable location for second homes and a destination for tourists, but it also faces complex challenges that are particular to rural regions, including persistent poverty and unemployment; lack of access to services and a dearth of educational resources. Most notably, The Wild Center has had a laser focus and major program on climate change, which continues to threaten the region's economic health and environmental vitality, and counters these challenges by providing place-based climate change education and by thoughtfully addressing topics that are important to residents. A major exhibition "Climate Solutions" opened in July 2022.

The Wild Center is a major economic engine for the North Country. Visitors and the museum's own operations generated \$27 million in total regional revenue and led to creation of 386 jobs according to a 2016 study.

Wild Center Climate Work

The Wild Center's Youth Climate Program is our signature program and has been widely recognized for excellence. Among other honors, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy recognized the program and staff as "Champions of Change for Climate Education and Literacy" in 2015. The Center's major climate change education effort is the Youth Climate Program, a year-round initiative, scaled from regional to global, that convenes youth both in person and virtually. The program inspires and empowers young people to learn about climate science, impacts, justice and solutions and take action in their schools and communities. The program helps students build confidence and competence as climate leaders, whether they choose to develop action projects to implement in their schools or make presentations to decision makers in their communities. This action oriented approach also deals with climate change as a source of anxiety, and even despair, for young people who face an uncertain future, and addresses climate justice and inequity, which is as rampant in rural areas as it is in cities.

The Wild Center's Climate Program staff serves hundreds of K-12 educators with professional development training, including an annual 4-day climate educator retreat, year-round professional development days for teachers, and a suite of resources for use in the classroom.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) helped establish the program and has been a major funder for nearly a decade. This prestigious support raised the Youth Climate Program's profile nationally and today it is seen as a successful model that has helped thousands of young people with educational resources and skills development. The Center also partners with the NYS Office of Climate Change and the Climate Smart Communities program to directly connect high school youth with community decision makers and local governments to develop Climate Action Plans to build community climate resilience. Youth are joining, or in some cases, initiating community-level climate tasks. Youth leaders around the State have provided valuable contributions, unique skills, and leadership to help their respective communities take action on climate change. Many other communities across the state and the nation are following suit - seeing the value of youth engagement in creating sustainable communities.

Part of what makes the program so powerful is its ability to be easily replicated, thanks in part to a rigorously-developed curriculum and training model, a free online toolkit and planning resources and a robust network of youth leaders and YCP alumni. To date, there have been over 155 youth climate summits in 22 states and eight countries in a range of locations from the North Country to Brooklyn to Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Mission

NEW MISSION - What we do

Ignite an enduring passion for nature that inspires action to ensure a thriving natural world.

Values

Science: experiential, creative, innovative

The Adirondacks: a learning and teaching medium for global sustainability

Diversity: inclusive, respectful, compassionate

Education: curiosity and lifelong learning about nature

Collaboration: connecting with communities in fun, engaging and meaningful ways

Vision

VISION -The change we want to create

By 2030, The Wild Center is a trusted catalyst, redefining the role of museums in society and promoting peoples' understanding their role within the natural world.

(DRAFT)

Strategic Direction

What we want to become

"The Adirondack story, and our story, have global implications."

As we implement this expanded mission and Strategic Framework, The Wild Center envisions combining its unique Adirondack natural laboratory, its strong and growing reputation in climate change education, its core competency in experiential learning and the science of natural systems, to provide new and compelling information about how nature works and its restorative capabilities. Visitors will engage with and understand nature in ways that will deepen connections, influence behavior, give agency and inspire action to ensure a thriving natural world.

Bringing this vision and mission to life requires an evolution that builds upon The Wild Center's highly successful and acclaimed experience over the past 17 years. New imaginative exhibits and programs will embed the science of natural systems using the Adirondacks as our teaching medium. The Adirondack story, and our story, have global implications. Experiential learning - focused on observation to promote understanding - will reveal and emphasize the science and awe of nature's interconnectivity. A new net-zero waterfront and climate convening center will demonstrate our commitment to net-zero building practices in service to our expanded mission. We will explore, experiment and innovate with new digital capabilities to expand our outreach, add more impact to our Youth Climate Program and grow the skills and capacity of our people, raise the necessary funds to grow in influence and impact.

Scientific Principles

- **Experiential Learning.** Learning by doing is the most effective method for engaging people in complex scientific inquiry and learning. We understand that different people learn differently and offering opportunities for exploring data in different ways provides onramps for curiosity and learning. With these experiential opportunities, observation will promote understanding and will reveal and emphasize the science and awe of nature's interconnectivity.
 - **Science as a Process of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS).** Science is about questions and how they are asked and answered, not only about the answers themselves. Rather than a set of data and facts, science that evolves and changes as more questions are asked. VTS "as a facilitation method...that fosters collaborative, inclusive, community-building dialogue" is central to our mode of engagement. Understanding inquiry and process is important in explaining why complex issues rarely have simple solutions.
 - **Evidence Based Learning.** We believe conclusions should be drawn using evidence that is discoverable directly with the senses, repeatable and verifiable by others.
 - **Community (Citizen) Science Literacy.** A public with more accurate scientific data can make intelligent and informed decisions that will positively affect the quality of their lives and those of subsequent generations. We believe that scientific literacy is important in providing a context for addressing major problems such as climate change, and coping with adversity.
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Five Areas of Focus

The Wild Center 2030 Framework has five focus areas and 13 strategic goals that when paced, sequenced and executed will significantly increase the Center's stature and impact on society.

1

Vibrant & Experiential Campus

Ensuring that the quality, sustainability and accessibility of our facilities are commensurate with our programmatic excellence

2

Convening & Outreach

Increasing our impact by maximizing participation in and reach of our climate program, exhibits and other educational activities

3

Organization Capability & Capacity

Expand our reach with an investment in our Digital Future and apply inclusive design principles in all our work

4

Marketing, Branding & Constituent Communication

Deepening and expanding our reach by developing clear and responsible approaches to audience development and nurturing long-term relationships with our visitors, partners, and communities

5

Increased Investment Capacity

Broaden our base of support, and increase our endowment through a well executed Capital Campaign

Summary: Focus & Goals

Each of the strategic goals identified by the board of Trustees will be implemented with multiple tactics across museum operational areas.

Focus Area	10 Year Strategic Goals
Vibrant & Experiential Campus	Expand the outdoor campus to focus on nature's four systems and their interconnectedness [1]
	Build a convening center to educate about climate and nature
	Develop the waterfront infrastructure to educate about water and the value of wetlands and water systems
	Become a Net Zero Campus
	Ensure all exhibits remain engaging and reflect current science incorporating interconnectedness concepts
Convening & Outreach	Export and grow The Youth Climate Program and other innovative educational approaches to gain more impact locally, regionally, and beyond and to inspire community and individual action
	Create an increased capacity for convening to make use of "The Center for Climate and Nature"
Organization Capability & Capacity	Expand TWC digital capability to engage digitally-native guests [2] beyond the 115-acres of our campus
	Explore and create innovative approaches experiential-learning methods [2] to become an exemplar in learning about the science of nature
Marketing, Branding & Constituent Communication	Modify TWC communication platforms and methods to reflect the new mission, educational goals and convening strategy
	Amplify engagement activity in a manner that increases reach, affinity, reputation, and impact
Investment Capacity	Supplement current fundraising and incrementally raise \$30 mm + through cultivation of existing and new investors, government, NGOs, and philanthropic entities to generate the capital necessary to execute our strategy
	Build endowment

Overview of Operations & Staffing

The Wild Center is located on a 115-acre campus in Tupper Lake, New York. The campus currently includes a range of facilities that support the museum's operations and programs, including a LEED-certified main building, outdoor exhibits, a theater, an elevated trail system, a café, and a retail store. The Wild Center operates year-round. The museum's operations are focused on promoting sustainability and environmental stewardship, with 20 year old physical plant that incorporates green technologies and materials. The museum has implemented and is a demonstration site for a range of sustainable practices, such as using renewable energy sources, reducing waste, and conserving water.

The Wild Center has a staff of approximately 50 full and part-time employees, including educators, animal care staff, IT professionals, Visitor Care representatives and administrative personnel. The museum also relies on a team of volunteers to assist with operations, programs, and events.

The Wild Center does not have a traditional organizational chart, allowing for ultimate flexibility and Matrix Organization for projects or new initiatives. In this illustration of The Wild Center's organizational structure, "The mission, board of trustees, and/or executive director are always at the top/center... Wheel or web can be "used to avoid suggestions of subserviency and encourage motivation"

Using this management style, teams can be established utilizing the best employees for the task regardless of what department they may belong to. This cross-pollination saves time, increases stakeholder participation and productivity and produces great results.



Supporting Operational Plans

The plans linked below further define the specific programs/projects, and scope, scale and reach of our intended programs, audiences and impact. Each plan will have its own set of metrics for success toward meeting overall goals of the Strategic Framework. Success will also be defined by delivering mission impact and through a broader lens of equity in alignment with The Wild Center's values. Links to plans and Annual Report can be found in the Board Portal.

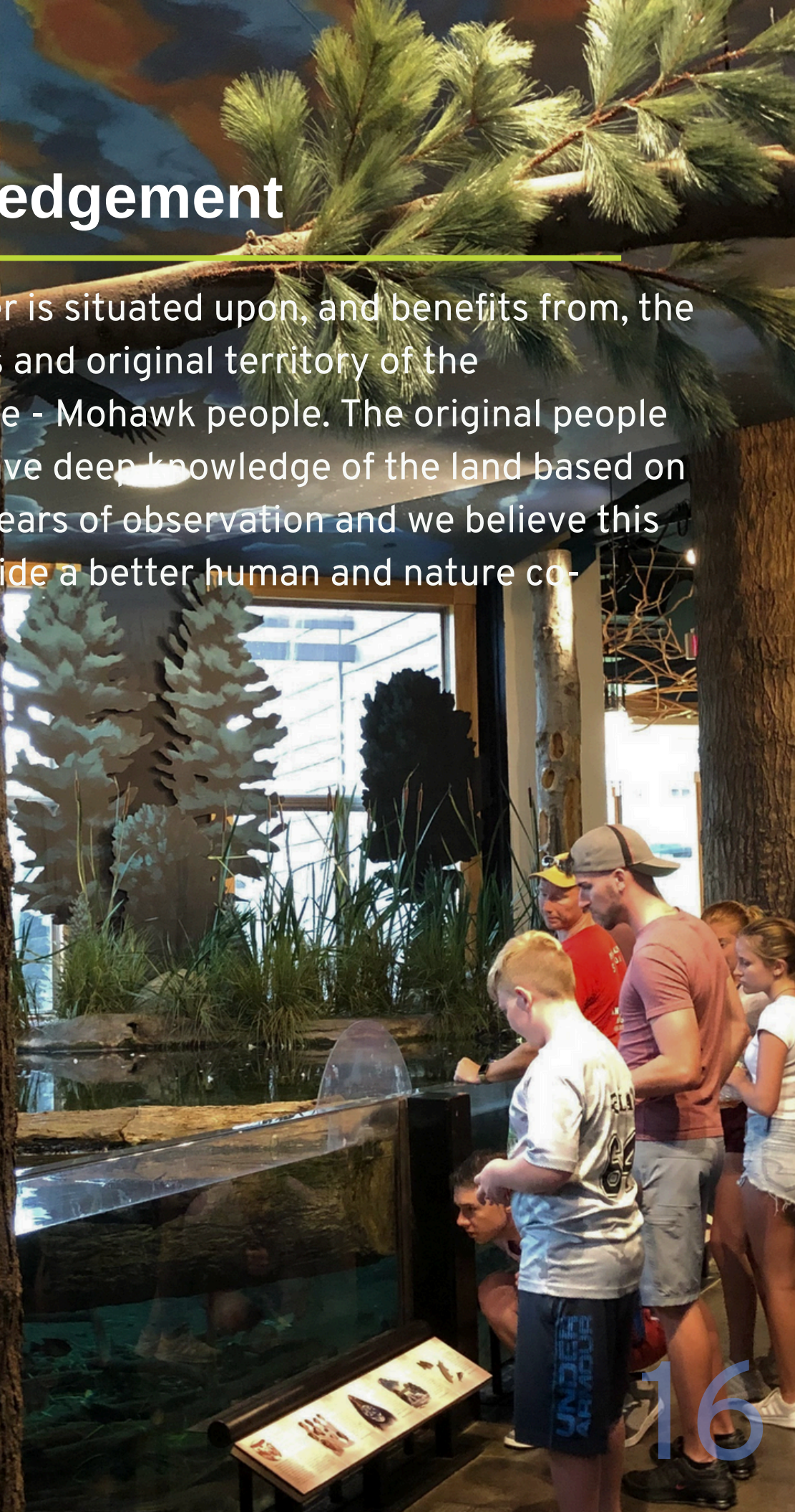
- 1 Facilities & Animal Care Plan
- 2 Education & Climate Program Plan
- 3 Development, Membership & Marketing Plan
- 4 Finance and Human Resources
- 5 Third Place: Cafe, Store & Visitor Care Plan
- 6 Capital Campaign Plan

Land Acknowledgement

The Wild Center is situated upon, and benefits from, the ancestral lands and original territory of the Haudenosaunee - Mohawk people. The original people of this place have deep knowledge of the land based on thousands of years of observation and we believe this wisdom can guide a better human and nature co-existence.

Come explore this representation of the Thanksgiving Address words that have guided the Haudenosaunee people for thousands of years, and continue to guide them today.

The Haudenosaunee (Six Nations/ Iroquois) open and close gatherings with the Thanksgiving Address, a reminder that all life is dependent upon the gifts of nature.



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