



TROUT UNLIMITED

National Conservation Agenda

2026-2027

PROPOSED

I. Purpose

Trout Unlimited’s (TU) National Leadership Council’s (NLC) principal responsibility is to develop, amend, and help implement this “National Conservation Agenda” (NCA). The NCA sets forth the highest priorities of TU’s state councils and local chapters to help guide the entire TU organization – national and local staff, councils, chapters, and members – to work together in carrying out TU’s Mission:

To bring together diverse interests to care for and recover rivers and streams so that our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon.

Similarly, the NCA brings focus to TU’s Vision of engaging our communities in “repairing and renewing our rivers, streams, and other water bodies on which we all depend.” The NLC intends for this NCA to carry forth these principles to guide the work of TU’s leadership, staff, volunteers, and supporters.

The NCA represents the most critical trout and salmon conservation priorities identified by TU’s state councils and chapters, communicated to the NLC’s conservation and organizational workgroups, and finalized by the NLC’s Steering Committee. The NLC Steering Committee then presents the priorities to the NLC for approval at the Annual Meeting. Once approved, the NLC then submits the NCA to TU’s Board of Trustees and TU’s Executive Leadership, who shall consider the NCA’s conservation priorities in setting TU’s Strategic Plan, policies, fieldwork, and financial priorities.

It is not the purpose of the NCA to strictly define TU’s conservation priorities; rather, its purpose is to inform TU’s Board of Trustees and Executive Leadership of those priorities of greatest national or regional significance to the councils and chapters. The NLC recognizes that TU’s selection of conservation priorities must consider other initiatives, issues, and strategies identified by TU’s Board of Trustees, CEO and Senior Leadership, professional staff, contractual commitments, and conservation partners.

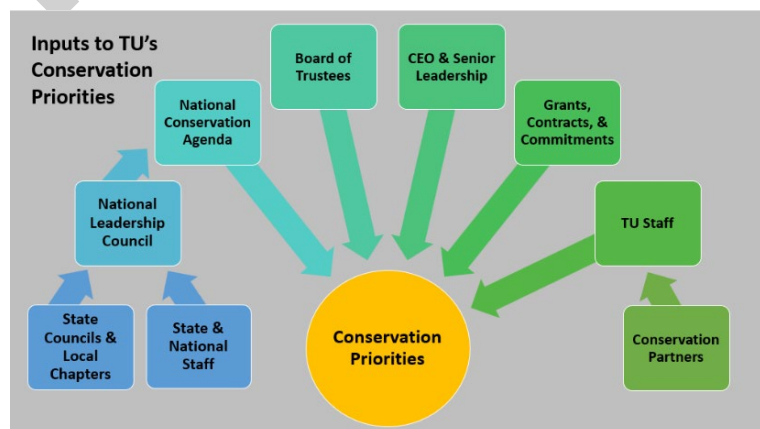


Figure 1

Nonetheless, the NLC recommends that the Board and Executive Leadership adopt the conservation priorities identified in the NCA because of their high importance to the state councils, chapters, and grassroots volunteers.

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This NCA provides a clear yet flexible process for identifying TU's conservation priorities and implementing measures to address those priorities. It also provides flexibility in determining when and how to address these priorities, who will be responsible, and how the status and results will be measured. While this process is flexible, it will require commitment from all NLC Representatives. Defining a specific process for identifying priorities will provide all NLC Representatives with clear responsibilities that will give greater significance to their roles as NLC Representatives. Ultimately, NCA will be fundamental to how TU pursues its mission to conserve, protect, and restore North America's trout and salmon fisheries and the watersheds that we value dearly and future generations will enjoy.

II. NCA Principles

The NLC has adopted four conservation principles guiding the NCA and the selection of its priorities. These principles are based on TU's mission to protect, reconnect, restore and sustain coldwater fisheries and their watersheds are based on the best available science. See Figure 2. It has also adopted a fifth principle that focuses on supporting TU's organizational capacity to fulfill its mission at all levels. Each of these five principles is discussed below.

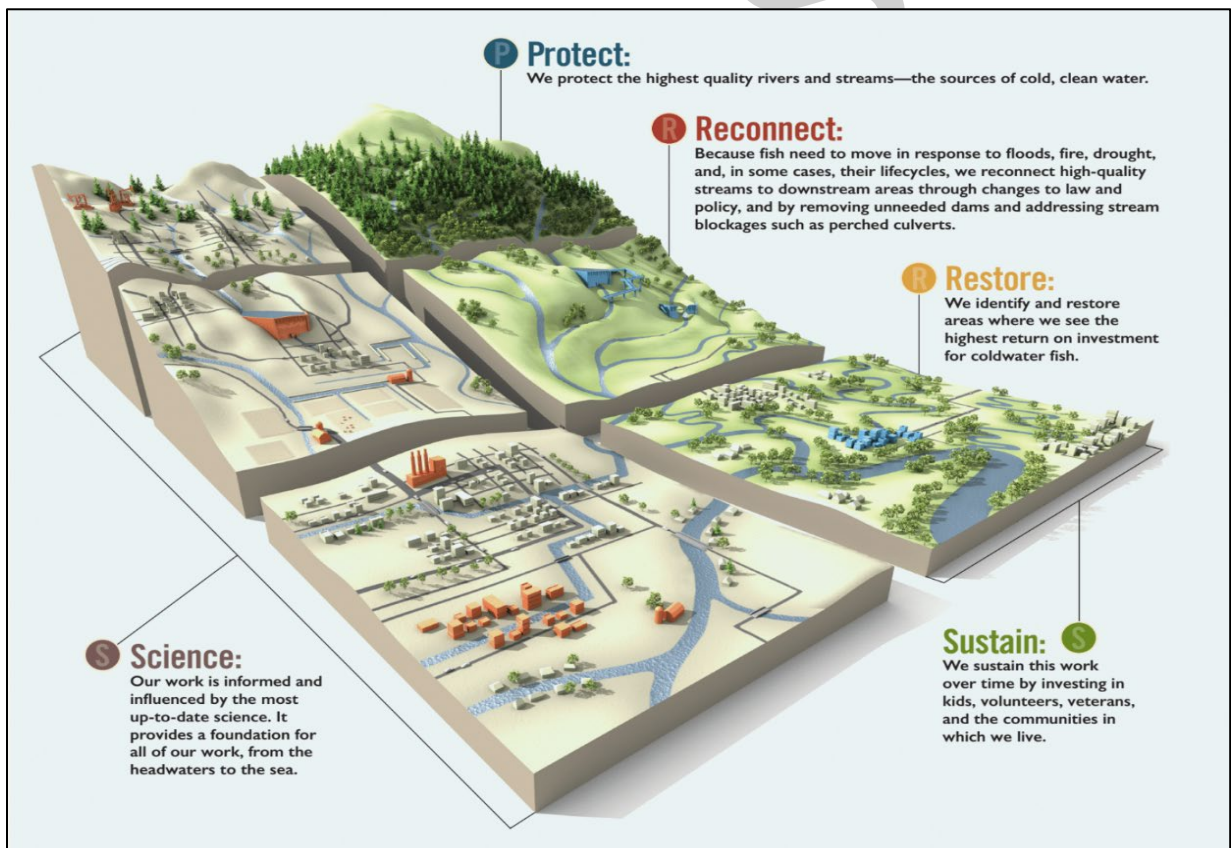


Figure 2

First, the NCA seeks to **PROTECT** healthy populations of wild and native salmonids and their waters and watersheds—particularly headwaters, strongholds, and outstanding waters—by opposing activities that can degrade those habitats or endanger those fish populations and by supporting efforts to preserve and improve those watersheds, including their aquifers and

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groundwaters. It will advocate for state and federal habitat designations protecting outstanding and high-quality waters on public and private lands. It will protect native and wild salmon and trout populations from risks posed by invasive species, unsound hatchery and stocking practices, and poorly managed aquaculture development. It will seek to ensure adequate quantities of water by opposing trans-basin diversions and transfers.

Second, the NCA prioritizes activities and policies that will **RECONNECT** trout and salmon habitat in headwaters, tributaries, mainstem rivers, lakes, estuaries, and the ocean. The NCA will encourage restoration work that removes mid- and small-scale dams, culverts, and obstructions (e.g., velocity barriers) that impede natural and historic migrations, while considering risks to wild and native populations threatened by invasive species (including other salmonids). It will prioritize acquisition and leasing efforts that increase connectivity by preserving and increasing existing streamflow. And, for large dams in critical watersheds, it will advocate to federal and state governments the need for increased fish passage or outright dam decommissioning, removal, and habitat restoration.

Third, the NCA supports TU and other efforts to **RESTORE** native and wild trout and salmon populations to their historic ranges by improving stream and watershed habitat and mitigating impacts to fish from environmental and anthropogenic stressors. This work must include restoring and enhancing riparian habitat, reducing pollutant discharges, strengthening water quality standards, reconnecting streams and groundwater, improving instream flows, and reducing stream temperatures to improve all life stages of trout and salmon. The goal is to increase native and wild salmonid populations where those populations have declined and restore them where they have been extirpated in their historic ranges.

Fourth, even if TU is successful in protecting, reconnecting, and restoring, the NCA also must advocate for strong efforts to **SUSTAIN** the work that has been accomplished and prevent any backsliding in the future on the successes achieved. This principle emphasizes the need for both broad and focused science-based policy work to protect water, land, air, and climate against future losses from changing environmental conditions, development pressures, and regulatory changes. The NCA will support policies to reduce carbon emissions, mitigate the impacts of climate change on trout and salmon populations, and prevent further damage as climate change intensifies precipitation, temperature extremes, and wildfires. It will oppose developments and activities that create risks of pollution from energy development, mining, agricultural run-off, transportation, acid deposition, incompatible land development, and other sources of pollutants to surface waters and groundwater. The NCA will advocate for freshwater and marine fisheries policies to protect forage fish, aquatic invertebrates, and other sources of prey for trout and salmon.

Fifth, the NCA recognizes that state councils, chapters, grassroots volunteers, and other supporters are critical to TU's conservation mission and the organization's long-term health. The NCA must advocate for projects and initiatives that **SUPPORT** and grow the organization and its volunteers. These efforts must include increasing and diversifying membership (e.g., increasing women, veterans, youth, and minority supporters), promoting a culture of broad inclusivity, community building, and strengthening volunteer participation throughout the organization. The NCA should promote education of its membership in all areas critical to carrying out the NCA, including science, policy, advocacy, grant-writing, community-building, fundraising, membership

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development, leadership, and communications. It should continue to increase member and supporter capacity and active involvement in chapter and fieldwork. The NCA must reinforce and amplify TU's national brand reputation throughout our communities and enhance TU's partnerships with aligned conservation organizations at the local and national levels. Effective execution of this NCA will help drive grassroots fund-raising and attract government (county, state, federal) resources to assure TU's long-term financial stability and growth.

III. Selection Criteria for NCA Priorities

The NCA gives local chapters and state councils considerable flexibility and autonomy in identifying their highest conservation priorities. During the first few years of implementing this revised NCA, the NLC will invite chapters and councils to provide their feedback on how they identified priorities. Based on this feedback, the NLC may develop guidance for chapters/councils to use and for the NLC to adopt for further screening of priorities. While the NCA does not require chapters and councils to consider all or even any of the following possible screening criteria, the list below identifies factors that the NLC will consider in recommending priorities to TU National Leadership.

- ✓ Alignment with NCA Principles: Does the priority align with the NCA Principles of Protect, Reconnect, Restore, Sustain, and Support?
- ✓ Broad Significance: Does the issue have national, regional, or multi-state significance?
- ✓ Implementability and Feasibility: Given its resources, expertise, influence, and other priorities, does TU have the necessary and available resources and expertise to address the issue meaningfully?
- ✓ Continuation of Prior TU Work: Will TU's efforts build upon or continue prior TU work on this issue or is it moving into an area where TU has had little or no past involvement?
- ✓ Urgency: Is immediate action required to prevent irreversible damage or capitalize on a time-limited opportunity?
- ✓ Potential for Long-Term Impact and Sustainability: Will a successful outcome create lasting benefits or require ongoing intervention?
- ✓ Volunteer Engagement: Will TU's efforts to address this issue create meaningful opportunities for volunteer engagement?
- ✓ Public and Political Support: Is there strong existing or potential public and/or political support for this issue?
- ✓ Agency and NGO Alignment: How well does the priority align with the priorities of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as those of other like-minded environmental or conservation groups?
- ✓ Equity and Social Justice Implications: Are there potential benefits or harms that will disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, indigenous populations, or other marginalized groups?

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Chapter/council priorities need not satisfy all criteria. In some cases, some state priorities standing alone would not rise to a national priority, but when grouped together, they do. For example, chapters in West Virginia, Idaho, and Arizona might each identify an abandoned mine as a priority and national staff might want to prioritize the implementation of the Good Samaritan Law. The NLC could consolidate these priorities into an overall national priority to develop an aggressive program for implementing the Good Samaritan Law at these high priority abandoned mines.

IV. Timeline

Guided by the above principles, this NCA defines a process for identifying and communicating concrete and actionable priorities to TU Leadership.¹ The NLC has adopted the following bi-annual process to identify, collect, review, and select the most critical trout and salmon conservation priorities identified by TU's state councils and chapters, TU's professional staff working in each state and nationally, and the Board of Trustees. See Figure 3. Each state's NLC representative is responsible for coordinating and managing this process with their state council and chapters and with TU state staff. The NLC Steering Committee will seek input from TU National Staff and the Board of Trustees.

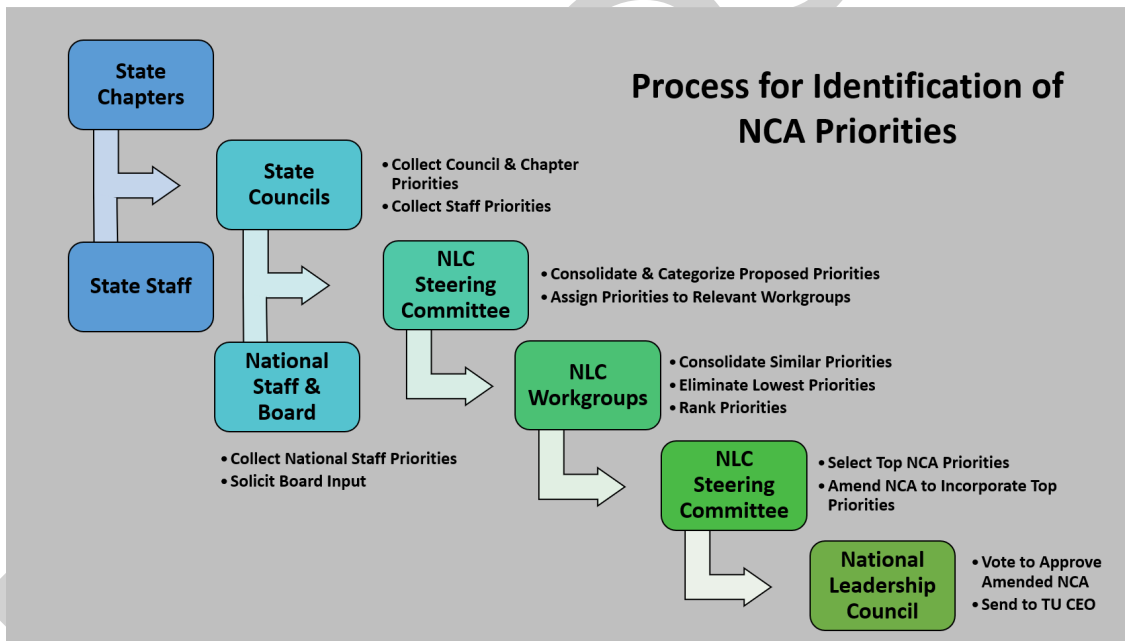


Figure 3

The schedule for determining and finalizing NCA priorities is driven by the need to finalize proposed priorities in time for TU's annual meeting, typically held in early fall. At this meeting, the NLC as a whole will receive, discuss, amend, and approve the final NCA and the selected priorities. To accomplish this process, work will begin at the start of the calendar year and follow this rough timeline.

¹ These priorities are similar to and replace TU's "Critical Focus Areas" (CFAs). Current CFAs will be considered in setting the NCA priorities but will not continue to exist thereafter.

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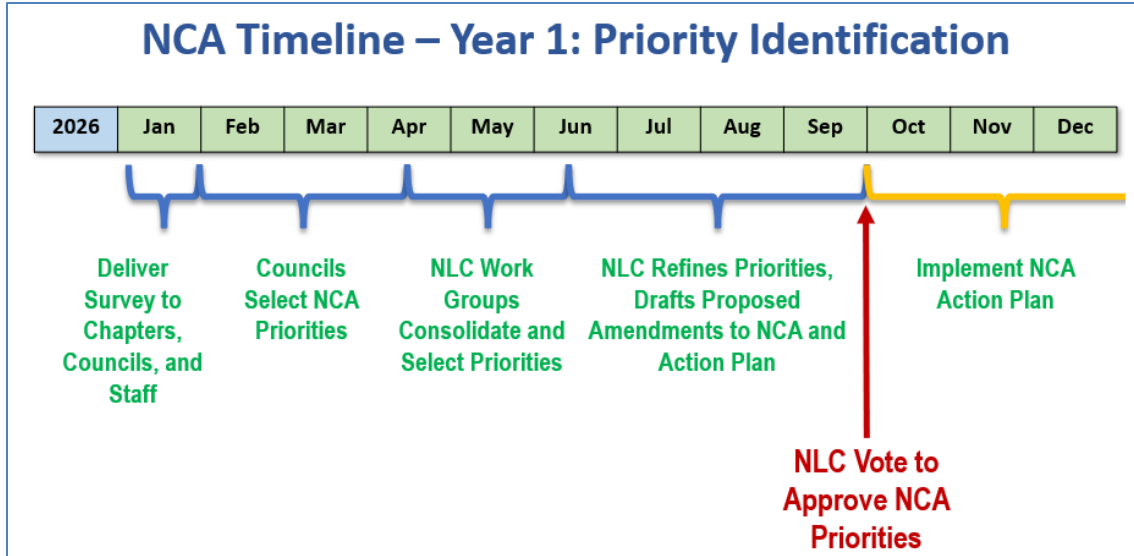


Figure 4

- January – NLC Steering Committee will prepare and distribute a survey and related documents to NLC representatives. The survey will include all prior NCA priorities and potential NCA priorities to be considered for adoption or deletion. The survey will also request councils and staff to propose any other priorities not previously identified.
 - ✓ **Deadline:** January 31 – NLC shall circulate survey to NLC representatives to forward to their state councils and local chapters.
- February-April – NLC representatives and each state council’s leadership will work with chapters and TU’s state professional staff to identify the most significant conservation priorities within each chapter, throughout the state, and in any Priority Waters within the state. Chapters should focus on local or statewide issues that have broad applicability throughout TU, are of appropriate scope and importance to be included in the NCA, and are of a scope and nature that they be addressed meaningfully by TU, whether through staff or volunteers. For example, a chapter might identify a need for local expertise in FERC relicensing proceedings, which might have broad applicability elsewhere in the country. Or, a chapter might need solutions to poor member communications tools, which might indicate a common and broader need within TU. Chapters should identify 1-3 priorities.
 - ✓ **Deadline:** April 15 – NLC representative shall submit the state’s top priorities to the NLC Steering Committee.
- Late April – NLC Steering Committee will meet and review the priority issues submitted and determine the workgroup and/or individual(s) for which each priority is most relevant. If the Steering Committee cannot agree as to which workgroup an issue is most relevant, the NLC Chair shall make the final decision.

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- ✓ **Deadline:** May 1 – The NLC Steering Committee shall assign all state priority issues to the workgroup and/or individual(s) for which the issue is most relevant.
- May-June – Workgroups meet to review, identify, and rank their top conservation priorities.
 - ✓ **Deadline:** June 15 – Each workgroup shall identify and rank their top priority issues and submit the list to the NLC Steering Committee.
- June-September – The NLC Steering Committee shall consolidate all ranked priorities and draft proposed amendments to the NCA. The Steering Committee has the discretion to include all top-priority issues submitted to it by the workgroups or a smaller subset of those issues. The NLC Steering Committee can also retain priorities from the prior year. The NLC Steering Committee will prepare a draft Action Plan that identifies workgroups that will be responsible for implementing or managing each priority.
 - **Deadline:** Annual Meeting – The NLC Steering Committee shall propose amendments to the NCA to include these priority issues and submit the proposed amended NCA to the full NLC for approval at the Annual Meeting. After approval of the NCA, the NLC Chair shall submit the approved NCA to TU's Chief Executive Officer for distribution to TU's Board of Trustees and TU's Staff. TU's Executive Leadership shall consider the NCA priorities in developing and revising TU's Strategic Plan.²

With the submittal of the final NCA to TU's Chief Executive Officer, the NLC expects TU's leadership to inform the NLC which NCA priorities TU will implement, how they will be implemented, and who within TU will be responsible for their implementation.

V. NCA Implementation

Under Trout Unlimited's Bylaws, the NLC is responsible for directing the implementation of the NCA. How the NLC will direct the implementation of the NCA will depend on the nature of the NCA's priorities and their related projects, direction from TU Executive Leadership and National Staff, the financial and volunteer resources available, and the technical/scientific expertise needed. In cases where resource and expertise demands may be modest, the NLC representatives and workgroups may participate directly in the implementation of an NCA priority, such as developing educational materials on native trout conservation or proposing revisions for communicating with members. For larger projects that span several states or larger regions, several state councils might assume responsibility and implement the priority with volunteers. In other cases where TU Staff will be primarily responsible for implementing an NCA priority, the NLC's role may be simply to communicate the priorities to the councils, chapters, and volunteers.

² Draft note: The NCA anticipates that TU will incorporate most of the priorities in its near-term planning over the following 1-2 years. Insofar as TU's Strategic Plan is updated on a 5-year cycle, there needs to be further discussion of whether the NCA priorities are incorporated into the Strategic Plan or into some sort of annual or bi-annual plan. The NCA is intended to provide greater flexibility and nimbleness than may be possible with a 5-year cycle for the Strategic Plan.

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The NLC Steering Committee will assume primary responsibility for determining how best to implement the NCA priorities. After approval of the NCA at the fall meeting, the NLC Steering Committee will assess the scope, resource demands, urgency, and expertise needed to implement each of the NCA priorities. The Steering Committee will identify whether a priority should be managed either as an NLC-Managed Priority or as a Staff-Managed Priority. Figure 5 below depicts this process.

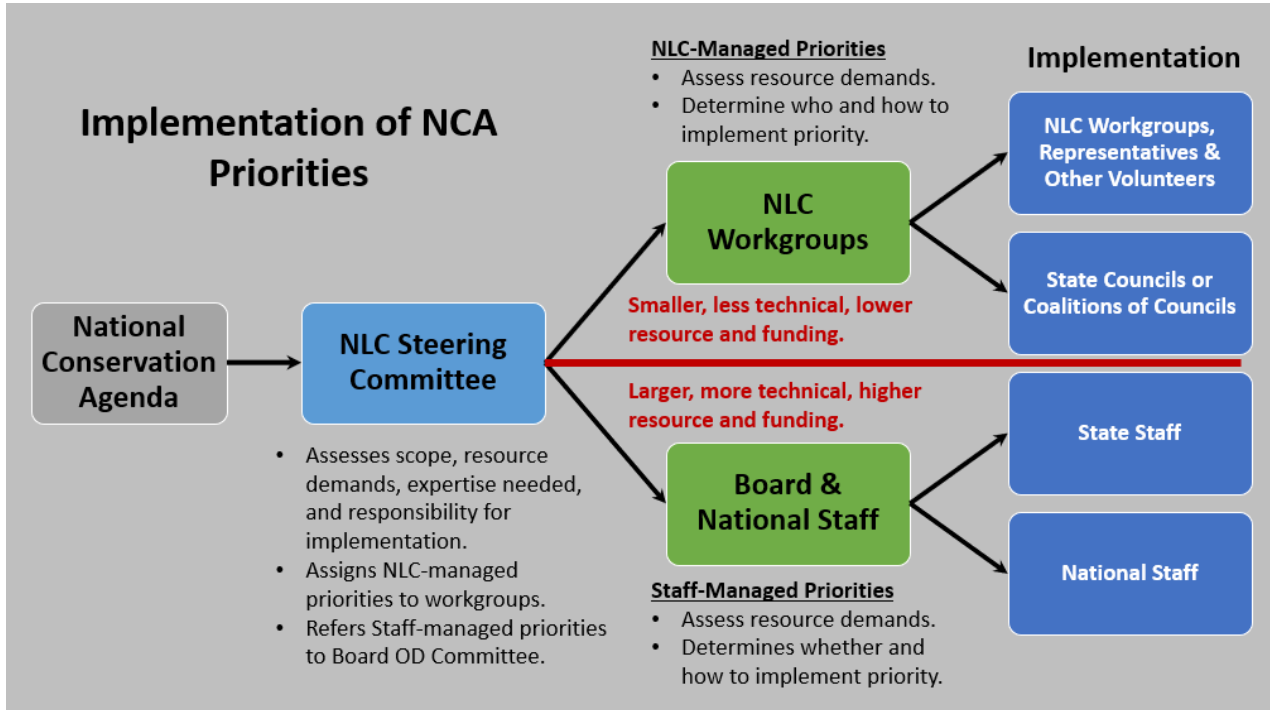


Figure 5

An **NLC-Managed Priority** is a priority that is well-suited to be managed by the NLC, its workgroups, NLC representatives, and state councils. These priorities will typically be smaller projects that do not require large funding, professional expertise, and significant staff support. They should also be implementable within a reasonable and realistic time frame (e.g., less than two years) to maintain volunteer focus. For example, NLC-Managed Priorities could include several NLC representatives developing a proposed TU policy on marine net-pen aquaculture, an NLC workgroup proposing changes to TU’s website, or state council volunteers developing educational materials on stream access laws. Priorities that have a limited geographic scope (e.g., several states or regions) that can be implemented with NLC representatives or volunteers from state councils would also be assigned as an NLC-Managed Priority.

Once the NLC Steering Committee has identified an NLC-Managed Priority, it will assign that priority to an appropriate workgroup that will determine how best to implement it. Each workgroup should be flexible in determining how to implement each priority. For smaller projects, the workgroup might determine that a couple of NLC representatives can develop an action plan and manage it, calling upon other volunteers or staff as necessary. Bigger, more complex projects might require three or more NLC representatives, a workgroup, or state council volunteers.

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Staff-Managed Priorities will be those larger projects that require significant scientific, technical, financial, policy, and legal expertise and would need staff and financial resources that cannot be reasonably provided by volunteers. For example, the NCA might prioritize the need to undertake a large restoration project in a watershed that requires heavy equipment, contractors, and engineering expertise. Such a project would not be suitable for volunteers to lead but it is precisely the kind of work for which TU's national and state staff have significant experience and expertise. Similarly, the NCA might identify a national policy issue that can be most effectively managed by TU's Leadership, its government affairs team, and members of the TU Board having expertise or political connections in Washington, D.C. These priorities may also include projects that have national or broad geographic scope and cannot be easily managed by a dispersed group of volunteers and councils. For example, TU's successful opposition to the development of the Pebble Mine in Alaska had national significance and required substantial staff and funding resources. This project needed the policy and legal expertise and resources of TU National and could not have been as well managed by NLC representatives and volunteers.

The NLC Steering Committee will recommend these Staff-Managed Priorities to the TU Board or appropriate National Staff for implementation. The Board or TU Staff will decide whether and how to implement these priorities given TU's staffing resources, funding availability, expertise demands, competing alternatives, schedules, existing commitments, and other strategic objectives. As discussed above in Section I (Purpose), the NLC and this NCA recognize that TU cannot implement every priority but must consider how the NCA Priorities fit within TU's broader initiatives and other practical and financial constraints. Nonetheless, the NLC believes that it is critical for a volunteer-focused TU to understand the priorities of its councils, chapters, and volunteers in carrying out its mission.

Finally, identification of an NCA Priority as NLC-Managed or Staff-Managed is not intended to create rigid silos for implementing priorities and projects. The NLC seeks to foster collaboration throughout the organization. NLC-Managed Priorities may require assistance and expertise from TU staff, such as strategy or support for drafting comments on federal regulations. Conversely, TU staff managing larger projects would be encouraged to reach out to the NLC and state councils and chapters for volunteer help, such as particularized expertise on an issue of state law or volunteer support for the revegetation phase of a larger restoration project.

VI. Implementation Timeline

Implementation of NCA Priorities should begin in late autumn following NLC approval of the NCA. The NLC Steering Committee will be responsible for the initial step of determining whether a priority is NLC-Managed or Staff-Managed. For NLC-Managed Priorities, the NLC Steering Committee will assign a workgroup to oversee each project, including the development of an action plan that describes its scope, sequencing of priorities, responsibilities, timing, resources needed, and reporting. For Staff-Managed Priorities, the NLC Steering Committee will forward the priority to the TU's Leadership for implementation. While the timing of the work will depend on the nature of the priority, the NCA anticipates that work will begin at the beginning of the year following approval of the NCA.

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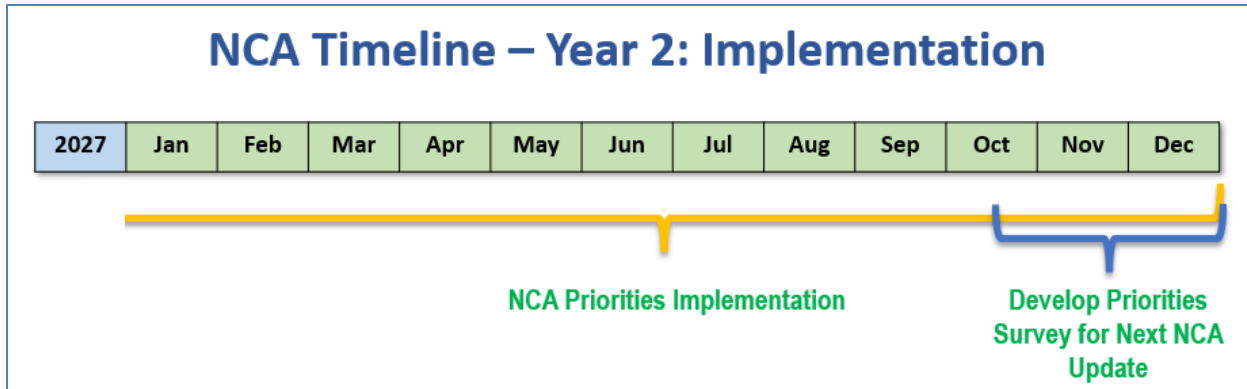


Figure 6

While the NLC hopes that most of the priorities can be addressed within two years, some projects may take longer. In either case, the NCA will request periodic and concise status reports for each priority. The purpose of the status reports is to ensure that progress is being made on each of the identified priorities. The length, scope, and frequency of a status report will depend upon the nature of the project. The NLC will however request a mid-year status report for each by priority. This mid-year status report is especially important for those in years in which the NLC is identifying NCA Priorities for the next two-year cycle.

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2026-27 NCA Priorities
Placeholder examples only:

Priority	Description	Geographic Region	NLC Workgroup	Primary Responsibility
Conservation Priorities				
Federal 6PPD-q Water Quality Standard	Advocate to EPA to develop and implement a WQS for 6PPD-q	National	Water Quality	TU Government Affairs
Net Pen Policy	Review and update TU's national policy on nearshore marine net pen industry	National	Wild & Native Salmonids	Wild & Native Salmonid Workgroup and TU Science Staff
Organizational Priorities				
Increase member email capture	Improve communications by capturing and correcting member email information, while respecting those members who have opted out of TU email communications.	National	Communications	Volunteer Operations