

# WILD ONES: NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES 2015- 2017 STRATEGIC PLAN



8/15/2014

Three-year Strategic Plan

# Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes 2015-2017 Strategic Plan

## A THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

### IN SUMMARY. . .

Using an issues-based planning approach, the Wild Ones Board and interested members developed the following strategic plan to guide the organization through the upcoming 3 years. As a starting point, a broad Board, staff, and member survey surfaced 4 key issues. This document provides detail on each issue, the goals we set, and an abbreviated action plan for each goal.

4 KEY ISSUES	2015-2017 GOALS
<b>Audience</b> <i>Who we must we reach</i>  <i>See pages 3 - 5</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Initiate a <b>national business organization</b> of native plant growers and landscapers.</li><li>2. <b>Partner</b> with like-minded organizations with complementary programs and resources.</li></ol>
<b>Financials</b> <i>How to ensure financial stability</i>  <i>See pages 6 - 8</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Markedly <b>increase staff's fundraising and grant-seeking expertise.</b></li><li>2. Broaden/diversify our <b>funding base.</b></li></ol>
<b>Growth</b> <i>How we will grow</i>  <i>See pages 9 - 12</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Increase the <b>number of chapters</b> by 10 in 3 years.</li><li>2. Increase <b>member retention rate</b> to at least 90%.</li><li>3. Increase <b>new member count</b> by at least 20%.</li></ol>
<b>Programs</b> <i>What we offer our audiences</i>  <i>See pages 13 - 14</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Inventory and <b>evaluate</b> national Wild Ones programs.</li><li>2. Annually, inventory and promote <b>chapter "best practices."</b></li></ol>

The history and process used in developing this Strategic Plan are described on the final page of this report (page 15).



## MISSION

Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes promotes environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities. Wild Ones is a not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization.

## VISION

Wild Ones strives to become a widely recognized voice for native plants and the sustainable landscaping movement, promoting increased use of native plantings that create living landscapes through grassroots efforts by example, education, marketing, and personalized support. We will:

- Raise public awareness regarding the benefits that native plants, including trees, shrubs, wildflowers and grasses, offer in a variety of settings so landscaping with native plants becomes the norm rather than the exception.
- Persuade the public that including native plants in home and public landscapes is aesthetically pleasing and healthier for our environment, and that reducing unnecessary turf grass reduces storm water runoff and unnecessary use of water, fuel, and lawn chemicals.
- See the use of native plants extend into an increasing number of areas where plants touch the soil – such as pollinator support and public places.
- Join forces with others to preserve native plants and biodiversity from loss due to development and other forces, including displacement by non-native invasive plants.

## CORE VALUES

**Respect.** Our mission stems from our respect for the other species on this planet and future generations. We will treat each other – our staff, members and volunteers – with respect at all times. We respect different tastes in landscaping but also ask that others show respect for the common good by considering how they can conserve resources and improve the environment via the inclusion of native plants in their landscapes.

**Personalized Support.** Our members value the opportunity for direct contact with other Wild Ones members and the ability to “learn locally.” This sets Wild Ones apart from many similar organizations. Networking and education are our most important functions.

**Appreciation—Volunteers are the Heart of Wild Ones.** To keep our dues low and our efforts local, Wild Ones is a grass-roots organization that runs primarily on volunteer effort. We will continue to rely on volunteers to carry our mission forward. We will support our volunteers and recognize their efforts, especially those in volunteer leadership positions.

**All Members are Valuable Members.** At the national level our income is largely derived from member dues and donations. We appreciate all members, respecting that everyone has varying priorities and demands on their time, which impact their ability to volunteer.

**Fresh and Adaptable.** While we stay focused on our core abilities and goals, we will continually look for and solicit ideas from our Board, our members and honorary directors for new strategies that we might use to further our goal of promoting sustainable landscape practices.

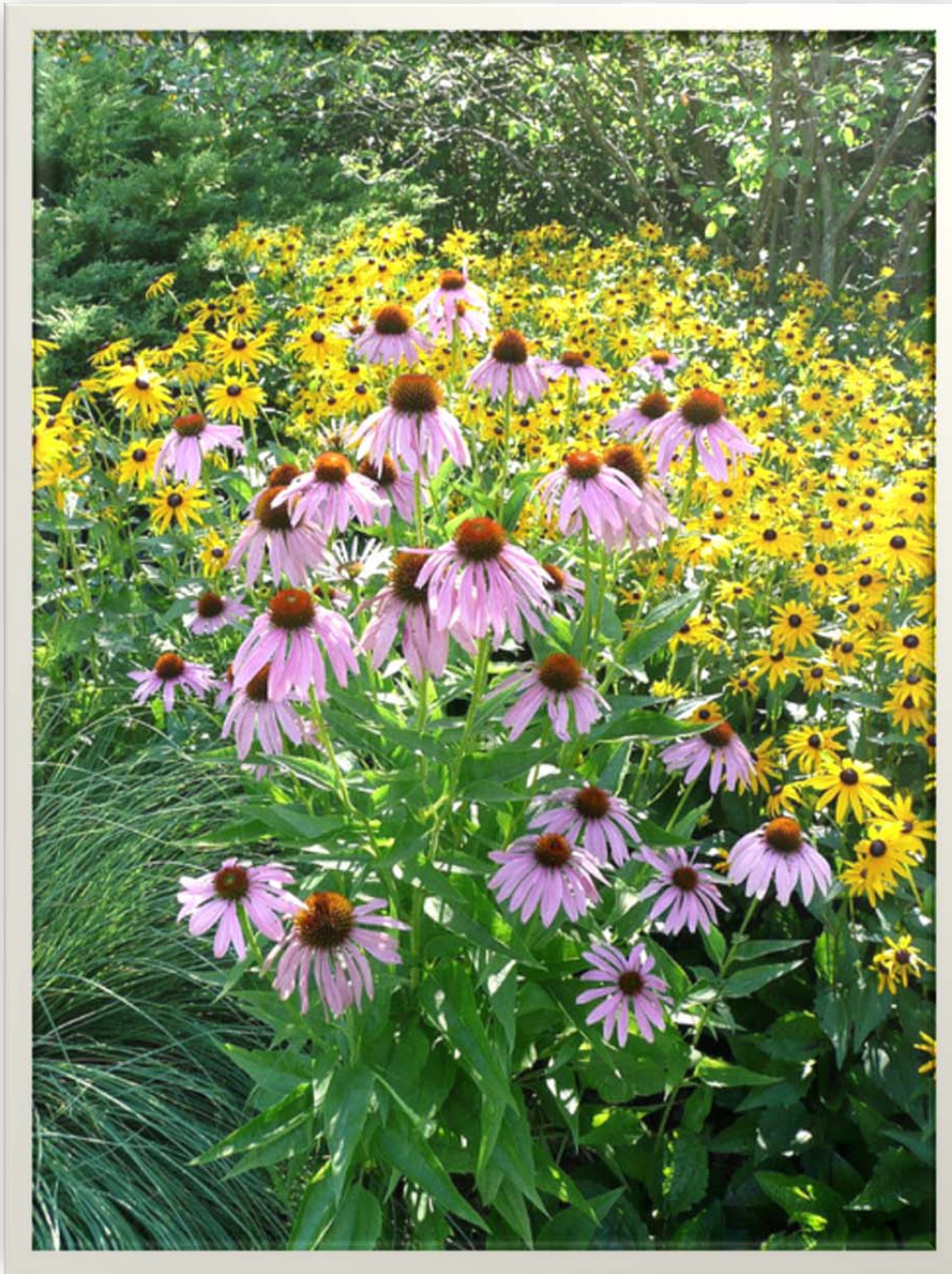
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## AUDIENCE . . . WHO WE MUST REACH

### “Audience,” the term

In this strategic plan, “audience” is the word we chose to encompass our members, the general public, and also other environmental organizations with whom we compete for attention, membership, and funding. Broadly, our audience is the public — at least those with a yard or landscape of their own or who are interested in native plantings. Other environmental groups are those that complement Wild Ones or with whom we have (or could have) partnerships. We must find ways to cut through countless other messages by other organizations and communicate that we are unique and important.



## AUDIENCE . . . WHO WE MUST REACH

### GOAL 1: Initiate a national business coalition of native plant growers and landscapers.

This goal is about the importance of helping the Wild Ones' audience of native plant landscapers (growers/ nurseries, landscape designers, and landscape installers) to come together and, as a group, encourage the public to choose native plants.

Action (what we will do)	Accountable (who ensures it)	Timeline (start-complete)	Est. Resources (\$, people, coop.)	Measurement (success when:)
1. Create an <b>advisory council</b> of native plant landscapers; ensure it becomes self-perpetuating	ED*	Sept. 2015 – Dec. 2016	ED time plus \$1,500 expenses	Roster of 7-10 council members
2. Establish <b>national native landscape design awards</b>	Designated committee	Jan. 2016 – Jan. 2017	Staff time	Round 1 awarded
3. Create an initial <b>e-listing</b> of native landscapers, including a users' review (similar to Angie's List™); ensure it becomes self-perpetuating	Designated committee	Sept. 2015 – ongoing	Volunteer time, staff time, and ad budget (\$5,000)	On-line list open for viewing
4. Establish and maintain a <b>native plant landscaping blog</b> for native plant growers and landscapers	Volunteer(s)	Sept. 2015 – ongoing	Volunteer time, staff time for consistency with WO website	Blog initiated
5. Implement <b>information and outreach programs</b> supporting native landscape nurseries/ professionals to integrate native plants into clients' landscape designs	Designated committee, staff	Oct. 2016 – ongoing	Volunteer and staff time, communications budget (\$10,000)	Program created, implemented and published

\* ED = Executive Director

**GOAL 2: Partner with like-minded organizations with complementary programs and resources.**

<b>Action</b> (what we will do)	<b>Accountable</b> (who ensures it)	<b>Timeline</b> (start-complete)	<b>Est. Resources</b> (\$, people, coop.)	<b>Measurement</b> (success when:)
1. <i>Local chapters:</i> <b>Expand relationships</b> and joint programming or working sessions with local growers, garden clubs, Master Gardeners, botanical gardens, conservation groups, etc. (Examples: At least 1 co-meeting and/or joint event per year; reciprocity in newsletters, WO Journal and/or other materials)	Chapter pres., supported by staff	Mar. 2015 – ongoing	National: provide explanation and examples; ask chapters for cooperation	Year 1: 30% of chapters  Year 2: 50% of chapters  Year 3: 65% of chapters
2. <i>National:</i> <b>Develop relationships</b> and joint programming or working sessions with regional and/or national complementary organizations (Example: Xerces)	ED	Ongoing (already under way)	Staff time (20% of 1 staff person)	Formal, Board-approved agreements (beyond Monarch Joint Venture)

## FINANCIALS . . . HOW TO ENSURE FINANCIAL STABILITY

### “Financials,” the term

These goals relate to resource development and the need for a strategy to diversify Wild Ones' funding base. Current and potential sources of income include membership dues, annual appeals, major donor campaigns, grant seeking, sponsorships, fundraising events, earned income, and in-kind contributions.





## FINANCIALS . . . HOW TO ENSURE FINANCIAL STABILITY

### GOAL 1: Markedly increase staff's fundraising and grant-seeking expertise.

At the 2014 Annual Meeting and Strategic Planning Session, consensus was to hire an executive director, a development consultant, or a part-time staff member with fundraising and grant-seeking expertise/experience. Raising increased dollars will be important to providing support for the organization to expand current and initiate future activities.

Action (what we will do)	Accountable (who ensures it)	Timeline (start-complete)	Est. Resources (\$, people, coop.)	Measurement (success when:)
1. Create job description and/or expectations for a <b>new focus on fundraising</b> for Executive Director or other staff	Governance Committee, ED	Nov. 2014 – May 2015	Committee and ED time	Written job description and/or plan
2. <b>Seek a grant</b> to expand and/or support fundraising and grant seeking capacity of staff*	ED, staff (Board support)	July 2015 – May 2016	ED and staff time	Grant obtained
3. <b>Conduct a search and hire</b> staff and/or a development consultant and orient to the organization	<i>If ED:</i> ED Search Committee, Board  <i>If staff:</i> ED (within budget)	May – Dec. 2015	Committee, ED, Board time, travel (and potentially relocation) expenses	Staff/ consultant hired and integrated

\* Note: New hires will require fundraising experience beyond that of current staff. Funders are likely to ask how Wild Ones will support the fundraising staff after Year 1, so the grant request could be a 3-year request with a lesser amount requested each year (where Wild Ones picks up a greater proportion each year, starting in Year 2).



**GOAL 2: Broaden/diversify our funding base.**

<b>Action</b> (what we will do)	<b>Accountable</b> (who ensures it)	<b>Timeline</b> (start-complete)	<b>Est. Resources</b> (\$, people, coop.)	<b>Measurement</b> (success when:)
1. <b>Research</b> sources of potential/ new local, regional, and national funding*	Board, ED, staff, chapters (potentially, a consultant)	April 2015 – ongoing	Board,** staff and chapter time; potential grant-writer	Written report
2. Create <b>Resource Development Plan</b> and obtain Board approval	Finance Committee, chapters, ED, (potentially, a consultant)	June – Oct. 2015	Committee, staff, chapter time; potential grant-writer; Board	Written development plan; Board approval
3. <b>Establish timetable</b> for grant solicitations and submit applications; obtain grants	ED or development staff	June 2015 – ongoing	Staff time or grant-writer fees (~\$10,000)	Written time- table; at least 5 grant applications; 2 obtained

\* Currently, this is an ongoing effort; this is meant to strengthen current these efforts.

\*\* Finance Committee (FINCOM)

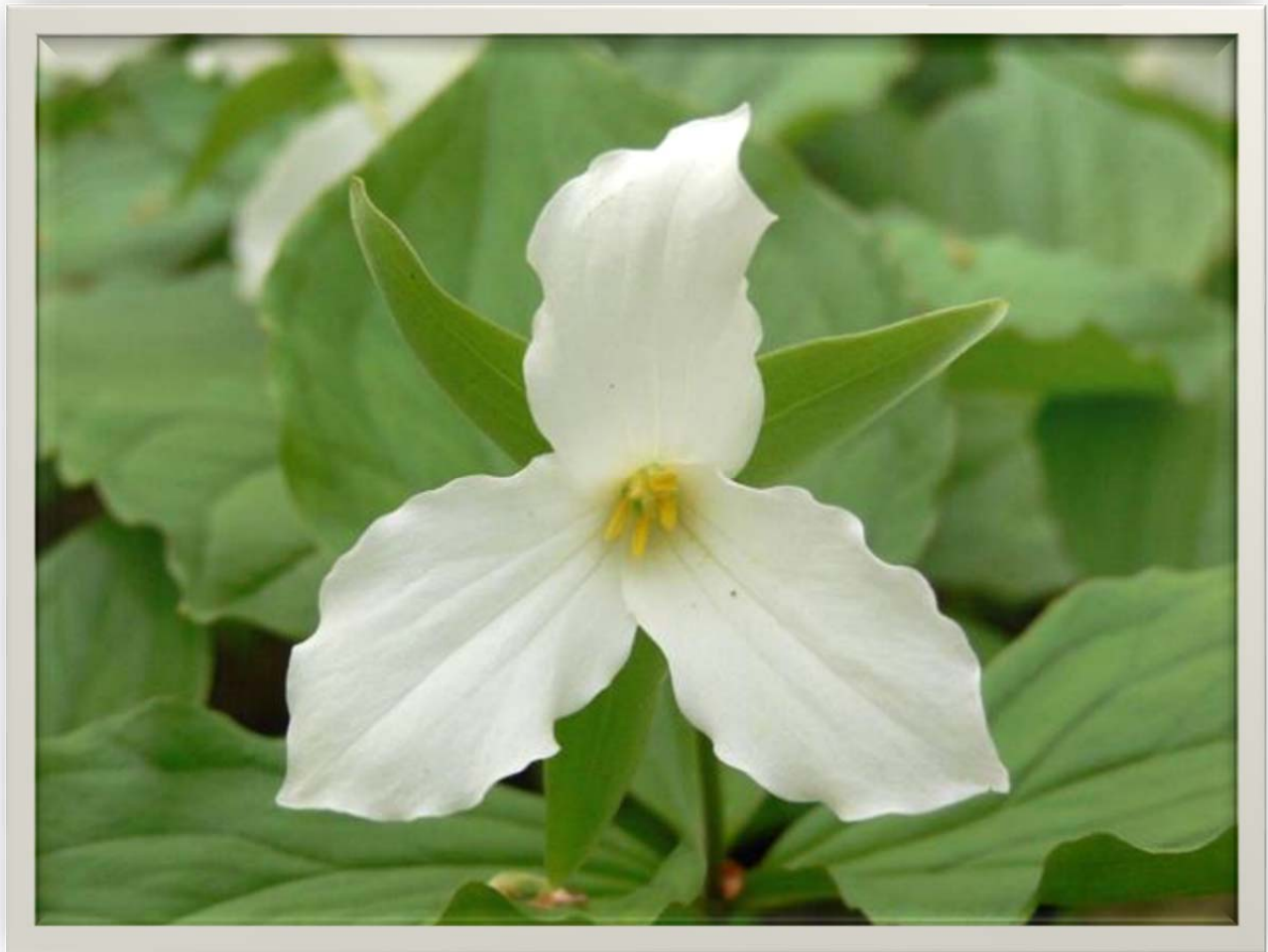
## GROWTH . . . HOW WE WILL GROW

### “Growth,” the term

In this strategic plan, “growth” relates to the number and location of chapters as well as the size and composition of membership (individuals and business partners). With regard to chapters, consensus is that Wild Ones should grow the organization “organically” through two models:

- The “Daughter Model” (splitting certain chapters), and
- The “Sprout Model” (chapters initiated by a dynamic individual)

This vision for growth basically involves continuing to grow from the Midwest out. Implementing growth plans will require effective communication (1) among chapters; (2) between National and chapters; and (3) with members, including Partners at Large (PALs), the business community, municipalities, other organizations, and the general public.



## GROWTH . . . HOW WE WILL GROW

### GOAL 1: Increase the number of chapters by 10 in 3 years.

This goal's intent is to create 5 new chapters via expansion of existing chapters (the "Daughter Model") plus 5 new chapters via PALs or others (the "Sprout Model") – for a total of 10 new chapters.

Action (what we will do)	Accountable (who ensures it)	Timeline (start-complete)	Est. Resources (\$, people, coop.)	Measurement (success when:)
1. <b>Determine criteria</b> for splitting well-established chapters; identify those that are ripe for a split ("Daughter Model") and implement	Board and/or designated committee, selected "parent" chapters, ED	Jan. – Dec. 2015	Staff and chapter time, travel/other expenses	Criteria in place; chapters identified; 5 new chapters created
2. Revise/design and implement a <b>retention program</b> for current chapters (incl. regular communication, highlighting chapter benefits, and leadership support and development)	Communication Committee, ED, staff	Jan. 2015 and ongoing	ED, staff time (potentially budget for travel/other expenses)	No loss of chapters
3. <b>Identify dynamic individuals</b> in PAL base and/or like-minded organizations; obtain agreement to start new chapters ("Sprout Model") and provide resources	ED, chapters	July 2015 – Jan. 2017	Staff and chapter time, travel/other expenses	Individuals identified; 5 new chapters created
4. <b>Work with new chapters</b> of both models; provide resources and share best practices to get them up and running*	Staff, "parent" chapters	July 2015 and ongoing	Staff and chapter time, (potentially budget for travel/other expenses)	10 new chapters up and running by end 2017

\* Currently, there is a limited program in place; this is meant to strengthen current efforts.

**GOAL 2: Increase member retention rate to at least 90%.**

Retention of members in all categories\*, linked with recruitment (in Goal 3, next page) and partnering (addressed in “Audience,” Goal 2), will immeasurably strengthen Wild Ones’ message and credibility.

<b>Action</b> (what we will do)	<b>Accountable</b> (who ensures it)	<b>Timeline</b> (start-complete)	<b>Est. Resources</b> (\$, people, coop.)	<b>Measurement</b> (success when:)
1. <b>Survey chapters</b> on best practices related to member retention and membership development**	Communication Committee, ED’s Marketing Committee, staff	Jan. – Mar. 2015	ED’s Marketing Committee, staff time	Survey completed; results reported
2. Revise/design and implement a <b>retention program</b> for current members in all categories* (incl. regular communications, membership benefits, and being part of a like-minded group) tailored to membership type	Communication Committee, ED’s Marketing Committee, staff	<i>Design:</i> Mar. – Nov. 2015  <i>Implement:</i> Nov. 2015 – ongoing	ED’s Marketing Committee, staff time (potentially)	Program in place and underway by Nov. 2015; 20% increase in retention by Dec. 2017

\*Categories: 1) household (including chapter and PAL), 2) business, 3) professional/educator, 4) affiliate NFP organization, and 5) limited income/student memberships

\*\*Currently, a limited program is in place (State of the Chapter Report); this is meant to strengthen current efforts

**GOAL 3: Increase new member count by at least 20%.**

<b>Action</b> (what we will do)	<b>Accountable</b> (who ensures it)	<b>Timeline</b> (start-complete)	<b>Est. Resources</b> (\$, people, coop.)	<b>Measurement</b> (success when:)
1. <b>Develop list</b> of new NFP organizations, businesses, and professionals/educators from which to recruit	Staff, Communication Committee, chapters	Jan. – July 2015	Communication Committee and staff time	List created
2. <b>Release and promote</b> newly updated brochures and increase social media and on-line marketing vehicles* to recruit within the NFP, business, and professional/educator communities	Communication Committee, ED, chapters	Jan. – Oct. 2015	\$5,000 for expenses	Disseminate brochure; 20+% increase in these categories by Dec. 2017
3. <b>Encourage chapters</b> to utilize printed and social media and online materials for recruiting new members in all membership categories	Communication Committee, ED, and staff	Ongoing	Staff time	20+% increase in all membership by Dec. 2017

\*Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, etc.; incl. keyword searches



## PROGRAMS . . . WHAT WE OFFER OUR AUDIENCES

### “Programs,” the term

The word “programs” means Wild Ones-sponsored events, educational series, contests, and other offerings by National:

- Annual members conference
- Annual photo contest
- Chapter development help/coaching
- Library
- Marketing/leadership workshops (for chapt.)
- Native Plants Butterfly Garden/Habitat Recognition Program
- Partnering with like-minded organizations
- Presentations by the ED and Board members
- Press releases
- Resources (brochures, PPTs, DVDs, books)
- Seeds for Education grant program (SFE)
- Themed merchandise (incl. DVDs, books)
- WILD Center
- *Wild for Monarchs* cooperative program
- *Wild Ones Journal*
- Wild Ones website and social media

Chapters offer the following programs and resources:

- Award programs
- Community events, projects, and gardens
- Invasive plant eradication projects
- Mentoring programs
- Newsletters
- Partnering with like-minded organizations
- Plant rescues
- Plant sales
- Speaker presentations, yard tours
- Themed merchandise

The strategic planners defined 5 components of a “good” program; it is one that is:

1. A learning opportunity
2. Linked to the organization’s mission
3. Action-oriented, creating interest that convinces the audience to act
4. Complete with tools and resources
5. Providing solutions to current problems and showing Wild Ones’ impact



## PROGRAMS . . . WHAT WE OFFER OUR AUDIENCES

### GOAL 1: Inventory and evaluate national Wild Ones programs.

Part of inventorying Wild Ones programs is finding which are: 1) unique to Wild Ones, 2) valuable to members, 3) creating more value than they cost (cost-benefit analysis), and 4) clearly meeting our mission and vision.

Action (what we will do)	Accountable (who ensures it)	Timeline (start-complete)	Est. Resources (\$, people, coop.)	Measurement (success when:)
1. <b>Inventory</b> current (and in-process) national WO programs ( <i>coordinate with Growth, Goal 2, Action 1</i> )	Communication Committee, staff	Jan. – June 2015	Staff time (limited)	Report of findings
2. Develop and test <b>program evaluation criteria</b> with a sample of Wild Ones' audiences	Staff	June – Oct. 2015	Staff time (could be significant)	List of evaluation criteria
3. <b>Evaluate national WO programs</b> vs. criteria; develop recommendations for the Board	Designated committee, staff	Nov. 2015 – Feb. 2016	Staff time (could be significant)	Report of recommendations

### GOAL 2: Annually, inventory and promote chapter "best practices."\*

This goal essentially has two benefits: 1) it recognizes and reinforces excellent chapter work, and 2) it provides value to chapters and members who want to improve and/or expand their own programming.

Action (what we will do)	Accountable (who ensures it)	Timeline (start-complete)	Est. Resources (\$, people, coop.)	Measurement (success when:)
1. <b>Gather and describe best practices</b> of chapters and members (e.g. activities and projects -- yard tours, plant sales, chapter meeting topics, networking/social bonding)	Communication Committee, staff	Jan. – Sept. 2015	Staff and chapter time (limited)	Written report of best practices
2. <b>Populate the WO website</b> with the "best of the best"; communicate to chapters and members	Staff	Sept. 2015 – Mar. 2016 (ongoing)	Staff and chapter time (limited)	Website information (searchable)

\* Currently, a limited program is in place; this is meant to strengthen current efforts.

## HOW WE GOT HERE

This section is a record of the process used in developing this strategic plan. It is Wild Ones' first strategic plan, built within the constraints of a geographically spread Board and the work of volunteer leaders.

*We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails. (Bertha Calloway)*

Starting in 1999, and then in 2002, 2009, and 2013, Wild Ones began work toward developing a strategic plan. Then, in early 2014, the Board named a Strategic Planning Committee. The Committee proposed — and the Board approved — a 3-phased process:

1) “listen” by surveying the Board, former Board members, chapters and staff; 2) “analyze and plan” by using both survey results and prior strategic planning work; and 3) “the plan” written from the combined information and using the August 15 annual meeting as the forum.

### **For Focus: a Board and member survey**

*It takes two to speak the truth –  
one to speak and another to hear.*  
(Henry David Thoreau)

To focus the strategic planning work and lessen the Board's time, the organization sponsored an online survey, in which participated 14 Board members; 30 chapters, former and honorary Board members, and committee chairs; and all 3 staff. (Total: 47 respondents) Conducted in May and June 2014, the survey found areas of strong agreement among all respondents,

as well as those where there was a split in opinion.

The survey generated the 4 strategic plan focus topics: 1) audience, 2) financials, 3) growth, and 4) programs.

### **A Meeting of the Minds: the strategic planning session**

During Wild Ones' August 15-17 Board and annual membership meeting, just over 30 Board members and interested participants gathered for an afternoon to work on the strategic plan. Four breakout groups, each assisted by an experienced “mentor,” worked individually on setting goals within the 4 focus topics and reported back to the main group for discussion and to vet their ideas. At the end of the day, the group reached general agreement on goals for each focus area.

### **The End Result: this strategic plan**

For accuracy, the strategic plan went through multiple reviews – by the Wild Ones Executive Director (for fact checking about current programs), breakout group mentors and others who volunteered for “review duty,” the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Board at its October 19, 2014 meeting.

This final document, containing Board revisions, was released in December 2014. The plan will guide the organization in 2015 through 2017. In 2017, work on a new strategic plan will start, carrying on the work described here in 2014.

*He who stops being better stops being good.*  
(Oliver Cromwell)



Cover photo by **John Meyland**, North Oakland Chapter (MI); all other photos by **Jamie Godshalk**, Lake-to-Prairie Chapter (IL)

