



# Arizona Trail

ASSOCIATION

## Strategic Plan 2016-2020



## Arizona Trail Association Strategic Plan (2016-2020)

### INTRODUCTION: VISION AND MISSION

#### **The Vision**

*An 800+ mile continuous, non-motorized trail across Arizona, linking deserts, mountains, canyons, forests, communities and people.*

The Arizona Trail Association (ATA) was founded on a vision. Over the past 30 years, that vision has been embraced, supported and furthered by individuals, organizations, agencies and others to turn a dream into reality. The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to guide the ATA, its Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and associated along a sustainable path that will secure the long-term health of the Arizona Trail.

An organization's mission is its foundation and provides direction for organizational development.

#### **The Mission**

*The mission of the Arizona Trail Association is to protect, maintain, enhance, promote and sustain the Arizona Trail as a unique encounter with the land.*

The Association achieves this mission by:

- Developing and allocating financial and organizational resources to maintain the Trail and its unique features;
- Recruiting, training and encouraging volunteers to monitor, maintain and enhance portions of the Trail;
- Directing resources toward conservation corps and professional trail builders when priority projects are beyond the ability of volunteers;
- Providing training, education and technological tools to encourage stewardship of the Trail;
- Promoting the Trail and the unique lands through which it passes to outdoor enthusiasts, local communities and the general public – locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;
- Educating the public on the Trail's proper use and the importance of stewardship;
- Protecting the Trail by playing an active role in the public scoping and commenting process on proposed projects that could impact the Trail, its resources and gateway communities;
- Engaging youth to experience the Trail and participants as its stewards;
- Working closely with gateway communities to promote the Trail and take pride in their role as an integrate part of the Arizona Trail experience; and
- Strengthening partnerships with county, state and federal governmental agencies.

The five objectives stated in the Association's Mission Statement – to protect, maintain, enhance, promote and sustain the Arizona Trail – organize the Mission Responsibilities of this Strategic Plan.

## **Background**

The Arizona Trail Association was formed in 1994 to support the efforts by Dale Shewalter and others to build a continuous trail across the State of Arizona.

In October 1995, the Arizona Trail Association, along with five other Arizona Trail Partners, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which established a framework upon which the Arizona Trail Partners and the ATA would cooperatively plan for the development, operation and maintenance of the Arizona Trail. In addition, four of these Trail Partners simultaneously signed an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) that established, funded and detailed the responsibilities of the Arizona Trail Steward – the individual responsible for leading the development of the Trail. Since 1995, the MOU and IGA have been amended twice. The first amendment extended the funding of the Trail Steward, while the second amendment transferred the duties and responsibilities of the Trail Steward to the ATA. Along with the second amendment, Arizona State Parks signed a contract with ATA that transferred all remaining Trail Partner funding and any future Trail Partner funding from Arizona State Parks to the ATA. The transfer of these responsibilities has made the success of the ATA critical to the attainment of the Vision of the Arizona Trail.

In 2007, the Arizona Legislature designed it a State Scenic Trail, and in 2009 Congress designated it a National Scenic Trail. This prestigious status brings with it not only the benefits of having a National Scenic Trail Administrator, under the auspices of the United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service, but also increases the profile of the Trail. The designation also allows the ATA to participate as a member of the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS), a cooperative group of nonprofit trail organizations and federal partners.

In 2010, the ATA added a Gateway Community program to build stronger relationships with the 33 towns located near the Trail. Realizing that many trail users' experiences are linked to the people they meet along the way, the ATA has worked diligently to help towns embrace their opportunities as "trail towns" and tap into the lucrative outdoor recreation market that has literally been built in their backyards. Gateway community signs, maps, events and other outreach efforts are benefiting many towns throughout Arizona.

In 2011, the final mile of the Arizona Trail was completed, realizing the dream that began 30 years ago. With the "build" component of the ATA's mission accomplished, the organization directed resources toward the other vital parts of the mission.

In 2012, the ATA added a youth outreach and education program to encourage more youth to connect with the Trail and inspire them to become its stewards. Called the "Seeds of Stewardship," youth from 4<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade are provided experiences on the Trail up to five times per year through a combination of experience, education and stewardship based outings. The ATA is committed to connecting future generations with the Trail and Arizona's wild landscapes.

## **Functional Needs**

In developing this long-range plan, the Strategic Planning Committee identified various functional needs that the ATA must be prepared to meet. They include:

- **Volunteer Coordination**  
Even with optimum resource development, it is likely that continued construction, maintenance and monitoring of the trail, as well as enhanced membership services, will require the expansion of both trail and administrative volunteer support. Better volunteer coordination is essential to meeting this task.
- **Membership Recruitment**  
Members are critically important to the success of the ATA and the Arizona Trail, since they provide a source of vital leadership personnel, volunteers and income. ATA should strive to recruit and retain adequate levels of membership into the thousands, to safeguard the financial and political future of the Trail. Greater membership services and programs will be required to sustain members' interest and participation, even if they elect not to take part in construction, maintenance and administrative projects.
- **Protection**  
Advocacy work is needed to strengthen relationships with partner organizations, agencies and the general public to help protect the Trail from development and/or negative impacts to natural resources that define the Arizona Trail experience. Members of the legal community should also be engaged to help guide organizational decisions.
- **Promotion & Publicity**  
A fundamental mission of the ATA is to promote the Arizona Trail. The Association's organizational structure must ensure that this responsibility is met by allocating appropriate resources.
- **Financial Resources**  
As the focus of the Association moves from the construction phase of the Arizona Trail to its operation, maintenance, protection, promotion and advocacy, dollars currently available through our public agency partners' budgets and existing grant sources are likely to diminish or disappear. The ATA must meet this challenge by expanding its financial resources through increased membership, enhanced marketing opportunities, and comprehensive fundraising through a diversity of funding sources and mechanisms.

## **Mission Responsibility #1: To Protect...**

Building, maintaining and promoting the Arizona Trail is not sufficient. Unless the Trail can be protected against extrinsic threats, the Trail may fail in its objectives or be physically compromised by changes in land use or agency priorities. Protecting the Arizona Trail from these types of threats is the unique role and responsibility of the Arizona Trail Association.

Strategic Goal: Take a lead role in protecting the Trail as a premier trail experience.

- Assist agencies in securing and maintaining viable, formal, legal access through all private lands, federal inholdings and state trust lands to ensure that the corridor is adequate to protect scenic, cultural, ecological and acoustic values of the Trail by November, 2018.
- Identify areas where additional protection of the Trail is the highest priority and develop strategies for long-term protection by June, 2017.
- Communicate and collaborate with project proponents to mitigate potential impacts to the Trail and strive for a net gain to trail resources.

Strategic Goal: Continue a strong working relationship with the US Forest Service and hold the agency accountable for its responsibilities as the administering agency of the Arizona National Scenic Trail to assure long-term protection and maintenance.

- Work with the AZNST Administrator to ensure the Arizona National Scenic Trail is in compliance with national laws and standards for National Scenic Trails, as approved by the Chief of the US Forest Service.
- Support development of the Comprehensive Plan & ensure that the Nature & Purpose Statement reflects the ATA's mission and vision by July, 2017.

Strategic Goal: Protect the trail from wildfires through coordination with local, state and federal entities to prevent and mitigate wildfire impacts.

Strategic Goal: Identify opportunities for increasing the width of the right-of-way on State Trust Land from 15 feet up to ½-mile or more by December, 2019.

Strategic Goal: Develop a Resiliency Model to address the challenges of climate change and what it means for the Arizona Trail by December, 2018.

Strategic Goal: Raise awareness of the Trail so it becomes a treasured local resource with a strong following of users, supporters and friends committed to its protection.

## **Mission Responsibility #2: To Maintain...**

Building and maintaining the Arizona Trail is why the Arizona Trail Association exists. Although the Trail was officially completed in 2011, there is much work to be done for the Trail to meet National Scenic Trail standards, especially where existing trails were designated as part of the AZT but were not built with sustainability in mind. This section of the Strategic Plan addresses the challenges of Trail maintenance.

Strategic Goal: Strengthen, enhance and elevate the Volunteer program and stewardship experience.

- Provide training opportunities and incentives to build a world-class volunteer corps of engaged, qualified and inspired stewards by January, 2017.
- Reorganize segments into more manageable lengths, and find a balance between individuals and groups as stewards by January, 2018.
- Recruit stewards proximate to their segments, whenever possible.
- Collaborate with at least 5 hiking clubs, 4 outdoor advocacy groups, 3 colleges, 4 cycling and running teams, and 4 employers to increase volunteerism by December, 2017.
- Participate in 12 community engagement events throughout the state annually with the focused goal of volunteer recruitment.

Strategic Goal: Trail Director and Trail Operations Committee to identify project priority list criteria, making the process more objective than subjective by March, 2017.

Strategic Goal: Adopt trail construction and maintenance standards and guidelines specific to Arizona and its various ecological regions by January, 2018.

Strategic Goal: Oversee, direct and help identify funding opportunities for paid conservation corps members to conduct maintenance on the entire Trail by September, 2018.

Strategic Goal: Develop the Remote Trail Maintenance Task Force concept throughout the Trail by engaging at least 80 individuals per year by December, 2017, increasing by 10% per year for the next five years.

### **Mission Responsibility #3: To Enhance...**

The Arizona Trail was completed by utilizing existing trails and designating dirt roads as the Trail to link segments of intentionally constructed singletrack together. Alignment with dirt roads with motorized interface is inconsistent with a National Scenic Trail experience and the vision of the ATA. In addition to replacing dirt roads with new trail construction, the Arizona Trail Association is also dedicated to enhancing the trail experience through trailheads and amenities; interpretive signs; navigational products; and educational opportunities. This section of the Strategic Plan addresses the challenges of Trail enhancement.

Strategic Goal: Increase number of miles as a sustainable singletrack trail.

- Inventory all non-singletrack segments and prioritize reroutes by February, 2018.
- Evaluate non-sustainable sections of the trail by August, 2018 and make recommendations to repair, or abandon and reroute.

Strategic Goal: Develop water resources in the interest of trail user safety.

- Identify areas of greatest need for water sources by December, 2016.
- Identify water development projects based on historic water source rehabilitation and new water source development by January, 2018.
- Develop agreements with Arizona Game & Fish Department and organizations committed to improving wildlife water sources by December, 2018.

Strategic Goal: Build, designate or enhance existing wilderness bypass trails to encourage mountain bike use on the entire Arizona Trail.

- Identify areas of greatest improvement needed, especially along paved and dirt road segments by May, 2017.
- Install signs designating formal bypass routes by June, 2019.

Strategic Goal: Develop a vision for aesthetics of trail signs and amenities, including trailheads; campsites and/or recommended camping areas; shade ramadas and other infrastructure; junctions; and reassurance signage by December, 2017.

Strategic Goal: Document historic events and trail values on/near the Trail to further an individual's connection to the land and the Trail by February, 2017.

Strategic Goal: Define minimum requirements for proposed connector trails to be part of the Arizona Trail network by June, 2020.

Strategic Goal: Collaborate with county, state and federal agencies and other trail organizations to provide input on land treatment activities, and identify opportunities for enhancement.

#### **Mission Responsibility #4: To Promote...**

Protecting, maintaining and enhancing the Arizona Trail is just the beginning. For the Trail to achieve the Vision of engaging individuals and connecting communities, it must become a household term with widespread acknowledgement and appreciation. A principal mission responsibility of the Arizona Trail Association is to promote the Arizona Trail to those who may not be aware of it and to educate them about the Trail and the lands and ecosystems through which it passes. The challenges of promoting the Trail are the focus of this section of the Strategic Plan.

Strategic Goal: Raise awareness of the Arizona Trail – locally, nationally and internationally.

Strategic Goal: Continue to enhance the Gateway Community Partnership program.

- Maintain a Gateway Community Advisory Council that meets at least twice per year by December, 2016.
- Encourage community participation in the organization of Arizona Trail appreciation events within gateway communities, growing the total number of events from 5 in 2016 to 7 events in 2017, 9 events in 2018, 11 events in 2019, and 13 events in 2020.
- Facilitate the installation of Gateway Community signs within every community by January, 2020.

Strategic Goal: Increase youth and family engagement in experiencing the Arizona National Scenic Trail and developing future stewardship.

- Engage the Boy Scouts of America in 6 stewardship projects throughout the state in 2017, increasing by 20% annually over the next five years.
- Secure long-term funding for the Seeds of Stewardship program, and increase the ATA's ability to engage youth in the enjoyment and stewardship of the Trail by December, 2018.
- Research educational credits, scholarship opportunities and paid internships for youth who regularly participate in Arizona Trail activities by March, 2017.

Strategic Goal: Engage more diverse audiences through bilingual signs, education and publications.

Strategic Goal: Partner with the Arizona Office of Tourism to make the Arizona Trail an integral component of their marketing efforts by October, 2017.

Strategic Goal: Develop a monthly calendar featuring Arizona Trail photographs in collaboration with another entity that can effectively print, market, distribute and sell the calendars for calendar year 2018.

Strategic Goal: Research options for Arizona Trail visitor centers statewide by January, 2019.

Strategic Goal: Develop itineraries for a variety of user groups (hikers, runners, mountain bikers and equestrians) to increase accessibility to the Trail and appeal to a broader audience by January, 2018.

Strategic Goal: Increase Social Media presence through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other online platforms, growing our community by 15% annually.

## **Mission Responsibility #5: To Sustain...**

Unless the ATA can create awareness and build organizational structure that can sustain the Trail over the long term, the Association may fail in its objectives. Without a viable organization to support, protect and advocate for the Arizona Trail, the long-term sustainability of the Trail itself is in doubt. Sustaining the Trail and the ATA is the focus of this section of the Strategic Plan.

Strategic Goal: Expand volunteerism.

- Increase the total number of volunteer hours by 20% to 21,600 hours donated annually, with a 10% increase annually over the next five years.

Strategic Goal: Expand membership.

- Increase membership retention by 10%, from 60% to 70% in 2017, and maintain retention rate over the next five years.
- Increase total number of members from 1,050 to 1,500 by December, 2019.

Strategic Goal: Develop the ATA's Advisory Council by December, 2016 and engage ATA members to support the ATA's goals and objectives.

Strategic Goal: Maintain a diversified funding program, with elements such as membership, product sales, philanthropic donations, bequests, foundation/private grants, business partners, and challenge cost share agreements with state and federal agencies so that no single element provides more than 20% of the organization's funding.

Strategic Goal: Engage State and County officials to secure financial support for the Trail by December, 2018.

Strategic Goal: Develop a relationship with the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) as a committed partner in the funding and promotion of the Trail by December, 2019.

Strategic Goal: Conduct periodic surveys to identify WHO our user groups are, WHAT their needs are, and HOW they use the trail. Use data to evaluate needs and inform long-term decisions on trail management and development by April, 2018.

Strategic Goal: Sustain the ATA's human resources (staff and volunteers) by expanding Board and Committee representation to maintain a diversity of members in geography, age, trail interest, and community connections; provide rewarding and meaningful opportunities; provide training for personal and professional development; recruit, retain and reward volunteers; and offer competitive compensation to recruit professional staff members.

Strategic Goal: Create a list of criteria for justification to be able to tap financial reserves by December, 2016.

Strategic Goal: Evaluate opportunities for fundraising for multi-year campaign(s) for large-scale priority projects by July, 2017.

Strategic Goal: Maintain and enhance ATA's grant writing ability by increasing grant revenue by 20% per year over the next five years.

Strategic Goal: Coordinate a comprehensive Economic Impact Study to document the value the Trail contributes to Arizona's economy with a completed report available by December,

2017.

Strategic Goal: Develop a plan to collaborate with municipalities and land management agencies to integrate the Trail into Master Plans by December, 2020.