



# Audubon Center of the North Woods

## 3 Year Strategic Plan

July 2015- June 2018

# Our Organizational Commitment

## MISSION:

*To instill a connection and commitment to the environment in people of all communities through experiential learning*

## VISION:

*A healthy planet where all people live in balance with the Earth*

## CORE VALUES:

- *We demonstrate respect, care and passion for the Earth, all people and all things*
- *We strive for excellence in everything we do through integrity, open communication and teamwork*
- *We value, engage and appreciate individuals for their unique contributions*
- *We believe in life-long learning through positive shared experiences with the natural world*
- *We encourage others to recognize our interconnectedness with the Earth through our actions*

## STRATEGIC GOALS:

1. Increase Client Base Regionally & Statewide
2. Build Organizational Capacity
3. Foster Care and Passion for the Earth in All People
4. Model Sustainability Leadership

# The Audubon Center of the North Woods Story

In 1968, as the surviving member of a prominent St. Paul medical family, Dr. Marguerite Schwwyzer bequeathed her family's farm near Sandstone, MN to the National Audubon Society. Given its remoteness from a major metropolitan area, the National Audubon Society at the time decided not to invest resources into it for staffing or infrastructure. In light of this, the Audubon Center gained autonomy when it was established as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in October 1970. In November of 1971, the Minneapolis Audubon Chapter, St. Paul Audubon Society and the Minnesota Valley River Audubon Chapter pooled funds and offered a 3-month long, \$300/month position to a newly hired founding director with the job description "See What You Can Do." The Audubon Center of the North Woods (originally named Northwoods Audubon Center) was born. We began offering programs in the winter of 1972 and have been doing so ever since as a residential environmental learning center (RELC) that has connected hundreds of thousands of people to the environment. In 1995 we received the deed to our property from the National Audubon Society, completing our autonomy.

ACNW, the closest residential environmental learning center to the Twin Cities, is a short 90 minute drive on I-35 from either St. Paul or Minneapolis. A fully accredited school for day use and residential K - 12 programs, we offer a diverse curriculum focused on earth and life sciences, cultural history, team-building and outdoor adventure, all tied to Minnesota State Standards. Currently we serve over 10,000 visitors annually through our K-12, College, Youth, Family, Community and Adult programs. Since 1976, we have served as a field campus for colleges and universities, teaching a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate level courses. We also partner with Road Scholar® to offer a number of well-attended adult programs. We regularly bring our staff and our educational animals into classrooms and other nature centers throughout the state through our Outreach programs.

As a conference and retreat center, we make environmental education a naturally occurring component to any ACNW facility rental. Nature artwork and book collections in our lodges, renewable energy and wildlife interpretive signs, 535 acre nature sanctuary, 7+ miles of trails, program options, and fresh meals in our dining hall round out the experience. A passion for the environment and desire to share that with others is embedded in all of our staff, with each staff member having special expertise in any number of subjects. The unique and diverse knowledge base of the ACNW program staff is what makes a visit to ACNW so very rewarding, as well as a leader in environmental education.

In conclusion, we believe that a healthy environment starts with and is perpetuated by a personal connection to it. The Audubon Center of the North Woods is and has been committed to that goal for over 40 years. By working with all ages and audiences, we create leaders in the environmental field who span generations, disciplines and the globe.

## **Strategic Goal 1: Increase Client Base Regionally and Statewide**

### ***Key Initiative 1.1:***

#### **Increase Contact, Impact and Reach with K-12 Schools**

##### *1 Year*

- Visit all new K-12 schools and lead teachers pre-trip to meet with teachers / chaperones / students / parents
- Evaluate the possibility of financial incentives and best timing of post-trip programming intended to reconnect K-12 students to their ACNW experience
- Obtain opt-ins to be able to share contact information with ACNW weekend program participants to foster networking and future connections
- Investigate best time of year to reach K12 teachers, outline and implement K12 marketing plan
- Seek out major scholarship funding and grant availability

##### *3 Years*

- Develop and encourage use of K-12 pre- and post-activities
- Create and encourage (financial incentive or automatic tie-in) post-trip follow-up programming at schools
- Revitalize Naturalist-in-Residence program at schools throughout the local area
- Pursue corporate donations, in-kind gifts and grants to provide additional gear to visitors who would benefit (winter clothes, boots, etc.)
- Increase K12 revenue by 20%

##### *10 Year Vision*

- ACNW K-12 program provides excellent value and customer service that increases retention and growth, and is booked at 75% capacity during the school year

### ***Key Initiative 1.2:***

#### **Expand Efforts to Reach Broader Regional Markets**

##### *1 year*

- Secure a marketing agency or consultant pro bono to develop a comprehensive marketing plan focused on all ACNW programs
- Broaden K12 marketing to include western WI and ACNW charter schools
- Expand online/digital marketing as well as increase utilization of broadcast media in region

- Target state and regional environmentally-focused organizations in our Retreats & Conferences marketing
- Research annual regional or national environmentally-focused conferences/events and market ACNW as a venue for future event
- Offer Educator Workshops (Master Naturalist, Flying Wild, Wet, PLT, Wild, etc.)

*3 Years*

- Pursue community college science, phy-ed, health and upward bound programs
- Pursue K-3 program niche utilizing our proximity and small campus size
- Target K-12 schools niche that other residential centers have not
- Market to corporate nature and team-building retreats
- Establish additional EE-related conferences and workshops for the public

*10 Year Vision*

- ACNW is the premier environmental education destination in the region, no longer referred to as a best-kept secret

## **Strategic Goal 2: Build Organizational Capacity**

### ***Key Initiative 2.1:***

#### **Strengthen Development Program to Ensure Financial Sustainability**

##### **1 Year**

- Launch Audubon Center of the North Woods Legacy Society
- Launch Charitable Gift Annuity program
- Increase written communication to minimum of once a month
- Increase in-person touches through house and park parties, dinners and events
- Implement systematic, sophisticated, replicable communication plan

##### **3 Years**

- Conduct Capital Campaign feasibility study for a predetermined multi-million dollar campaign
- Put in place a Capital Campaign steering committee
- Offer 1<sup>st</sup> ACNW Gala consisting of silent auction and board-secured items
- Increase lower level, mid level and high level donors by the following:  
LL donors by 20% and gifts by 25%; ML donors 15% and gifts by 20%; HL donors by 10% and gifts by 15%

##### **10 Year Vision**

- ACNW is free of debt, financially stable and has high quality facilities that are well-maintained and fully operational, achieved through a Capital Campaign

### ***Key Initiative 2.2:***

#### **Improve Systems and Accountability for Improved Visitor Experience**

##### **1 Year**

- Increase lead-time and decrease steps for required K-12 paperwork
- Ensure all current and proposed programs are fully scoped and analyzed, with interdepartmental input, prior to commitment or implementation
- Focus on opportunities to improve customer service within all departments and facilitate training needed to identify and deliver excellent customer service
- Utilize centralized visitor feedback system to better focus on areas for organizational improvement
- Expand usage and effectiveness of ACNW database

### *3 Years*

- Emphasize quality over quantity in program offerings
- Improve security of internal and external network and web-related systems
- Arrange for additional staff to provide database/ IT and development support

### *10 Year Vision*

- Visitors experience high functioning organizational systems and smooth operations that regularly exceed their expectation

## ***Key Initiative 2.3:***

### **Support and Engage Staff**

#### *1 Year*

- Job-shadowing in certain positions to alleviate understaffed departments
- Provide up-to-date online technical equipment and resources to all staff
- Pursue and encourage professional development opportunities for all staff
- Offer Master Naturalist course for all 2015-16 Naturalists
- Revise annual staff evaluations to include regular performance feedback meetings with supervisor using formal organization-wide system

#### *3 Years*

- Build culture of organizational awareness and mission buy-in
- Research and obtain applicable and well-respected center affiliations, certifications and professional memberships
- Pursue staff credential maintenance and professional affiliation membership
- Increase staff wages to retrain and attract high quality environmental educators and advocates who reflect the mission, vision and core values of the organization

#### *10 Year Vision*

- Staff is excited and fully-engaged in their work and embrace ACNW's mission. All staff believes that ACNW is a great place to work, and their actions and attitude reflect that

## ***Key Initiative 2.4:***

### **Diversify and Increase Available Human Resources**

#### *1 Year*

- Recruit, train and retain substitute educators
- Plan for adequate staffing in all areas to bring plans to fruition

- Ensure program staff availability & capacity to match our marketing efforts
- Develop a stronger volunteer coordination process to better organize and promote volunteer participation

*3 Years*

- Establish strong and self-sustaining volunteer program
- Foster partnerships with local entities and supportive organizations to enhance the volunteer and substitute teacher pool
- Hire more highly qualified program staff

*10 Year Vision*

- Have a sophisticated, efficient system of scheduled and trained on-call, substitute and regular staff to respond to programming needs

## **Strategic Goal 3: Foster Care & Passion for the Earth in All People**

### **Key Initiative 3.1:**

#### **Create & Implement a Place-Based Interdisciplinary Experience for All Communities**

##### *1 Year*

- Offer more non-formal program selections (stewardship, exploration, journaling)
- Simplify and strengthen K-12 menu of class options
- Compile list of top lead teachers and consider possible incentives for participating in Teacher Advisory Board

##### *3 Years*

- Create Teacher Advisory Board for feedback and oversight
- Increase diversity of programming types to highlight interdisciplinary learning
- Build Nature Playscape to encourage free, nature-based play
- Fully integrate interdisciplinary programming for all K-12 students

##### *10 Year Vision*

- All ACNW programs leave people with a strong sense of place

### **Key Initiative 3.2:**

#### **Encourage Reflection of Mission in Participants**

##### *1 Year*

- Incorporate student journaling into K-12 residential experience
- Incorporate digital cameras into programming as personal reflection tools, using photographs to synthesize the learning experience
- Update K12 student feedback form to be a more interactive and impactful learning assessment

##### *3 Years*

- Wrap-up all student visits with interactive learning assessments, reflection and personal follow-up action steps
- Wrap up all visits with actionable commitments by participants and follow up regarding progress once back home

#### *10 Year Vision*

- Students' capacity for learning and stewardship is increased through active reflection

### **Key Initiative 3.3: Strengthen our Portfolio of High Performing Environmentally-Focused Charter Schools**

#### *1 Year*

- Fully comply with and participate in the MN Authorizer Performance Evaluation System (MAPES) process in order to achieve the highest rating possible for our organization
- Review and update authorizing policies and practices, using feedback from MAPES process to ensure alignment with state authorizer evaluation system
- Develop more robust resources and tools on our website to impact financial and operational performance of schools
- Clarify academic performance expectations and improve evaluation systems to impact academic performance of authorized schools and better inform high stakes decisions
- Identify resources to develop a quality environmental literacy (EL) measurement toolkit for ACNW authorized schools

#### *3 Years*

- Establish a system to identify educational needs around the state and conduct a request for proposal (RFP) process for new charter school proposals that addresses those needs
- Internally evaluate implementation of authorizing policies and practices to ensure alignment with MAPES
- Assess the impact of high quality evaluations of schools in the areas of academic, environmental education, financial and operations performance
- Pilot and implement a quality environmental literacy (EL) measurement toolkit for ACNW authorized schools

#### *10 Year Vision*

- ACNW authorized charter schools demonstrate exemplary performance in academics, finance & operations, and are models for improving environmental literacy of students

## Strategic Goal 4: Model Sustainability Leadership

### ***Key Initiative 4.1:***

#### **Reduce Carbon Footprint**

##### *1 Year*

- Empower staff to proactively clean, repair, update, maintain, report and recommend changes to the ACNW operations and facilities to reduce our environmental impact
- Implement process of analyzing the impact of all our purchases and processes to find environmentally-friendly alternatives (store items, office supplies, cleaning supplies, equipment, food service, travel, etc.)
- Meet regularly as a staff to highlight sustainability goals and ideas and track progress/changes
- Ensure existing ACNW Energy Systems are operating at a high level

##### *3 Years*

- Improve the envelope barrier the Staff House
- Address key energy capital needs list items
- Deliver zero-waste organizational programs and events
- Pursue Power Purchase Agreement and other options for large-scale solar photo-voltaic system

##### *10 Year Vision*

- Be a net-zero campus

### ***Key Initiative 4.2:***

#### **Encourage On-Site and Long- Term Behavior Changes in Visitors**

##### *1 Year*

- Better engage K12 Chaperones in role-modeling and mission engagement by creating user-friendly guide and updating Chaperone Orientation messaging
- Create more visibility of recycling and other methods to reduce a visitor's impact while visiting the Center
- Strengthen guidelines provided to visiting groups to reduce the impact of their stay at the Center

##### *3 Years*

- Positively reinforce environmentally-friendly behavior of visitors

- Organize friendly energy conservation competition between K12 schools
- Post real-time ACNW energy generation and use

#### *10 Year Vision*

- Through their fully immersive learning experience, visitors make informed decisions to decrease their environmental impact after their visit to ACNW

### **Key Initiative 4.3:**

#### **Fully Embrace Food as a Mission-Based Program**

##### *1 Year*

- Implement a clear Food Policy with customer service being the focus
- Implement a food cost/per serving (food & labor) system using vendor price comparisons
- Redesign ort presentations to encourage table conversations and involve KP duties (slop cops, ort graph, compost pile, etc.)
- Make meal time a learning experience for every visitor
- Replace purchases of ready-make food items by increasing in-house production (i.e., pizza dough, bread, desserts, sauces, dressings, etc.)

##### *3 Years*

- Highlight intentional purchasing and low-impact meals for guests
- Eliminate individually packaged items from dining hall meals
- Utilize independent growers for produce purchases and ensure all 'Dirty Dozen' produce purchases are organic
- Create robust and professional composting system and related class material
- Conduct feasibility study for ACNW Farm

##### *10 Years*

- Through a combination of intentional food purveyor purchasing, local producer/grower relationships, and on-site production, ACNW serves environmentally friendly, healthy and delicious meals