



# MAPPING OUR FUTURE

2020-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN





## OUR PURPOSE

The Northern Forest Canoe Trail is a nonprofit organization and water trail connecting communities, history and wildlands across the Northern Forest. We believe access to wild places improves people's lives, strengthens our communities and increases our care for the natural world.



## OUR MISSION

We promote and steward our water trail and support communities, waterways and paddling across the Northern Forest.

## OUR VISION

An unrivaled network of paddling opportunities across the Northern Forest will inspire ongoing experiences and stories, enticing people to fall in love with the region. Their passion and commitment will contribute to the health of our communities, landscapes and waterways.

## OUR VALUES

Our community of paddlers, staff, directors and partners upholds a commitment to these values:

**HISTORY:** We are inspired by the deep human history of the Northern Forest, by the Indigenous Peoples who established the routes we steward and by those who continue to work and travel on the land to this day.

**INCLUSION:** We believe everyone should have access to the outdoors and feel welcome in the outdoor community.

**CONNECTION:** We create opportunities to connect people and the environment in order to protect the places and relationships that sustain us.

**COLLABORATION:** We are passionate about working with others and listening to and including the voices within and beyond our community.

**COMMUNITY:** We dedicate ourselves to work that strengthens and bridges communities across the Northern Forest and to building a community of paddlers invested in the region.

**WILD PLACES:** We are fueled by our love of wild places. Whether a park, forest or wilderness river, these places are the reason for our work.



## Since our founding in 2000, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail has partnered with communities to create an exceptional paddling trail.

We are a leader in innovative waterway stewardship, helping set the standard for excellence in infrastructure and trail management. Our maps, guidebooks and online resources provide quality trip planning tools for paddlers. We support economic vitality in the Northern Forest by helping paddlers find our trail, as well as the communities and businesses that benefit from their trips. While tracing historic travel routes across the Northern Forest, paddlers discover the region's history and culture, immerse themselves in inspiring landscapes and connect with the human and natural communities here.

In 2019, our staff and board worked together with community input to plan for the future of the NFCT. This three-year plan is our first step; it sets the organization on a path for sustained management of our trail and growth of waterway access in the Northern Forest region. We will continue to add value for the people and communities we serve and the landscapes and natural resources we steward.

As we embark on our third decade, we reaffirm our commitment to sharing the wonders of the Northern Forest with paddlers by stewarding and promoting the NFCT. We also rise to the challenge of fulfilling our founders' aspiration that our trail act as the thread linking watersheds and communities of the region. The four strategic pillars highlighted in this report will guide our work.



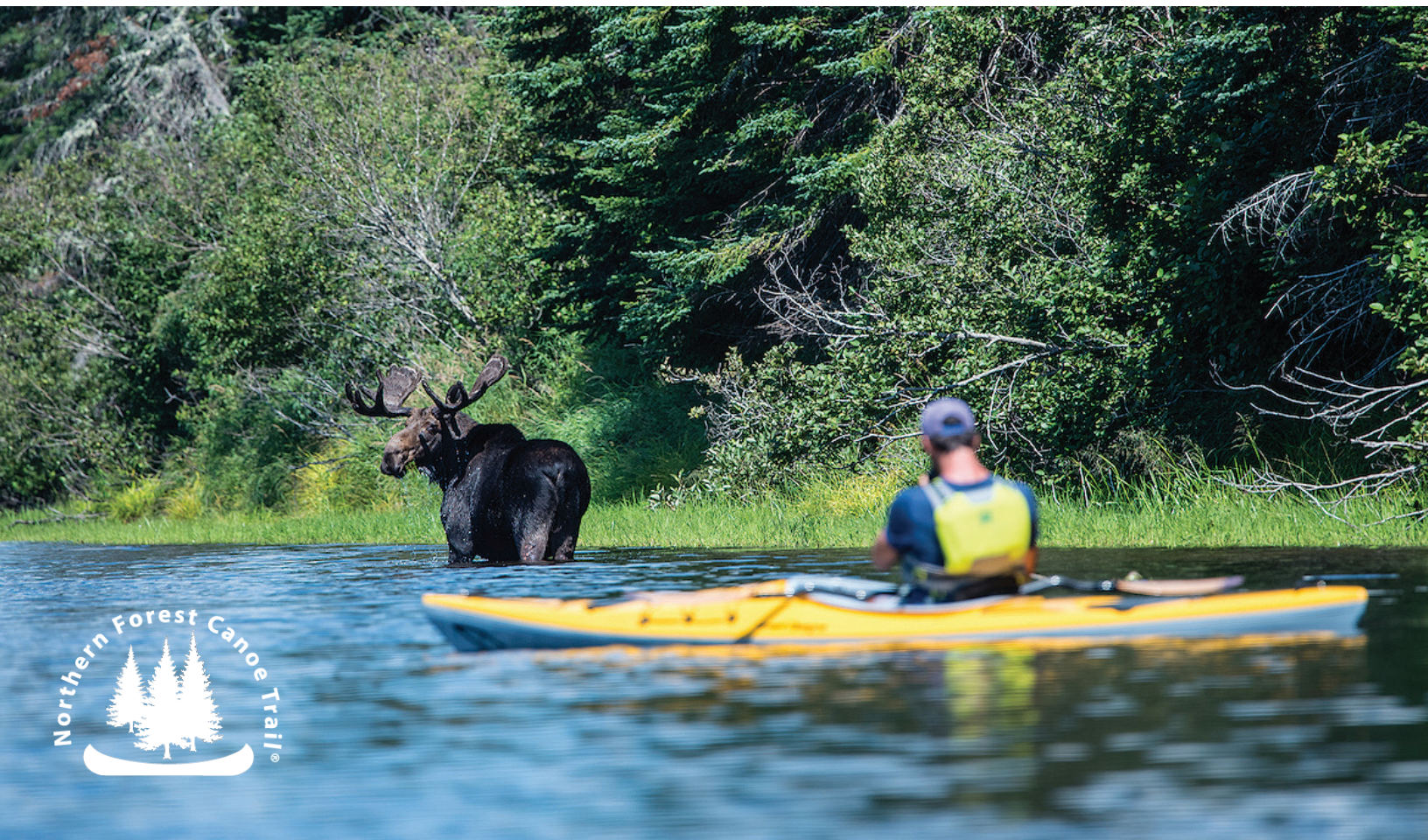
## STRATEGIC PILLAR #1: STEWARD OUR WATERWAYS

Caring for the rivers, lakes, portages and access points along our 740-mile route and assisting other waterway stewards to do the same is central to our mission.

We will maintain and improve waterway access while mitigating human impacts on the landscape resulting from paddling. Ongoing maintenance of existing portages, access points and campsites, as well as construction of new infrastructure, will improve the experience for paddlers and trailside communities. With support from water quality and environmental protection experts, our stewardship work will help protect healthy riparian ecology by preventing soil compaction, erosion and the spread of invasive species.

NFCT owns no land, and thus is wholly reliant on landowners to create paddling access in the Northern Forest. Waterway stewardship involves respect for the generosity of landowners. We will attend to their needs in order to ensure ongoing healthy relationships between landowners, paddlers and the trail.

In addition to maintaining and improving our water trail, we will share our capacity and expertise with other communities looking to create or enhance similar experiences. We are excited to support neighboring water trails and their stewards.







## STRATEGIC PILLAR #2: ENGAGE OUR COMMUNITY

We offer information and inspiration that will enable adventures for paddlers of all kinds. Our trail has diverse waterways which can entice experienced thru-paddlers, weekend adventurers and first-time paddlers alike.

We provide high-quality trip planning tools, host events and support youth paddling experiences along the NFCT. In all these activities, we seek to build a community of paddlers and connect them to the trailside communities where they paddle. Likewise, we strive to support linkages between our community and the outdoor recreation and environmental tourism industries.

We provide value to paddlers with information to support their access to the wildlands and communities of our region. Our stories celebrate the joys and challenges of traveling our waterways, and the important role individuals, businesses and corporate partners play in ensuring that our route is maintained and accessible.

Cultivating a stewardship ethic among the NFCT community will help promote a sense of responsibility for the Northern Forest region. We protect what we love. Ensuring lasting access to the wild places of this region is imperative to our future and the health of the Northern Forest.





## STRATEGIC PILLAR #3: LEVERAGE RELATIONSHIPS

The NFCT was built through extensive collaboration with individuals, community partners, government agencies, businesses, nonprofit organizations and private funders. Cultivating and engaging vested relationships will always maximize our impact.

NFCT relies on our partners to help us design and implement effective stewardship tasks and realize the economic and social benefits of the NFCT. Further investment in these partnerships will foster education, stewardship and economic development and strengthen our organization and the region.

Relationships with academic institutions can help engage young people and connect them with the Northern Forest. Investing in these partnerships will lead to volunteer and intern opportunities, more young and passionate people embracing paddling and the Northern Forest, and future generations of NFCT members and Northern Forest advocates.



## STRATEGIC PILLAR #4: BUILD ON OUR FOUNDATION

Our strategic plan maintains our organizational health and our commitment to sustaining what we have built while creating a platform to support a more far-reaching regional vision.

All of our strategic goals depend on the capacity of our board and staff, and the strength of our operating systems. We set and maintain our course through compelling leadership, fiscal discipline and effective staffing. We will steadily strengthen the organization's financial position with a goal of building long-term fiscal resilience.

Our staffing structure and needs will evolve with the organization; our operational plan will remain responsive to program changes and community expectations while it continues to align with fiscal capacity. The board will continue to cultivate a strong culture of support and pride in the work of the NFCT while ensuring its structure and function serves staff and organizational needs.







To learn more, get involved or invest in access and stewardship, visit [northernforestcanoetrail.org](http://northernforestcanoetrail.org).