

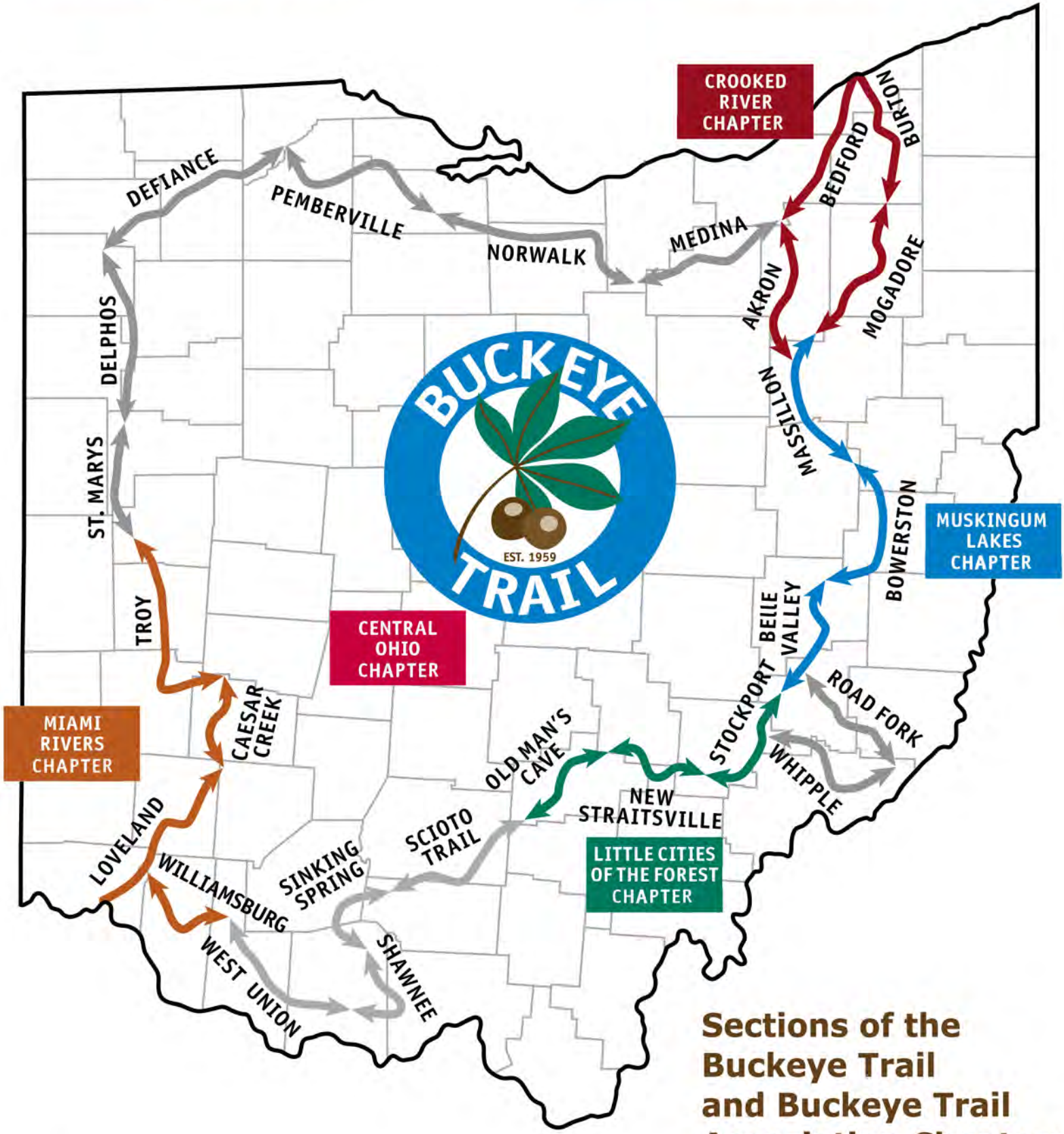


Buckeye Trail Association

January 2020 - December 2025



Strategic Plan



Sections of the Buckeye Trail and Buckeye Trail Association Chapters



The Buckeye Trail Story . . .

In 1958, Merrill Gilfillan wrote an article for the Columbus Dispatch proposing a trail from Cincinnati to Lake Erie. One of his hopes was that the trail would serve as an encouragement to young people to slow down and learn about their native land. Spurred on by the article, several people met with Merrill in Columbus in February, 1959 to discuss building such a trail. In June, they formed a non-profit organization – The Buckeye Trail Association (BTA).

The first 20 miles were dedicated on September 19, 1959 in Hocking County. Several of the founders and early leaders were among the 34 people making that dedication hike, including the BTA's most famous grandma, Emma Gatewood. From that beginning, the trail grew to over 1,444 miles under the auspices of the BTA.

The BTA Constitution states; “the purpose of the Association is to promote the construction, maintenance, and use of state-wide trail system, with the State of Ohio, to be supplemented with side trails, campsites, and other facilities, so as to render accessible some of the historical and scenic spots of the Buckeye State. The trail shall be primarily a footpath, but certain portions may be designated for use by horsemen and/or other non-motorized users.”

Today, the Buckeye Trail Association is a large, strong body of volunteers who both maintain and promote the trail. Though the entire route is marked, the Buckeye Trail (BT) continues to change and improve. The BTA continuously strives to not only move trail sections off roads, but also to upgrade the entire Buckeye Trail to a high-quality trail.

“The Buckeye Trail Association is the leader in building, maintaining, protecting and promoting use of Ohio’s longest scenic hiking trail for our citizens, communities and partners. We provide outdoor recreation, opportunities to volunteer, education, access to the varied resources of Ohio and local economic benefits.”





BTA MISSION:

Since its beginning in 1959, volunteers have been the heart, soul and backbone of the Buckeye Trail Association. Each year hundreds of volunteers managed by the BTA generously donate thousands of hours so that millions of Ohioans and visitors can enjoy the Buckeye Trail. The BT would not exist without the hard work and inspiration of our volunteers, both on and off the Trail.



BTA VISION:

“The Buckeye Trail, Ohio’s State Scenic Trail, is a sustainable hiking trail that provides a safe and unique experience throughout the state reflecting the diverse resources, people and stories of Ohio. The trail is a dedicated, recognized and protected route developed and maintained by the Buckeye Trail Association; an organization reflective of the diversity of the trail. The Buckeye Trail Association works in close partnership with communities, organizations and agencies around Ohio creating a legacy for present and future generations.”



Volunteerism



Volunteers build the BT as Buckeye Trail Crew Members, maintain the trail as Trail Adopters, protect it by creating a permanently preserved corridor and promote the trail by organizing hikes and events around the state. BTA Volunteers are represented by a volunteer Board of Trustees that work closely with the BTA staff. Successful achievement of our goals in the years ahead depends primarily on our shared ability to continue to recruit, train, retain, support and acknowledge the great work of an ever-increasing corps of volunteers in everything they do.

THANK YOU BTA VOLUNTEERS!

” The broadest, and maybe the most meaningful definition of volunteering: Doing more than you have to because you want to, in a cause you consider good.”

Ivan Scheier

Partnerships

Strong partnerships have been critical to the Buckeye Trail Association since our beginning. For over 1,400 miles the Buckeye Trail traverses 47 counties and their park districts, 100 trail communities with local initiatives, a multitude of Ohio State Parks, Forests and Wildlife Areas, the Wayne National Forest, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 2 Watershed Conservancy Districts, private landowners and many more.

Over the past 60 years the Buckeye Trail Association has forged an overwhelming string of partners that include land managers, trail user groups, local stewards, outdoor enthusiasts, elected officials, tourism and economic development agencies, and private businesses that all support a common vision for Ohio's Buckeye Trail. BTA partners have chipped in and shared the true costs of developing and maintaining a world-class hiking experience. The BTA is in a stronger position to leverage even more impact in the years to come thanks to the foundation that our partners have created. We have a lot of work yet to do, "miles to go before we sleep," as eloquently stated by poet Robert Frost. Our success depends on the strength of our existing partners, new partnerships yet to be developed and the important work we do with and for each other.



"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Helen Keller





Strategic Planning Process

In June of 2017, President Steve Walker and Executive Director Andrew Bashaw began discussions regarding creating a strategic plan for the Buckeye Trail Association. The decision was made to present this at the August 2017 Board and Staff Retreat. In preparation for that presentation, Andrew developed a list of potential goals for a strategic plan which he called “The Big Ideas.” At the Retreat, each BTA Board member was asked to choose the most important “Big Ideas” for possible inclusion into the plan. The results were analyzed and the top nineteen “Big Ideas” were determined by BTA Board Members.

With Board Member Heather Stehle’s help, Andrew took the survey results and developed a session at the BTA 2018 Board and Staff Retreat permitting additional review and comments. Board members offered a great deal of input to further refine the

“Big Ideas”. The Strategic Plan Committee then met in April, 2019 and condensed this input into strategies, goals and objectives in preparation for further review by the BTA Board. At the 2019 Board and Staff Retreat, work groups were formed to provide a narrative for the final version the eleven strategic goals of the plan. As those working groups met, the entire BTA membership was given a one last opportunity to review and provide comment.

The BTA Board was presented with a draft of the strategic plan at its November, 2019 meeting for final review and comment. In early December, the Board met and approved the strategic plan. This strategic plan that began as a concept in June of 2017 is now called “BTA 2025” providing the guiding principles of the BTA over the next six years starting in January, 2020.





From this collaborative and inclusive process, the following seven focus areas were established:

- Communications and Marketing
- Advocacy and Leadership
- Operations and Buckeye Trail Association Chapters
- Membership and Volunteerism
- The Buckeye Trail Hiking Experience
- Preserving a Buckeye Trail Corridor
- Fundraising

The BTA2025 Strategic Plan for the Buckeye Trail Association comes at an important time in the organization's development. The BTA has grown substantially over the last ten years, with broad successes in developing new partnerships and supporters, new relationships with local communities, and a stronger financial foundation. There have been significant increases in protecting, constructing, maintaining and managing the Buckeye Trail. This Strategic Plan is the foundation for the future.

We thank you for the important role you will play in implementing this strategy for creating, supporting and protecting the Buckeye Trail.

Communications & Marketing:

Sharing the Buckeye Trail story with our hikers, members, volunteers and partners.

Communications

The BTA is an organization that effectively communicates to all BTA Stakeholders what it has done, what it is doing, and where it is going.

Objective 1: Provide effective monthly communication.

Strategies:

1. Develop and implement a communications plan that identifies ways to provide consistent and integrated internal and external in print, digital, web-based, social media, and in person communications.



Marketing

The BT is well known, acknowledged and supported by: the 100 communities and the agencies, managers and elected officials in the 47 counties the BT passes through; state, federal and other public and private/nonprofit partners; and the general public both in Ohio and visitors looking for an outdoor recreation opportunity.



Objective 1: Create a marketing plan and approaches for our target diverse audiences that will increase awareness of the trail, build new relationships and increase both support and revenue.

Strategies:

1. Seek outside professional advice to assist the BTA with development of a marketing plan that creates a foundation for the use of print, website, social media and direct email communication to share information with stakeholders and partners old and new.

Objective 2: Designation of 25 Buckeye Trail Towns by 2025.

Strategies:

1. Focus time and fiscal resources on improving and promoting the Buckeye Trail Town Program.

Objective 3: Increase Buckeye Trail Shop sales for both greater visibility and increased income for the BTA.

Strategies:

1. Provide an online gateway and outlets for members, prospective members, and users of the trail to interact with the BTA through the purchase of memberships, information and gear.

Leadership & Advocacy:

Establish strong leadership and advocacy for future development of the BT by growing our partnerships, increasing legislative support, and promoting our role as a leader in trail preservation, building and maintenance

Leadership

The BTA exhibits its standing as a leader, steward, respected partner and authority through a sharing of expertise; a focus on internal and external grant-making; and recognition and support of trail building volunteers.

Objective 1: BTA is the “go to” organization for trail building, maintenance, training, resources and recognition.

Objective 2: Recognition of the BTA as a Trail Partner Leader by 5 external partner organizations.

Strategies:

1. Increase and enhance partnerships with state and local government agencies, non-profit organizations, the business community and educational institutions.

Objective 3: Illustrate leadership in Trail Building through recognition by 3 external organizations.

Strategies:

1. Create a “Buckeye Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance Certification” for college level and professional Continuing Education Units (CEUs).
2. Document and share successful land conservation techniques, use of land donations and easements for BT protection, and best property management approaches.

Objective 4: Develop a Grant Program that provides assistance to at least one organization and scholarship per year.

Strategies:

1. Create Small Business Development Grant Program for outdoor recreation businesses.
2. Create sustainable Scholarship Fund for students in the field of natural resources or related fields encouraging them to become stewards of the BT.



Advocacy

The BT and BTA are respected and acknowledged for nearly 6 decades of achievement by having the appropriate legal protection, funding support, and consistent and accepted design standards from state agencies, as well as the support of City, County, State, Federal, and nonprofit agencies and others that share the vision of the BTA.



Objective 1: Agency and organizational recognition of the BT at both state and local levels working to help improve and enhance the value of the BT for their own constituencies.

Strategies:

1. Continued engagement and leadership in the Ohio Trails Partnership and Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus and implementation of the Ohio Trails Vision.
2. Maintain and develop relationships with state agencies, (ODNR, ODOT, Ohio Tourism, ODOH), local governments, nonprofit partner and other trail user groups.

Objective 2: The Buckeye Trail is designated as a nationally recognized trail.

Strategies:

1. Research and develop an approach for national recognition through strong relationships with governmental leadership at the Federal level.

Operations & Chapters

The BTA will support the needs for professional staff and local chapters through improved resources for our professional staff and development of a strong local chapter system.

Operations:

The BTA is an organization that is run responsibly and efficiently with: appropriate staff, satisfied, and passionate employees sufficient office space; modern technology and resources; and an engaged Board that provides leadership and support.



Objective 1: Obtain and appropriately develop the necessary space, tools, human resources, publications, to welcome visitors, volunteers, hikers, members to the BTA office.

Strategies:

1. Operational review to determine staffing needs for each of the goals in this plan and how best to fill them with a human resource - paid staff, volunteer(s), BTA Board Committees, third party agreements and partnerships, or other creative solutions.
2. Development of operations procedures including employee and volunteer handbook of policies.
3. Development of a Board plan that identifies best approaches to Board engagement, recruitment, retention and assessment.



BTA Chapters:

A healthy local BTA Chapter System that serves the entire trail as the local identity/connection to the BTA; recruits and supports volunteers, members and users; and, is strongly supported by the BTA Trustees and Staff.

Objective 1: Chapter guidelines and procedures are established, clear, and consistent including best practices for development and operations of Local BTA Chapters.

Strategies:

1. Develop a strong local Chapter organization with resources for outreach that are strongly supported by BTA Board and staff.

Objective 2: Local Chapters are established that support the entire Buckeye Trail.

Strategies:

1. Develop and implement a chapter/partnerships approach.



Membership & Volunteerism

To grow a strong, diverse membership and engage members so that they feel a part of the organization and want to volunteer with the BTA.

Membership:

A diverse BTA membership that grows, is sustained, and feels: their contribution supports the growth and maintenance of the BT ; inspired to share their skills and time and participate in a variety of well-organized events; and they become ambassadors reaching out to others.



Objective 1: Increase membership 10% annually

Strategies:

1. Develop and implement an outreach plan with a focus on under-served areas and increased diversity within membership and enhanced membership benefits.

Objective 2: Increase membership participation in events by 10% annually.

Strategies:

1. Review existing events to determine value to BT and BTA; prepare and implement event marketing plans.

Volunteerism:

A positive BT user experience as a result of and with the assistance and contributions of volunteers who, through their efforts, help to support and maintain the BT and BTA.

Objective 1: An annually and well-managed volunteer program with participants that clearly understand the opportunities, roles and responsibilities, are properly supported, trained and equipped and are recognized annually for their important contributions.

Strategies:

1. Develop a clear and easy process for recruitment, recording activities, hours and impact, evaluating training and other needs.
2. Ensure that all volunteers have all necessary protective equipment and training appropriate to assigned work.
3. Empower and train volunteers to actively communicate BT activities and news as representatives of the BTA.



The Buckeye Trail Hiking Experience:

Make the Buckeye Trail hiking experience more enjoyable, easier to navigate, with a deeper understanding of the communities and natural/cultural environments through which the trail passes.



Objective 1: A Buckeye Trail user experience that leads to increased financial and volunteer support of the trail of no less than 25% of each past year's level.

Strategies:

1. Develop and implement best BT management practices that are accepted and implemented state-wide including wayfinding, orientation and resource information.

Objective 2: Implement at least one priority project per year that relocates a portion of the BT off-road.

Strategies:

1. Inventory and prioritize potential on-road conversion to off-road trail with input from Section Supervisors, Trail Management Team, Map Team, BTA GIS, Trail Crew, land owners/land managers.

Objective3: Build at least one new campsite and new shelter per year.

Strategies:

1. Identify potential campsite location, requirements to obtain permission and build campsite and potential funding support.

Trail Corridor Preservation:

Preserving a Buckeye Trail Corridor and assure a permanently protected trail corridor in partnership with landowners and managers.



Objective 1: The BT staff and volunteers will work toward creating and preserving a permanent corridor for the BT acquiring at least one parcel per year that furthers the objective of this goal.

Strategies:

1. Complete a BT trail assessment / inventory to establish areas of priority for re-routing so focus can be placed on the most pressing needs.
2. Partner with landowners, governmental agencies and others who share a common vision for a permanent corridor for the Buckeye Trail.



Fundraising:

Financial sustainability for the BT, with sound financial management to meet evolving needs.



Objective 1: The BTA will support its growth by creating revenue that exceeds annual expenses.

Strategies:

1. Finance Committee will develop 3- year plan for incremental growth, with projected income and expenses that increases revenue through expansion of major individual, corporate, foundation, and government funding sources.
2. The Development Committee will spearhead fundraising initiatives including major donor campaigns, grant writing, increasing Blue Blaze membership, and other events such as concert, hiking and promotional activities.



