Vision 2020 – Educating for the Future
STRATEGIC PLAN - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
(2013-2020)

Our Commitment
The Hitchcock Center for the Environment is committed to a healthy world full of hope and possibility for our children and future generations.

The Need
Humans are threatening the integrity and diversity of the ecosystems we depend on through the occupation and destruction of habitats, our resource use and creation of waste, and our contributions to climate change.

Failure to restore the health of ecosystems over the next generation not only threatens biodiversity, it promises to deprive hundreds of millions of people of clean air, water, and healthy soil that are essential to human survival.

Our Approach
For over 50 years, the Hitchcock Center has grown to be one the region’s top environmental education leaders. Serving over 7,000 individuals each year, the Center’s programs use the study of science and nature, nature’s models, systems, processes, and elements, as a means to inspire creative solutions to problems of sustainability. Our goal is to develop in our program participants a continuum of competencies that begins at the earliest, most formative years and progresses through a process of lifelong learning.
Our Focus
Our environmental educational programs—the curriculum we develop, the knowledge we impart, and the values we model—are centered on six fundamental areas. These include:

1. **Teaching Principles of Ecology**
   Our core mission is to create sustainable communities—communities designed to function in a way that life for citizens, business, local government and institutions harmonize with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life. We need to understand the principles of organization that ecosystems have developed to sustain the web of life. Teaching this ecological knowledge—which may be called “principles of ecology,” “principles of sustainability,” or even the “basic facts of life”—is the most important role of education in this century. It entails new ways of seeing the world and new ways of thinking in terms of relationships, connectedness, and context.

   **Topics:** NATURAL CYCLES (WATER, CARBON, NITROGEN, ENERGY, NUTRIENT) COEVOLUTION • CLOSED & LOOPING SYSTEMS • INTERDEPENDENCE • ECOSYSTEM SERVICES • SYSTEMS THINKING • BIODIVERSITY • NATURAL LAWS

2. **Understanding Place**
   Understanding how sense of place develops and changes is relevant to understanding how people interact with their environment and how this interaction can foster commitment to protecting the places we love. Of particular note is the importance of childhood experiences. Research has quantified links between exposure to natural environments in childhood and environmental preferences later in life. Learning about the natural world during childhood is strongly influenced by the direct experience of playing, as well as through the role of family, school, culture, and community.

   **Topics:** SENSE OF WONDER & DISCOVERY • THE HUMAN-NATURE CONNECTION • NATURAL HISTORY • BIOPHILIA • LOCAL HERITAGE • EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING • FREE PLAY • CITIZEN SCIENCE

3. **Knowing The Whole Story**
   The things we create and own or consume have a life cycle; they started somewhere and they need to go somewhere when we are done with them. To understand the full story of most goods and services, we have to explore complicated relationships and patterns of cause and effect. But this detective work is essential. A focus on the whole story takes us to the “cradle” stage of a product’s lifecycle, where the entire rest of its life is determined. This is the stage
where change towards sustainability practices must start, and the most powerful place from which to begin a redesign of the material world.

**Topics:** CRADLE TO CRADLE • CONSUMER-PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY • PRODUCT LIFECYCLE • LABELING • HUMAN HEALTH • TOXICOLOGY • THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

4. **Promoting Community Resiliencies and Ecological Restoration**

“Community resilience” describes the ability of a community to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse environmental situations. Actively influencing and preparing for economic, social and environmental change can achieve this. An important aspect of community resiliency is implementing practices that help heal and sustain the land. Ecological restoration, through the practice of renewing and restoring degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystems and habitats, is critical to achieving healthy, self-reliant communities.

**Topics:** QUALITY OF LIFE • CLIMATE CHANGE • LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENTS • BIOREMEDIATION • INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT • CONSERVATION • TRANSITION TOWNS

5. **Demonstrating Sustainability in the Built Environment**

The Hitchcock Center seeks to demonstrate best practices of sustainability in the built environment as a model for our community.

**Topics:** ECOLOGICAL DESIGN • ZERO ENERGY, WATER & WASTE • BIOMIMICRY • PASSIVE DESIGN • DESIGN FOR DECONSTRUCTION • RECYCLED & NON-TOXIC MATERIALS • SMART GROWTH

6. **Educating for Active Citizenship**

A central aspect of our educational practice is to develop people with the environmental understanding and know-how to actively participate in environmental decision-making at the individual, community, municipal, state and national levels.

**Topics:** COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS • SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY • CIVIC LEADERSHIP • PERSONAL EFFICACY • COMMUNITY SERVICE • POLITICAL ACTION • VOLUNTEERISM

**Our Capacity**

Today, the Hitchcock Center faces a pressing need to expand its educational classrooms, offices and resource areas to keep pace with the rising demand for our programs and to stay at the forefront of
our field. In the last 12 years alone, the number of environmental education programs offered annually has nearly doubled. With this growth, our classrooms are in near constant use and requests for program services are increasingly being turned away for lack of space.

To address this need, the Hitchcock Center is taking an ambitious step forward by planning, designing and building a new visionary environmental learning center that will more than double the size of the Center’s facility.

This new center will be built to the highest standard of ecological design to reinforce and amplify our ability to teach, inspire, and lead in a movement that uses nature as model and measure to improve our quality of life.

This Strategic Plan (2013-2020) provides an important organizational roadmap to guide key decisions and future directions as we plan for our new environmental education center and ways to educate thousands of people in new ways of thinking, being and acting as environmentally literate citizens.

**Our Objective**

Over the next seven years, the Hitchcock Center will strengthen and expand its delivery of high-quality, effective environmental education programs to a wider geographic region. We expect:

- a 40% *increase* in the number of people who participate in our programs;
- more than doubling the number of people who visit the Center as a destination for innovative ecological design and learning.

Highlights include:

- An educational building and program of local, regional and national significance with new and enhanced *K-12 School, Children, Youth and Family, Adult Education, and Professional and Curriculum Development* programs;
- Expanded hours of operation to include weekends and evenings;
- Heightened focus on engaging underserved and disadvantaged people and communities in ongoing programs and operations; and
- A wider regional draw of educators, naturalists, environmentalists, humanists, activists, artists, and students from throughout New England and the Northeast who seek new knowledge and understanding about our natural world.
FY12 Annual Baseline

No. of program participants: 7,200
- K-12 School Students (4,500)
- Children, Youth and Families (1,500)
- Adult & General Audience Learners (1,000)
- Teachers and College Students (200)

% low income people served: 20%
No. of visitors: 780
No. of K-12 schools served: 50
No. of colleges, universities, & organizations assisted: 10
No. of urban & rural communities supported: 45

Our Plan
To achieve success in meeting the objectives listed above, the Hitchcock Center’s 7-Year Strategic Plan will address three significant development areas: 1) Program Development; 2) Facility Development; and 3) Resource Development.

1. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
Implement a comprehensive program plan, adapting it as appropriate for pre-K-8 and high school students, teachers, university and college students, and adult learners, that is on the leading edge of innovative educational strategies, up-to-date theory and knowledge, and effective audience development.

Objective 1a: K-12 School Programs
Expand experiential, interdisciplinary environment and science-based curricular and instructional programs to enable every teacher improve their students’ environmental literacy. Direct experience with the natural world and the complex interdependence of life on Earth strengthens the link between cognitive and affective learning in the sciences, providing a bridge to advanced understanding. An emphasis on place- and project-based learning gives students a real context to explore, understand, develop and apply the values of curiosity, rigor, careful observation, reflection and inquiry.

Objective 1b: Children, Youth and Family Programs
Grow Center- and community-based educational programs that serve children and youth at every development stage of their lives, from early childhood through their teenage years, along with their families, to foster a lifelong commitment to protecting the environment.
Children are naturally curious and open to learning about nature, but in an increasingly urban society we often need to consciously create opportunities to help children bond with nature and learn about the environment.

**Objective 1c: University and College Students**
Develop new learning opportunities for university and college students to increase their academic and professional engagement in the fields of natural history, sustainability, environmental education, and the green economy.
College is the jumping off point for many of tomorrow's decision makers and educators yet there is a trend toward the elimination of natural history studies and field-based experiences in college curricula. Boosting the rigor and availability of natural history programs at the college level presents a unique opportunity for the Hitchcock Center to infuse new life into the environmental movement within the Five College community and beyond.

**Objective 1d: Adult and General Audience Learners**
Promote greater environmental understanding and engagement with adult and general audience learners through a comprehensive environmental literacy program that promotes greater dialog, debate and discussion on solutions for creating a more sustainable and healthy planet.

Understanding and appreciating the natural world is at the core of a healthy relationship between humans and our environment. It is imperative to educate and motivate the general public to think and act with deep affinity for Earth and seek solutions to human problems based on understanding the finite resources and systems of the planet. The Hitchcock Center can support public education by offering ample opportunity for life-long learning and citizen engagement.

**Objective 1e: Underserved Communities**
Increase program service delivery to underserved communities that otherwise are not able to afford or have access to environmental education opportunities that lead to environmental literacy and action.

**Objective 1f: Educational Partnerships**
Pursue new and improve existing partnerships with pre-K-12 schools, institutions of higher learning, interfaith communities, State and Federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and the education community.
2. **FACILITY DEVELOPMENT**

Build a new compelling and visionary environmental learning center to support our expanded program aspirations and to serve as an effective and innovative teaching tool demonstrating the principles of ecology and the practice of sustainability.

**Objective 2a: Regenerative, High Performance Green Building Design**

Build to the highest green building standard to serve as the most advanced measure of sustainability in the built environmental possible and act to diminish the gap between current limits and ideal solutions.

**Objective 2b: Inspirational, Innovative and Educational Learning Spaces**

Use the building as a remarkable opportunity to create a unique educational resource to reinforce learning experiences inside and out through its construction, operation, and interaction with the natural world.

**Objective 2c: Functional, Healthy, and Collaborative Work Environments**

Improve the work environment for a growing staff to better manage and administer the Center’s new building and expanded programs.

3. **RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

Strengthen resources to bring the Center to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, and organizational maturity in order to more effectively and efficiently fulfill its mission.

**Objective 3a: Financial Development**

Stabilize, diversify and grow financial resources to maximize mission success.

**Objective 3b: Staff Development**

Assess current and future staff needs to ensure capacity for mission success.

**Objective 3c: Technology Development**

Maximize the impact that technology can have on the effective delivery of the Center’s programs, finances, and operations.

**Objective 3d: Communication, Marketing and Outreach**
Enhance marketing and outreach efforts to broaden audience participation and general public awareness of the Center.

**Our Impact**

Program participants of the Hitchcock Center will develop the following competencies as environmentally literate citizens. They will:

- Have a positive relationship with nature and the natural world, as a result of meaningful outdoor experiences
- Understand ecological principles and are connected to the world around them
- Feel empowered to do something to make the world a better place: they know about environmental issues, can think critically about them, and are engaged in activities to address them
- Are competent in their public action skills, have experience in applying them, and know their actions make a difference
- Are active citizens

**Our Future**

We have a responsibility to leave our children and our children’s children a safer, more prosperous, cleaner and sustainable world full of hope and vision.

Implementing our Strategic Plan will ensure that the next generation is knowledgeable about the interconnections between natural and social environments, and human and ecosystem health, and is inspired to act on their knowledge.

We call now on our community to help us achieve this world through an assertive plan of innovative, cross-cutting educational curriculum that empowers our future generations to act responsibly, creatively and courageously to solve problems among the health of people, economies and the natural world.