

FORGING NEW TRAILS

**A STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR THE PERIOD 2008 TO 2013**

SQUAM LAKES NATURAL SCIENCE CENTER



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A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE SQUAM LAKES NATURAL SCIENCE CENTER

The Board of Trustees of the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center (SLNSC) adopted this strategic plan on May 17, 2008. It is intended to define the Center's future and the organizational priorities and resources required to achieve the organization's goals. We welcome comments by all stakeholders.



INTRODUCTION

The Squam Lakes Natural Science Center, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located in Holderness, New Hampshire, accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), and serving more than 75,000 visitors annually. We are governed by a Board of Trustees elected by dues-paying members. Major assets as of 2008 include our 200-acre campus, an endowment of \$3.3 million, 24 active trustees, a permanent paid staff of 19, a dedicated volunteer corps of more than 200 individuals and groups, 1,700 member families, and a museum collection of hands-on exhibits, live animals, trails, and buildings.



This Strategic Plan reaffirms our mission and sets forth a vision for our future. It defines our niche in the marketplace. It asserts our values and identifies those distinguishing assets and competencies that set us apart from competitors. Building on past strategic plans, it identifies ongoing institutional priorities to ensure our success. Finally, it sets a course with specific goals to guide our future.

THE MISSION

To advance understanding of ecology* by exploring New Hampshire's natural world.

As the complexity of our natural world and the effects of human activity become more apparent, we believe it is important to provide education about the principles of natural science and ecology, so that those we interact with become stewards of the natural world and are able to make informed decisions about environmental issues. Our programs encompass the broad theme of the dynamic nature of the Earth's environment and the role of humans as one piece of the whole, through the prism of New Hampshire's natural world.

Current research shows that ecological awareness in future generations begins with regular, direct, unstructured childhood experiences in the natural world. To this end we strive to address the unique interests and education needs of children, while also educating and satisfying the interests of adults.

* Ecology: The relationship between organisms and their biological and physical environment.



A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Through experiencing the exhibits and programs of the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center, visitors of all ages will have a demonstrably greater understanding of ecology. Children and young adults, in particular, will be excited by their experiences and will acquire a profound, lifelong respect and appreciation for the natural world.

Our staff and volunteers will effectively promote ecological awareness in their interactions with our visitors and program participants. The public and our peers will see the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center as the premier environmental education site in the region. We will enjoy robust program participation, increased exhibit trail admissions, and the enthusiastic generosity of donors, resulting in fiscal stability and deliberate and appropriate growth.

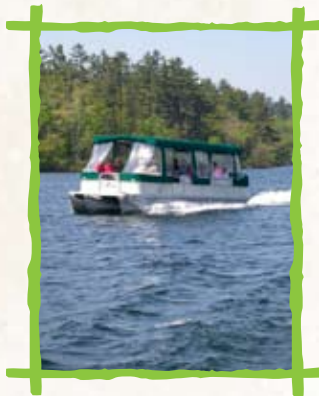


Ed Sharon

OUR VALUES

Nature

Nature is at the core of all we do. We value natural communities and ecological systems at local, regional, and global scales and celebrate the interconnectedness and biodiversity of the natural world.



Learning

We believe in positive outdoor experiences where learning is fun, engaging, and enduring. We recognize the intrinsic value of maintaining native wildlife and providing learning opportunities through direct observation, inquiry, interaction, and wonder.

Commitment

All operations should function with a passionate pledge to mission, quality, guest needs, overall improvement, “green” practices, and fiscal responsibility.

Excellence

We endeavor to operate with the highest standards and levels of professionalism, as an enduring, premier institution garnering the respect of peers. We value accuracy and authenticity of our information and programs. We honor our past as we encourage dynamic, but appropriate growth.

People

We value strong relationships within the human community. We strive to be welcoming to all, while particularly offering a safe, nurturing environment for children, where authentic experiences result in meaningful differences in people’s lives. We always seek to cultivate an atmosphere of respect for those who work, visit, or live here.



ASSETS AND COMPETENCIES

These assets and competencies of the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center differentiate it from any other facility in New England. The preservation of these assets and competencies is essential to our continued success.

ASSETS

Place

We are fortunate to have an exceptional location in the center of New Hampshire, close to Interstate 93. Our 200-acre campus, located near the Squam Lakes and surrounded by mountains, includes wooded hills, grassy meadows, wetlands, ponds, streams, and access to lakes. Excellent exhibits, trails, gardens, guided lake tours, and buildings support our educational mission.



Collections

We have educational exhibits and a native New Hampshire wildlife collection, which is maintained according to AZA standards. With an emphasis on New Hampshire's natural world, this collection serves as a primary visitor educational attraction in support of our mission.



Ed Sharon

People

Many dedicated people contribute to our success as an outstanding and engaging educational facility. A knowledgeable staff leads the way in operating and maintaining the facility and in educating our audiences. An enthusiastic volunteer corps assists the staff, including providing enlightening and entertaining education for our visitors and program participants. An engaged Board of Trustees provides leadership for continued success and growth. Finally, a devoted membership and generous donors are part of the larger supportive community that keeps the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center a vibrant and financially healthy organization.

COMPETENCIES

Education

We teach broad ecology concepts by experiencing live, native animals first-hand. Natural history awareness, appreciation, and understanding is fostered by skilled professional naturalists who have an average tenure of over 10 years. Educational programs focus on experiential learning using all five senses. Audiences have multiple opportunities to explore and interact with the natural world on the exhibit and other trails, and through programs and classes that utilize the extensive collective experience of the education staff and trained volunteers.

Operations

We provide effective learning experiences for our visitors and program participants using thoughtful, well prepared educational programs and well maintained grounds and exhibits. Our Gift Shop provides our visitors with high quality mission-related merchandise. We operate in accordance with a disciplined business plan, which controls costs and optimizes revenue streams. People regard membership and admission fees as a good value. Our live animal collection is maintained according to the highest ethical standards. Our loyal members enjoy seeing their children and grandchildren engaged with the Center; they know the Center will fulfill their sense of discovery.



Development:

We succeed in engaging and motivating, over time, a consistent group of capable supporters who share our dedication to our Mission. We assure these supporters that their investment does, and will continue to, enhance our community.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

I. CONTINUING INITIATIVES

In order to maintain and improve upon the differentiating assets and competencies of the Center, and building on the experience gained and program evaluations conducted in past years, the Center will emphasize the following aspects of its operation.



1. Education

The Science Center affirms that:

- The education programs are at the heart of the Center's pursuit of its mission.
- We maintain our commitment to the support of our live animal exhibits.
- The primary focus of our educational programs is and should continue to be children while also providing meaningful educational opportunities for adults.
- The educational focus will be expanded to more fully address the broad theme of the dynamic nature of the earth's environment and the role that humans play, as participants and co-habitants with other forms of life.
- Our program focus will remain on the New Hampshire natural world.
- The Center will educate without engaging in explicit political action.



2. Operations

We will develop a long-range business model (rolling five-year business plan), which will support our strategic goals. The plan will consider the capacity of our physical resources to accommodate visitors, the capacity of our services to generate income in support of operations, and the philanthropy of individuals, foundations, and corporations.

3. Human Resources

We will attract and retain quality staff and volunteers, provide for effective training and development of staff and volunteers, assure that human resources are properly matched to our strategic goals, and attract dedicated and supportive trustees.

4. Program Evaluation

We will evaluate education programs regularly, including internal and external inputs. Evaluations will maintain and improve the relevance and quality of our offerings and identify opportunities for expanding programs, exhibits, and revenue sources.

5. Technology

We will advance our mission by using new technologies to enhance education delivery and expand marketing and outreach.



Ed Sharon

6. Science Connection

We will identify opportunities to associate with cutting edge science through programs such as: scientist in residence, visiting lecturers, and collaborations with educational, science, and research institutions.

7. Development

We will enhance our organizational capability to attract and motivate younger supporters to complement our loyal donor base. We will extend our development plan to align with our long-range education program priorities, capital improvement plan and business plan.



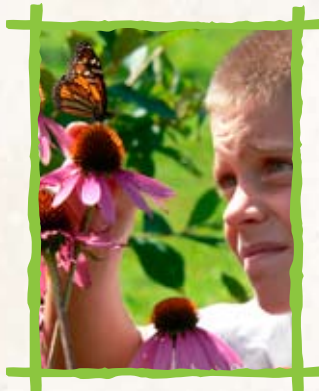
8. Capital Improvement

We will keep a long range Capital Improvement Plan in order to maintain the quality of the physical plant and to plan and budget future major capital improvement needs.

9. Green Practices

We will strive to practice what we preach by adopting sustainable (green) practices in all aspects of our operations.

II. NEW INITIATIVES



1. School Programs

Our school education programs form the core of our educational mission. During the last few years, we have seen changes in many schools' use of our facilities and programs. We will research and understand the reasons for the changes and will look for new opportunities that we can capture to expand our services to schools, teachers, and students in the ever-changing school environment.

2. Early Childhood Education

We are committed to providing childhood education and will explore and develop new initiatives to extend that commitment to encompass even younger children. To that end, we will evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Nature Pre-school, by ourselves or with a partner organization, and will also consider other early childhood education programs.

3. Expanding Educational Horizon

We will plan for the creation of a **new theme**, focusing on the dynamic nature of the natural world and the role of humans in it. For example, the theme might incorporate the concept of a "walk through time" to depict the changing world in the context of geologic time, among other elements.

We will develop at least one **new major attraction**/exhibit within the next five years. The new attraction/exhibit may or may not be a part of the new theme. One example might be an Underwater Squam exhibit.



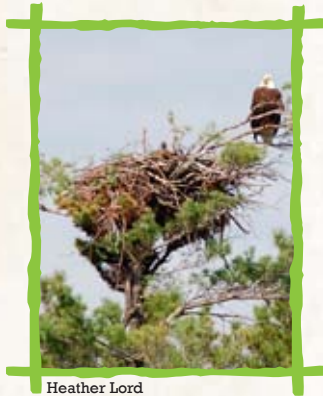
STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of goals and initiatives will be accomplished using five separate but interrelated planning tools that are updated annually: the Project Implementation Plan, the Operational Business Model, the Capital Improvement Plan, the Development Plan, and the Marketing Plan.



Project Implementation Plan:

Following the adoption of this Strategic Plan, and annually prior to the beginning of each fiscal year, the Executive Director will present an Implementation Plan to the Board with specific project strategies, timelines and projected staff and resource needs and allocations.



Heather Lord

Operational Business Model:

The Operational Business Model will project operating budgets over a traveling five-year horizon and will model both revenue and expense streams to generate a long-term balanced budget projection.

Capital Improvement Plan:

The Capital Improvement Plan will identify and prioritize projected capital improvement projects over a progressive five- to ten-year time frame.

Development Plan:

The Development Plan will identify major fund-raising goals and needs for the same five-year time span from planned gifts, major gifts, memberships, annual fund, special campaigns, and other external funding sources.

Marketing Plan:

The Marketing Plan will identify specific advertising, outreach, and communications strategies to achieve the goals of the plan.

Together these tools will help us Forge New Trails

