

Forever Squam **Initiative and Campaign Case Statement**

“Conserve What You Love”

The world is changing rapidly, yet the essence of Squam remains. We are grateful to the many visionaries before us for laying the groundwork for Squam becoming a national model as a conservation-minded community, as evidenced by achieving 30% of its land permanently protected *while* remaining privately owned! But the soul of Squam is being tested.

Prompted partly by the pandemic, development pressure has surged. Demand for property in the Squam watershed and region has spiked. Easy access to the outdoors is a major factor of this migration. Increased pressure to develop land throughout the region, including some previously overlooked and marginal tracts, has prompted the Squam Lakes Conservation Society to launch the “Forever Squam” Initiative and Campaign.

The goal of the Forever Squam Initiative is to energize a new generation of participants to continue the sacred trust of stewarding our lands and natural resources while increasing the amount of conserved land by a third, which would result in having 40% of Squam’s land permanently protected! We will achieve these goals by expanding our stewardship and outreach efforts while offering meaningful support to landowners by covering the many related costs associated with permanent land protection and its never-ending stewardship.

The means to achieve this vision is a campaign to raise \$3,200,000 through new donations to create a pool of funds of \$4,000,000 when added to \$800,000 remaining from the Squam Uplands campaign. These funds will be allocated to the following three categories of expenses:

- 1.) \$2,500,000 for bargain-sale purchases, if needed, of conservation easements or land;
- 2.) \$900,000 for perpetual stewardship;
- 3.) \$600,000 for related costs for land owners willing to conserve their land now.

Conservation is a matter of urgency:

This movement has led some in the press to refer to New Hampshire as the “New Colorado.” Demand has exhausted supply throughout the area. Average prices on those few lots that have sold in recent months spiked significantly. The region has experienced surges in building permits, boats registrations, hikers, and school enrollments. Rapid expansion of development threatens water quality, wildlife and the natural beauty of our surroundings.

Conservation is forever:

Legally conserving land forever is not a simple process. There are several associated costs, such as surveys, appraisals, legal fees, title work, and environmental studies. Furthermore, the task of conserving land does not end with the transfer of an easement or land. Rather, the land trust takes on the daunting responsibility to monitor compliance with the terms of the easement “in perpetuity.” On a practical level, the monitoring of compliance requires regular visits to each property and documenting continued compliance. Field visits are conducted by either staff or the team of a hundred or so dedicated and trained volunteers. Meanwhile, the staff provide advice and resources to landowners as part of the ongoing stewardship of each conserved property.

Each time SLCS accepts the responsibility of holding a conservation easement in perpetuity, we typically request a cash donation from the landowner to underwrite this perpetual expense. Understandably, this request for funding from a landowner becomes a burden and sometimes a disincentive. Under this initiative, we will be offering a compelling incentive to landowners by covering the related stewardship endowment contribution of \$15,000 per property, which is invested in SLCS's Dedicated Funds specifically for stewardship purposes.

A community-wide campaign:

The Campaign goal is to raise an additional \$3.2 million in the community. To achieve this goal, we will need donations from a range of donors across the watershed. SLCS has typically raised funds for the acquisition of easements or properties on a project-by-project basis, soliciting support from adjacent landowners and other interested parties. Forever Squam is our opportunity to reach more deeply into the broader community to make the case for conservation with a sense of urgency while also increasing the number of volunteers and overall participation as members.

Protecting land, particularly on a community-wide basis, has been shown to enhance community character and social networks. The goal of Forever Squam is to engage the wider community in the protection of its natural resources while providing common areas for exploration, recreation such as hiking and skiing, and serving as a resource for students of all ages.

From the bottom to the top:

The Forever Squam initiative focuses on high conservation-value properties throughout the watershed, from the lakeshore to its highest peaks. These lands include wetlands, forested lands, upper-elevation lands, and properties adjoining existing conservation lands. Specific areas include the upper ridge of the Squam Range, Mt. Prospect, White Oak Pond and its highlands, the Rattlesnakes, Upper Dog Cove, Upper Asquam Preserve, islands, and a score of other key parcels throughout the watershed.

Encouraging landowners to donate an easement or consider a bargain sale will be a central focus of our effort. We will make the case that conserving one's property preserves the beauty and character of that land forever. Conserving it in conjunction with other lands enhances the impact of each project, reinforcing the ethic of a community bound by its stewardship of its natural resources, and building on Squam's tradition of conservation and community.

Forever Squam is about conserving what we love. What we love about Squam is worth conserving. The Forever Squam Initiative and Campaign's vision is to build on past conservation successes while challenging the community to extend its commitment to protecting its natural resources at this critical time.

Please join us by making your commitment to Squam's future by completing the Forever Squam pledge form. You are a vital link in Squam's ever-evolving story.