



Strategic Plan 2023-2025

MOJAVE DESERT LAND TRUST



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Mojave Desert Land Trust

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Mission

The Mojave Desert Land Trust protects the Colorado and Mojave Desert ecosystem and its scenic and cultural resource values.



Introduction

We take on the greatest challenges facing the California desert, permanently protecting land, restoring habitat, and preserving native seeds. We defend the dark night skies, water, and critical species that make up a thriving desert ecosystem. We recognize this work is only possible through collaboration with the wider community and by inspiring the next generation of desert stewards. We believe in the transformative power of this landscape, and that everyone deserves access. We're determined to maintain the California desert as an intact and biodiverse ecosystem for generations to come.

The California Desert Conservation Area (our service area) encompasses 25% of California and over 24.5 million acres. Home to over 2,000 species of native plants, the desert region is one of the most biodiverse regions in the country. One quarter of those species, including the iconic Joshua tree, can be found nowhere else on Earth.

Headquartered in Joshua Tree, the Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) has built a record of tremendous impact by conserving large portions of the Colorado and Mojave Desert ecosystem. Since being founded in 2006, MDLT has acquired and protected over 100,000 acres. With a current full-time staff of 24, the organization has gained technical skills in acquisition, management, restoration, seed banking, and propagation of native species. The organization received accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance in 2018, a significant achievement in operational success.

The Strategic Plan is a living document, and will be used to measure success over the next three years. As the challenge of a changing climate and the loss of habitat surges, MDLT stands ready to expand its impact to protect 100,000 acres in the next seven years.

This bold goal of protecting an additional 100,000 acres will require the support of stakeholders and donors. There is an urgency to this work, as the demand for development increases, and protection of habitat corridors is increasingly imperative.

The planning process engaged a diverse set of stakeholders including desert leaders, other land trusts, federal agencies, community members, tribal representatives, artists, and funders. This strategic planning process energized the organization and its leadership to plan for what may be necessary organizationally to attain success in an increasingly complicated desert landscape.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) were key themes through the entire process. The Strategic Plan outlines high-level goals and strategies. Elements of DEIB are interwoven throughout the document as an integral part of strategic implementation.

We have set ambitious goals to govern this work in the years ahead. Let's take a closer look at what we will achieve.

– *Cody Hanford and Kelly Herbinson, Joint Executive Directors*

Goals for 2023–2025



LAND ACQUISITION

Conserve an interconnected, biodiverse, and climate resilient desert ecosystem.

1. Accelerated landscape-scale conservation of the California deserts.
2. Continued acquisition of inholdings in Wilderness Areas, National Parks, Monuments and other significant areas.
3. Increased alliance with tribes, NGOs, agencies, and federal, state and local entities to develop and reach common conservation goals.
4. Expanded engagement with mitigation land requirements.



LAND MANAGEMENT & RESTORATION

Manage and restore an interconnected, biodiverse, and climate resilient desert ecosystem.

1. Habitat is restored on MDLT lands.
2. Improved habitat protection through stewardship of MDLT land in perpetuity.
3. Improved management of federal land.



PRESERVATION OF DESERT FLORA

Preserve and restore the diverse and unique flora of the Colorado and Mojave Deserts.

1. A flourishing seed banking program with increased capacity to preserve seed species. Increase species represented by 60 new species.
2. Native plant materials provided to improve restoration of the Colorado and Mojave Desert ecosystems.
3. The public increases engagement with and commitment to native plant conservation.



POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Deeply influence local, state, and federal policy to support Colorado and Mojave Desert conservation.

1. Increased strategic policy engagement advances landscape-scale desert conservation.
2. Increased evaluation of desert energy and infrastructure development informs land conservation decisions.
3. The public is educated and engaged in policies affecting the desert region.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The value and importance of a thriving, interconnected desert ecosystem is understood by the public, locally and beyond.

1. Innovative and inclusive educational materials attract, engage, and inspire the public to protect the desert.
2. Students, teachers, and community members are cultivated to become future stewards of the desert through active participation in MDLT's mission.
3. Groups historically marginalized by conservation efforts are actively engaged.



COMMUNICATIONS, MEDIA & MARKETING

MDLT is a leading voice in desert conservation with a recognizable, modern, and inclusive brand.

1. Local, national, and international audiences are informed and engaged in desert conservation through an ambitious communications strategy.
2. MDLT has a recognizable, modern and inclusive brand that is well-known and broadly supported by local communities and partners.



HUMAN RESOURCES & FACILITIES

MDLT cultivates a positive, collaborative, and inclusive workforce committed to desert conservation.

1. MDLT cultivates a compassionate and positive work culture rooted in collaboration, inclusion, respect, and a commitment to desert conservation.
2. MDLT actively supports staff in reaching their own potential.
3. MDLT attracts and retains a highly qualified, diverse, and motivated workforce and volunteer group eager to work collaboratively to achieve MDLT's mission.



FUND DEVELOPMENT

Long-term, sustainable, and diverse income provides flexible support for MDLT's operations and landscape-scale conservation strategy.

1. Increased, diverse funding matches capacity needs and landscape-scale land conservation goals.
2. Thoughtful pursuit of large government and private grants to support targets.
3. Sustainable, internal grant processes facilitate more grant income.
4. A successful major gifts solicitation program significantly increases diversified, flexible funding.
5. A thriving business sponsorship program increases fund development and enhances community engagement.



FINANCE & I.T.

Key financial and IT systems support bold, sustainable growth and strategic direction to deliver mission.

1. Growth is predicted and tied to projected needs.
2. Efficient and responsive finance systems.
3. Financial investments are well managed, balanced, reflective of values and growing.



BOARD GOVERNANCE

Board members are fully informed and effectively engaged to support the mission.

1. Strategic vision is clear and aligned with board action.
2. Board expands skill sets and governance skills.
3. Board oversees finances and support to fund development growth.
4. Board serves as an ambassador to champion key mission and vision of MDLT.

Key Successes

To move forward as an organization, the Mojave Desert Land Trust celebrates the successes achieved to date by the organization and its partners. These milestones are significant.

PROTECTION OF OVER 100,000 ACRES

Over a 17-year history, chief among the tangible successes of MDLT is the acquisition of over 100,000 acres of desert lands with significant ecological value. Why is the desert in particular an important ecosystem? The California deserts represent one of the most intact ecosystems in the United States, and conserving this landscape is critical to reducing the impacts of climate change. The desert ecosystem provides an essential service to the planet in the form of carbon sequestration, with more than 10% of California's carbon stored in desert plants and soil.

In addition, MDLT has conveyed more tracts of land to the National Park Service than any other non-profit—a total of over 55,000 acres have been conveyed to Federal Agencies since 2006.

“MDLT has established a really strong reputation as the go-to conservation organization.” —Stakeholder interview

SEED BANK AND NURSERY GROWTH

Over 2,000 species of native plants have been described in the Colorado and Mojave Deserts and many more likely exist.

Growing native plants and collecting seeds for restoration is imperative to MDLT's mission of protecting the desert. The Mojave Desert Seed Bank is a repository of seeds and spores of native flora from throughout the California desert ecoregion. The seed bank serves as a conservation tool for use in restoration, education, and research. Expanding the seed bank to over 700 seed collections is an achievement. Since 2016, the MDLT nursery has grown over 101,000 plants. One of the key community events is the native plant sale, which typically sells out quickly.

“I think it's just revolutionized that area in the desert.” —Stakeholder interview

KEY COMMUNITY-CENTERED FACILITY IN JOSHUA TREE

The MDLT headquarters is a hub for various activities. Stakeholders recognized the incredible opportunity to share the space for larger community gatherings, and the opportunity for visitors to see the presence of MDLT from a significant vantage on Highway 62. MDLT prides itself on having a diversity of staff who are skilled at land acquisition, management and restoration, community engagement and operations. In stakeholder interviews, participants mentioned the deep passion and

commitment of staff, as well as their skills, and recognized these as necessary to accomplish bigger goals.

“The building has really turned into a center of conservation.” —Stakeholder interview

A VOICE OF THE MOJAVE

Through its dynamic communications and advocacy work, MDLT has become a leading and trusted voice for desert conservation. It educates decision-makers and the public about the value of the desert ecosystem and engages in policy to protect the region from threats including climate disruption and habitat loss. It provides platforms for people to make their voice heard and clear analysis of the biggest issues facing the region.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

MDLT has grown its approach to engaging volunteers in restoration and citizen science, and currently engages 98 active volunteers a year. In addition, the organization has started some significant internship programs and school programs to increase opportunities for women and students from underrepresented communities in conservation science and research. As an example, Women In Science Discovering Our Mojave (WISDOM) will continue to develop the next generation of public lands managers, scientists, and stewards.





**Around 100
active volunteers
& interns**

**Protection of over
100,000 acres**

**Educational
programs
delivered to
3,400
students**

**Skilled
staff**



**Over 700
collections in
Mojave Desert
Seed Bank**

**Over
100,000
native
plants
grown**

Key Opportunities: Saving the Desert Now

California's desert landscapes and biodiversity continue to face mounting threats from climate change, development, wildfire, invasive plants, habitat and species loss. We urgently need to protect this ecosystem before it's too late. The Mojave Desert Land Trust provides landscape-scale solutions that can ensure the long-term protection of this critical ecoregion.

LAND ACQUISITION AND STEWARDSHIP

The key threats of development and climate change create a sense of urgency. The organization has credible success in land acquisition, and desires to seize the opportunity to expand its mission to protect fragile desert lands, setting a bold goal of protecting an additional 100,000 acres. Staffing and funding will need to be aligned to produce these results.

FUND DEVELOPMENT

To acquire lands, MDLT needs to significantly grow funding sources, including major donors and campaigns, as well as obtain emerging federal and state funding.

POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Deepening existing partnerships and growing new partnerships at the local level with Native American tribes and other key stakeholders, as well as with federal and state policy-makers will be critical to expand protection of desert ecosystems and to preserve culturally significant resources.

DIVERSITY EQUITY INCLUSION AND BELONGING (DEIB)

The Board and staff developed a new DEIB statement and included multiple strategic actions. Some of them are to integrate ways to increase diversity in the workforce, and voices in the current conservation field, and expand meaningful connections to MDLT's work.



PROTECTION OF SPECIES

The Mojave Desert Seed Bank will continue to grow its collection of desert species, further providing protection of unique repository of seeds and spores.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

Although broadly recognized, MDLT needs to increase understanding of the importance of protecting desert lands with multiple audiences, and the critical role MDLT plays.

CAPACITY BUILDING

To support bold goals, increased attention to financial and operational systems are needed. MDLT will have a major focus this first year on evaluating, improving, and establishing internal systems and processes to grow the organization’s impact.

BOARD GOVERNANCE

The Board will increase practices for greater engagement in fund development and community partnerships, as well as provide good governance practices. The Board has set a goal of increasing board size and diversity to reflect new opportunities to increase impact and partnerships.



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Statement

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are central to MDLT's mission and to who we are. Creating opportunities for everyone to access, steward and benefit from conservation land is key in the fight for biodiversity and climate resiliency in the California Deserts. We value collaboration in fighting against climate change and habitat loss and seek to uplift and make space for voices of communities who are systemically left out of environmental and conservation movements.

We recognize the painful and complex history of Native Peoples and their traditional land, and embrace the growing, diverse populations that visit and call the desert home. MDLT acknowledges that the land conservation movement has contributed to and benefitted from systemic racism, and we are committed to confronting and making amends for these injustices.

At MDLT we are committed to coming together. We believe that a diverse and inclusive environment leads to better discussions, decisions, and outcomes for everyone. We welcome the unique contributions that people can bring in terms of socio-economic status, education, opinions, culture, ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity and expression, nation of origin, age, languages spoken, veteran status, color, religion, visible and invisible disabilities, sexual orientation, and beliefs.

**We acknowledge that this is not a static statement and will be revised by Board and Staff as needed.*

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The Mojave Desert Land Trust protects
the unique living landscapes of the Colorado and Mojave Deserts,
forever weaving together national parks, national monuments,
wilderness areas, and wildlife linkage corridors.

