

CHARTING OUR COURSE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030



Celebrating
25 Years

OUR PURPOSE

The Northern Forest Canoe Trail connects people to communities, wild lands and history across the Northern Forest. We believe access to wild places improves people's lives, strengthens communities and increases care for the natural world.

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

We envision an unrivaled network of paddling opportunities across the Northern Forest that inspires people to fall in love with paddling 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:

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

BELONGING: We believe everyone should have access to the outdoors and feel welcome to contribute to and participate 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 committed to working with others and listening to the voices within and beyond our community.

PEOPLE: We are inspired by the rich human story of the Northern Forest, from the indigenous peoples who first established the routes we steward to those who continue to work and travel on the land and waterways today.

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.

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 outdoor recreation and 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.

With this plan, NFCT board and staff propel the organization on a path for sustained management of our resources and improved waterway access across 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 next quarter century, 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 the watersheds and communities of the region. The strategic pillars highlighted in this report will guide our work.



STRATEGIC PILLAR #1: STEWARD OUR WATERWAYS

INFRASTRUCTURE: Caring for the access points along our 740-mile route and assisting other regional 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 paddlers. Ongoing maintenance of existing resources, as well as construction of new infrastructure, will improve the experience for all paddlers and trailside communities. Our stewardship work helps protect healthy riparian ecology by preventing soil compaction, erosion and the spread of invasive species. We seek to understand and support the access needs of diverse communities including those with mobility challenges and disabilities.

RELATIONSHIPS: NFCT is reliant on landowners to create paddling access in the Northern Forest, and waterway stewardship involves respect for their generosity. We attend to their needs to ensure ongoing healthy relationships between landowners, paddlers and the trail.

PARTNERSHIPS: NFCT depends on our partners to help us design and implement effective stewardship projects and realize the economic and social benefits of the NFCT. In addition to maintaining and improving our water trail, we share our capacity and expertise with others looking to create or enhance similar experiences. While we prioritize access work on the NFCT, we are excited to support neighboring water trails and waterway stewards.





STRATEGIC PILLAR #2: ENGAGE OUR COMMUNITY

INFORMATION: We provide high-quality trip planning tools, host events and support paddling experiences along the NFCT. We pursue this in a variety of ways including races, clinics and community paddles. In all these activities, we seek to build a community of paddlers in collaboration with the trailside businesses and communities where they paddle. We aspire to pursue these opportunities across the trail. Likewise, we strive to support linkages between our community and the outdoor recreation and environmental tourism industries.

INSPIRATION: We inspire paddlers' 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 partners play in ensuring that our route is maintained and accessible.

EDUCATION: We cultivate an ethic of stewardship and respect among the NFCT community to promote a sense of responsibility for the Northern Forest region. We protect what we love, but we must know a place to appreciate it; 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: MAINTAIN ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

FOUNDATION: Fulfillment of our strategic goals depends on the capacity of our board, staff, partners and community, and the strength of our operating systems. We set and maintain our course through compelling leadership, fiscal discipline and effective staffing. We will maintain a healthy financial position with the ongoing goal of improving long-term fiscal resilience.

COLLABORATION: The NFCT is an extensive collaboration with individuals, community partners, government agencies, businesses, nonprofit organizations and private funders. Cultivating and engaging vested relationships will always maximize our impact. Further investment in these partnerships will foster community, stewardship and economic development, and strengthen our organization and the region.

RESPONSIVENESS: The board will cultivate a strong leadership role related to policy, fiscal responsibility and executive support and evaluation. Our organizational structure will evolve as necessary in order to remain responsive to changes and opportunities to fulfill our mission, while staying focused on fiscal health and capacity.



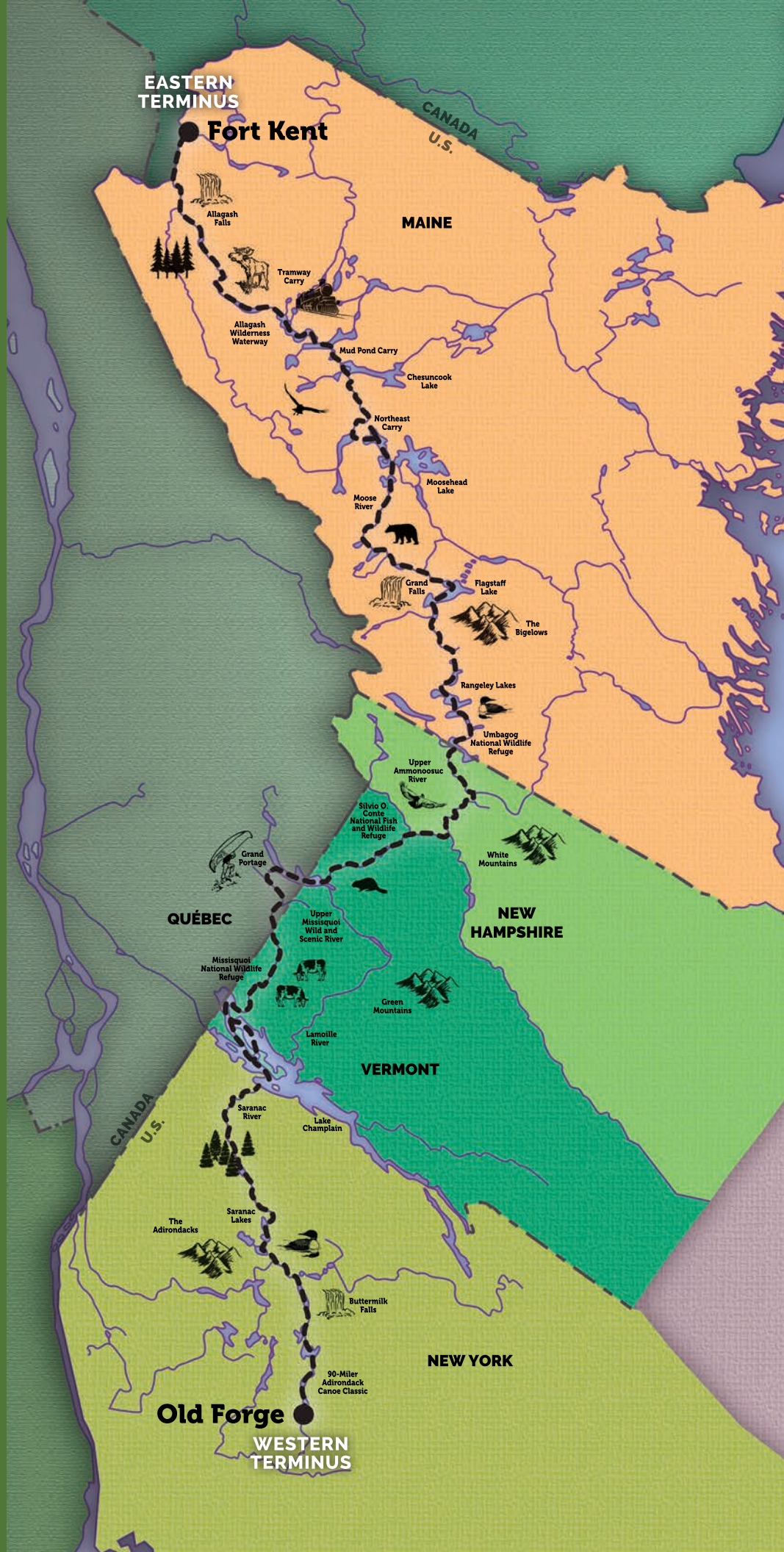
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Rivers and Streams

59
Lakes and Ponds

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Carries or Portages

3
National Wildlife Refuges

45
Communities





**To learn more, get involved or invest in access and
stewardship, visit northernforestcanoetrail.org.**