



Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Vision into Action – Pathways to a Sustainable Future

We Advocate Thorough Environmental Review (W.A.T.E.R.)

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W.A.T.E.R.'s Board of Directors thanks the many community members who reviewed and provided feedback on earlier drafts of this document.



Introduction

We Advocate Thorough Environmental Review, more commonly known as W.A.T.E.R., is a grassroots, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to protecting Mount Shasta's waters and other natural attributes for the benefit of current and future generations. In our eight-plus years as an organization (five-plus years as a nonprofit) we have focused on protecting our water resources from depletion by extraction and corporate privatization, protecting surface and groundwater from contamination by industrial activity, and protecting the environment from other inappropriate and polluting industrial/commercial activities. Our work has clarified for us the following realities:

- The climate crisis is the most urgent existential threat to humanity.
- “Environmentalism” in the 21st century cannot exist without addressing economic and social justice issues.
- Achieving social, economic, environmental, and climate justice requires confronting the dysfunctional economic and political systems that are ruining the planet and stonewalling efforts to change.
- Local issues are not strictly local; they are impacted by what happens regionally, statewide, nationally, and globally. And what we do in our communities can have far-reaching impacts around the globe.
- It is a moral obligation to protect Mount Shasta's water and other natural attributes.
- W.A.T.E.R.'s internal governance system must reflect the inclusion, equity, and justice we wish to see in the larger society.

Recognizing that restoring the planet's biosphere¹ is foundational to ensuring social, environmental, economic, and climate justice, we offer the following vision for collaborating with our communities on this quest.

Here are the governing principles, goals, and objectives articulated to guide our efforts for the next five years.

Vision/Values/Mission

Vision:

We envision a society that stewards and equitably shares in the care of our planet's ecosystems now and for future generations.

Values:

- We believe in the inherent value of all Life. This planet is our only home and each generation has the responsibility to steward the Earth so the biosphere can regenerate and thrive now and for countless generations to come.
- We must act urgently and boldly in challenging unjust systems that threaten the Earth. We must also act humanely and with civility as we join together to build upon the values of respecting all life and human rights while protecting the Earth.

¹ Biosphere -- The global ecosystem composed of living organisms (biota) and the abiotic (nonliving) factors from which they derive energy, nutrients, and habitat.

- Recognizing the interconnections between the many social, economic, and environmental justice issues of our time, we value solidarity and collaboration with other groups, Tribes, and agencies. We see this as essential to amplifying the voices of communities and people most impacted by the injustice of our economic and political systems.

Mission: The primary objectives and purposes of this nonprofit organization shall be to:

- Embed the climate crisis front and center in our work, given the urgent, existential threat it poses to humanity;
- Advocate for the restoration and preservation of the biosphere to ensure a healthy environment, with a primary emphasis on advocating for the ecosystems of the regions encircling Mount Shasta and its watersheds, while recognizing the connections between surface, spring, and groundwater;
- Advocate for and participate in long-range community planning and regenerative practices to promote healthy and sustainable communities;
- Encourage community-wide participation and volunteerism through education and action;
- Engage with government officials and agencies in advancing these issues with active participation, social activism and, if necessary, litigation that benefits public interests.

Evaluation of Accomplishments and Current Programming

As our keystone project, we organized in 2013 to challenge the proposed Crystal Geyser Water Company (CGWC) beverage bottling plant which would have proceeded without an environmental review, even though there was considerable community concern about suspected significant environmental impacts of plant operations. The seven and one-half years of persistent community work paid off. In May of 2021, CGWC issued a public statement that they will not be operating the beverage bottling plant and the property was listed for sale. W.A.T.E.R. and many in the community are hopeful the property will be used by a new occupant for purposes benefiting the Mount Shasta Community.

As we organized, we chose to utilize the power of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a central strategy in this challenge. Following the CEQA process helped us gain an understanding of our area's water attributes and the consequences of beverage bottling. CEQA specifically provides opportunities for public involvement in the environmental review process, defining procedures to challenge decisions and actions that citizens believe are inappropriately taken by local agencies. W.A.T.E.R. successfully rallied with the community to demand an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) be completed for the CGWC project. W.A.T.E.R. then engaged the community, expert attorneys, scientists, and our Board members in evaluating and formally commenting on the EIR. After the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors approved a woefully inadequate EIR, W.A.T.E.R. and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe sued the County and Mt. Shasta City for violations of CEQA. Although Siskiyou County Superior court ruled against us, we continue litigation as co-petitioners with the Winnemem Wintu Tribe in the State Appellate Court challenging the faulty EIR. This legal action will continue to be one of our key projects with the goal of a judgment requiring the County to set aside the flawed EIR. A detailed account of our history can be found at www.cawater.net/about/history.html.

W.A.T.E.R. is currently involved with several additional area projects:

- Supporting neighboring community members in their efforts to protect water as a public trust;
- Involvement in the environmental review process for multiple other projects at the local, state, and federal levels, utilizing skills learned from engaging in the CEQA process for the former CGWC plant;
- Monitoring groundwater levels, water quality and air quality in areas surrounding the former CGWC plant;
- Creation of a local Stop Plastic Pollution campaign.

State, County, and local level policies must be continually strengthened to support public interest over profits. We have collaborated with other Non-Governmental Organizations along with local agencies to update agency policies to correspond with changing times.

- We participate in the **City of Mt. Shasta's General Plan Update process** by providing input on issues related to environmental protections that are supportive of a healthy environment, economy and our community.
- As active members of the **Upper Sacramento Regional Water Action Group**, we will continue to advocate for needed water infrastructure improvements that protect local water quality, quantity, and sources.
- We participate in efforts of the **California NGO Groundwater Collaborative** to work with State legislators and agencies to fix loopholes in laws and promote legislation to protect California groundwater and source waters.
- We provided public comments and an attorney's letter to **Siskiyou County** concerning groundwater extraction regulations.
- We are members with the Eco-Network of the **Shasta Environmental Alliance** of Redding, CA, in advocating for the environmental integrity of the Sacramento River Watershed.

In addition, to elevate the rights of people over profits, we have joined state and national efforts:

- The ***Last Chance Alliance*** champions a vision for California and the world that looks beyond fossil fuels to a future that is safe and healthy for everyone.
- ***Move to Amend*** is a coalition of hundreds of organizations and hundreds of thousands of individuals committed to social and economic justice, ending corporate rule, and building a vibrant democracy that is genuinely accountable to all people, not corporate interests.

Community engagement has been an important part of our efforts:

- We participate in community events organized by others (e.g., tabling at Earth Day celebrations and Fourth of July events, etc., giving invited speeches to community groups);
- We host forums to educate the community about local environmental issues;
- We have provided “how to” trainings for commenting on the Environmental Impact Report process;
- We organize volunteer actions.
- We maintain a Facebook page (facebook.com/mtshastawater), website (www.cawater.net) and email list (mountshastawater@gmail.com) to which we send monthly e-newsletters.

Goal 1: Expanding Our Community and World Impact

A. *Beyond CGWC*

Objective 1: Continue the legal challenge against Siskiyou County and the City of Mt. Shasta with the goal of having the flawed EIR set aside by the court. Litigation is in process in the appellate court and will continue. We must also prepare to support any proposed use of the property that will benefit the Mt. Shasta Community in a sustainable manner.

Objective 2: Utilize the CEQA process to identify and modify projects with potentially negative environmental and community impacts. We will thereby work to protect water sources as part of the public trust, preventing contamination by industrial activity, and protecting the environment from other inappropriate and polluting industrial/commercial activities. For examples, we will continue protecting municipal water sources in McCloud as a public trust, monitor proposed projects in the Mt. Shasta area, support efforts to restore the Shasta River ecosystem, and participate in promoting healthy forest management practices (responding when necessary to projects requiring National Environmental Policy Act review and commenting on CalFire Timber Harvest Plans).

Objective 3: Further develop and conduct data collection and analysis protocols for air quality, groundwater, and spring water monitoring (quality and quantity) in the region.

Objective 4: Expand and enhance the components of the Stop Plastic Pollution campaign:

- Engage retailers to offer plastic-free products;
- Educate the community on ways to reduce household plastic waste;
- Initiate, fundraise for and support installation of water bottle refill stations in schools and community parks;
- Engage with federal, state, and local legislators in promoting regulations to reduce plastic production.

Objective 5: Instead of supporting historically extractive industries, promote “generative” and “attractive” local economies that provide living wage jobs, linking the challenges of our local economic struggles to the larger issues of an economic system that puts profit above all other considerations.

Objective 6: Create local projects that inform and engage the community to counter the climate crisis.

B. *Changing Policies*

Objective 1: Work with local and state agencies to change/create ordinances and laws for strong environmental protections, including protection of source waters (i.e., surface, ground, and spring water) as part of the public trust.

Objective 2: Collaborate with others to strengthen CEQA to prioritize healthy environments for all by continuing to participate in the CEQA process for local projects. In this way we can learn more about how CEQA needs to be improved and engage with collaborators to promote legislative changes.

C. Community Outreach--Education, Engagement, and Volunteers

The goals of our Community Outreach program will be to further incorporate/engage the Siskiyou County communities with the global movements for climate justice and environmental justice, while working to protect our local region.

Objective 1: Maintain truthful high-quality content in all programming and communications.

Objective 2: Develop outreach efforts to connect with all ethnic, cultural, and age segments of our communities.

Objective 3: Expand the volunteer program—engage fundraisers, scientists, artists, poets, writers, and people from all walks of life. Identify volunteers with leadership abilities and develop their skills as potential board members.

Objective 4: Utilize the Internet. Continue using our Web site, Facebook page, and e-newsletter while implementing additional social media platforms and other platforms to facilitate communications with the public.

Objective 5: Establish an on-going public education forum series pertaining to local watersheds, ecological issues, and the climate crisis (via video conferencing and/or in-person). Adapt the content to develop programs/curricula for local schools.

Objective 6: Build and expand relationships with local and regional reporters and news outlets.

D. New Paths Forward

We will continue to study and educate ourselves and the community about our local ecosystems while organizing around the environmental threats in our area as well as working toward protecting our planet. The threats to our local communities and environment are not limited to, nor do they primarily result from, local causes. Our work has taught us environmental issues are not stand-alone problems. They are intertwined with:

- the climate crisis;
- economic issues (low wage jobs, export of public resources for profit, exploitation of economically depressed communities, etc.);
- issues regarding sovereignty of local Indigenous Peoples;
- corporate dominance issues (multinational corporate influence over local policy making);
- militarism, racism, and sexism.

All of these issues will be exacerbated by the climate crisis in the coming years. We must have foresight as we understand our work in the context of this larger world picture.

Therefore, we will strive to educate ourselves and the community about:

- Opportunities for citizens to engage with county/city/community governments to influence public discourse and policy directions for the benefit of people over profit;
- The national “Move to Amend” movement (movetoamend.org) that strives to build a truly participatory democracy and amend the US Constitution to say corporations are not people and money is not speech, the goal being to counter corporate advantage in our legal, economic and political systems;
- Alternative economic models that fulfill humanity’s needs and promote peace, equality, and human dignity while regenerating the planet and biosphere.

E. How to Expect the Unexpected

It is difficult to predict what the future, even the next five years, will look like. In view of our Mission, Vision, and Value statements, we developed the following schematic to support our decision-making process in these unprecedented times.

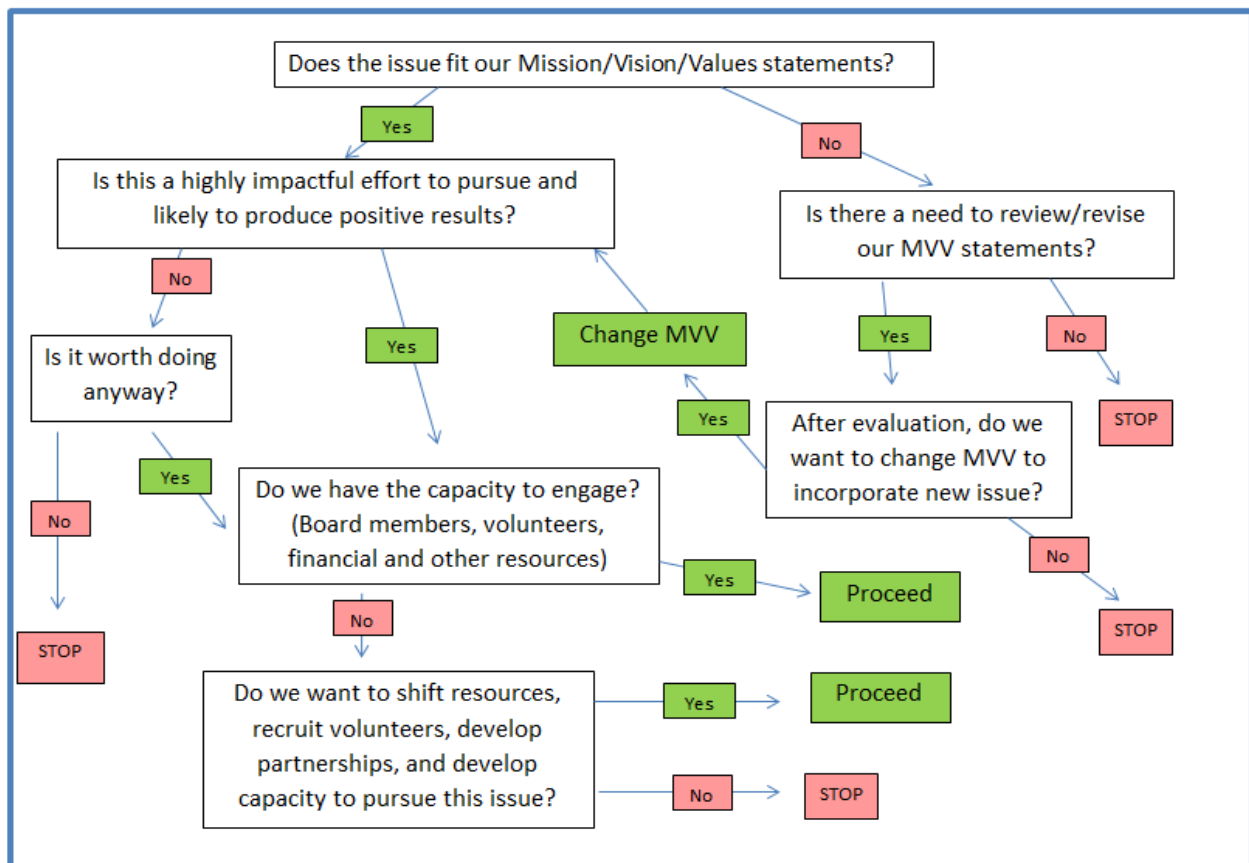


Figure: Schematic representation of our decision-making process.

Goal 2: Building Partnerships

We have already prioritized collaboration when it is appropriate and will continue to seek fruitful partnerships: we have collaborated with the Gateway Neighborhood Association since our inception; we have a powerful collaboration with the Winnemem Wintu Tribe in the legal challenge to the County's flawed CGWC EIR; we have supported the communities of Weed, CA and McCloud, CA in their struggles to protect municipal and domestic water sources; and we have collaborated with others as summarized in the Evaluation section above.

In our strategic planning discussions, we identified main themes to pursue in developing current and future collaborations. The ultimate goal is to build toward a stronger, larger, inclusive movement that further engages the Siskiyou County region with the global movement for climate and environmental justice. Building partnerships will be essential to expand our Community and World Impact (Goal 1).

Main Themes for Building Partnerships

- Involve groups beyond our natural allies
- Unify across issues for mutual protection and augmented impact
- Show prospective allies that we persevere and stick to the initiatives we choose
- Become allied with other groups in long term projects
- Organize community forums as an avenue to develop and build strong relationships
- Coordinate with other groups to lobby in Sacramento
- Recognize other groups for the good they are doing
- Invite other community leaders to our board meetings when appropriate
- Be open to changing how we operate (e.g., day, time and frequency of meetings) to accommodate input from new partners

Goal 3: Building Internal Capacity and Sustainability

A. Speak Your Peace Civility Project

The Board of Directors has always made decisions by consensus. Although this process often leads to lengthy meetings, it leads to high confidence in the final decision. As we look forward to including new directors, volunteers, and supporters in our efforts, we want to ensure all participants are able to contribute optimally. Therefore the Board of Directors has chosen the “**Speak Your Peace Civility Project**” (dsaspeakyourpeace.org) as a guide for our interactions internally (among board members, core leadership team, volunteers) and externally (in interacting with community members, collaborators, agency staff, etc.). The program highlights nine simple tools for practicing civility.

- **Pay Attention**--Be aware and attend to the world and the people around you.
- **Listen**--Focus on others in order to better understand their points of view.

- ***Be Inclusive***--Welcome all groups of citizens working for the greater good of the community.
- ***Don't Gossip***--And don't accept when others choose to do so.
- ***Show Respect***--Honor other people and their opinions, especially in the midst of disagreement.
- ***Be Agreeable***--Look for opportunities to agree; don't contradict just to do so.
- ***Apologize***--Be sincere and repair damaged relationships.
- ***Give Constructive Criticism***--When disagreeing, stick to the issues and don't make a personal attack.
- ***Take Responsibility***--Don't shift responsibility and blame onto others; share disagreements publicly.

Whereas these may seem like simple actions, we have observed that they are not always easy to carry out. Implementation of the program will consist of having one tool on the agenda at each Board meeting (until all nine tools are covered) for group discussion about what it means and how to collectively implement it. Each time a new director joins the board, the process will be repeated. Volunteer training sessions and public forums will include discussions of the Speak Your Peace principles.

B. Strategy for Expanding Our Core Leadership Team and Recruiting New Directors to the Board

We will develop and implement Leadership Training for volunteers and invite select volunteers to join the Core Leadership Team; new Directors can be recruited from these candidates. A Director's handbook will be created to use as a tool in training and recruiting new board members while serving as a guide for current board members.

C. Strategy for Revising Bylaws, Policies and Procedures

The strategy for updating/revising/creating the governance protocols for W.A.T.E.R. will be to start with the current bylaws and update/revise them as appropriate. The revised bylaws will then identify the policies and procedures necessary for carrying out the Group's mission. In addition, a list of issues identified in a Board Self-Assessment will serve as a guide to further ensure all governance issues are addressed.

D. Fundraising

We have been fortunate to have a very supportive community of donors. We have also been successful at securing grants from like-minded foundations. To continue to ensure the financial security of our organization, we will:

- Expand our grant-writing efforts and participate in more grant-writing trainings
- Work to extend our outreach with the Giving Tuesday on-line fundraiser hosted by Community Foundation of the North State
- Expand our donor engagement efforts
- Develop a signature annual fundraising event
- Develop a comprehensive, sustainable fundraising plan.

Summary

The W.A.T.E.R. Board of Directors has prepared this strategic plan as a guide for confronting challenges and utilizing opportunities during the next five years. We acknowledge that the goals are ambitious and include long-term issues that may not be resolved in just five years. However, we are dedicated to initiating efforts within the next five years to set the foundation for long-lasting success in the future.

We have worked to ensure this organization will continue to represent our communities' interests in preserving and protecting our area's unique environmental and social qualities. Although we are living in difficult times with unprecedented economic, social, political, public health, and environmental upheavals, we are committed to working with our communities and organizations at the regional, state, national, and international levels to foster harmony in a safe, equitable and healthy planet for all.