

Northwest Connections

STRATEGIC PLAN – 2011-2013

Mission

Integrate Science, Education and Community in the Conservation of Rural Working Landscapes

Overview

Conservation of rural working landscapes like the Swan Valley will be promoted when conservation professionals recognize the biological importance of lands outside of parks and wilderness areas, when residents of working landscapes value conservation, and when professionals and rural residents work together in functional decision making processes that honor and align diverse values toward a common conservation vision. At its core, Northwest Connections is seeking to simultaneously address each of these three needs.

Northwest Connections seeks to achieve the following core impacts:

- a) Develop leaders in community based conservation who have a working knowledge of the land and a capacity to build productive partnerships with rural residents.
- b) Secure the economic, social and ecological benefits of conservation to rural communities by creating innovative local projects and advocating for improvements to public policy.
- c) Lead and support collaborative decision making processes that integrate science and local knowledge to support sustainable land management practices.

Background

Northwest Connections was organized 15 years ago to integrate local knowledge and science, promote local involvement and employment in conservation, provide a learning laboratory for students around the country, and promote and ethic of lands stewardship for future generations. While we work in the Swan Valley, we see ourselves as a regional organization that uses local successes to catalyze system change.

Program Areas

EDUCATION

Core Impact: Develop leaders in community based conservation who have a working knowledge of the land and a capacity to build productive partnerships with rural residents.

Strategies to continue or initiate in the next three years:

- Undergraduate student Opportunities
 - Landscape and Livelihood – Field Semester in Community Based Conservation
 - Wildlife in the West – Field Program in Community Approaches to Wildlife Conservation
 - Resource Conservation field skills camp – Host this new program for University of Montana
 - Host other undergraduate field programs at NwC on a fee-for-service basis
- Opportunities for local residents
 - Animal Tracking Clinics – Weekend workshops in animal track I.D. and Natural History
- Alumni/Internship opportunities
 - Internships for alumni – Summer (conservation), Spring/Fall (education), Winter (recruiting)
 - Summer event for alumni – Integrate into annual Bud Moore celebration day.

- Graduate student Opportunities
 - Graduate research project committee – to mentor students through graduate level projects that help meet community and local conservation needs
 - Explore the opportunity for offering an orientation for incoming EVST students at UM.
- Professional Opportunities
 - One week summer program in community based conservation for professors/researchers
 - Offer UM and other colleges speaker services
- K-12 Environmental Education
 - Provide support , under contract, for local schools/organizations doing K-12 EE
- Citizen Science Projects
 - Improve our ability to integrate students into existing and stand alone research and monitoring projects.
- Document/assess/measure the impact of our educational programs
 - Publicize outcomes of courses on website and in other venues
 - Utilize social media effectively appropriately.
 - Build on and refine our educational assessment tools and document outcomes
 - Collaborate on publications and presentations regarding our educational work
 - Use these activities to improve student recruitment

COMMUNITY

Core Impact: Secure the economic, social and ecological benefits of conservation to rural communities by creating innovative local projects and advocating for improvements to public policy.

a) Strategies:

- Montana Legacy Project “Phase 4” Project
 - Participate in the Conservation Strategies Committee and help secure 1280 acres of former PC lands for a demonstration forest in Swan Valley
 - Lead the effort to create a for-profit subsidiary “Swan Valley Innovations” to develop an integrated sustainable business campus on one former Plum Creek site.
- Implement CFLRP (Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program)
 - Participate in the Southwestern Crown Collaborative Committee (SWCC)
 - Work with SEC to lead community outreach efforts to raise awareness
 - Conduct workforce trainings to prepare local contractors for emerging opportunities
- Swan Valley Workforce Assessment
 - Share the assessment with key contracting agencies
 - Advocate for local job creation and retention in forestry/natural resource sectors
- Policy Development
 - Participate in the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition to promote national policies that support local benefits (economic, ecological, social).

CONSERVATION

Core Impact: Lead and support collaborative decision making processes that integrate science and local knowledge to support sustainable land management practices.

Strategies:

- Co-fund and coach new leadership for the Swan Lands Coordinating Committee (a collaborative effort among agencies, NGO's, elected officials, and citizen to identify priority projects and implement them)
- Conduct long term monitoring efforts that integrate local citizens
 - Native Fish, Whitebark Pine, Grizzly Bears, Carnivores, Amphibians
 - Improve data collection and record keeping systems for all citizen science projects
- Communicate and amplify lessons learned through monitoring and link to decision making
 - Annual one page summaries of findings
 - Formal presentations to relevant agencies and public entities
- Partner with SEC and USFWS to provide stewardship services for private lands in the Swan Valley
 - Consult on stewardship and restoration plans
 - Prioritize private lands for stewardship and restoration projects
- Partner with SEC, FWP, UWFWS to promote human-wildlife coexistence in the Swan Valley.
 - Work with SEC to lead the wildlife subcommittee of SLCC
 - Provide vision and muscle for Swan Valley Bear Resources projects

PRIORITIZATION

Northwest Connections prioritizes resources on projects that have crossover between Conservation, Education and Community program areas.

Organizational Systems

In order to achieve our mission, Northwest Connections recognizes that we must maintain an effective organizational infrastructure necessary to support our programs. The following five components are critical to our operational effectiveness:

- Strategic communication and outreach
- Appropriate technology
- Sound and successful funding
- Proactive human resource management
- Effective financial management

Over the next three years we will continue and/or initiate the following:

- **Communications**
 - **Revamp and improve print and digital media communicating NwC mission and programs**
 - **Launch facebook page to connect with students, alumni, donors, fans, and colleagues.**
 - **Brand ourselves around one annual event – Bud Moore Conservation Day**
- **Appropriate technology**

- **Improve our file server and network system for all computers for remote access**
- **Improve our phone systems to provide consistent customer service**
- **Funding**
 - **Partner with SEC on donor event to support SVI and shared conservation project work**
 - **Engage all board and staff in surfacing donor prospects and soliciting support**
 - **Diversify grant funding**
 - **Develop new contracts for services**
- **Human Resources**
 - **Revamp our organizational chart to better align staff capacities**
 - **Provide all staff with clear job descriptions and expectations**
 - **Assess pay scale and align with like organizations**
 - **Provide regular and consistent feedback to staff**
 - **Host annual staff retreat to assess program effectiveness and annual workplans**
 - **Provide professional development opportunities to all staff**
- **Financial Management**
 - **Involve leadership team in budget development and management**
 - **Improve our ability to track program and project level budgets**

Strategic Alliances

Northwest Connections maintains strong working relationships with several organizations and agencies. Two of them that figure prominently in the Swan Valley are Swan Ecosystem Center and the USDA Forest Service, Swan Lake Ranger District. The relationship of NwC to each of these core partners is currently being clarified and strengthened.

Swan Ecosystem Center

While Northwest Connections has always valued place-based collaborative decision making, we initiated our business with the idea that Swan Ecosystem Center would lead such efforts in the Swan Valley and that Northwest Connections would actively participate. Over the years NwC has provided much of the vision and leadership for such collaborations, and so we are now interested in strengthening and clarifying our partnership with SEC. For that reason, we have recently concluded a series of meetings between the leadership at both organizations. The attached report will be converted into a Memorandum of Agreement in summer, 2011 to clarify how the two organizations will share leadership on areas of common interest moving forward.

USFS – Swan Lake Ranger District

Northwest Connections, since its inception, has worked to conduct ecological and social monitoring projects in the Swan Valley that help inform better decision making. Many of our first projects were grant supported, however, as we have gained credibility we have increasingly been hired on contract for such work. Looking ahead, there will be many reasons for NwC and the FS to partner on wildlife, habitat and forestry projects so we are working to develop a Master Challenge Cost Share Agreement with the Flathead National Forest which will allow us to contract our services to the Forest Service quickly and efficiently.

Evaluation

The NwC Board of Directors and Staff will review progress toward this strategic plan at each quarterly meeting. In addition, the Board and Staff will hold an annual retreat to amend this plan as necessary.