

Buffalo Audubon Society Strategic Plan 2013-2015

The Buffalo Audubon Society, with headquarters in North Java, New York, has approved a new strategic plan for the next three years. Since its beginnings in 1909, Buffalo Audubon has grown to provide stewardship for our seven nature preserves and our nature center, Beaver Meadow Audubon Center. In shaping the strategic plan, Buffalo Audubon Society reached out to members, volunteers, partner organizations and community leaders to provide input and perspective about the organizations past and potential future impact on the Western New York region. The planning team also drew from the National Audubon Society's strategic direction to ensure alignment with its broad, conservation-focused plans. Buffalo Audubon's Society's strategic plan for 2013 through 2015 sets forth strategies in the following five areas:

Education: Provide experiences in nature that are educational and inspirational

Conservation: Strengthen our centers and preserves.

Advocacy: Influence personal and collective decisions to better protect and enhance the natural world, with a special emphasis on birds.

Diversity: Increase the diversity of those engaged with and by Buffalo Audubon, with a special focus on families, youth, and urban communities.

Linkage: Link our work to regional, state-wide, national and international programs.

About the Buffalo Audubon Society:

The Buffalo Audubon Society has a 100 year history of excellence in environmental education and stewardship. We provide more nature education than any other organization in Western New York, and we play a critical role in the preservation of our rich natural resources. We engage in exciting collaborations and develop innovative ways to expand our reach and impact across the region such as our collaboration with Audubon New York, which brought the For the Birds! program to Niagara County.

We maintain and conserve seven nature preserves spanning the diverse array of ecosystems found in our region, from the suburban forest of our North Tonawanda wetlands to the unique and fascinating refuge of Allenberg bog, with its wild orchids and dense thickets of rhododendrons.

Our flagship Beaver Meadow headquarters is a 384-acre natural preserve that features its namesake beaver meadow, glacial kettle ponds, wetlands with a boardwalk trail, wooded uplands, meadows, a hawk watch, an arboretum, and eight miles of marked and groomed trails.

Our trained naturalists and dedicated volunteers lead nature center tours, give presentations in classrooms, provide curricula and hands-on-learning kits, and allow individuals to experience first-hand the beauty and wonder of our natural heritage. Thousands of children visit Beaver Meadow each year to snowshoe, study pond life, explore the woods, and develop their personal bond with nature.

Strategic Planning Process:

Throughout the year 2012, Buffalo Audubon Society (BAS) directors and staff engaged with volunteers, community stakeholders and peers through a series of moderated discussions to share our perspectives on how Buffalo Audubon currently touches our lives, and our visions for its future. These exploratory conversations laid the foundation for the strategic planning committee, comprised of BAS board and staff leadership, to develop a framework for clearly articulating the initiatives that will drive our mission forward and bring Buffalo Audubon closer to fulfilling its vision of creating a culture of conservation in Western New York.

Vision:

We seek to shape a culture in Western New York where nature is a common interest of all – where people learn to appreciate, understand, and actively protect birds and the natural world. As we inspire others to join us in strengthening this culture of conservation, our region's irreplaceable biodiversity will be more highly valued and vigorously protected.

Mission:

To promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the natural world through education and stewardship.

Strategies

- Education Provide experiences in nature that are educational and inspirational
- Conservation Strengthen our centers and preserves.
- Advocacy Influence personal and collective decisions to better protect and enhance the natural world.
- Diversity Increase the diversity of those engaged with and by Buffalo Audubon, with a special focus on families, youth, and urban communities.
- Linkage Link our work to regional, state-wide, national and international programs.

Strategy Area: Education

Action Plan: Provide experiences in nature that are educational and inspirational

2013

- Conduct assessment of current education programs; and offerings from other Audubon Chapters.
- Reach out to Middle and High School educators to assess interest in/barriers to Audubon-infused programming.
- Identify funding sources to support an additional naturalist position.
- Identify a major national opportunity to support programming at centers and preserves.

2014

- Establish Citizen Science opportunities within educational programming informed by response from Middle and High School educators.
- Assess readiness for the pursuit of a national proposal.
- Pursue funding sources to support additional naturalist position.

2015

- Have in place a sustainable stream of unrestricted funds to support education and conservation programs.
- Submit a national proposal linking centers and preserves with educational opportunity.

Strategy Area: Conservation

Action Plans: Strengthen our Centers and Preserves

2013

- Collect, review and assess habitat management plans from area preserves to devise a model for BAS.
- Convene a meeting with peer organizations to determine broad outlines for a Habitat Management Plan.
- Gather data to form a framework for decision making, and identify short and long- term goals for the role of Beaver Meadow, and the actions necessary to achieve them.

2014

- Formalize a Habitat Management Plan for BMAC.
- Determine criteria for assessing other preserves, and apply BMAC process where appropriate to create habitat management plans.
- Formalize a Beaver Meadow Strategic Plan, including goals and actions.
- Establish a business development committee to conduct a market analysis of preserves and develop marketing materials informed by analysis.

2015

- Utilize collected data to actively market BAS preserves, increasing visibility and recognition, and engaging new audiences.
- Investigate policies and procedures employed by National Audubon and other environmental peers for the acquisition and acceptance of additional, gifted properties; develop a land/easement monitoring policy.

Strategy Area: Advocacy**Action Plans: Influence personal and collective decisions to better protect and enhance the natural world.**

2013

- Establish role as recognized environmental education advocates with WNY environmental community.
- Conduct assessment of environmental advocacy issues relevant to WNY and to BAS habitats and ecosystems.
- Identify best practices to empower stakeholders to become advocates.

2014

- Expand environmental education advocacy role.
- Identify issues most connected to BAS' mission, and become primary advocates.
- Employ best practices to empower stakeholders and peers to drive forward the advocacy role/presence of BAS.
- Brand advocacy messages to be recognizable by recipients and communicate positions on a regular, frequent basis.

2015

- Continue and establish strategic partnerships with Audubon Chapters, Audubon New York and National Audubon to increase visibility of BAS' advocacy.
- Explore programmatic opportunities to build upon our growth as advocates.
- Further increase and expand BAS' national advocacy role.

Strategy Area: Diversity**Action Plans: Increase the diversity of those engaged with and by Buffalo Audubon, with a special focus on families, youth, and urban communities.**

2013

- Identify and collect best practices for working with diverse urban audiences.
- Assess use of technology/social media by peer organizations and collaborators.
- Analyze current diversity of BAS supporters and participants.

2014

- Foster collaborations with urban/diverse organizations as a gateway to new audiences.
- Assess feasibility of a Buffalo or Niagara Falls "satellite" location.
- Identify best practices for use of technology to engage people with nature.

2015

- Fully utilize social media/technology for citizen science/partnerships.
- Based on feasibility assessment, decide whether to establish an urban program satellite.

Strategy Area: Linkage**Action Plans: Link our work to regional, state-wide, national and international programs.**

2013

- Identify National Audubon practices that can be successfully translated and employed at the local level.
- Establish role on National Eastern Flyway committees.

- Follow migratory birds that visit WNY to identify connections throughout the Western Hemisphere.

2014

- Follow migratory routes to other Audubon chapters and explore potential opportunities.
- Employ National Audubon practices at local level.
- Identify green practices to be carried out locally to promote mitigation of climate change effects.

2015

- Evaluate success of National Audubon practices, “tweak” as necessary.
- Solidify “migratory sister cities” programs with partner Audubon chapters or other international organizations as deemed appropriate.
- Connect green practices with larger scale efforts carried out at the National Level

Envisioned Strategic Projects: 2013-2015

Beaver Meadow

The Beaver Meadow Audubon Center will be a showcase for our programs and activities and an incubator where exciting projects are envisioned, developed, implemented and tested. It will be a resource for the community and a locus for high-quality education, conservation and advocacy. “Tech Touchstone:” cutting-edge technology will be integrated across all of our programs.

The Niagara River Corridor Important Bird Area

The Niagara River supports one of the world’s most spectacular concentrations of gulls, waterfowl and migratory songbirds. The Niagara River corridor area is also home to over 1 million people, and is a critical stopping point on the Atlantic flyway. “Tech Touchstone:” Citizens will use cell phones and the internet to monitor bird populations and habitat along the Niagara River Corridor.

North Tonawanda Wetlands

Between 1995 and 2008 Buffalo Audubon and partner organizations banded together to preserve over 40 acres of wildlife habitat embedded within the community of North Tonawanda. We will work to link the children, students, families, schools, businesses and neighborhoods of North Tonawanda preserve to create a Bird Friendly Community. “Tech Touchstone:” An online ‘virtual wetlands’ will act as a hub to reinforce education, conservation and advocacy centered at the preserve.

Lights Out Buffalo

An engaged corps of urban naturalists will monitor bird collisions with buildings, work with building owners to implement simple bird-friendly actions that reduce bird collisions, and will become a core group of volunteers who can assist in bringing Audubon programs to diverse communities in Buffalo and across Western New York. “Tech Touchstone:” Non-birders take pictures of injured birds and upload them to a web-based bird identification resources and ‘tag’ buildings that are bird collision hot spots.

Reaching all of the goals outlined in this plan will require Buffalo Audubon Society to challenge itself as an organization. In order to build the capacity needed to achieve these strategic goals, the Staff and Board of Directors will strive to:

- Boost resources by exploring new, sustainable revenue streams and diversifying funding sources
- Integrating technology into our existing activities, and utilizing it to engage new and diverse audiences
- Strengthen our communications and marketing, both as environmental educators and as a tourism destination, by increasing online presence, promoting Beaver Meadow as a community resource and regional destination, and increasing stewardship of school groups and other clients.
- Expand our volunteer corps through strengthened board leadership and governance, the establishment of a volunteer and membership committee, development of an “Urban Volunteer Corps” and a broader array of volunteer opportunities – they make our work possible!
- Strengthen strategic partnerships that will drive us toward our goals while maximizing capacity and increasing visibility and relevance within the environmental community.
- Develop a culture of evaluation and continuous quality improvement through the establishment of measurement tools and regular impact assessment.