

A wooden sign for Northland Arboretum. The top part of the sign is light-colored wood with a teal tree logo. Below the logo, the words "Northland" and "Arboretum" are written in large, white, serif font. The bottom part of the sign is dark wood with the words "Paul Bunyan Conservation Area" in a smaller, white, serif font. In the foreground, there are yellow and purple flowers.

# Northland Arboretum

Paul Bunyan  
Conservation Area

FEBRUARY 2022

# Northland Arboretum

Strategic Plan

PRESENTED TO  
Northland  
Arboretum Board of  
Directors

PRESENTED BY  
Candice  
Zimmermann



Northland Arboretum  
**Strategic Plan 2022-2024**

Adopted: 01/27/2022

**Executive Summary**

As the Northland Arboretum approaches 50 years of incredible service to the environment and the community, we are encouraged by the amount of support and the potential for growth. The last decade has been a rocky road for the organization as it navigated inconsistent leadership, financial instability, and a global pandemic. This strategic plan will be the compass and the roadmap our leadership will utilize to navigate any uncharted territory in the years ahead. The Northland Arboretum is sitting at a crossroads and the direction which it has decided to go will not be without its challenges. The strategic goals of this plan include taking this organization to the next level, growing bigger, becoming stronger, and setting a foundation that will allow future generations to enjoy the Arb's natural beauty. To do this, we must evaluate and be critical of ourselves. Programs that were beneficial to the community ten years ago are not relevant today. Leadership has evolved and success has a different definition. Revenue sources that were once plentiful have dried up and new possibilities have emerged. This strategic planning process has allowed us to look at our organization through a lens of possibility, dream big, and ask ourselves "what if". It also has allowed the leadership team to have honest conversations and let go of the things that do not directly align with our mission. With this plan, we have a clear focus of our goals and can move forward with confidence toward a new beginning. By our Golden Anniversary, we hope to achieve the actionable items laid out in this 3-year strategic plan so we can celebrate progress, perseverance, and look forward to the next 50 years.

**Vision**

*"Be a place where the community respects and connects with the natural world."*

**Mission**

*"Be a valued community asset providing outdoor recreation and educational activities for all while protecting the natural environment."*

**Core Values**

*We are stewards of the natural world.*

*We are a place for the community to feed the mind, body, and soul.*

*We are welcoming and accessible to all.*

*We are a place for lifelong learning.*



## Operations

### Board Roster

#### **Bryan Pike**

*President*

Natural Resource Manager, Crow Wing County (Retired)

#### **Dan Lee**

*Vice President*

Corporate Attorney (Retired)

#### **Judy Morgan**

*Secretary*

Aon Risk Solutions - (Retired)

#### **Jake Spandl, CPA**

*Treasurer*

Senior Associate, CliftonLarsonAllen LLP

#### **Rick Meyer**

Ex. Office & Admin Specialist, Brainerd Regional Ex. Office

#### **Jana Froemming**

Realty Group

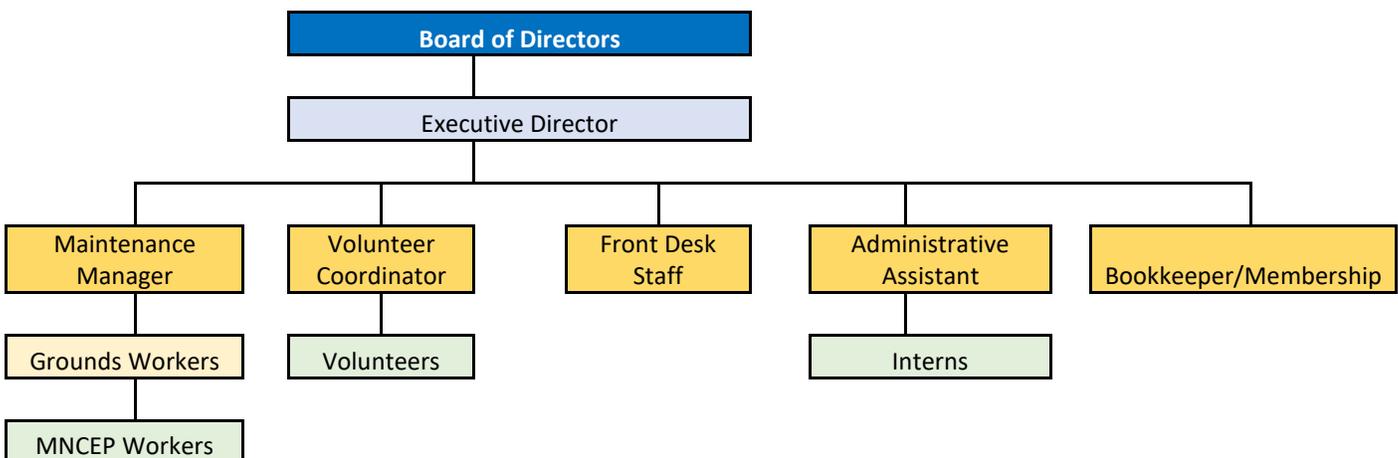
#### **Lori Scharenbroich**

West Shore Marketing

#### **Peggy Stebbins**

Cuyuna Regional Medical Center

### Staff Work Chart





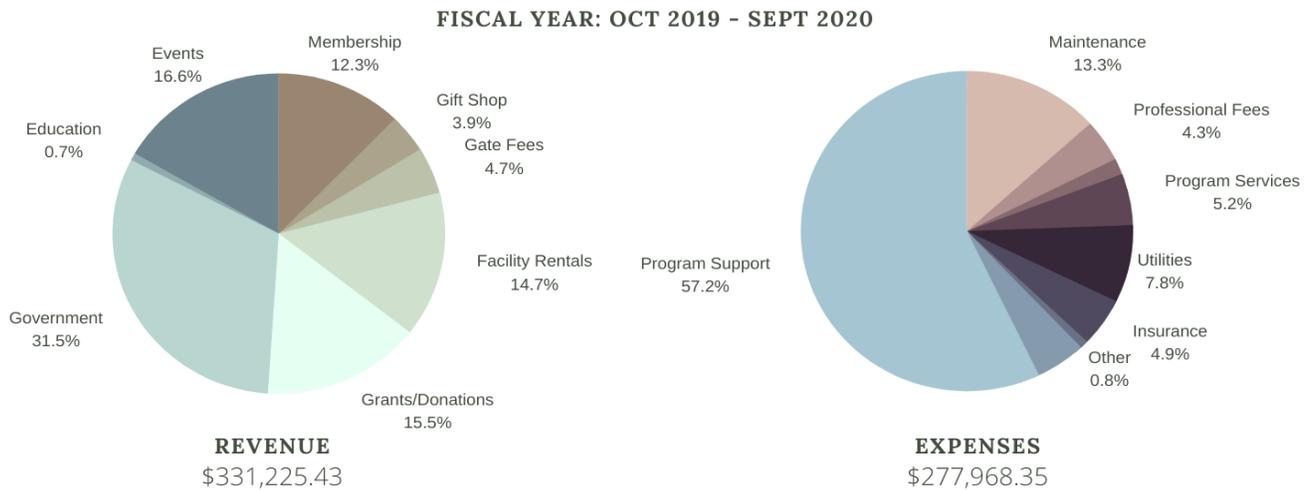
## Grounds and Facilities



The Northland Arboretum is made up of nearly 500 acres of undeveloped land. The land is owned by three entities including Crow Wing County, The Nature Conservancy, and the Northland Arboretum. The land is also split between the cities of Brainerd and Baxter. The Northland Arboretum maintains a one-hundred-year lease agreement with Crow Wing County which allows the Arboretum to perform operational improvements as needed if the core focus is to utilize the land for conservation and recreation. The Nature Conservancy maintains an agreement as well to protect critical habitats such as the Jake Pine Savanna. The Northland Arboretum must follow guidelines such as limited motor use on the trails to maintain the integrity of those environments. The Nature Conservancy is responsible for the maintenance of those habitats, but the Northland Arboretum does maintain the trail system. It is through these partnerships that the Northland Arboretum is able to maintain current conservation practices while also providing a beautiful, central location for the community to stay healthy, and for nature-based education to take place.



## Financials



Data gathered from the 2019-2020 fiscal year shows that the main areas of expenses for the Northland Arboretum are between Program Support (Salaries and Benefits) and Maintenance. Major revenue is from City of Brainerd, Events, Facility Rentals, and Grants/Donations. The organization would like to grow the areas of Grants/Donations, Gift Shop and Membership.

## Volunteers

Volunteers are the kingpin of our organization and help to ensure the gardens continuously look beautiful for our guests. Creating a first impression is a high priority in this strategic plan. Showing the community and visitors that we take pride in our facilities and grounds will lead to increased volunteers, community engagement, and donations. Additional volunteers help instruct our educational programming, maintain the trail system, and assist the administrative team with office-based tasks and reception. Currently, we have 79 volunteers on our roster with the majority of those volunteers helping only with the Haunted Trail fundraiser. In 2020 the total number of volunteer hours contributed to the Northland Arboretum was 1,779.



## SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a framework used to evaluate an organization's position and develop strategies that will address the threats and weaknesses by leveraging its strengths. The process helps to assess internal and external factors, how they effect the organization, and what is the current and future potential. The Northland Arboretum identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats throughout the strategic planning process. This data helped guide the process toward strategic goals that leveraged existing strengths and potential opportunities. For example, knowing the Northland Arboretum already has an extensive trail system which is groomed in the winter by a partner organization, the Arb leadership identified ways to leverage eco-tourism to boost usage and trail fees during the cold weather months, leading to a successful way to strengthen a funding stream. By using and marketing an asset that separates us from the competition, the Arb can become more financially stable during the winter months when there is less traffic on the trail system.

<p><b><u>Strengths</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent income from Brainerd</li> <li>• Facilities available for rental</li> <li>• Weddings are cheaper than others</li> <li>• Trails &amp; Gardens</li> <li>• Programming</li> <li>• Partners</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Weaknesses</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of storage/facilities</li> <li>• Not using facilities to full extent</li> <li>• Lack of staff</li> <li>• Marketing overall</li> <li>• Volunteer engagement</li> <li>• State of repair of venue for weddings and similar groups (i.e. better looking could mean higher fees and use)</li> <li>• Inconsistent leadership</li> <li>• Low fees</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Opportunities</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase gate fees</li> <li>• Snowshoe rentals</li> <li>• Increase rental potential</li> <li>• Fitness trail potential</li> <li>• Technology &amp; social media</li> <li>• Increased partnership opportunities</li> <li>• Increasing membership</li> <li>• Reaching young families</li> <li>• Fundraising and grants</li> <li>• Endowment funds/Legacy funds</li> <li>• Increased in-kind donations – contracts with partners</li> <li>• Use the space as a northern nursery</li> <li>• Reaching younger generations</li> <li>• Change educational programming</li> <li>• Increase winter usage</li> <li>• Greater MN Parks and Trails designation</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Threats</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unstable revenue streams</li> <li>• Competition for wedding rentals</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• COVID effect on rentals</li> <li>• Loss in volunteer base</li> <li>• Turnover of staff/leadership</li> <li>• Cyber security threats</li> <li>• Weather-related incidents/Fire</li> </ul>



## **The Northland Arboretum Strategic Plan**

### **Strategy I: Protect and enhance our natural resources and be good stewards of the environment by maintaining biological diversity. (CONSERVATION)**

#### A. Objective: Encourage native plantings and natural environments

Focus 1: Restore or enhance native plant communities throughout the Arboretum grounds

- Control invasive and undesirable species
- Establish native prairie grasses within open areas of former landfill
- Plant conifers to replace aging jack pine forest.

#### B. Objective: Restore Whiskey Creek into a healthy habitat.

Focus 1: Conduct a water quality study

- Discuss student research project with CLC instructors

Focus 2: Collaborate with other agencies on ways to improve water quality of the creek.

- Discuss options with partner organizations and local agencies

### **Strategy II: Provide programming that creates positive connections between people and nature. (EDUCATION and RECREATION)**

#### A. Objective: Create an educational component to our trail system

Focus 1: Create and install interpretive signage that is appropriate for all ages.

- Develop a committee that will be responsible for interpretive signage

Focus 2: Update physical and virtual maps

- Marketing and Grounds Committee work together on updating the maps.

#### B. Objective: Develop a cohesive and branded program that will serve the purpose of our educational pillar for people of all ages, abilities, and incomes.

Focus 1: Hire an Education Coordinator/Nature Instructor

- Research grant opportunities that would support staff capacity

Focus 2: Expand our education beyond the Arb and into the community

- Partner with school district on Elementary classes and workshops



- Take classes “offsite” and into local public parks
- Offer a balance of fee-for-service and free activities/classes

Focus 3: Education Committee develops Nature Camp

- Come up with consist name, brand and logo alongside Marketing Team
- Work with local partners on collaboration opportunities
- Build in cooking classes – how to best use fresh produce

Focus 4: Maintain an engaging calendar of educational opportunities.

- Plan events and activities 90 days in advance to allow for marketing
- Put the activities calendar on our website
- Seek feedback from participants and members on topics they would like to see

**Strategy III: Broaden our visibility in the community (MARKETING)**

A. Objective: Raise awareness of the Arb’s offerings and location

Focus 1: Install large sign at Excelsior Drive

- In progress: working with Signs Plus (August 2021)
- Keep sign updated with events and activities

Focus 2: Increase online presence providing convenience for members and visitors

- Designate a staff or volunteer willing to take on social media
- Update website and provide a user-friendly platform for making donations, renewing membership, and understanding the activities the Arb has to offer.

**Strategy IV: Increase visitation by providing great guest experiences. (MEMBERSHIP)**

A. Objective: Increase visitation by non-members

Focus 1: Create a marketing plan with tourism partners to increase reach in community and beyond.

Focus 2: Create a tracking system that will provide data to Membership committee on number of visitations from non-members.

- Increase visitation by 10% year over year



B. Objective: Increase visitation and engagement of members

Focus 1: Create a Membership Experience team that will help engage members in everything the Arb has to offer.

- Committee should meet regularly and share goals with the Executive Director.

**Strategy V: Invest in improving our current infrastructure and seek opportunities to grow.  
(GROUNDS AND FACILITIES)**

A. Objective: Develop a capital campaign that will address key infrastructure improvements.

Focus 1: Meet with consultants to understand timeline and capital plan.

Focus 2: Develop a capital campaign committee to guide the process.

B. Objective: Develop sustainability plans for all assets of the Arboretum.

Focus 1: Develop maps of each garden and region of the grounds

Focus 2: Work with Committee Chairs to communicate any changes needed to the gardens or grounds.

Focus 3: Develop a structured process for new projects including plans, budgets, documentation and presentations needed to committees or full Board.

**Strategy VI: (FINANCIAL)**

A. Objective: Increase new donors, improve donor retention and increase overall donations received 10% per year.

Focus 1: Understand the need for an endowment or agency fund.

- Contact BLA Community Foundation for information

Focus 2: Create a donor recognition program

B. Objective: Grow general operating fund by \$100,000

Focus 1: Increase membership counts, visitation, and gift shop.

Focus 2: Increase event revenue



Focus 3: Increase donations

**Strategy VII: Retain and recruit organizational capacity who will lead the strategic plan and assist in accomplishing its goals. (LEADERSHIP)**

A. Objective: Retain a diverse and knowledgeable Board to assist the Executive Director in meeting goals.

Focus: Recruit talent in specific areas including natural resources, fiscal responsibility, and fundraising.

B. Objective: Increase staff capacity by adding to employee roster, specifically in the areas of education, outreach, and maintenance.

C. Objective: Increase the volunteer roster to provide greater capacity to the maintenance and administrative teams.

D. Objective: Foster and create partnerships that will assist with meeting our goals, not distract from them.



## Accountability

### Key Performance Indicators

	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Date Goal Met</b>
<b>Strategy I</b>		
<b>Strategy II</b>		
<b>Strategy III</b>		
<b>Strategy IV</b>		
<b>Strategy V</b>		
<b>Strategy VI</b>		
<b>Strategy VII</b>		

### Check in dates

May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022



Takeaways:

**September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022**

Takeaways: