

NICHES Land Trust Executive Copy Strategic Plan

Mission

NICHES protects, restores and sustains Northern Indiana's ecosystems by providing habitat for native species and offering natural places for the education, appreciation and enjoyment of current and future generations.



Vision for the future

NICHES' long-term vision is that our region is a place where:

- There are large connected areas of critical terrestrial and aquatic habitat, in which sustainable populations of native species thrive;
- Local communities are integrated into ecologically sustainable, aesthetically appealing landscapes offering many opportunities for enjoyment of natural areas and open space;
- Local communities have found ways to minimize negative human impacts on local ecological processes and take advantage of local environmental resources in a sustainable manner thereby improving region's quality of life; and,
- Multiple and diverse stakeholders from local communities are engaged in protection, restoration and stewardship of the landscape in an open and participatory manner.



Core Values

NICHES believes that:

- The Northern Indiana landscape is home to ecosystems of native plants and animals that should be protected.
- Access to and connection with natural areas and open space improves the quality of people's lives. People in our region should be able to live among sustainable, healthy, attractive landscapes.
- Private landowners have an important role to play in helping to provide larger ecological and social benefits for the local community.
- Fostering an ethic of stewardship for the land and water is an important step to achieving lasting protection of native plants and animals.
- The study of the natural resources of our region contributes to our understanding and appreciation of the lands and waters.
- The long term viability of our organization is a critical component to being able to achieve our vision so that future generations can enjoy the same quality natural experiences as today.



Long Term (2030) goals and strategies

Land and Water Protection

NICHES will have a leadership role in the regional efforts to protect populations of native species in perpetuity by restoring the structure and processes of our regional ecosystems.

- NICHES will help to protect, restore and manage a substantially expanded area of land and waters in Northern Indiana that contains functional high quality natural areas
- Develop, build and maintain key working relationships and partnerships needed to implement NICHES' Land and Water Protection Plan
- NICHES' conservation properties will be actively managed and protected in order to become and remain functional, high quality natural areas

Long-Term (2030) Measures of Success:

- 50% of the Wabash River 100 yr floodplain from Granville to Portland Arch has perennial vegetation
- A minimum of 5 contiguous areas greater than 1,000 acres of perennial vegetation exists along the Wabash
- 6,000 acres of protected forested land through fee title, permanent easements and classified forest along Sugar Creek in Montgomery downstream from Camp Rotary
- 5,000 protected acres within the Kankakee Marsh and a physical corridor >100' wide re-connecting the Kankakee River to TNC's Kankakee Sands and DNR's Jasper Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area
- Restoration of 200+ acre black soil prairie within a mile of an existing prairie/ savanna remnant in the grand prairie natural region (Roughly centered on Benton County)
- Permanent stewardship position on NICHES staff, coordinating the maintenance of



NICHES lands, and a sufficient number of volunteer stewards

- Prescribed burn plans completed and implemented for all properties needing fire
- Invasive and over abundant species are controlled for the benefit of larger biodiversity goals
- Stewardship plans that address invasive species are in place on all NICHES' acres
- Demonstrated increase in biodiversity on NICHES properties
- Demonstrated progress toward majority of conservation goals in site conservation plans

Members and regional stakeholders understand, support, and contribute to NICHES Land and Water Protection Plan

- A significant number of regional organizations are actively collaborating with NICHES
- Collaboration projects with partners have resulted in NICHES receiving 3 dollars of support for every dollar NICHES' members contribute to acquisitions

2. Public Access, Education and Appreciation

NICHES will increase the public's connection to, recreation on and appreciation of natural areas, create awareness of our natural heritage and provide places to foster those connections.

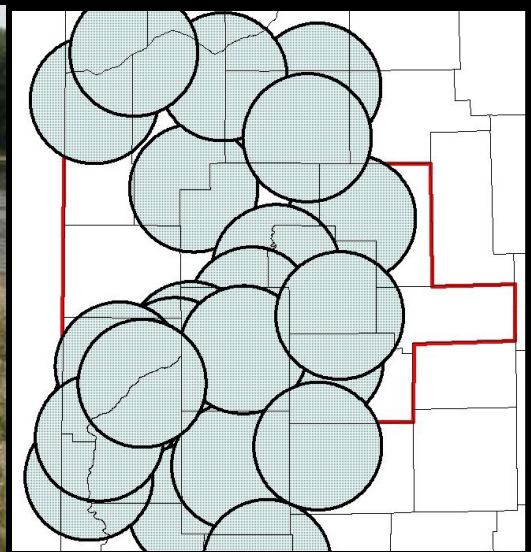
- People in the region have access to and take advantage of natural areas for nature-related activities
- People in the region understand the natural world and how their actions affect it

Long-Term (2030) Measures of Success:

- All people in the service area live within 20 KM of a ½ mile or longer nature trail
- Navigable waterways have legal water access for non power boats every 10 miles
- All population centers in the service area are within 20 KM of a publicly accessible location for fishing
- NICHES region has a 50+ KM hiking trail with backpacking opportunities
- Scientific research is being conducted on NICHES lands and researchers are reporting findings to the staff and board
- Natural region or subregions (Entrenched valley –Wabash, Entrenched Valley- Sugar Creek and Kankakee Sands) have at least one nature center open to the public
- At least 200 children and/or 50 families participate annually in joint education programming developed with partners

All people in our service area live within 20 KM of a 1/2 mile or longer nature trail.

NICHES region has a 50 KM hiking trail with backpacking opportunities



3. Fiscal and Organizational Sustainability

NICHES will be a viable, effective and permanent institution in the region.

- NICHES has the financial capacity and revenue predictability to be able to implement its goals and remain a viable institution in the region
- NICHES' leadership is engaged and equipped to implement the vision
- NICHES has the human resource capacity (e.g., staff, members, volunteers) to implement our programmatic goals
- NICHES and its mission are known and valued throughout our region and the larger conservation community

Long-Term (2030) Measures of Success:

- 1,000+ NICHES members
- 50% of all members are retained 5+ years
- 75 % annual member retention rate
- Endowment funds increased to \$500,000
- Acquisition fund of \$250,000
- Reserve fund at 12 months operational costs
- Strategic plan formally is reviewed and re-freshed every 5 years
- Board members satisfied and feel their talents are well-utilized (at least 66% serve 2 terms)
- Reduced frequency of Board Meetings and greater Board involvement in organizational direction setting and fundraising.
- Stable, satisfied upper management personnel, especially Executive Director.
- Meet all recommended LTA standards for human resources and personnel policies
- Staff retention and satisfaction is high (low staff turnover, high staff satisfaction with job duties and organization)
- Staff salaries and benefits commensurate with comparable conservation organizations in our region
- Stable, significant pool (20+) of trained volunteers working on variety of organizational priorities, including stewardship, administrative, and education/outreach efforts
- High volunteer satisfaction and retention rates (greater than 75% annually)
- At least 10% of residents in service area recognize NICHES name and express positive feeling about NICHES' work.
- Leading conservation partners assess NICHES' efforts and collaborations positively
- Regular contact with important private landowners in priority conservation areas; positive relationships and increasing numbers of owners working with NICHES on coordinating conservation efforts.
- Increasing utilization of NICHES staff and publications as regional conservation resource—increasing staff contacts, landowner inquiries, website hits and queries, etc.
- Membership, donations and corporate and individual support for NICHES' initiatives growing annually
- Positive media coverage of NICHES work at steady or growing annual rate





**NICHES Land Trust Inc.
Strategic Plan
Passed by Board of Directors September 22, 2009**

