

# Arizona Trail Association Strategic Plan 2011-2016



All photos by Dave Baker



# Arizona Trail Association - 2011-2016 Strategic Plan

## INTRODUCTION: VISION AND MISSION

### The Vision

*A continuous, over 800 mile trail across Arizona from Mexico to Utah linking deserts, mountains, canyons, communities and people.*

The Arizona Trail Association was founded on a vision. From an improbable beginning, that vision has caught fire with ordinary people, groups and agencies and a great Trail has slowly come into being. The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to create the tools to complete the final miles of the Trail and to build the foundation necessary to secure its long-term future.

An organization's mission is its foundation. It describes the nature and concept of the organization, describes its philosophy, and establishes what the organization plans to do and how it will be done

### The Mission

*The mission of the Arizona Trail Association is to build, maintain, promote, protect, and sustain the Arizona Trail as a unique encounter with the land.*

The Association tries to achieve this mission by:

Finding, training and encouraging volunteers to build, maintain and interpret the Trail and its lands to visitors and communities;  
Promoting and interpreting the Trail and the unique lands through which it passes to outdoor enthusiasts, local communities and the nation at large;  
Developing, growing and deploying financial and organization resources to complete the trail, maintain its uniqueness, and promote its proper use and understanding; and  
Fostering communities, groups and individuals who cherish the Arizona Trail and the links it forges with the land, communities and each other.

The four mission objectives stated in the Association's Mission Statement – to build and maintain, to promote, to protect, and to sustain the Arizona Trail-- organize this Strategic Plan.

### Background

The Arizona Trail Association was formed in 1994 as the outgrowth of the efforts by Dale Shewalter and others to help bring the vision of a continuous trail running across the state to life.

In October 1995, the Arizona Trail Association along with five other Arizona Trail Partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which established a

framework upon which the Arizona Trail Partners and the ATA would cooperatively plan for the development, operation and maintenance of the Arizona Trail. In addition, four of these Trail Partners simultaneously signed an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) that established, funded and detailed the responsibilities of the Arizona Trail Steward. Since 1995, the MOU and IGA have been amended twice. The first amendment extended the funding of the Trail Steward, while the second amendment transferred the duties and responsibilities of the Trail Steward to the ATA. Concurrently with the second amendment, Arizona State Parks signed a contract with ATA that transferred all remaining Trail Partner funding and any future Trail Partner funding from Arizona State Parks to the ATA. The transfer of these responsibilities has made the success of the ATA critical to the attainment of the Vision of the Arizona Trail.

In 2009, the Arizona Trail was recognized as a National Scenic Trail, having fulfilled one of the goals of the previous Strategic Plan. The partnership between the National Scenic Trails and the Arizona Trail Association will help ensure the long term goals of protecting and sustaining the Trail. This long-awaited status brings with it not only the positives of having a National Scenic Trail land manager, in conjunction with the United States Forest Service, but also increases the profile of the Trail. We must consider this increase as we move forward.

### **Functional Needs**

In developing this long-range plan, the Strategic Planning Committee identified various functional needs that the ATA must be prepared to meet. They include:

**Completing the Arizona Trail.** Completion of the Arizona Trail is the reason for the Arizona Trail Association. There are less than 40 miles left to complete in December 2010. Completing the trail has been instrumental in achieving National Scenic Trail status.

**Financial Resources.** As the focus of the Association moves from the construction phase of the Arizona Trail to its operation, maintenance, protection, promotion and advocacy, dollars currently available through our public agency partners' budgets and existing grant sources are likely to diminish or disappear. The ATA must meet this challenge by expanding its financial resources through increased membership, enhanced marketing opportunities, and comprehensive fundraising.

**Volunteer Coordination.** Even with optimum resource development, it is likely that continued construction, maintenance and monitoring of the trail, as well as enhanced membership services, will require the expansion of both trail and administrative volunteer support. Better volunteer coordination is essential to meeting this task.

**Membership Recruitment.** Members are critically important to the success of the ATA and the Arizona Trail, since they provide a source of vital leadership personnel, volunteers and income. ATA should strive to recruit *and retain* adequate levels of membership into the thousands, to safeguard the financial and political future of the Trail. Greater membership services and programs will be required to sustain members' interest and participation, even if they elect not to take part in construction, maintenance and administrative projects.

**Promotion & Publicity.** A fundamental mission of the ATA is to promote and publicize the Arizona Trail. The Association's organizational structure must ensure that this responsibility is met by allocating appropriate staff, resources and programs.

## **Mission Responsibility: To Build and Maintain...**

Building and maintaining the Arizona Trail is the very reason for the Arizona Trail Association's existence. Completing development and construction work is thus the top priority for the 2011-2016 Strategic Plan. As the Arizona Trail nears completion, it is imperative that the focus of the Trail Association shift to trail maintenance and user experience. This Section of the Strategic Plan addresses the challenges of Trail completion, Trail development and maintenance.

### **Strategic Goal 1: Complete Trail Construction**

- Complete 100% construction of all segments of the Arizona Trail by February 14, 2012 to provide a continuous path across the state

### **Strategic Goal 2: Maintain the Trail Resource**

- Reorganize segments into more manageable lengths and divisions by December 2011.
- By December 2013, have 100% of segments represented by a segment steward.
- By December 2013, 75% of trail maintenance identified in the annual trail assessment will be completed on an annual basis.

### **Strategic Goal 3: Improve Trail Access and Enjoyment**

- By December 2016, 75% of sign installation needs (as identified in the annual trail assessment) will be completed on an annual basis.
- Identify location and type of all needed trailheads by December 2012.

## **Mission Responsibility: To Promote...**

Building the Arizona Trail is not sufficient. For the Trail to achieve the Vision of engaging people and connecting communities, individuals must experience it. A principal mission responsibility of the Arizona Trail Association is thus to promote the Arizona Trail to those who may not be aware of it and to educate them about the Trail and the lands and ecosystems through which it passes.

### **Strategic Goal 1: Expand our Resource Base**

- By 2012, increase the number of Facebook/Twitter followers by 10%.
- By 2014, have an active Arizona Trail support group in 10 of the Gateway Communities.
- By 2015, hold one Gateway community sponsored ATA work event for 15 of the Gateway communities.

### **Strategic Goal 2: Retain the current membership base**

- By Dec 31, 2011, increase retention rate by 10% from 68.5%
- By 2016, increase annual new member retention by 50%

### **Strategic Goal 3: Utilize the diversity of trail experiences to reach out to non-traditional members**

- By 2012, 3 events held by alternative (affiliate) groups.

### **Strategic Goal 4: Utilize our trail partners to increase our visibility on a local and national stage**

- By 2012, 10% increase in through hikers/users using the AZT sign-in panel at the Arizona/Utah boundary.
- By 2014, complete three new outreach efforts to potential trail users outside of Arizona.

## **Mission Responsibility: To Protect and Sustain...**

Building, maintaining and promoting the Arizona Trail is not sufficient. Unless the Trail can be protected against extrinsic threats to its very existence, the Trail may fail in its objectives or, worse yet, be physically compromised by changes in land use or agency priorities. Protecting the Arizona Trail from these types of threats is the unique role and responsibility of the Arizona Trail Association.

Building, maintaining, promoting and protecting the Arizona Trail is not sufficient. Unless the ATA can build a structure that can sustain the Trail over the long term, the Association may fail in its objectives of building, maintaining, promoting and protecting the Arizona Trail. Without a viable organization to support, protect and advocate the Arizona Trail, the long-term sustainability of the Trail itself is in doubt.

### **Strategic Goal 1: Develop a strong working relationship with the US Forest Service as the lead agency for the Arizona National Scenic Trail.**

- By December 2011, Complete a Memorandum of Understanding and Challenge Cost Share Agreement with the Forest Service;
- By December 2015, the Arizona National Scenic Trail will be in compliance with national laws and standards for National Scenic Trails, as approved by the US Forest Service

### **Strategic Goal 2: Enhance relationships with other trail partners.**

- By December 2015, Execute new Memoranda of Understanding for Trail Operation with all affected Trail partners

### **Strategic Goal 3: Take a lead role in sustaining the Trail as a first class trail experience.**

- By 2016, secure viable, formal, legal access through all private, federal and state lands.

- By 2012, identify areas where additional protection of the AZT is the highest priority (such as expansion of the trail corridor (easement))
- By 2014, identify where alternate trail routes around wilderness for hiking, equestrians, and mountain biking are needed

#### **Strategic Goal 4: Maintain an effective organization focused on achieving ATA Mission and implementing the strategic plan.**

- Efficiently distribute duties among Board, volunteers and staff to accomplish goals.
- Complete review of operating models, and implement in 2011 and 2012.
- Expand Board representation to maintain a diversity of members in geography, age, trail interest, and community connections.
- Strengthen Board committees, by requiring each Board member to serve on at least one ongoing committee. Active ongoing committees may include, for example, Trail Operations, Membership, Development and Audit.

#### **Strategic Goal 5: Expand volunteerism.**

- By 2014, increase the # of volunteer hours by 20% to 26,000.
- By 2012, increase the number of AZT volunteers by tracking the number of individual volunteers to form a baseline for expansion.
- By 2013, produce two volunteer recognition activities per year
- By 2012, include ATA approved training for trail construction, crew leader training and segment steward in the annual work program

#### **Strategic Goal 6: Maintain a diversified funding program, with elements such as membership, product sales, philanthropic donations and grants.**

- By 2016, increase corporate sponsors, premier legacy partners, and business members by 30% from 2010 level to \$73,000.
- By 2014, achieve annual funding from grant funding and/or corporate/business members on an annual basis to cover all salaried personnel.