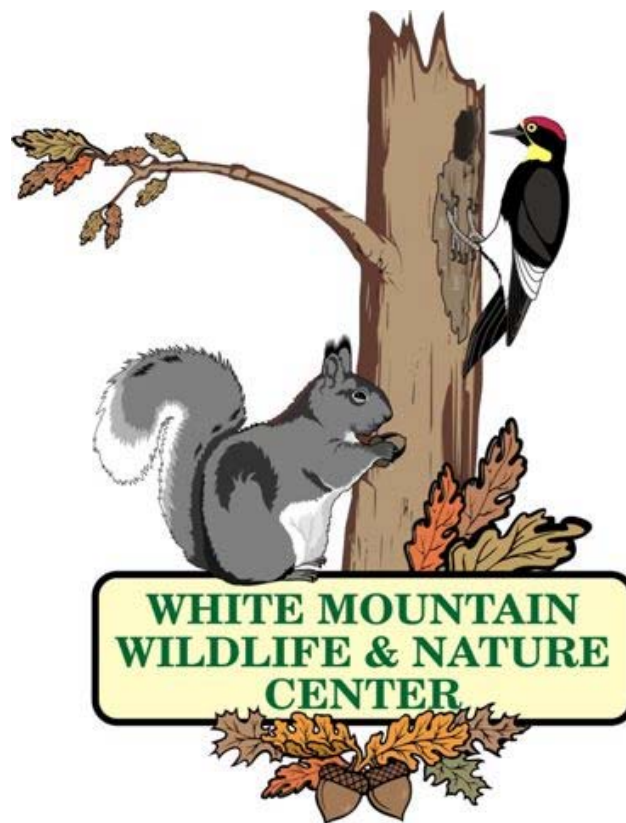


# White Mountain Wildlife and Nature Center, Inc.

## Strategic Management Plan 2008 – 2012



***“Living together in their backyard”***

**White Mountain Wildlife and Nature Center, Inc.**

**P.O. Box 581**

**Pinetop, Arizona 85935**

[whitemountainnaturecenter.org](http://whitemountainnaturecenter.org)

**White Mountain Wildlife and Nature Center, Inc.**  
**STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
**2008-2012**

***Our Mission:*** *To connect people with wildlife through educational experiences that inspire appreciation, responsibility, and respect for the inter-relationships among humans, other living organisms, and the natural world we share.*

### **JUSTIFICATION AND NEED**

For more than a century, individuals from around the Southwest have been drawn to the unique environment of the White Mountains. The Town of Pinetop-Lakeside lies atop the Mogollon Rim at the geographic center of the region and is nestled between the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest and the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. The White Mountains region lies at the heart of the largest contiguous stand of ponderosa pine forest in the World. It is also located adjacent to the pinyon-juniper woodland and grasslands near Show Low and Snowflake/Taylor and the spruce-fir/aspen forests at Mount Baldy, Big Lake, and Greer. Wildlife abounds throughout the area with elk, black bear, deer, antelope, wild turkey, coyote, smaller mammals, and numerous bird species ranging in size from the bald eagle to diminutive hummingbirds.

The economy of Pinetop-Lakeside and the entire White Mountains region is now focused on tourist-based recreation and seasonal, second home residents, all seeking hiking fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing opportunities, and participation in a myriad of seasonal sports activities. These activities contribute tremendous economic benefit to all communities in the White Mountains. And though reduced from their previous influence, commodity-based use of the area's diverse natural resources remains an important part of the region's economy and lifestyle. The 468,000-acre Rodeo-Chediski Fire that destroyed over 400 homes in 2002 underscored the White Mountains communities' tenuous relationship to their setting within the fire-prone ponderosa pine forest and the need to reduce wildfire risk and promote forest health. Water is an especially valuable commodity of the White Mountains, supporting tremendous water-based recreation at numerous lakes, stream and rivers. The demand for water to support human population growth within and outside the region continues to intensify. The nation's current economic situation has lead to increased attention on environmentally sensitive and sustainable lifestyles, integrating energy and water efficiency into human developments. To address these many opportunities and challenges in promoting sustainable living and human population growth in the White Mountains, and to promote appreciation and understanding of our role in the natural environment so vital to our economy and lifestyle, we recognized the need for a education-based learning center to serve the entire White Mountains region.

### **NATURE CENTER HISTORY AND BACKGROUND**

Recognizing a need for an educational and interpretative nature center to serve the White Mountains, the White Mountain Wildlife and Nature Center (Nature Center) was established in

2003. In 2004, The Nature Center filed and published its articles of incorporation with the Arizona Corporation Commission and was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation (No. 1122773-3) on March 8, 2004. In 2005, the Internal Revenue Service conferred 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status upon the Nature Center as a nonprofit educational organization.

Effective partnerships are considered the key to the success of the Nature Center achieving its Mission. At local level, we focused on fostering relationships with the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside (Town), the Blue Ridge Unified School District (BRUSD) and a myriad of other entities and nonprofit organizations, particularly in our efforts to locate a site for the construction of our nature center facilities. With our Mission's regional scope, we understand the need to expand our focus to other communities, school districts and organizations throughout the White Mountains region of Arizona.

In 2007, after considerable evaluation of numerous potential sites at which to locate our nature center, we entered into a cooperative lease/services agreement with the Town to locate the nature center facilities on their Mountain Meadow Recreational Complex (Appendix A). This location was considered nearly ideal due to its immediate adjacency to the Big Springs Environmental Study Area (ESA) which has been under special use permit from the U.S. Forest Service to the BRUSD for over 25 years for use as an outdoor classroom. The 40-acre Big Spring ESA is part of the 583-acre Woodland Lake Park tract whose acquisition from the Forest Service constitutes one of the highest strategic management plan priorities for the Town; this parcel is replete with a developed hiking trail network and valuable habitats including riparian/stream habitat along Walnut Creek, the spring-fed pond and wetlands at Big Springs ESA and ponderosa pine forest and meadows. The lease with the Town covers 5.15 acres at the far north end of the Mountain Meadow Recreation Complex, which draws thousands of visitors for youth and adult sporting events, as well as several festivals and art shows throughout the year. The term of the lease is for 25 years and is renewable. The lease agreement stipulates that the Nature Center build a minimum 2000 square foot visitor/nature center within 5 years, or 2011. In the lease/services agreement, the Town recognizes that the community will benefit greatly from the nature center in terms of providing a meaningful recreational and education venue for residents and visitors alike, helping diversify our economy, promoting appreciation and responsible use of our natural resources, and extolling the benefits of sustainable living.

Another key component of our local partnerships is formalizing the relationship with the BRUSD. This was accomplished in 2007 with the execution of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Nature Center and BRUSD Governing Board (Appendix B). This MOU addresses the development of joint multidisciplinary educational programs and opportunities for students and teachers once the nature center is opened. Further, the MOU details the roles and responsibilities of the BRUSD and Nature Center in operating and maintaining the adjacent Big Springs ESA and integrating educational programs.

Once the Nature Center executed its lease agreement with the Town for a site on which to build a visitor/nature center, it engaged an architect to begin the process of developing a site plan. Upon reviewing the lease property, our architect recommended that the Nature Center purchase the property adjoining the lease portion of the Town's Mountain Meadow Recreation Complex and the Big Springs ESA as an entry to the Town site from the main access road, Woodland Road.

Thus, in late 2007, the Nature Center purchased the adjoining 5.05 acres bring the total acreage under its control to 10.20 acres. A preliminary site plan of the full acreage was completed in summer 2008 (Appendix C), and it was determined that the visitor/nature center will be constructed on the Nature Center's own property and associated facilities will be constructed on the Town leasehold property. As such, the lease/services agreement with the Town was amended to reflect this change in September 2008 (Appendix A).

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

In late-2007, the Nature Center Board of Directors initiated a strategic planning exercise which was intended to outline strategic priorities for the next three to five years. As a part of this planning exercise, the Board examined the organization's current situation ("situation assessment"), which evaluated not only our strengths for building upon our work, but also our weaknesses, or challenges, that we must seek to overcome as we move forward. The Board then developed priority strategies (or goals), and defined the measurable milestones needed to accomplish these goals.

### **Nature Center Vision**

Our vision is to achieve our mission through:

- Being the "one-stop shopping center for all things environmental" in the White Mountains region;
- Integrating our work, and the work of partners, to educate our visitors and encourage responsible action to better live with the natural resources we all share and care about;
- Being an economic benefit to the communities we serve; and
- Committing to and advocating sustainable multiple use of our lands and resources

### **Nature Center Situation Assessment**

Our organization has numerous assets, strengths, and resources available for our use to meet our mission. The Nature Center:

- Is an incorporated 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt non-profit organization;
- Has financial reserves of approximately \$96,000 (stocks) and \$17,000 (checking account);
- Has a home on 10.2 acres, of which the Nature Center purchased 5.05 acres (appraised value \$490,000 with \$150,000 equity in the property) and another 5.15 acres is under long-term lease from the Town; this home is in an ideal location for our activities, located adjacent to Big Springs Environmental Study Area;

- Is located in an area that attracts visitors from around the state;
- Has unprecedented support from the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside;
- Has created key partnerships with the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside and the Blue Ridge School District;
- Is currently communicating with an architect to develop plans for a Nature Center;
- Has initiated a web site ([www.whitemountainnaturecenter.org](http://www.whitemountainnaturecenter.org)), with green link;
- Has strong support from many individuals who are committed to our mission;
- Has support from Pinetop-Lakeside's grant writer for assistance in grant applications; and
- Has initiated partnerships with multiple government agencies and other organizations to share in our effort to promote sustainable use of our natural resources, and established an advisory group in July 2008 to help steer and participate in the future development and operation of a nature center, with formal representation from:
  - Blue Ridge Unified School District
  - Show Low Junior High School
  - University of Arizona Cooperative Extension
  - Sitgreaves Community Wildlife Protection Program
  - Northland Pioneer College
  - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
  - Arizona Game and Fish Department
  - Arizona Department of Environmental Quality
  - The Nature Conservancy
  - Arizona Wildlife Federation
  - Pinetop-Lakeside Chamber of Commerce
  - Kerr-Cole Sustainable Living Center
  - Save Woodland Lake Park Committee

### **Nature Center Challenges**

Even with the above assets and progress made in making a nature center for the White Mountains a reality, we nonetheless face some challenges, which include:

- The need for formal guiding strategic documents and business plans;

- Limitations on our funding;
- Limited public/agency awareness;
- Potential “image” conflicts between differing interest groups and stakeholders;
- A lack of a cohesive strategy for increasing membership;
- Potential conflicts with other community initiatives that are currently underway such as the acquisition of Woodland Lake Park;
- The need for clarifying roles for Board members;
- The need for an Executive Director to lead our efforts;
- The recognition that there are deep-rooted feelings in our communities about terms such as “environmentalists”;
- The need to strive to promote balanced information and to find common ground in the stewardship of our natural environment;
- The need to sell our message; or to succinctly articulate “why should I care about the Nature Center?”

## **STRATEGIC GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

As part of our Strategic Management Planning process, the Nature Center identified key goals, and defined the measurable objectives and actions needed to accomplish each of these goals. Each milestone has a timeline, a responsible party (or parties) to ensure completion and/or modification, and an estimated budget. This strategic document is intended to be a “living” plan, updated annually or as needed, and will serve to guide us as we work towards meeting our Mission.

### **Strategic Goals**

We have identified the following seven strategic goals:

1. Complete and implement various necessary planning and organizational documents, including Strategic Plan, Business Plan, and annual Operating Plans.
2. Pursue and formalize partnerships with appropriate organizations and agencies that have a stakeholder interest in the vision and mission of the Nature Center, such that it helps these organizations further their messaging and outreach.
3. Increase general membership and increase active involvement (docents, fundraising volunteers, etc.) to achieve educational and financial goals.
4. Establish a comprehensive fundraising program to achieve short- and long-term financial security to meet Center’s strategies, goals, and objectives.

5. Initiate outdoor educational programs or community activities concurrent with the construction of the Nature Center, including administrative needs such as insurance for such activities.
6. Develop plans that incorporate a phased development approach for the Nature Center and Center property, including infrastructure, signage, roads, bridge, trails, clean-up, parking, insurance, etc.
7. Develop a communications strategy to increase awareness of Center's mission and programs; financial needs; membership; and support.

**STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
**GOALS, OBJECTIVES**  
**AND**  
**ACTION PLAN**

GOAL 1	Objective	Actions required	Timeline/Status	Responsibility
<p><b>Complete, develop and implement various necessary planning and organizational documents, including Strategic Plan, Business Plan, and annual Operating Plans</b></p>	<p>1. Complete 2008-2012 Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>Board will review, edit.</p>	<p>November 2008  DONE</p>	<p>Board Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>2. Develop Annual Operating Plans by October of each year. Annual operating plans will tier off Strategic Plan, and outline activities to be completed in each year.</p>		<p>October each year</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>3. File appropriate Federal nonprofit and State Corporation Commission annual reports each year.</p>		<p>Annually  DONE for 2008</p>	<p>Treasurer</p>
	<p>4. Complete Business Plan concurrent with Strategic and Annual Operating plans.</p>		<p>January 2009</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director with appropriate experts</p>
	<p>5. Review and update organizational bylaws, and develop committee structure and responsibilities, and review insurance coverage needs.</p>		<p>As needed; need to accomplish for 2008 by November 2008</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>

<b>GOAL 2</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Timeline/Status</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<p><b>Pursue and formalize partnerships with appropriate organizations and agencies that have a stakeholder interest in the vision and mission of the Nature Center, such that it helps these organizations further their messaging.</b></p>	<p>1. Develop MOU between Blue Ridge Unified School District and Nature Center.</p>	<p>a. Draft MOU b. Obtain BRUSD governing board action</p>	<p>DONE  DONE</p>	<p>Board</p>
	<p>2. Plan and convene a Partners Workshop to foster relationships with potential partners and stakeholders.</p>	<p>a. Hold workshop with field tour of Nature Center site</p>	<p>DONE</p>	<p>Board</p>
	<p>3. Develop an Advisory Committee to guide implementation of Nature Center development and programs (focus on Goal 6).</p>	<p>a. Conduct follow-up coordination from Partners Workshop</p>	<p>November 2008</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>4. Initiate formal agreements or letters of support for funding, grants and other appropriate documents/actions.</p>		<p>As needed</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>5. Develop addendum for agreement with Town of Pintop-Lakeside for Nature Center use of their property.</p>		<p>October 2008  DONE</p>	<p>Board</p>

<b>GOAL 3</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Timeline/Status</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<p><b>Increase general membership and increase active involvement (docents, fundraising volunteers, etc.) to achieve educational and financial goals.</b></p>	<p>1. Develop a membership subcommittee to spearhead membership efforts.</p>	<p>a. Consult bylaws for status on membership</p>	<p>December 2008</p>	<p>Board</p>
	<p>2. Develop a Membership Action Plan to include promotional items, media outreach products, promotional programs, and other activities to increase membership, active involvement, and community support</p>		<p>January 2009</p>	<p>Membership Subcommittee with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>3. Develop a volunteer/docent outreach program utilizing existing and new active members for implementation</p>		<p>May 2009</p>	<p>Membership Subcommittee with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>4. Plan and host a docent training and orientation workshop.</p>		<p>July 2009</p>	<p>Membership Subcommittee with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>

<b>GOAL 4</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Timeline/Status</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<p><b>Establish a comprehensive fundraising program to achieve short- and long-term financial security to meet the Nature Center’s strategies, goals, and objectives.</b></p>	<p>1. Develop a Fundraising Subcommittee to spearhead fundraising efforts.</p>		<p>November 2008</p>	<p>Board</p>
	<p>2. Develop a Fundraising Action Plan with strategies to guide fundraising efforts, including conducting research into all significant fundraising vehicles (e.g., estates, foundation grants, public grants, major donors, partners).</p>		<p>February 2009</p>	<p>Fundraising Subcommittee with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>3. Obtain fundraising training for the board, Fundraising Subcommittee or active members engaged in or leading fundraising efforts.</p>		<p>March 2009</p>	<p>Fundraising Subcommittee with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>4. Pursue funding and other options (e.g., land exchange) to secure Nature Center property.</p>	<p>a. Revise Capital Fundraising Campaign</p> <p>b. Contact partners for assistance and support in fundraising</p>	<p>December 2008</p> <p>January 2009</p>	<p>Board and Fundraising Subcommittee with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>5. Obtain/commit funds to contract with architect to develop conceptual design/plan for Nature Center.</p>		<p>January 2009</p>	<p>Board with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>

<b>GOAL 4 (Continued)</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Timeline/Status</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
	6. Plan and hold annual Nature Center Benefit Dinner fundraiser.		Annually in October	Board with assistance of Interim Executive Director
	7. Pursue getting on United Way and AZ State Employees Charitable Campaign list of eligible non-profit organizations.		March 2009	Interim Executive Director
	8. Pursue funding to develop architectural plans for Nature Center and associated elements		March 2009	Interim Executive Director
	9. Pursue funding for construction of Nature Center elements, as per site plan and architectural plans utilizing a phased/modular construction approach.		July 2012	Board with assistance of Interim Executive Director
	10. Allocate funds to hire a Nature Center Executive Director		March 2009	Board

<b>GOAL 5</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Timeline/Status</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<p><b>Initiate outdoor educational and interpretative programs and community activities concurrent with the construction of Nature Center elements.</b></p>	<p>1. Develop an annual summer-fall educational and interpretative activities program integrating increased fundraising and public awareness creation, utilizing a diverse group of presenters and educators.</p>		<p>Annually by March</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director with Board</p>
	<p>2. Pursue cooperative program with Phoenix Zoo, Lions Club and others to develop summer camp for disadvantaged inner-city youth.</p>		<p>December 2009</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>3. Plan and hold at least one property clean-up event/year</p>		<p>Annually by May</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director with Board</p>
	<p>4. Implement priority (short-term) site improvements to foster public use and appreciation of the Nature Center site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Sign (main)</li> <li>b. Parking area</li> <li>c. Trail – Phase I</li> <li>d. Kiosk</li> <li>e. Foot bridge</li> <li>f. Trail – Phase II</li> <li>g. Pavilion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DONE</li> <li>DONE</li> <li>June 2009</li> <li>May 2009</li> <li>December 2009</li> <li>June 2010</li> <li>June 2010</li> </ul>	<p>Board with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>

<b>GOAL 6</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Timeline/Status</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<p><b>Develop and implement plans for Nature Center and Center property, including major infrastructure, signage, roads, bridge, trails, clean-up, parking, etc.</b></p>	<p>1. Develop final Master Site Plan that identifies construction elements and phases consistent with funding.</p>		<p>March 2009</p>	<p>Board with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>2. Obtain plans for visitor center.</p>	<p>a. Architectural b. Engineering</p>	<p>March 2010</p>	<p>Initiate 2.a. by Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>3. Host workshop(s) with architect and partners and stakeholders to obtain input on design of visitor center.</p>		<p>June 2009</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>4. Evaluate role that the Blue Ridge/NAVIT construction skills program may play in Nature Center construction</p>		<p>March 2009</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>5. Pursue grant for cooperative development of pavilion with Northern Arizona Wood Products Association.</p>		<p>March 2009</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>6. Cooperate with Boy Scouts of America and Pinetop-Lakeside TRACK in trail development.</p>		<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Board and Interim Executive Director</p>

<b>GOAL 6 (Continued)</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Timeline/Status</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>Develop and implement plans for Nature Center and Center property, including major infrastructure, signage, roads, bridge, trails, clean-up, parking, etc.</b>	7. Implement phased approach to construction of Nature Center.		May 2011	Board
	8. Pursue educational resources for green building, such as NPC, NAU's Center for Sustainable Environment, Kerr-Cole Sustainable Living Center, and other organizations.		December 2009	Interim Executive Director

<b>GOAL 7</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions required</b>	<b>Timeline/Status</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<p><b>Develop an integrated communications strategy to increase public awareness of the Nature Center’s mission and programs, financial needs, membership, and support.</b></p>	<p>1. Refine and update the website, with e-commerce capabilities for donations and merchandising sales.</p>		<p>February 2009</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director with appropriate technical support</p>
	<p>2. Develop a Communications Subcommittee to spearhead communications activities.</p>		<p>December 2008</p>	<p>Board</p>
	<p>3. Develop a Communications Action Plan to identify strategies for communicating with the public, groups, funding sources, etc,</p>	<p>a. Explore possibility of cooperative/joint public relations with Save Our Park and WM Land Trust.</p>	<p>March 2009</p>	<p>Communications Subcommittee with assistance of Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>4. Develop and update a generic PowerPoint presentation to be used at various functions and post on website</p>		<p>January 2009</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>5. Take advantage of school contacts to develop student programs, and develop programs with all area schools and NPC.</p>		<p>April 2009</p>	<p>Interim Executive Director</p>
	<p>6. Obtain media coverage on all Nature Center activities.</p>		<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Board and Interim Executive Director</p>

## **APPENDIX A**

**Lease and Services Agreement  
between the  
Town of Pinetop Lakeside  
and the  
White Mountain Wildlife and Nature Center  
(Original and Amended Agreements)**

## **APPENDIX B**

**Memorandum of Agreement  
between the  
Blue Ridge Unified School District Governing Board  
and the  
White Mountain Wildlife and Nature Center**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Preliminary Site Plan for the White Mountain Wildlife and Nature Center Properties**