

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2021-2025



We envision a community where people value and embrace our natural world and make it a priority in their everyday decisions and actions.



# Our Guiding Values

## Nature is accessible and welcoming to all

Everyone should be able to enjoy the thrill of the outdoors, feeling the seasons change, hearing birdsong, and seeing flowers bloom and eagles soar. By removing barriers to experiencing Pickering Creek and its programs, people of all backgrounds and circumstances can experience wild green spaces. No admission fee for visitors, offering low to no-cost programming for schools, providing scholarships and transportation from town to summer camp, and finding ways to encourage new audiences to participate are examples of how we remove barriers to getting outside.

## Diverse partnerships

Securing the health of our ecosystems requires the effort and a connection to nature of individuals and community, faith, business and government groups with diverse interests and needs. Through strategic programming, Pickering Creek engages with individuals and groups with a broad range of perspectives and expertise to empower people of all backgrounds to take action for birds and their habitats.

## Healthy native habitats big and small

As part of the 5,454 square mile Delmarva Peninsula, we manage our 400-acre wildlife sanctuary to feel naturally wild and representative of the habitats of the Mid-Atlantic region, while safely accommodating human visitors as well. Our respect for all living things guides us to inspire and empower our Delmarva Peninsula neighbors to improve their own landscape, big or small, for wildlife.

## Lifelong relationships with nature

We believe people of all ages should play outside. Research confirms that a meaningful adult connection with the natural world develops in early childhood. Because of this understanding, Pickering Creek educators begin hands-on science programming in early childhood, then nurture those initial connections regularly throughout school careers and adulthood, encouraging lifelong exploration and action.

## Authentic experiences in wild spaces

Nature is hands on. We learn about it by navigating rough terrain, examining insects and climbing trees. Natural spaces are dynamic, changing and complex places to explore. They are disorderly, free-range and untidy. Being at Pickering Creek helps people develop relationships with nature, including appreciation of natural processes, interrelationships between organisms and care for plants and animals, large and small. Pickering Creek's space and experience-based programs are designed to get people outside and into nature to get things accomplished for the benefit of wildlife and their habitat.

## Community involvement and action

We believe in the power of collective action. That is why we act as trusted partners to leverage resources, using nature as the unifying force to bring people together to improve the health of Delmarva's human and wild communities.





# PICKERING CREEK AUDUBON CENTER

## Strategic Plan: 2021-2025

### INTRODUCTION

Forty years ago, the George Olds and Margaret Olds Strahl families made an extraordinary gift to the Eastern Shore community—their 400-acre farm on Pickering Creek with 4,400 feet of waterfront. They intended their land to become a sanctuary, open to the community and dedicated to conservation and education. In their own words, “If this world is ever to bring mankind’s material needs into harmony with the needs of our natural environment, we must start with the education of young people.”

From this gracious start, Pickering Creek Audubon Center has grown, flourished and brought life to the gift of its founders in ways that neither the donors nor the community could have imagined. Today, the center is:

- The leading provider of conservation education on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, its programs reaching 9,000 students in Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot and Wicomico schools. Complementary programs for teachers provide tools to support and enhance student exploration of the natural sciences.
- A trusted partner in the community, which engages people of all ages in activities that promote learning and action that benefits the environment. From programs on climate change communication to landowner habitat restoration, the center inspires people to incorporate stewardship into everyday life.
- A sanctuary of carefully managed lands. Our forests, meadows, wetlands and shoreline attract people to the center. Since 2010, the number of visitors to Pickering Creek has doubled. The rustic and wild surroundings invite birders, hikers, canoeists, families and young explorers to immerse themselves in the natural world as they find pleasure in unscripted adventures or participate in programs and volunteer activities.

As the impacts of climate change become increasingly clear in our everyday lives, the work of the center is needed now more than ever. Audubon’s 2019 report, “Survival by Degrees,” notes that 389 North American bird species are vulnerable to extinction from climate change. The health of the Chesapeake Bay, on which wildlife and people depend, continues to decline. Flooding brought on by stronger storms and sea level rise is regularly apparent. The enormity of current environmental issues leaves many feeling disconnected from the natural world



while still struggling to find meaningful ways to make a difference.

The center directly and effectively addresses these critical issues through its award-winning programs and activities that, true to its mission, engage and empower the community. Yet, there is so much more to accomplish! With a world desperately in need of wise ecological stewardship, it is time to magnify the center’s reach and the power of its solutions. Time is of the essence.

We need champions, some to enhance the visitor experience and others to help extend the center’s vision beyond its borders. We turn to you—our community, the community to whom the Olds and Strahl families gifted their land—to enhance visitors’ experiences, solidify the center’s financial future and support programs that extend far beyond Pickering’s borders.

We set forth this strategic plan that will enhance and magnify Pickering Creek Audubon Center’s impact on the Eastern Shore. On the following pages are five interlocking strategies to guide the center forward. As you read them, imagine a more powerful center five years from now as it welcomes new friends and old, counters challenges with leadership and celebrates successes you have helped achieve.

We look forward to working with you to realize our bold vision—a community where people value and embrace our natural world and make it a priority in their everyday decisions and actions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dirck K. Bartlett".

Dirck K. Bartlett  
*Board Chair*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mark Scallion".

Mark Scallion  
*Director*

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and Staff of Pickering Creek Audubon Center  
Fall 2021.

**Vision:** We envision a community where people value and embrace our natural world and make it a priority in their everyday decisions and actions.

**Mission:** Pickering Creek Audubon Center conserves natural habitats on Maryland’s Eastern Shore by engaging and empowering our community through exploration, education and stewardship.





# 1 Engage Multiple Audiences in High-Impact Activities and Programs that Lead People to Action

### Key Elements


- Excel in leading and demonstrating effective conservation education on Maryland's Eastern Shore.
- Continuously assess and enhance the center's programs, including:
  - › School curricula developed through extensive collaboration at the school system level;
  - › Community-based programs connecting people with healthy ecosystems, including collaboration with community partners;
  - › New opportunities that grow the capacity and impact of the center to stimulate conservation action within the community.
- Ensure that center programs are inclusive and welcoming to all, especially people with limited access to nature, wildlife and the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.
- Identify and recruit champions as supporters and spokespeople for each program to help ensure that center initiatives are well publicized, well attended and sustainably funded.
- Create new opportunities for volunteers to assist staff with center activities and programs.

# 2 Enhance the Site to Meet the Needs of Pickering Creek Audubon Center's Mission

### Key Elements

- Develop a long-range vision of site enhancements that promotes the wide-ranging interests of the center's visitors and advance the center's mission.
- Expand the center's reach to conserve carbon-storing forests and wetlands, to create corridors for wildlife and to open new opportunities for learning and exploration.
- Assess the 2013 Master Site Plan to determine which of its recommendations remain realistic and desirable today. For desirable components of the Master Site Plan, determine the cost and sequence of accomplishing these elements and include them in the long-range planning.
- Define current and expected maintenance needs of the center, budget for them, and address them according to a timely multiyear schedule.

*For 35 years, Pickering Creek Audubon Center has been open daily for bikers, walkers and explorers to enjoy nature with no admission fee.*



► **Connecting students to nature at every grade level,** Pickering Creek has provided a continuum of learning for Talbot County students for over 30 years. What was once 3½ contact hours with students in the late 90's and early 00's, with one in-school visit and one field trip is now between nine and 13 hours of programming per year that weaves birds and their habitats into each lesson.

► **For 25 years, Pickering Creek's summer EcoCamp** has regularly sold out and has created a sense of place in nature for over 4,500 children. Campers return as Junior Counselors, Junior Counselors return as Counselors. Years later, campers return on school field trips with their children, often remarking that it is just like they remember, only even better.





## 3 Enhance the Public's Understanding of our Mission and Motivate People to Visit Pickering Creek Audubon Center

### Key Elements

- Establish an advisory group comprised of a cross section of community leaders and stakeholders to provide guidance on broadening the Center's message of education and stewardship.
- Increase knowledge about the full range of the Center's work through publicity and social media.
  - › Identify key partners to help develop and implement an effective communications plan.
  - › Utilize a wide range of outlets to expand and improve the Center's media presence to reach new, diverse audiences.
  - › Increase the frequency of Pickering Creek's name, programs or events appearing in newspapers, magazines, social media, radio, and television.
- Identify strategies to develop sustained involvement with the center and its mission.

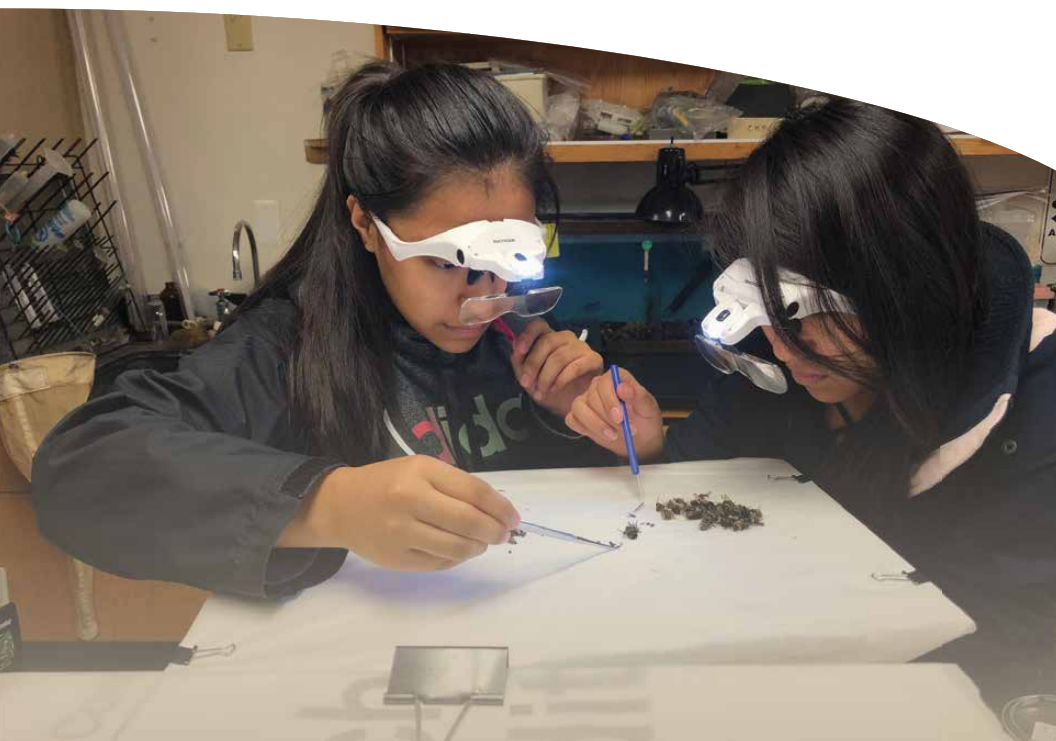
## 4 Broaden Pickering Creek Audubon Center's Philanthropic Base to Secure its Growth and Long-Term Sustainability

### Key Elements

- Increase the number of donors and average gift amounts over the next three years in anticipation of a larger campaign.
- Require annual fundraising training for the board, staff, and select stakeholders. This training should provide guidance on the importance of fund development, including targeting individuals as well as large and small groups.
- Evaluate the center's overall revenue portfolio, including its endowment, and strategically develop and test new revenue-positive activities.
- Explore opportunities to raise revenues through new and existing relationships with partner organizations.
- Ensure income is sufficient to support any activities proposed in this strategic plan.



► Overall, because branding is about creating and sustaining trust it means delivering on promises. The best and most successful brands are completely coherent. Every aspect of what they do and what they are reinforces everything else. —Wally Olins, author and branding strategist



► Ninety percent of Pickering programs are for public school systems, however just 2% of the revenue represented in the operating budget is received from the school systems served. Without the generosity of the community and the competitive private, state and federal grants secured by staff, students of all backgrounds, means and academic standings would not receive the quality outdoor STEM experiences provided by Pickering Creek.



# 5 Ensure that Board Governance Practices Reflect, Guide and Sustain Pickering Creek Audubon Center’s Mission and Vision

## Key Elements

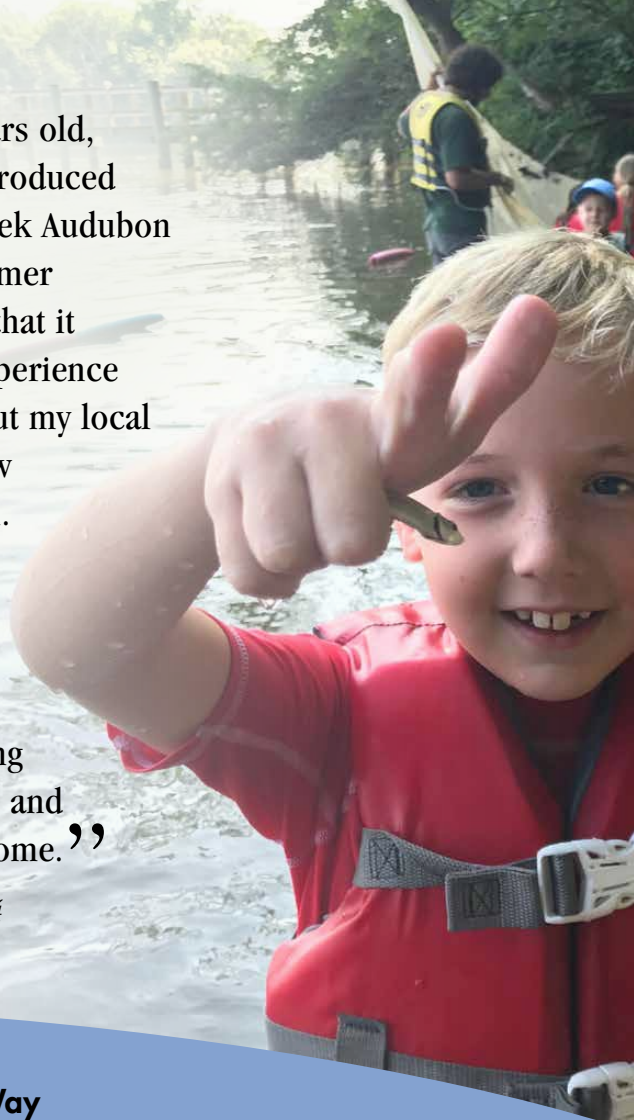
- Promote continuous improvement in the culture, capacity and diversity of the board to meet the needs of the center.
- Ensure that the board and committees of the board are operating at a level constituting best practices.
- Make certain that governing documents are up-to-date and observed.
- Seek board members from a broad diversity of Eastern Shore residents.
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of the governance and mission-based accomplishments of the center in keeping with the wishes and charitable intent of the founders.

► Leadership is about finding your unique organizational blueprint and expressing that courageously, confidently and vulnerably.



“When I was four years old, my grandmother introduced me to Pickering Creek Audubon Center through summer EcoCamp. She said that it would be a great experience for me to learn about my local ecosystem, meet new people and have fun. Little did I know that it would turn out to be a summer tradition that I would continue doing for another 11 years and hopefully more to come.”

—Natalie, age 14



## We’ve Come a Long Way

For over thirty years, Pickering Creek Audubon Center has been at the forefront of environmental education on the Eastern Shore and a force within Maryland in making outdoor experiences part of every students’ education. For over 30 years, Pickering Creek has been growing a citizenry of advocates and protectors of birds, habitat and the Chesapeake Bay. We’ve done that by working with local school systems to develop their science curricula, training many of the region’s conservation leaders, advocating for an environmental literacy requirement for high school graduates and serving on Maryland’s Project Green Classroom Initiative.

PCAC by the numbers 1992–2024	Yesterday 1992	Today	Tomorrow 2025
Classrooms Served	35	701	920
Program Length	2 hrs	13 hrs	13 hrs
No. of Student Contacts	1,146	11,437	15,000
Staff Positions	2	8	13
Donors	66	512	1024
Operating Budget	\$93,624	\$630,052	\$850,000
Endowment and Reserves	\$300,000	\$1,507,494	\$3,000,000
Miles of Trail	1.6	4.75	6.25
Acres Managed as Habitat	127	285	380
Total Center Acreage	380	390	450



“That our students get an immersive experience in nature is amazing enough, but it’s the students who begin the day doubtful that they will have fun, or fearful of what they will find, who end the day proudly planting more than anyone and shrieking with joy as a snake slithers away, that remind me why this work is so important to our kids and the earth.”

—Samantha, Teacher Naturalist



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