



# **Berks Nature**

# **2021-2026 Strategic Plan**

## **Executive Summary**

Full plan adopted by the board of directors on 5-19-2021

## Recent history of planning:

In March, 2020 the board began to work on another 5 year update to the strategic plan and then we were gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic. In January 2021, the board of directors determined we needed to move forward with strategic planning and appointed a small group of board and staff to assist with an extension of the work done by the board in 2020 and offered a well vetted plan to the board for approval in May 2021.

## Mission:

The mission statement is:

**“Berks Nature is the leading agent for the conservation of the environment in our community.”**

*Our “tag line”:*

**We believe nature is essential to our quality of life.**

We demonstrate that by protecting our environment through conservation, improved land-use, and educating youth and adults about the importance of nature in our lives."

## Vision:

In 2021 we modified our vision slightly to reflect how our own organization has changed over the past 16 years. (Additions to the original vision shown in blue)

- “The vision of Berks Nature is to be a cornerstone of excellence in the stewardship of the environment. Clearly identified with our special mission, we strive to meet the ever-changing needs of our **community and seek** to conserve its heritage and essential character. **We provide time innovating, thinking and implementing how we can transform people’s relationship with nature.**

We provide environmental leadership, direct action, expertise, land use planning, advocacy, research, and education programs in accordance with the natural, historic, social, economic, and technical needs of our region and its many local communities.

We are a well-funded organization staffed for the times who are strategic in our work and also nimble enough to meet emerging community needs and opportunities related to our mission. Our staff, administration and leadership are uniquely qualified and committed to our mission and to helping our region embrace conservation at a local community level. Our board of directors demonstrates general organization and financial comprehension and transparency seeking the very best practices of governance in our operations. We are committed to the creation of significant partnerships that directly support the needs of other local “on the ground” groups. We aspire to have our membership be active and engaged not only with Berks Nature, but also in their local communities.

We own and operate the LEED Gold certified The Nature Place at Angelica Creek Park and leverage the building and the park as a gathering place for schools, events, educational programs, and community needs. The Nature Place is known locally and regionally as a demonstration campus for environmental best management practices and a demonstration center for education and connection to nature.

We steward 425 acres of leased land, own 424 acres of preserves and manage nearly 27 miles of trails and seek to connect and share those assets with the public where and when that is compatible with our stewardship goals for those specific properties.

In the midst of modern pressures on the land, we help our community maintain a large, healthy, natural environment. We seek to support and encourage rational and sustainable land use planning and practices throughout the region.

In fulfilling these responsibilities we challenge and change attitudes, yet nurture a strong sense of respect and dignity for diverse disciplines and perspectives. We are recognized for our leadership and accomplishments. The impact of Berks Nature is readily visible – free flowing streams, natural vistas, open space and farmland, clean water, healthy forests and a robust citizenry connected to and advocating for, their environment.”

## **Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice**

We know that the conservation community has traditionally not been effective at involving certain cultures and ethnicities in conservation conversations, especially communities of color who face a disproportionate risk of harm from environmental hazards. We recognize, understand, and value the inherent worth of the differences of people and their cultures within our society, and understand the need to include a diverse audience in the conservation discussion in order to ensure future success, the achievement of our mission and the health of our communities.

In 2019 the board of directors adopted an inclusion statement and a method by which the organization can measure its progress toward the goal of “becoming more diverse and inclusive”. The public statement shared in our communications materials reads:

- Just like it takes a diversity of species to make our natural environment thrive, Berks Nature recognizes that having a culture of inclusion where all individuals feel respected, and are treated fairly will bring us a power of talent to do our work and engage others in the love for and protection of nature. Accordingly, it is Berks Nature’s goal to be intentional and inclusive in the involvement, engagement, and empowerment of all groups of people within our community to help Berks Nature achieve its mission. Berks Nature will take the broadest possible view of diversity in order to attract, develop, engage and retain people from all walks of life and backgrounds in our work. Berks Nature endeavors to not see any species become extinct. So too, we desire not to neglect or exclude any audience from our work.

## **Commitment to Climate Change**

With an increased global focus on the rapidly changing issues of climate change, Berks Nature remains committed to mitigating and restoring the effects of human impact on our planet. Humans have caused a pollution blanket around the world and we can fix it. Climate matters to everyone’s personal life; extreme weather, flooding, an overheating planet, the need for clean and cheap energy are issues our global community needs to solve for our lives and our livelihood. Climate change is at the intersection of all that Berks Nature does as an organization and we remain dedicated to helping to solve this problem. We will continue to work on environmental and conservation issues that help keep our local community safe, healthy and vibrant for our children, grandchildren and future generations to come.

## What might Berks Nature be able to do in 2021-2026 that we couldn't do in 2016-2020?

Berks Nature has the opportunity over the next several years to build upon its reputation of nearly 50 years, and specifically its reputation following the opening of The Nature Place in 2017. Our involvement in 2 regional Delaware River Watershed-wide partnerships (DRWI & AWE) has increased our capacity to deliver on the ground restoration work and land protection as well as sharpening our quality of environmental education programs. Building on the excellent social media growth, partnerships and demonstration projects we have completed in the past 5 years should continue to propel us into a leadership role in the environment.

Since the opening of The Nature Place in 2017 we have long wanted a covered structure to accommodate large groups (*more than the 60 capacity of 2 classrooms*) of children for field trips and large groups of individuals for programs. (*Typically schools prefer to send entire grades which could look like upwards of 300+ students*). In 2020 the organization began to explore the possibility of some kind of addition to the building or the creation of a covered pavilion. Berks Nature received an anonymous commitment from a donor to underwrite the cost of this addition. The organization engaged GWWO architects to design a second floor rooftop deck and classroom that will in total accommodate 300+ people. Construction will begin in June 2021 and be finished by October 2021. The addition of this facility expansion will allow Berks Nature to be a location for regional meetings regarding the environment, provide opportunity for greater educational programming, and create space for small conference rentals and special events and increased desire to visit the location.

## Stabilize, Catch-up, Exceed

As we approve this strategic plan in May 2021, the staff has been informed of a significant endowment gift, largely unrestricted that will enable the organization to have additional operating income to address the sustainability of the organization for the long term. In addition, this will put the organization in a position to address many of the initiatives outlined in this plan. While grant writing and fundraising will always be part of the culture of the organization, this gift will allow us to essentially “catch up” for years of underfunding and stabilize the organization well into the future, positioning us to consistently exceed expectations in our work and impact.

## Long-Range Strategies

Based on the strategic assessment as detailed previously, Berks Nature has identified seven overriding strategies, with supporting strategic actions, it will implement in its efforts to fulfill its mission and achieve its vision. Those 7 strategies are outlined on the remaining pages.

- 1. Berks Nature will expand its environmental and conservation education programs.**

*Every child in our county has an experience with Berks Nature through our environmental education programs; We have multiple locations of our nature preschool to begin to grow our next generation of conservationists. Scholarships are available so there are fewer barriers for people to share in that experience.*



- 2. Berks Nature will utilize the Nature Place and the newly constructed rooftop deck and classroom to expand its educational programs, increase profitability, and grow our community's involvement in the preservation and appreciation of natural resources.**

*The Nature Place becomes a revenue producing hub of environmental activity, community engagement and location for organizations to meet.*



**3. Berks Nature will invest in and grow its human resources to facilitate the organization’s growth, implement succession planning and prepare for senior staff leadership transition.**

*We are adequately staffed and nurture and grow our employees even more than we do currently by providing high quality professional development opportunities, competitive salaries and better benefits like a retirement contribution program.*



**4. Berks Nature will increase, diversify, and strengthen the funding of the organization becoming less dependent on grants.**

*Focus on diversifying funding so we are able to address mission related needs before us with adequate funding.*



**5. Berks Nature will become more diverse and inclusive, with particular attention paid to urban BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities**

*We are active in and include and nurture our urban communities to become involved in our organization, take responsibility for nature in their community and pursue conservation as a career path.*



**6. Berks Nature will expand and grow the engagement of our community with nature.**

*Increase opportunities for individuals and groups to connect with nature, advocating for a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.*



**7. Berks Nature will expand and grow our land protection, watershed restoration and recreation activities.**

*Encourage others to make a lasting impact on our environment through best management installation, land and wildlife/habitat protection, watershed restoration and protection. All open space and agricultural land identified in the Berks County 2030 Comprehensive Plan will be permanently protected by conservation easements or outright purchase; Trails connect to key hubs and preserves.*

