

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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FY2024 - FY2028

Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SAWS is an award-winning organization setting standards of excellence that inspire, connect, and equip people to steward wild landscapes. To best achieve our purpose, SAWS will accomplish **1) Resource stewardship, 2) Transformative opportunity, 3) Access and awareness, and 4) Sustainability** to best overcome threats of resource degradation, societal disconnection, limited development opportunities, and inequities in access and safety to the outdoors.

**GOAL 1** outlines three outcomes with eight strategies to build stronger stewardship throughout our region by bolstering and diversifying our crew, ranger, specialist, and volunteer programs.

**GOAL 2** identifies three outcomes with ten strategies to invest in staff development and growth, fostering meaningful connections to the outdoors.

**GOAL 3** outlines three outcomes with eleven strategies to build authentic partnerships with individuals and organizations across Southern Appalachia, enhancing access and awareness of wild public land resources.

**GOAL 4** identifies two outcomes with seven strategies to long-term organizational sustainability with foundations of operation and financial strength.

SAWS developed internal metrics for each strategy to clearly communicate to staff and the Board of Directors how the organization will measure and track success over time. Each strategy has at least one accompanying metric with a total of seventy-one individual metrics.

We have a strong reputation throughout our region, gaining national attention and accolades for our distinct work in stewardship and partnership. We attract and retain talented experts and hard-working conservation leaders, uniquely positioning us to take strategic steps to realize our mission and build a world where wilderness is bountiful, cared for, and valued by all.



## ABOUT SAWS

Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) is an award-winning conservation non-profit organization setting standards of excellence *that inspire, connect, and equip people to steward wild landscapes*. At SAWS, we believe that taking care of our wild public lands and connecting them to the next generation matters. We believe it is our shared responsibility to help create equity in access to the outdoors and to educate, train, and develop a skilled workforce to be the next conservation stewards and conservation leaders.

Founded in 2010, SAWS was born from a need for stewardship. We focus our efforts on wilderness and wild public lands throughout the southern Appalachian Mountains and maintain our headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina. We regularly work across 7 states including North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee and respond on a case-by-case basis to assistance in other locations. Our work primarily occurs with communities and partners on national forests and parks.

We are passionate and knowledgeable about wild public lands in our backyard. Through stewardship jobs and volunteerism, workforce development, education and training, partnerships, and community engagement, we are working to take care of wild public lands, provide transformational experiences, build wilderness relevancy, and increase equitable access to the outdoors, to build a world where wilderness is bountiful, cared for, and valued by all.



# PURPOSE

## VISION

A world where wilderness is bountiful, cared for, and valued by all.

## MISSION

SAWS sets standards of excellence that inspire, connect, and equip people to steward wild landscapes.

## VALUES

SAWS is a premier wilderness organization with **STELLAR** values:

**Stewardship** - *Wilderness and wild public lands have value, and we share responsibility in caring for those lands and for the ecological benefits they provide for current and future generations.*

**Transformation** - *We build the next generation of conservation stewards by providing jobs and meaningful, transformational outdoor experiences.*

**Equity** - *We all share responsibility for creating equity and working to disrupt systems that are unjust.*

**Leadership** - *We strive to deliver stewardship excellence in all facets of our organization.*

**Learning** - *Sharing knowledge and offering skills-based training for employees and partners will help revitalize stewardship in our region and the country.*

**Access** - *Safe, inclusive access to the outdoors is a basic right, and access to meaningful and transformative outdoor places, experiences, and careers must be equitable.*

**Respect** - *The foundation of our relationships. SAWS is more successful when we build respectful relationships to share capacity, work to understand mutual objectives, and support the needs of the communities.*



## RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Take care of wilderness



## TRANSFORMATIVE OPPORTUNITY

Inspire + connect outside



## ACCESS AND AWARENESS

Build inclusive partnerships



## SUSTAINABILITY

Organization resiliency

## STRATEGIC PLAN AREAS

To best achieve our mission and vision, SAWS will focus on four strategic areas to overcome threats of resource degradation, societal disconnection from the natural environment, limited traditional skills development opportunities, and the inequities in outdoor access and safety that persist across marginalized communities. SAWS will succeed by supporting our staff and volunteers, maintaining a strong and open organizational culture, and investing in the next generation of conservation stewards and leaders.

We have worked hard to build a strong reputation throughout our region, gaining national attention and accolades in recent years for our distinctive work in stewardship and partnership and are thus uniquely positioned to excel in the following strategic areas.

1. Resource stewardship
2. Transformative opportunity
3. Access and awareness
4. Sustainability

SAWS goals, outcomes, and strategies for each strategic area are outlined on the following pages to be accomplished over the next five fiscal years. SAWS Strategic Plan FY2024 - FY2028 provides transparency about how the organization will take steps to fulfill our important mission. Additionally, SAWS developed internal metrics for each identified strategy to be accomplished at the end of each fiscal year with fiscal year target accomplishments.



## GOAL 1: TAKE CARE OF WILD PUBLIC LANDS IN OUR BOOT PRINT

*Support the continued need for stewardship to address the range of challenges facing wilderness and remote, wild public lands through expanded workforce capacity and skill building programs. Build on agency capacity for wilderness stewardship through increasing internal staff, expanding volunteer field options, and fostering safe and inclusive environments that inspire and connect growing diverse communities and individuals.*



## OUTCOME 1.1 WILDERNESS CHARACTER IS PRESERVED ACROSS THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN LANDSCAPE

**Strategy 1.1.1** *Build and sustain capacity for boots-on-the-ground stewardship within the stewardship program.*

**Strategy 1.1.2** *Improve federal wilderness data, information, and reporting systems in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service.*

**Strategy 1.1.3** *The wilderness stewardship community is powered and led by a growing number of demographically diverse individuals that are more representative of communities in the southeast surrounding local community.*

## OUTCOME 1.2. WILD PUBLIC LAND RESOURCE IMPACTS ARE MITIGATED TO IMPROVE TRAIL CONDITIONS AND OTHER RECREATION RESOURCES TO IMPROVE VISITOR EXPERIENCE.

**Strategy 1.2.1** *Backcountry maintenance and construction needs are continually met within SAWS field crew and ranger programs.*

**Strategy 1.2.2.** *Build capacity for SAWS to respond quickly to natural disasters, address resource damage, and quickly open up backcountry trails, campsites, and access points.*

**Strategy 1.2.3.** *Build the support, education, partnership, and infrastructure to safely connect underrepresented communities to wilderness and wilderness stewardship opportunities.*

**OUTCOME 1.3. SAWS IS A RESOURCE IN THE WILDERNESS COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS LONGER-TERM CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS TO WILDERNESS CHARACTER:**

**Strategy 1.3.1** *Provide expert wilderness leadership knowledge and information using the latest research, best practices, and information to inform agency decision making.*

**Strategy 1.3.2.** *SAWS can respond quickly to training needs, equipping partners, and community members to better steward wild landscapes.*

**Strategy 1.3.3.** *Build a robust SAWS volunteer program that offers regular and reliable opportunities to volunteer with our organization.*

**Strategy 1.3.4.** *Host a range of internship opportunities that offer and facilitate diverse and inclusive experiences that enhance knowledge about wilderness and wild public lands.*



## GOAL 2: PROVIDE TRANSFORMATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE OUTDOORS THAT INSPIRE AND CONNECT THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATION STEWARDS

*SAWS offers compelling opportunities for meaningful connection to the outdoors accompanied with strong professional and personal growth. SAWS' staff experiences strong internal culture representing a diverse community of passionate stewards to ensure an ever-growing stream of wilderness-oriented conservation leaders in the Southern Appalachians region and beyond.*



OUTCOME 2.1. BUILD A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE THAT PROVIDES OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES, ATTRACTING AND CREATING LEADERS IN THE WILDERNESS AND CONSERVATION COMMUNITY.

**Strategy 2.1.1.** *Instill a strong sense of purpose and value within all employees throughout the organization, showcasing how each employee's role contributes to the overall mission.*

**Strategy 2.1.2.** *Offer competitive compensation and benefits to support a positive work environment that encourages employees to stay and contribute their best.*

**Strategy 2.1.3.** *Build an employee-centric culture by fostering one that values and prioritizes employee well-being, growth, and respect.*

**Strategy 2.1.4** *Cultivate a culture of continuous improvement where SAWS actively seeks ways to enhance employee experience.*

OUTCOME 2.2. STAFF FEEL EMPOWERED TO TAKE INITIATIVE, LEADERSHIP, AND MAKE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES AND PROGRAM OF WORK.

**Strategy 2.2.1.** *Provide skill development and growth opportunities to better equip staff to be internal or external conservation leaders.*

**Strategy 2.2.2.** *SAWS fosters a sense of autonomy, collaboratively setting clear goals with staff and allowing them to take ownership and feel invested in their work.*

**Strategy 2.2.3.** *SAWS leadership facilitates strong, cross-functional collaboration, offering regular opportunities to receive feedback as well as guidance and communication on performance in program and project execution.*

OUTCOME 2.3. SAWS INVESTS IN CONTINUED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TO GAIN A DEEPER APPRECIATION FOR RACIAL, GENDER, AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND DEVELOP INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES THROUGH INTERACTIONS WITH DIVERSE GROUPS.

**Strategy 2.3.1.** *SAWS reviews internal processes annually and incorporates best practices.*

**Strategy 2.3.2.** *Provide regular training on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics to increase awareness and understanding among staff and our wilderness stewardship community.*

**Strategy 2.3.3.** *Invite speakers and perspectives from diverse backgrounds to share experiences and insights with staff and board.*



## GOAL 3: PROMOTE INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH TO ENHANCE ACCESS AND AWARENESS OF THE VALUE OF WILD PUBLIC LANDS AND STEWARDSHIP

*SAWS fosters authentic partnerships with individuals and organizations across Southern Appalachia and listens to the communities and people we serve. These thoughtful relationships inform the development and implementation of wilderness training and education programming that seeks to provide more robust opportunities to connect people to their wild public lands, break down barriers to wilderness and outdoor access, elevate underrepresented voices in our sphere of influence, and share the vital importance of stewardship of wilderness and natural areas for all today and the future generations.*



OUTCOME 3.1 EXPAND COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT IN CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES, VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS, AND EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES RELATED TO WILD PUBLIC LANDS, FOSTERING A MORE INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR COMMUNITY AND INTEREST IN STEWARDSHIP.

**Strategy 3.1.1.** *Establish a local presence at reoccurring community events and cultivate local partnerships within the community across the SAWS boot print.*

**Strategy 3.1.2.** *Develop high-quality tailored education and outreach programming catered to the interests and preferences of a range of demographic groups.*

**Strategy 3.1.3.** *Host capacity building workshops and trainings that equip community members and organizations with natural resource knowledge, conservation practices, and stewardship techniques to care for wild public lands.*

OUTCOME 3.2 ESTABLISH AND BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH A DIVERSE RANGE OF ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING COMMUNITY GROUPS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AND BIPOC-LED AND -SERVING ORGANIZATIONS TO COLLABORATIVELY PROMOTE OUTDOOR ACCESS AND AWARENESS.

**Strategy 3.2.1.** *Identify organizations with strong community presence and shared values that align with our mission and target audience.*

**Strategy 3.2.2.** *Understand priorities and mutual benefits and collaborate on initiatives that align with both organizations' expertise, promote access, and increase awareness of wild public lands.*

**Strategy 3.2.3.** *Maintain open dialogue about diversity, equity, and inclusion with our partners to create a culture of continued learning, humility, and support.*

**OUTCOME 3.3. BRING AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SAWS' STEWARDSHIP IMPACT, EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING OUR MISSION, VISION, GOALS, AND ACHIEVEMENTS.**

**Strategy 3.3.1.** *Update communication and outreach materials to reflect SAWS' new mission and vision and all programs of work.*

**Strategy 3.3.2.** *Develop high-quality content that effectively communicates our story.*

**Strategy 3.3.3.** *Engage in public relations to feature local stories about SAWS' impact and initiatives.*

**Strategy 3.3.4.** *Engage ambassadors and advocates to share their experiences and advocate on behalf of SAWS.*

**Strategy 3.3.5.** *Use social media effectively to amplify education campaigns and organization messaging.*



## GOAL 4: BUILD ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY AND FISCAL RESILIENCY

*Provide a foundation of operational and financial strength and long-term sustainability through a culture of excellence, prudent fundraising, donor relations, and strategic outreach.*



OUTCOME 4.1. SAWS IS A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP ORGANIZATION THAT DELIVERS DISTINCTLY SUPERIOR PROGRAMS AND PROJECT RESULTS WITH WELL-TRAINED TALENT AND EXPERTISE.

**Strategy 4.1.1.** *Develop a culture of excellence throughout the organization with clearly aligned and communicated vision, mission, and values.*

**Strategy 4.1.2.** *The SAWS team executes strong communication and regular feedback about its operation and programs, developing an internal process that allows SAWS to continually learn, grow, and strengthen.*

**Strategy 4.1.3.** *SAWS operates seamlessly through staff transitions because the organization experiences strong onboarding procedures and retains knowledge and expertise in a documented and organized way.*

**Strategy 4.1.4.** *SAWS Board of Directors maintain continuity of leadership to ensure that organizational strategies remain intact and SAWS' mission and strategic plan progress smoothly.*

OUTCOME 4.2. SAWS BENEFITS FROM A DYNAMIC FUNDRAISING LANDSCAPE CHARACTERIZED BY A WIDE ARRAY OF FUNDING CHANNELS AND A GROWING POOL OF DIVERSE FUNDING SOURCES.

**Strategy 4.2.1.** *Explore a diverse range of funding sources, including individual donors, corporate sponsorships, grants, events, and partnerships.*

**Strategy 4.2.2.** *Cultivate meaningful and long-lasting relationships with donors by engaging and listening to them regularly.*

**Strategy 4.2.3.** *Conduct a thorough organizational needs assessment to identify the specific requirements, understand fundraising landscape, and identify expertise needed to successfully onboard a Development Director.*





## EVALUATION

The important key to success in any strategic plan is the process of evaluation and determining what success will look like. To supplement the goals, outcomes, and strategies outlined above, SAWS developed specific metrics for each strategy to clearly state to staff and the Board of Directors how the organization plans to measure and track success. A full list of Strategic Plan FY2024-FY2028 Metrics is available as an internal appendix document, used by SAWS leadership annually in the evaluations process. Each strategy has at least one accompanying metric with a maximum of four. SAWS will use a total of seventy metrics to be accomplished at the end of fiscal year 2028 unless otherwise noted.

## SUMMARY

SAWS is an award-winning, premier conservation organization setting standards of excellence that inspire, connect, and equip people to steward wild landscapes. Since 2010, we have worked hard to build a strong reputation throughout our region, gaining national attention and accolades in recent years for our distinctive work in stewardship and partnership. We attract and retain talented experts and hard-working conservation leaders to excel in the strategic areas of **resource stewardship, transformational opportunities, access and awareness, and sustainability**. With passionate staff, dedicated volunteers, and inspiring leadership, SAWS is uniquely positioned to take meaningful steps to realize our mission and build a world where wilderness is bountiful, cared for, and valued by all.