Natural Land Institute
Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023

Planning for Maximum Impact
**Our Mission:** The mission of the Natural Land Institute is to create an enduring legacy of natural land in northern Illinois for people, plants and animals.

**Our Vision:** We envision a world in which people recognize that we are a part of nature and act with the knowledge that our future depends upon preserving the natural systems that support all life on earth.
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*Founded in 1958, The Natural Land Institute (NLI) is a conservation land trust that protects natural land and habitat in perpetuity. NLI is governed by a 21-member Board of Trustees, all of whom contribute to the organization through their expertise in real estate, law, finance, natural resource management, education and community engagement. NLI currently employs five fulltime staff and two part-time staff. Over 200 volunteers contributed over 1600 hours to NLI in 2017 through volunteerism in the areas of habitat restoration, community education and outreach, administration, and governance.*
Introduction

This plan provides a background summary including the benefits, challenges and committee approaches to using a trio of approaches to promote creative conservation finance strategies and intentional practices, as well as excellence in leadership, inclusiveness and diversity to strongly support NLI’s mission into the future. In this five year strategic visionary plan, NLI proposes to incorporate working lands, cooperative partnerships and community conservation as tools to achieve results that will provide for NLI’s sustainable future. These initiatives are new tools in NLI’s ‘Toolkit’ for sustainably financing NLI’s conservation activities into the future, effectively leveraging NLI’s important donor contributions, and promoting an engaged and healthy community that supports protecting biodiversity into the future.

NLI Programs

NLI’s Land & Water Protection Program works to conserve land in perpetuity and protect NLI’s surface and groundwater in areas that NLI has identified as a priority for protection by working with private landowners and organizational partners. NLI’s land and water protection efforts target high quality natural areas including streams and rivers, expanding and buffering NLI’s preserves, as well as assisting with creating large ecological complexes. To date, NLI has helped to preserve and restore more than 17,000 acres of natural land and high quality habitat in Illinois. NLI is currently working with its organizational partners to develop a regional land and water conservation plan that will include protecting large ecological complexes.

NLI’s Stewardship Program focuses on maintaining and improving sites currently owned by NLI. These sites are restored and/or managed for biodiversity, habitat enhancement, and soil and water conservation. Typical management and restoration activities include prescribed ecological burning, invasive species control, native seed collection, and forest and prairie plantings. Since its founding, NLI has restored approximately 1,500 acres of land to native woodlands, grasslands, and wetlands. NLI’s Stewardship and Land Management program has been a priority for the last few years as the board recognized that NLI needs to be able to care for the land it has, especially with the stressors of climate change and invasive species that are threatening to destroy the high quality habitat and biological diversity. The board and staff have selected a handful of NLI preserves on which to focus initial efforts. This has resulted in amazing successes at NLI’s Burr Oak Valley Preserve, Nygren Wetland Preserve, the Lyndon Agnew Railroad Prairie, Silver Creek Biodiversity Preserve, Colman Dells Nature Preserve, the Kyte River Bottoms Preserve, as well as the Pecatonica Woodland Preserve.
All of NLI’s preserves have management plans to guide restoration and management activities. The Stewardship program also includes engaging NLI’s conservation easement landowners to sustain a consistent and high level of stewardship activities on their land.

NLI has an **Engagement and Outreach Program** that aims to expand its constituency and cultivate in-depth and intentional engagement with NLI and conservation regionally. NLI’s Vision underlies the strategic focus of this program where enlightened communities encourage conservation and where conservation is a core value. Educational tools include a Rare and Unusual Plants Program and public stewardship days at NLI preserves. This program develops support for the awareness of managing NLI’s natural habitat and how it is so important for everyone’s health, not just the health of the ecosystem, including fostering clean water and air.

Membership and volunteer programmatic efforts are folded into all of the outreach and stewardship activities and are integral to each of the programs with recognition events and trainings. This experiential toolkit supports a more engaged grass roots community, encourage long term relationships and assist with growing broader community support for NLI preservation efforts and for preservation and conservation efforts across the region.

NLI also works with partners such as the Illinois Environmental Council and local elected officials to develop and advocate for sound public policies and plans for the benefit of conservation, native species and habitat, and the well-being of people.
Working Lands, Collective Impact Partnerships, Community Conservation Initiatives

Background Summary of New Initiatives

Funding and finding adequate, sustainable resources, including capacity on all levels, for land management and restoration activities on NLI’s protected lands and preserves became an urgent challenge a few years ago. This challenge began to affect NLI’s ability to continue to protect more land, as well as to steward the land NLI already owns. Gone are the days when it was automatically expected that protected lands would be rolled over to state or local government agencies for them to steward. These agencies are also facing significant resource challenges in meeting the needs of protecting biodiversity. These challenges include the current economic and political environment the state is in, and to a significant degree, the challenges that a changing climate presents.

Looking around, it is evident that there is an evolving culture where children are no longer engaged with early and regular experiences in nature. It leaves us to wonder who will support the protection of native biodiversity in the future.

Invasive species and fragmentation of ecosystems are threatening to destroy much of the biological diversity that has been protected, and the state is also challenged with stewarding and holding new lands. Illinois environmental land trusts are working together to find solutions to this 21st century challenge through the Vital Lands Illinois Network and the Prairie State Conservation Coalition. Together these organizations are stepping outside the box, through conservation finance research with partners statewide to explore multi-revenue business models for a sustainable future. We are also researching and creating collective impact models for working together, and bringing positive experiences of nature home.
In the past, the NLI Board of Directors put a temporary hold on acquiring new lands in order to build up stewardship capacity. It is evident that stewardship will continue to be an ongoing challenge. Fortunately, NLI has risen to that challenge and is now making sure that there is stewardship funding to support its acquisitions. Our board is committed to stewarding our land and to raising the resources needed because we see that natural land protection is more urgent than ever. NLI’s Conservation Easement stewardship fund is growing, the endowments are growing, and our capacity is growing. All this is thanks to our donors, to our Foundation funders for supporting our capacity development, our board’s efforts, and to our donated working lands.

Each of these strategies comes with its own unique set of challenges as NLI seeks to adapt to a changing economic, political and environmental landscape. Some experimentation and creative thinking will be required as NLI proactively creates new opportunities for protecting NLI’s special places in the region. Member support, combined with the board’s guidance, bravery and thoughtful approach to these new initiatives will be critical to successfully meeting these challenges to further NLI’s mission and vision into the future. This strategic plan is NLI’s current best effort to meet these challenges head on.
Working Lands Initiative

NLI is embarking on a working lands initiative that seeks to accomplish a twofold goal, that of providing cash flow to support its conservation mission (ie. production oriented) while also being protective of the soils, water quality and microbiomes (protective oriented). NLI is practicing regenerative agricultural techniques, such as increasing the soil biota, as well as employing agroecology practices. Regenerative farming practices have the power to restore farm health, resilience, and biodiversity, as well as protect water and wildlife. Regenerative farming practices are able to raise agricultural productivity in economically viable and environmentally benign ways. NLI is working with local farmers on its land to encourage biodiversity which, in the long term, will be both productive and protective.

All cropland/grazing management decisions NLI makes are with soil health, water quality and wildlife in mind in addition to productivity. Conservation leases are used, and removing row crop production from highly erodible areas may also be an option. USDA farm programs also help NLI achieve conservation goals on cropland.

Many farms already contain significant natural areas such as streams and wildlife corridors. Ecologically managed farms can also provide buffers to help protect the biodiversity of high quality natural areas. With regenerative agricultural practices setting the stage, some farms may eventually be returned to natural habitat entirely. NLI will be preparing some guiding principles for its working lands initiative, as well as developing a policy on farm management. Donations of farmland will now be encouraged as a mechanism to support NLI’s mission, with NLI honoring the donor’s wishes for their land.
**Benefits and Challenges to NLI of Working Lands:**

- Donations and/or acquisitions of working lands increase NLI’s potential to achieve its conservation mission by providing long term and sustainable revenue to manage and restore its preserves.

- By holding and managing working lands, NLI gains credibility within the agricultural community, opening the door for new relationships in an area that has historically been challenging.

- Buffers and habitat corridors between protected natural areas are increasingly important for the future of diverse ecosystems. When farms include both income-producing fields and natural places, they act as vectors for animal and plant movement in a fragmented landscape. By employing best practices of regenerative agriculture, working lands provide expanded potential to market the concept of farms as habitat.

- Regenerative agricultural practices* naturally sequester large amounts of carbon into the soil, rebuild soil organic matter and restore degraded soil biodiversity — resulting in both carbon drawdown and improving the water cycle.

- Practicing regenerative agriculture best management practices with local farmers will ultimately prepare soils for potential future restoration.

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*Regenerative agriculture is an approach to food and farming systems that regenerates topsoil and increases biodiversity now and long into the future.

“ReGenerate IL” aims to restore farm, soil, water quality, wildlife and community health.

The Wild Farm Alliance protects biological diversity on working lands.

Wild Farm Alliance works to empower farmers, connect consumers, and protect wild nature.
Collective Impact Partnerships Initiative

Cooperative partnerships have always been an important feature of NLI’s work. NLI has historically partnered with other organizations for land protection, land stewardship activities, education, and outreach events. This initiative seeks to expand the impact that NLI’s partnerships could potentially have on the region’s biological diversity and habitat connectivity using the collective impact model. This initiative will look at partnering in more impactful ways, as well as looking outside traditional partnering opportunities.

NLI has been a leader in three collective impact project initiatives that have formed out of the Vital Lands Illinois Network. For several years, this network has focused on creating impactful networks for environmental land protection. This includes partnering with other not for profits as well as local government groups across the state.

The first is a restoration and biodiversity enhancement initiative to share rare seeds to increase biodiversity across the region economically. The second is the creation of a regional stewardship cooperative to expand NLI’s capacity to manage regionally protected lands. The third is the creation of a strategic regional land and water conservation plan with multiple partners to focus on creating large ecological complexes, and to explore how land trusts can work together with non-traditional partners to protect water quality in the state.

For more information on the collective impact model go to:
http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/collectiveimpact

Benefits to NLI of Collective Impact Partnerships:

- Creates an organizational framework of collaboration and cooperation between partners to work toward addressing pressing and urgent natural area management concerns and land acquisition across jurisdictional boundaries.

- More effectively addresses stewardship challenges and natural area management over large landscape areas by expanding mutual capacity.

- Provides a mechanism for partners to agree that it is to their mutual benefit and interest to work cooperatively to educate, train, and share technology with each other and with the general public about the issue being addressed.

- Provides collaborative public/private partnerships with a higher likelihood of funding.
**Planning for Maximum Impact**

- Results in less fragmentation and committed, targeted and strategic implementation.
- Creates the opportunity for partnerships with Universities and organizations that do relevant scientific research and monitoring will further NLI’s mission
- Expands the opportunity for NLI’s leadership in the conservation community
- Results in deeper community engagement through enhanced messaging.

**Some Challenges of Collective Impact Partnerships:**

- Finding new ways of working together, such as through Memorandums of Understanding or more formal agreements
- Making sure that NLI’s partnerships are adding significant value and are not a drain on NLI’s capacity or resources
- Finding ways of engaging non-traditional partners by focusing on shared values
- Providing meaningful support to the shared initiative
Community Conservation Initiative

Goals of the Community Conservation initiative are 1) to inspire and empower private property owners to implement habitat and conservation practices on their land. This fosters a cultural shift towards personal engagement with nature that aligns with the vision of NLI; 2) to support the growth and development of NLI by expanding its potential donor and volunteer base, and increasing the organizations visibility in the community through meaningful and long-lasing relationships; and 3) to support NLI’s program efficacy by advancing efforts to create a more informed community where conservation is encouraged and is a core value; 4) providing a mechanism for a consistent and expected presence in our communities where we can foster and promote a deeper mission impact.

Private urban and semi-rural lands within targeted critical watersheds of the Kishwaukee, Rock, Pecatonica and Sugar Rivers, as well as within the IDNR Conservation Opportunity Areas will be prioritized. These watersheds, in both urban and semi-rural areas of Winnebago, Ogle, Boone, and portions of Stephenson and Dekalb Counties, support ecologically important areas. They provide corridors or stopping points for species, many of which are threatened by a variety of biological, environmental and landscape factors including habitat fragmentation (such as Monarchs and other butterflies). NLI also recognizes that the engagement of and stewardship actions by private landowners is necessary for the long term health of these lands and rivers.

In partnership with conservation landowners both public and private, Natural Land Institute proposes to offer the award winning Conservation@Home and Conservation@Work programs for ecologically friendly landscaping and green infrastructure implementation for water quality to home and business owners.

Using these proven program models, private landowners (individuals, businesses and faith communities) in these urban and semi-rural areas can be engaged and empowered to increase private land stewardship.

The expectation is that this effort will result in exposure to and engagement by those who would not otherwise participate in stewardship actions, thereby creating a momentum and local culture that is in line with the environmental land protection community’s long-term visions. It is our hope that there will be the eradication of aggressive/invasive plants and the establishment of oaks and other native trees, shrubs and understory plants due to the priority put not only on education but on implementation.
Benefits to NLI of Community Conservation Initiative

- Expands a culture of the stewardship of nature through personal experiences and realizing NLI’s vision
- Expands partnerships with local businesses and other non-governmental organizations
- Enfolds program participants into NLI membership
- Raises awareness of the work NLI does throughout the region
- Links protected lands with habitat corridors through private lands
- Creates an empowered and proactive community invested in protecting nature into the future

Some Challenges for Community Conservation Initiative

- Finding new ways of engaging non-traditional partners by focusing on shared values
- Creating sustainable funding for the program
OUR MISSION
To create an enduring legacy of natural land in northern Illinois for people, plants and animals.

WHO WE SERVE
- Members
- Donors
- Partners
- Landowners with Conservation Interests
- Diverse Communities

CORE VALUES
- Stewardship
- Leadership
- Inclusiveness
- Respect
- Honor
- Integrity
- Learning

I. LAND & WATER CONSERVATION
- Protect Land for Ecological Health
- Protect our Watersheds & Waters
- Promote Habitat Corridors & Large Ecological Complexes

II. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY
- Develop & Implement Fundraising & Planned Giving Programs
- Responsibly Manage and Grow our Long-Term Financial Resiliency

III. STEWARDSHIP
- Steward our Members, Donors, LandKeepers Fostering Long Term Engagement
- Manage & Restore Our Land & Waters for Ecological Diversity

IV. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- Cultivate a Culture of Respecting Nature
- Promote Learning on Ecosystems & Threats
- Engage People in Understanding their interconnection with Nature

V. LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION & EXCELLENCE
- Continually Seek Organizational Excellence
- Explore Non-Traditional Partnerships
- Implement Creative Conservation Finance Strategies
OUR VISION

Which people recognize that we are a part of nature and act with the knowledge that our future depends upon preserving the natural systems that support all life on Earth.

PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES

**Committee Strategies Include:** Working with Landowners; Acquiring strategic parcels; Planning with partners for targeted protection; Expanding preserves & providing buffers; Promoting water quality protection strategies; Completing strategic and targeted watershed planning

**Committee Strategies Include:** Working from an annual fundraising plan; Growing the endowment & stewardship funds; Re-establishing a planned giving program; Overseeing a robust investment portfolio; Creating strategies to increase unrestricted funding for programs

**Committee Strategies Include:** Growing our relationships with our donors, members and Heritage LandKeepers; Regularly reviewing preserve management plans; Maintaining professional, high quality staff; Promoting staff development; Assessing staff capacity

**Committee Strategies Include:** Being effective advocates for our Mission; Developing creative multi-faceted marketing campaigns; Initiating Community Conservation Programs; Providing issue oriented workshops & seminars; Providing opportunities for direct engagement with nature

**Committee Strategies Include:** Maintaining a diverse, issue educated & engaged Board; Seeking out research partnering opportunities; Creating enhanced local & regional partnerships for positive collective impact; Adopting working lands as a conservation finance strategy
Nygren
Wetland Preserve
721 Acres
Rockton, Illinois
Committee Strategic Plans

I. Land Conservation Committee

Committee Purpose: To plan and establish conservation priorities, review land protection and restoration projects, and recommend policies on the management and use of NLI preserves and working lands.

OBJECTIVE 1: PROTECT LAND, RIVERS & STREAMS AND THEIR WATERSHEDS FOR NATIVE ECOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

STRATEGY: Plan for Protection of Priority Habitat Corridors and Large Ecological Complexes

Tactic: Work with partners to create a strategic regional land and water conservation plan for NW Illinois

Tactic: Work with partners to develop coordinated local watershed based plans to guide targeted land protection strategies and large ecological complexes

Tactic: Implement the new state wildlife action plan and other appropriate state, regional and local plans

Tactic: Prioritize planning and protection in the Raccoon Creek, Apple River Canyon, Rock River Bluffs, Sugar River, Mississippi Blufflands, Kilbuck Creek, the bottomlands of the Pecatonica River Valley and Kishwaukee River Watersheds and as may be identified in the NW IL. Strategic Land & Water Conservation Plan

STRATEGY: Promote Conservation Easements and other land and water protection strategies in targeted watersheds

Tactic: Work with landowners and other partners to protect vulnerable and important land along rivers and streams, or high quality upland habitat such as oak woodlands, in keeping with NLI’s Land and Water conservation plan

Tactic: Using a suite of land protection tools, work with landowners and partners to expand and provide buffers for NLI preserves and other high quality natural areas

Tactic: Promote Agricultural BMP’s for water quality protection along river and stream corridors and floodplains

STRATEGY: Acquire and hold land for permanent protection according to ‘board approved’ watershed and conservation plans

Tactic: Participate in the creation of a regional strategic land and water conservation plan and the preparation of strategic watershed land and water protection plans.

Tactic: Expand existing preserves
OBJECTIVE 2: EFFECTIVELY MANAGE AND RESTORE NLI PRESERVES FOR NATIVE ECOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

STRATEGY: Restore ecological integrity and resiliency of NLI’s preserves

Tactic: Maintain experienced and knowledgeable stewardship staff

Tactic: Require stewardship income to be included for each acquisition

STRATEGY: Regularly Review and Update NLI Preserve Management Plans

Tactic: Identify social, political, economic, and biological threats to biological diversity

Tactic: Obtain Illinois Nature Preserve or Land and Water Reserve status for all eligible NLI preserves

STRATEGY: Encourage and support creative conservation financing strategies for impactful conservation investment

Tactic: Work with other committees to research and implement innovative and sustainable financing to support NLI’s mission

STRATEGY: Adopt NLI’s ‘Working Lands Initiative’ and manage NLI’s working lands for an income stream that supports the conservation mission

Tactic: Prepare and submit to the Board a Policy/Guiding Principles for agricultural and working lands management

Tactic: Integrate regenerative agricultural practices into leases

Tactic: Consider agricultural land as buffers to NLI preserves and to provide corridor linkages

Tactic: Promote the principles and practices of farms as habitat

Tactic: Complete a periodic review of each farm’s management plan and its income stream

STRATEGY: Assign preserves and conservation easements to other agencies and/or partners for effective stewardship, as appropriate

Tactic: Periodically review NLI’s stewardship capacity and funds

Tactic: Identify an appropriate and willing conservation organization to accept the assignment

OBJECTIVE 3: CREATE IMPACTFUL LOCAL, REGIONAL AND STATE PARTNERSHIPS

STRATEGY: Provide local, regional and state leadership

Tactic: Adopt NLI’s Cooperative Partnerships Initiative to increase biodiversity protection locally and regionally

STRATEGY: Commit to partnerships that create effective collective impact for land and water protection; management and restoration

Tactic: Develop MOU’s or other formal working agreements as appropriate
II. Resource Development Committee

Committee Purpose: To provide leadership, active involvement and oversight of fundraising and donor stewardship activities; to plan appropriate fund development programs, and to work with other committees for ongoing financial stability for NLI programs.

OBJECTIVE 1: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT FUNDRAISING AND DONOR STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS

STRATEGY: Work with the Executive Director to draft and implement a strategic five year fundraising plan.

Tactic: Set capital and operating targets and goals for the next 5 years
Tactic: Identify and implement activities to meet the fundraising plan goals
Tactic: Regularly review entire membership for donors to steward and emerging major gift opportunities
Tactic: Manage assignments of donors with donor stewards
Tactic: Evaluate fundraising objectives and targets annually
Tactic: Maximize the 2018 60th anniversary celebration in support of fundraising goals

STRATEGY: Fully engage all board members as effective ambassadors and donor stewards and create a board culture of philanthropy

Tactic: Use the Fundraising Cycle Process
Tactic: Mentor and guide the board on donor stewardship
Tactic: Provide regular trainings for the board and committee

STRATEGY: Create strategies to increase unrestricted operating funding to assist with funding priority programs

Tactic: Build relationships with existing donors at the $250 and above level
Tactic: Host small informal gatherings
Tactic: Develop a new exclusive category to raise member levels

STRATEGY: Work with Marketing and Membership Committee to expand membership strategies

Tactic: Develop and implement membership recruitment strategies
Tactic: Explore and implement ways to increase annual giving levels
Tactic: Create a simple “overarching” donation matrix which pictorially conceptualizes opportunities and or mechanisms for giving
Tactic: Complete a competitive environment survey and create a “Value Proposition” differentiating NLI from the competition
Tactic: Collaborate on a member/donor survey
Tactic: Implement coordinated effective donor stewardship program
STRATEGY: Lead a robust planned giving ‘Land Legacy’ program
  Tactic: Encourage members to consider naming NLI in their estate planning documents & retirement plans
  Tactic: Find and promote easy and simple approaches to planned giving
  Tactic: Consider promoting estate gifts of working agricultural lands as a conservation finance mechanism
  Tactic: Provide on-going recognition of people who have included NLI in their estate plans with annual appreciation events

STRATEGY: Develop a Robust Sponsorship Program
  Tactic: Work with Board and Corporate Council and other partners to seek new sponsorship opportunities

OBJECTIVE 2: INITIATE SPECIAL PROJECT APPEALS

STRATEGY: Annually identify and lead special projects
  Tactic: Build stewardship and restoration funds for easements, preserves, working lands & new land bequests
  Tactic: Select special project champions to lead the appeal and support the champion during the appeal
  Tactic: Build and cultivate a portfolio of angel donors

STRATEGY: Complete the Gordon G. Eggers Fund Endowment Campaign
  Tactic: Continue the Endowment Campaign Committee
  Tactic: Develop matching strategies
  Tactic: Engage with the donor community through small intimate gatherings, including Legacy and planned giving events.

III. Board Development Committee

Committee Purpose: The Board Development Committee’s purpose is to maintain and build a strong, engaged, knowledgeable, effective and diverse corporate Board of Trustees that reflects the local and regional social and environmental landscape in which NLI works.

OBJECTIVE 1: BUILD A STRONG, RESILIENT BOARD

STRATEGY: Diversify the Board by recruiting nominees across age, gender, skills, geographic, and ethnic communities
  Tactic: Facilitate impactful partnerships by recruiting from non-traditional partners such as the agricultural community
  Tactic: Update and utilize the board composition analysis to determine board skills, related experience and other attributes needed for diversity
  Tactic: Expand the board mentoring and orientation program for new trustees.
STRATEGY: Involve strong and committed past board members
Tactic: Create Board Emeriti positions to honor past trustees that continue to go above and beyond for NLI’s mission

STRATEGY: Create a succession plan for key board and staff positions
Tactic: Develop a protocol for President, Vice Presidents and committee chairs to have experience on all committees prior to appointments
Tactic: Have three or more prospective board members working on committees and in line to become board members
Tactic: Develop a succession plan for the Board president, Vice President and committee chairs
Tactic: Develop a leadership succession plan for the Executive Director and Assistant Director
Tactic: Keep the board fully populated with individuals committed to the NLI board member expectations.

OBJECTIVE 2: EQUIP THE BOARD WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND TOOLS TO BE EFFECTIVE LEADERS

STRATEGY: Provide regular board training on programs and issues to advance NLI’s mission impact
Tactic: Provide training on such topics as environmental justice, climate change, board diversification, conservation finance and other issues that impact NLI’s membership and the community
Tactic: Create awareness of NLI’s Community Conservation program and its impacts working with the Marketing and Membership Committee
Tactic: Normalize the ‘nature and conservation’ experience within the board
Tactic: Provide training to develop personal stories about the importance of NLI’s mission and its impact, including fostering a personal communication style of ideas, beliefs and an environmental ethic.
Tactic: Provide field trainings and mini tours to easements and properties

STRATEGY: Be responsive to committee needs
Tactic: Develop a protocol for combining committee needs (assignments) with personal interests for new trustees.
Tactic: Develop and conduct annual board assessments to evaluate Board effectiveness
Tactic: Review and revise assessments that are easy and fun to take such as an electronic survey that can be discussed in small groups
Tactic: Provide periodic Board retreats based on the results of the annual assessments
IV. Finance Committee

Committee Purpose: To oversee the fiscal health of the organization and to ensure NLI’s long term viability as an effective 501(c)3 Conservation Land Trust.

OBJECTIVE 1: BE RESPONSIVE AND PROACTIVE TO NLI’s FINANCIAL NEEDS

STRATEGY: Oversee a Strong, Resilient, and Diverse Investment Portfolio

Tactic: Regularly evaluate investment options to enhance NLI’s investment portfolio

Tactic: Maintain investments in traditional and green markets

Tactic: Coordinate with Resource Development Committee on their goals

STRATEGY: Create a comprehensive Conservation Finance Strategy Plan

Tactic: Incorporate working/agricultural Lands as an investment tool for enhanced and sustainable cash flow to fund NLI’s financial needs

Tactic: Explore innovative environmental markets that produce positive environmental outcomes, as well as financial returns (impact investing)

Tactic: Research environmental credit markets and avoided cost markets

Tactic: Attend a Conservation Finance conference

Tactic: Provide an annual training to the board about Conservation Financing strategies

STRATEGY: Quarterly and annually review NLI’s financial status

Tactic: Review quarterly and annual financial reports

Tactic: Oversee the annual audit

Tactic: Make recommendations based on financial policies and best practices

OBJECTIVE 2: MAINTAIN UP TO DATE POLICIES AND ANNUAL BUDGETS

STRATEGY: Review and revise policies on a regular basis

Tactic: Regularly review NLI’s Investment Policy

Tactic: Review updates to the LTA Accreditation Requirements

Tactic: Monitor state and federal legislation for potential impacts to NLI’s fiscal strategies.

Tactic: Regularly review NLI’s banking relationships and investment portfolio manager’s performance

STRATEGY: Oversee preparation of the annual operating and project budgets

Tactic: Review draft budgets, and make recommendations

Tactic: Diversify operating revenue sources emphasizing sustainable funding sources
V. **Marketing and Membership Committee**

**Committee Purpose:** The committee (MMC) develops programs and materials to promote the organization and to increase public awareness of its mission, goals and projects, as well as developing programs to identify, recruit, retain and recognize members and volunteers.

**OBJECTIVE 1: ENCOURAGE A CULTURE IN NORTHERN ILLINOIS THAT RESPECTS NATURE, LAND, WATER, PLANTS AND ANIMALS**

**STRATEGY:** Empower people, organizations, and political bodies to participate in protecting nature

**Tactic:** Share information on conservation and environmentally-friendly property management methods

**Action:** Continue participation in the R1 Environment Committee

**Action:** Maintain Speakers Bureau and offer speakers to community organizations

**Action:** Promote the Conservation@Home and @Work program

**Action:** Promote environmentally-friendly farming best practices

**STRATEGY:** Increase awareness of the organization and its mission

**Tactic:** Develop a multi-faceted marketing campaign

**Action:** Insure that all promotional materials, including print and digital, comply with NLI branding protocols

**Action:** Prioritize and assess continued use of print vs. digital

**Action:** Survey Members to assess awareness of NLI services and programs

**Action:** Utilize public service announcements and other media

**Action:** Develop and implement a plan to celebrate NLI’s 60th anniversary

**Tactic:** Offer events to highlight the holdings and work of the organization

**Action:** Develop programs and events to attract specific and diverse demographics

**Action:** Partner with younger community groups to hold events, e.g. Ignite, Next Rockford, Young Professional Group

**Action:** Disseminate an annual calendar highlighting marketing and public relations campaigns and products to targeted audiences

**Action:** Increase the range of regional locations for events

**Action:** Promote solutions that NLI offers to new challenges

**Action:** Hold events to celebrate NLI’s 60th anniversary in 2018

**Tactic:** Increase awareness of NLI preserves

**Action:** Review and make recommendations for signage at preserves

**Action:** Increase information about preserves on website/social media
**Action:** Acquire additional photos and graphic materials of preserves for promotional purposes

**Action:** Continue to promote and host events at preserves

**STRATEGY:** Advocate for the conservation of nature

**Tactic:** Promote legislation and actions that positively affect nature and conservation

**Action:** Develop relationships with state and local legislators

**Action:** Monitor state legislation that impacts NLI services

**Action:** Include state and local legislators on distribution lists for marketing and event materials

**Action:** Keep local planners informed of relevant legislation

**Action:** Coordinate the distribution of legislation information with other local conservation groups and inform them when action is needed on legislation

**Action:** Monitor the implementation of the plans of local governmental bodies that affect areas and issues of concern to NLI

**Action:** Offer advocacy tools and training to stakeholders

**OBJECTIVE 2: GENERATE MEMBERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERS SUFFICIENT TO SUSTAIN AND GROW NLI’S OPERATIONS**

**STRATEGY:** Promote membership in NLI throughout the service area

**Tactic:** Define and identify target populations

**Action:** Establish goals for each membership category

**Action:** Develop a strategy to attract student members, including college and university students

**Action:** Research opportunities in rural and agricultural communities to promote NLI, its values and services

**Action:** Articulate what makes NLI unique among conservation and environmental organizations using data from RDC’s Competitive Environment Survey

**Action:** Encourage members with one-year discounted memberships to renew and upgrade

**Tactic:** Develop and implement a plan for promoting membership throughout the twelve-county region

**Action:** Assess marketing materials to determine their impact on member recruitment

**Action:** Identify one advocate in each county
**Action:** Use all communication platforms and outlets to promote membership, including potential onsite venues, e.g. as public markets, fairs and festivals

**Tactic:** Conduct membership drives

**Action:** Survey current members to identify reasons for joining NLI, e.g. “when you hear NLI, what comes to mind?”

**Action:** Assess the feasibility of creating a drive based on matching trustee membership totals

**Action:** Investigate holding a one-day event that includes calling lapsed members and using website promotion

**Action:** Adopt and implement a plan(s) for at least one drive annually

**Action:** Encourage, but not require, volunteers to become members

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**STRATEGY:** Maintain and expand the volunteer base

**Tactic:** Inform and appreciate current volunteers

**Action:** Continue the ‘Land and Nature’ and ‘Notes from the Field’ newsletters

**Action:** Keep volunteers informed of NLI events, news, and activities

**Action:** Invite volunteers to participate in events and activities

**Action:** Host an annual volunteer appreciation event

**Action:** Recognize selected volunteers through annual awards, articles within printed and digital publications

**Tactic:** Increase volunteer outreach

**Action:** Identify audiences for potential volunteers

**Action:** Inform audiences of presentations and speaker events of volunteer opportunities

**Action:** Post volunteer opportunities on NLI social media
VI. Education Committee

Committee Purpose: To provide learning opportunities for members of NLI and the general public which focus on hands-on learning techniques that bring about a better understanding of nature. The committee reviews, plans and implements educational programs and projects, and recommends educational policies.

OBJECTIVE 1: PROMOTE LEARNING ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL ECOSYSTEMS AND HOW TO AID IN THEIR SUSTAINABILITY

STRATEGY: Introduce NLI to new populations with diverse demographics
Tactic: Partner with other organizations to present educational programs and workshops to diverse populations
Tactic: Participate in other organizations’ workshops and programs
Tactic: Stimulate young professional interest by holding seminars at local breweries/restaurants

STRATEGY: Provide learning opportunities about invasive species, native habitats and ecosystems
Tactic: Partner with other organizations to present educational programs and workshops to diverse populations
Tactic: Participate in other organizations’ workshops and programs
Tactic: Stimulate young professional interest by holding seminars at local breweries/restaurants

STRATEGY: Implement Conservation @ Home and @ Work program
Tactic: Hold public launch event
Tactic: Introduce the program through a series of speaking engagements to groups that feature homeowners, professionals, businesses, and staff and local elected officials
Tactic: Print and distribute brochures about the program
Tactic: Speak to partner organizations
Tactic: Promote the program to NLI’s Corporate Council members

STRATEGY: Provide learning opportunities about agronomy and agroecology
Tactic: Host workshops and seminars to increase awareness of soil management, edible plants, herbs, and other topics related to conservation in agriculture

STRATEGY: Organize field trips and workshops that feature application based learning at Nygren Wetland Preserve for 6th – 12th grades
Tactic: Coordinate with local schools, 4-H Clubs, FFA
STRATEGY: Create a series of “Learn This” or “Did You Know...” videos
Tactic: Post the videos on NLI’s website and social media platforms

STRATEGY: Provide reading resources that are related to nature and environmental conservation
Tactic: Ask NLI board members and members for recommendations on their favorite books for children and adults
Tactic: Recommend these in NLI’s various publications and online communications

STRATEGY: Provide opportunities to learn about threats to the local ecosystems
Tactic: Stimulate young professional interest by holding seminars at local breweries/restaurants
Tactic: Host programs for local elected officials and business leaders

STRATEGY: Create a dialogue between the conservation and agricultural communities based on shared values
Tactic: Partner with existing organizations that are connected to the farming community
Tactic: Provide educational opportunities to learn about the value of conservation farming
Tactic: Compile resources about conservation farming and make available on NLI’s website
Tactic: Follow up on recommendations in the Northwest Illinois Strategic Land & Water Conservation Plan

OBJECTIVE 2: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY, NLI MEMBERS AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN THE MISSION OF NLI.

STRATEGY: Increase awareness of natural habitats
Tactic: Host events in preserves that provide learning and fun nature experiences for all ages
Tactic: Stimulate young professional interest by holding seminars at local breweries/restaurants

STRATEGY: Provide resources and learning opportunities for managing private property
Tactic: Promote to existing Heritage LandKeepers and Conservation@Home and @Work members

STRATEGY: Create partnerships with farmers
Tactic: Work with farmers to present educational programs on conservation best practices
Throughout 2017, the Natural Land Institute Board of Directors, Committees and staff undertook a unique approach to strategic planning. Rather than having a board gathering with an outside facilitator, NLI’s Board President, Mark Maffei, encouraged a more radical approach. This approach entailed addressing the issues facing NLI through the lens of each committee with their special function and purpose. One committee, the Resource Development Committee, chose to have a committee training that incorporated some strategic planning to assist them in their committee process of re-invention. The committees consist not just of board members and staff, but of NLI’s members as well, which provides an expanded viewpoint and a ‘focus group’ perspective.

The Executive Committee meetings served as a sounding board for the committee chairs to bring their respective committees’ work to be reviewed by the other committee chairs. This resulted in some interesting cross-pollinating as similar goals were discovered. The Executive Director, Kerry Leigh, assisted with providing a synthesis of the ideas and issues discussed. The process was at times challenging, yet clearly thought provoking.

This strategic plan report is just the beginning of the process. It provides a guiding structure for the committees as they develop their annual work plans and implement their strategic thinking. This will include the refinement of strategies and tactics as the organization moves through challenges and addresses the issues over the next five years. The board and staff of the Natural Land Institute look forward to growing the organization and to providing a sustainable future for generations to come.
## NLI Standing Committees

**Land Conservation Committee**  
*Trip Thiemann, Chair*  
*Jon Duerr, Vice Chair*  
*Paul Baits*  
*Steve Clark*  
*Ed Eggers*  
*Ray Ferguson*  
*Adam Guarino*  
*Tom Hartley*  
*Mark Keister*  
*Dan Loescher*  
*Gary McIntyre*  
*Rebecca Olson*  
*Ashley Sarver*  
*Dan Swift*  
*Staff:*  
*Ed Cope*  
*Zach Grycan*  
*Kim Johnsen*  
*Kerry Leigh*  

**Education Committee**  
*Troy Skwor, Chair*  
*Jim Applegate*  
*Marion Applegate*  
*Judy Barnard*  
*Rick Barton*  
*Karen Blomgren*  
*Jared Cacchiato*  
*Paulette Gilbert*  
*Joey Holmes*  
*Judy Letourneau*  
*Mark Luthin*  
*Deborah Krug*  
*Jim McFarlane*  
*Chris Reisetter*  
*Laura Sjoquist*  
*Scott Steurer*  
*Julie Tackett*  
*Andrea Wallace*  
*Stacy Wallace*  
*Carrie Zethmayr*  
*Staff:*  
*Zach Grycan*  
*Kim Johnsen*  
*Kerry Leigh*  

**Marketing / Membership Committee**  
*Linda Miller, Chair*  
*Shelby Best*  
*Mike Bugler*  
*Paulette Gilbert*  
*Joey Holmes*  
*Gus Larson*  
*Michele Larson*  
*Chris Reisetter*  
*Ashely Sarver*  
*Pam Shaver*  
*Andrea Wallace*  
*Rob Young*  
*Carrie Zethmayr*  
*Staff:*  
*Kim Johnsen*  
*Jill Kennay*  
*Kerry Leigh*  

**Finance Committee**  
*Tom Ptacin, Chair*  
*Jay Evans, Vice Chair*  
*Paul Baits*  
*Judy Barnard*  
*Adam Guarino*  
*Russ Johansson*  
*Dan Loescher*  
*Rob Young*  
*Staff:*  
*Jill Kennay*  
*Kerry Leigh*  

**Board Development Committee**  
*Rick Barton, Chair*  
*Judy Barnard*  
*Ellwyn Engloff*  
*Ruth Little*  
*Mark Maffei*  
*Dan Swift*  
*Staff:*  
*Kerry Leigh*  

**Resource Development Committee**  
*Ellwyn Engloff, Co-Chair*  
*Dan Loescher, Co-Chair*  
*Ed Eggers*  
*Judy Barnard*  
*Mary Caskey*  
*Ruth Little*  
*Alan Nowicki*  
*Jerry Paulson*  
*Tom Ptacin*  
*Dan Swift*  
*Dan Williams*  
*Staff:*  
*Kim Johnsen*  
*Jill Kennay*  
*Kerry Leigh*  

**Note:** Name in bold indicates a 2017 board trustee
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Owner/President, Androck Hardware Corp

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Executive Director, Kane County Forest Preserve (retired)

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Physician, Rockford Urological Associates (retired)

Rolf (Trip) A. Thienemann, III
Attorney at Law, Rolf A. Thienemann, III

Robert Young
Owner and President, Midwest Packaging and Container

Carrie Zethmayr
Northern Stateline Region Manager, State of Illinois Department of Commerce

Troy Skwor
Associate Professor of Biology, Rockford University

For Board member biographies, visit www.NaturalLand.org