

2023-2025 3-Year Strategic Plan

Endorsed by the CFPA Board of Directors April 2023

Accomplishments: CFPA's Previous 2020-2022 Strategic Plan

CFPA's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and global economic instability. During this time, the outdoors were one of the only places that never closed, and CFPA's essential role in connecting people to forests, parks, and trails was magnified. During this difficult time, CFPA accomplished many priorities spurred by our 2020-2022 Strategic Plan. The following "Canopy" program accomplishments would not have been possible without essential support from the "Trunk" and "Roots" priorities. You'll see a similar organizing theme of Canopy, Trunk, andRoots in the 2023-2025 Plan.

Advocacy: Incentives for Land, Trails, and Climate Change

- Chaired the Forests Sub-group of the Governor's Council on Climate Change in 2020, and also Chaired a follow-up report to DEEP in 2021/22 involving 15 organizations known as the "Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut's Future" (PRFCT Future). The recommendations from the GC3 and PRFCT Future reports have been included in several bills in consideration by the CT General Assembly in 2023.
- Led the charge for public hearings in 2020 and 2022 on a bill that would have created a new property tax incentive for landowners who host trails. This generated strong momentum for an updated bill (SB 998) raised in 2023.

Education: Restructure Partnership with Goodwin State Forest

- Restructured partnership with DEEP at Goodwin State Forest—DEEP now has responsibility for facilities maintenance while CFPA delivers education programs and manages seasonal naturalists at the Goodwin Conservation Center.
- Launched Connecticut's first "Master Woodland Manager" certification program with a cohort of 35 landowners and land managers in 2021. This partnership effort with DEEP, UConn, Audubon CT, CLCC, and several others continues to grow.
- Enhanced partnership with Windham Middle School through the pandemic, with new lessons added to facilitate learning both at the Middle School, and at Goodwin State Forest.

Land Conservation: Focus on Protection of Trail Corridors

- Reorganized CFPA's land conservation work to bring additional focus to protecting trail corridors, and hired CFPA's first Trail Protection Coordinator in 2021.
- Developed first trail landowner database and fully mapped all private lands hosting our trails.
- Contracted to both manage CFPA's fee-owned properties and monitor conservation easements.

Trails: Get More People Outside on the Trails

- Launched popular Hiking Challenges on the New England National Scenic Trail and across Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails in general.
- Hosted young adult AmeriCorps teams for major trail projects and expanded in-house Trail Crew to a fully in-the-field program.
- Released new trailsday.org website for CT Trails Day with improved features.
- Inventoried structures and trail issues on 540 miles of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System.

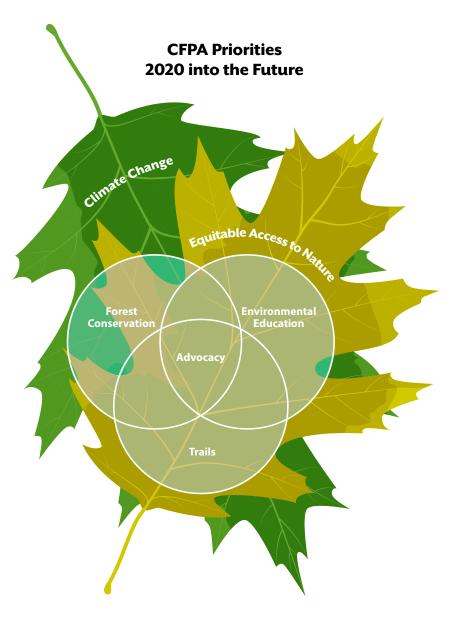
CFPA Priorities 1895 to 2020



INTRODUCTION CFPA 3-Year Strategic Plan 2023-2025

CFPA's mission is to ensure forests, parks, and Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails are protected and wellmanaged for future generations of all communities to enjoy. For almost 130 years, that has centered our programmatic focus on forest conservation, environmental education, trail stewardship, and advocacy to support those priorities in all aspects of society.

Although our focus on these core priorities continues, we now set them in a broader vision to better meet the needs of Connecticut today and into the future. Climate change impacts forest resilience, makes it more challenging to manage trails sustainably, alters our understanding of nature, threatens wildlife biodiversity, and is a central advocacy priority. At the same time, if we wish to preserve and celebrate the many benefits that forests, parks, and trails provide to Connecticut, they must be accessible to EVERYONE. Although climate change and equitable access were included in CFPA's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, both are consciously magnified in 2023-2025.



Be Part of Our Community

Since December 2020, CFPA has worked with excellent consultants at Thought Partner Solutions to increase our understanding of the institutional racism, language discrimination, bias, social inequities, and other barriers that have led to unequal access to the outdoors, in particular for BIPOC individuals and communities.

That lack of equal access has separated many people in Connecticut from the physical, mental, emotional, and many other benefits provided by forests, parks, and trails. We at CFPA are committed to change this.

To reverse the effects of racism and exclusion on the equitable enjoyment of Connecticut's outdoors, CFPA is dedicated to make a difference through actions such as:

- Achieving additional diversity in the decision making process of CFPA's Board, Staff, and volunteer base with a clear commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) principles in hiring, recruitment, and volunteer participation.
- Ensuring CFPA's culture and practice is inclusive, diverse, and welcoming to all by informing Staff, Board, and volunteers about implicit bias, cultural responsiveness, best practices, and staying connected to current events related to our mission.
- Partnering with organizations and individuals working to engage people of color in the outdoors.
- Recognizing and publicizing that the land where trails, forests, and parks are located spring from an indigenous history, varied land uses, and multiple factors that have taken place since colonization.
- Acknowledging that historically our organization and conservation organizations throughout the United States have participated in purposeful or inadvertent systemic racism that too often has excluded marginalized groups, and understanding our responsibility to act decisively to reverse this deep-rooted and unfortunate reality.
- Celebrating when progress is made to overcome historic and current obstacles to equitable enjoyment of the outdoors, and honestly assessing what CFPA is doing to make the greatest difference.

We invite you to be part of our community working together toward a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just future for Connecticut.

MISSION

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) connects people to Connecticut's forests, parks, and Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails, and ensures these special places are protected and wellmanaged for future generations.

VISION

CFPA inspires active, lifelong engagement with Connecticut's abundant and well-managed forests, parks, and trails by building a vibrant and diverse conservation community.

VALUES

As members of the CFPA family, we believe that...

- Civic engagement and action make a difference
- Connecting to the outdoors improves your quality of life
- Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do
- Long-term success comes from a commitment to excellence
- Partnerships with stakeholders lead to lasting successes
- Connecticut's outdoor resources are for everyone
- Responsible natural resource management is based upon sound science
- Financial stability is essential for ongoing forest and trail stewardship

CFPA is working with guidance from its volunteer Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Advisory Council to incorporate the needs and perspectives of people of color and diverse backgrounds into the design and implementation of CFPA's strategic plan, programming, organizational culture, and policy priorities.



We want to give special recognition to JEDI Advisory Council members Marissa Jayawickrema, Jay Levy, Lauren McGregor, Edith Pestana, Marcus Sibley, and Ivelise Velazquez, who have met bi-monthly with CFPA Board and Staff. We appreciate their willingness to provide thoughtful input on issues such as: incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion into CFPA's ongoing and new work; monitoring the progress and process of equity and diversity in CFPA's programs and communications; and addressing potential and actual implications from changes to existing or new programs. The Advisory Council has also worked with CFPA Staff to craft a values statement that affirms CFPA's commitment to addressing the social inequities, institutional racism, language discrimination, bias, and other barriers that have historically limited access to the outdoors.

In addition, CFPA has established three action planning teams—Decentralizing Whiteness to Build Anti-Racist Culture; Understanding the Needs of BIPOC Communities; and Building an Anti-Racist Workplace—that have identified key issues and actions considered in this Strategic Plan. CFPA's Board and Staff members all serve on one of these teams.

We also thank the following individuals who provided insightful advice and reflections on CFPA priorities to make this Plan a truly collaborative effort:

- 🖉 Stephen Beyer and Beth Schiro
- 🕪 Kathy and Paul Connolly
- 🔊 Barbara David
- 🖉 Eileen Grant, Friends of CT State Parks
- 🖉 Jenita Hayes, Thought Partner Solutions
- 𝕪 Andrew Long and Kelly Fellner, National Park Service
- 🐌 Larry Lunden
- 𝕗 Christopher Martin, State Forester
- \mathfrak{P} Amy Paterson, Connecticut Land Conservation Council
- 🖉 Ashley Stewart and Erika Williams
- **≫** Trails Committee, CFPA
- 🖉 John Triana, Regional Water Authority
- 🐌 Tom Tyler, Director, State Parks
- 🖉 Tom Worthley, UConn Extension

2023-2025 CFPA Strategic Plan Goals

GOAL 1 The Canopy Increase the Impact

of Our Conservation Programs

GOAL 2 The Trunk Invest in Our Staff, Board of Directors & Volunteers

GOAL 3 The Roots Improve Our Organizational/ Financial Stability **Advocacy** Continue advocacy to preserve the Passport to the Parks program; Establish trails protection incentive(s); Promote nature-based climate solutions/forest resilience.

Education Build Master Woodland Manager and Master Naturalist programs; Expand Windham partnership to other district(s); Use CFPA trails and properties for educational programs.

Trails Protect trail corridors; Launch CT Woodlands Conservation Corps; Enhance CT Trails Day and hike challenge programs; Facilitate inclusive hikes.

Cross-Program Priorities Nurture diverse partnerships; Work to improve equitable access; Build capacity in communications and volunteer support; Assess and improve technology.

Commitment to JEDI Attract and retain Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to be Board members, Staff, volunteers, and program participants as integral to achieving CFPA's mission; Recruit individuals with diverse skills, geographies, and perspectives that make CFPA a more impactful organization.

Board Ambassador Skills Offer trainings to build Board skills as CFPA ambassadors, and carry forward a shared culture of accountability.

Nurture Staff Excellence Provide competitive salary/benefits; Underwrite professional skills development; Support flexibility for recruitment, retention, and work-life balance.

Volunteer Engagement Ensure volunteers are well-trained and deeply appreciated for the essential education, trails, advocacy, and community work they perform.

Fundraising Utilize challenge matches in campaigns; Build monthly giving; Grow Winslow Society; Encourage legacy gifts; Expand membership base; Invest in capacity.

Marketing/PR Bolster CFPA's proficiency to conduct marketing, public relations, and outreach; Publicize partnerships and crosspromotional opportunities.

Plan for Succession Develop succession plans for key Board and Staff leaders.

Infrastructure/Systems Assess and address facility challenges; Improve Community Room technology and connection to CFPA's mission; Enhance data management and systems security. Advocacy: Trail Protection, Climate Resilience, and Equitable Access

To protect trail corridors, ensure Connecticut's forests are more resilient to climate change, and remove barriers to equitable access to the outdoors, we will:

- Pursue tax relief and other incentives to protect vulnerable trail corridors.
- Advocate for the Passport to the Parks and other programs fundamental to equitable outdoor access, and seek additional resources for DEEP to manage public lands adequately for more diverse users.
- Pursue unit status for New England Trail to achieve parity with other national scenic trails.
- Ensure natural and working lands and ecosystems are valued as nature-based solutions that help us both mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Education: Extend Statewide Capacity and Impact

To extend the education program's statewide impact, we will:

- Enhance statewide field visits and urban forestry content in our Master Woodland Manager and Goodwin Conservation Center's Master Naturalist certification programs with contractual support.
- Build on successful Windham Middle School partnership, identify and pursue funding to support outreach to new environmental justice community-based school(s) to connect diverse students, teachers, and families to the outdoors.
- Contract and lead seasonal programming for the public that incorporates the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail system, CFPA properties, CT Woodlands Conservation Corps, and volunteers.
- Sustain our strong partnership with DEEP by providing educational programs at Goodwin Conservation Center with contractual support.

Trails: Protect, Steward, and Welcome New Users

Over 825 miles of Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails in 96 communities depend upon CFPA protecting trail corridors; stewarding trail footpaths and infrastructure; and connecting more people to the outdoors. To extend these efforts, we will:

- Expand Trail Crew program to launch new Connecticut Woodlands Conservation Corps with more benefits, skill development, and exposure to green job opportunities for participants.
- Enhance landowner and partnering trail host relationships, trail planning, data management, and protection efforts to identify key gaps and protect vulnerable trail corridors.
- Facilitate new and inclusive hike programs and volunteer trainings with contractual support and partnerships.
- Utilize digital platforms to promote use of and access to the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails.
- Develop communications plan and campaign to promote CT Trails Day, hike challenges, and Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail awareness, vulnerabilities, and use/etiquette.

Cross-Program Priorities

To deepen the impact and sustainability of all CFPA programs, we will:

- Identify institutional, transportation, infrastructure, or other barriers to outdoor access, and act to improve equitable access for all residents.
- Build communications capacity to represent ALL people in the outdoors as well as elevate public awareness of forests, parks, trails, and CFPA's critical role.
- Nurture partnerships with landowners, outdoor recreation retailers, land trusts, and users such as veterans, youth organizations, and groups engaged in connecting BIPOC individuals and communities to the outdoors.
- Assess and improve technology to enable trail users to share experiences, improve mapping and land management systems, and collect data in the field.

GOAL 1 The Canopy Increase the Impact of Our Conservation Programs

Sustain our Commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Our Governance Committee and Staff leadership will continue efforts to attract and retain BIPOC Board members, Staff, volunteers, and program participants. CFPA will also recruit individuals with diverse skills, geographies, and perspectives that make CFPA a more impactful organization and further CFPA's commitment to build an anti-racist culture, understand the needs of BIPOC communities, and build an anti-racist workplace.

Build Board Ambassador Skills

Staff will identify Board training opportunities (workshops, consultants, or other), strengthen Board members' roles as CFPA ambassadors, and build a Board culture of accountability for supporting each other in following through with actions that support CFPA.

Develop and Nurture our Staff's Excellence

Staff excellence and retention is foundational to the Association's ongoing work and success. To continue to be a positive and proactive place of employment, CFPA will:

- Ensure levels of compensation and benefits to allow CFPA to successfully recruit and retain outstanding and diverse talent.
- Utilize Pro Bono Partnership and other external resources to assess personnel policies to keep CFPA at the forefront of best practices for non-profits.
- Encourage Staff to find professional mentors or peer groups to help build a supportive learning network.
- Underwrite Staff advancement with webinars, trainings, workshops, and other learning opportunities to build expertise.
- Provide ongoing JEDI training for Staff to foster a safe, supportive, and equitable work culture.
- Upgrade technology and resources that enable productive remote work and allow Staff to maximize efficiency, flexibility, work-life balance, and overall success.

Promote and Support Volunteer Engagement

- Invest in volunteer support and engagement to ensure CFPA is able to meet the needs of volunteers as an essential part of our community.
- Recognize and appreciate the work of volunteers, and ensure they find their outstanding service to be rewarding.
- Improve volunteer systems and support to make volunteering fun, easy, and engaging.
- Collaborate with our volunteer community to find the best nexus between our shared goals, and the additional individual talents that volunteers bring to the CFPA family.

GOAL 2 The Trunk Invest in Our Staff, Board of Directors & Volunteers

Strengthen and Expand Fundraising Efforts

Individual Giving

- Identify supporters who are inspired to make larger gifts that endow a specific program or structural investments in CFPA headquarters.
- Facilitate annual gatherings of CFPA's Honorary Board Members to ensure this important community of supporters stays engaged.
- Cultivate and organize a group of volunteer leaders focused on the Winslow Society and CFPA membership to help grow these critical groups of supporters.

Legacy Donor Support

- Recruit supporters to participate in our legacy-giving program and help their gifts inspire others.
- Utilize CFPA communication platforms to promote bequests and legacy gifts.
- Evaluate use of capital campaign to endow programs, improve facilities, and help CFPA address other long-term priorities.

Grants

• Engage contractual support to help CFPA identify and compete for foundation, state, and federal grant opportunities.

Infrastructure

Invest in our development team and systems to retain and/or attract top-notch fundraising expertise.

Enhance Marketing and Public Relations

- Expand CFPA's capacity to enhance our marketing and communications.
- Publicize partnerships and opportunities for cross-promotional efforts, especially with organizations that provide diverse participants with access to outdoor and nature-based activities.

Plan for Succession

Recruiting, retaining, and replacing Staff and Board members is critical to our ongoing success.

- Develop succession plans for key executive and Board leadership roles, and implement strategies to retain Staff and secure institutional knowledge.
- Cross-train Staff leadership and conduct succession planning to build operational durability.
- Develop business continuation plan to ensure CFPA's mission survives unforeseeable setbacks.

Reinforce Our Infrastructure and Systems

- Develop feasibility plan to resolve current facility challenges (e.g., inadequate parking capacity and private office space).
- Increase awareness for Community Room users about CFPA's mission and goals.
- Upgrade CFPA's Community Room with improved technology for hybrid meetings and interactive presentations.
- Ensure CFPA's mapping and trails database, financial management databases, and other shared data is well-managed, secure, stored, backed-up, and accessible to Staff as needed.

GOAL 3 The Roots Improve Our Organizational/ Financial Stability

APPENDIX Looking Forward to 2030: Priority Actions

While the previous pages represent CFPA's Strategic Plan Policies for 2023-2025, we share below the longer-term priorities that CFPA is working to achieve by 2030 and beyond.

Goal 1

The Canopy

Increase the Impact of Our Conservation Programs

- Secure the legacy of the Blue Trails to achieve long-term protection of the trails by utilizing innovative practices and incentives with landowners and partners.
- Advocate at all levels of government and in the community for healthy forests and science-based forest stewardship, adequately staffed and well-managed parks, inspirational educational experiences, connected trails, climate resiliency, and access for all to Connecticut's outdoors.
- Develop new partnerships to enhance the CT Woodlands Conservation Corps, build climate resilient trails, and train the next generation of trail stewards and leaders.
- Educate and mentor lifelong learners in the values, skills, and science of local forest stewardship, and prepare more young people for green jobs.
- Connect people of all ages and diverse backgrounds to the outdoors through both hands-on experiential learning and new technologies that facilitate public awareness, access, and sustainable use.

Goal 2 The Trunk

Invest in Our Staff, Board of Directors & Volunteers

- Dedicate ongoing resources to expand CFPA's actions on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion both internally and externally with partners.
- Attract and retain top-flight Staff and Board who represent and respect the diversity of Connecticut.
- Enhance volunteer programming, recruitment, recognition, and trainings to welcome and retain CFPA's committed volunteer force and advance our mission.

Goal 3 The Roots

Improve Our Organizational/Financial Stability

- Continue growth of CFPA's family of diverse supporters—donors, volunteers, partners, legacy gift-givers, and advocates—to further CFPA's mission.
- Expand public appreciation for the essential role CFPA plays in the economy, quality of life, and enjoyment of Connecticut's forests, parks, and trails.
- Ensure CFPA's headquarters, grounds, landholdings, and supporting infrastructure are models of sustainable management and resilience to demonstrate CFPA's conservation leadership.



"A tree has roots in the soil yet reaches to the sky. It tells us that in order to aspire we need to be grounded and that no matter how high we go, it is from our roots that we draw sustenance." Wangari Maathai