

MTRI
Strategic Plan
2012

Building on success

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Executive Summary

The Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute has been in operation since 2004. The co-operative has grown and developed with the guidance of a strategic plan which is now six years old. This second iteration is based on input from a three-month long consultation process with members, partners, committees, staff, and board. This plan describes MTRI's history leading up to and including the current planning phase and includes summary descriptions of the charity's finances, staff, and membership. MTRI's mission and vision have been its foundation; they remain almost unchanged since 2004. In this plan, to reflect a maturing organization and to reflect the ideas generated by the member survey, the list of guiding principles is expanded and accompanied by an abbreviated list of values. To help understand the complex people-power behind MTRI, graphics are presented for the organizational structure and committee structure. During this recent planning process, each committee and working group of MTRI has re-visited its role and updated it to accurately capture and to focus its work. To help the charity achieve its mission, five goals are presented with associated objectives. Committees will detail the actions required to meet these goals and objectives annually in action plans that are appended to this document. This strategic plan concludes by outlining a process for monitoring and measuring success in implementing action plans and achieving MTRI's goals and objectives.

Foundations of MTRI

Mission

MTRI's mission is to promote sustainable use of natural resources and biodiversity conservation in the Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve and beyond through research, education, and the operation of a field station.

Vision

MTRI envisions prosperous and knowledgeable human communities in the SNBR where decisions with biodiversity implications are well-informed by research, where species are not at risk, where there is landscape and aquatic connectivity, healthy forests, and healthy aquatic ecosystems.

Guiding Principles

- Promote research including natural science, social science, and promote the inclusion of local community knowledge and aboriginal knowledge in MTRI activities
- Cooperate with local communities, educators, researchers, industry, and government
- Openly communicate research results to the public
- Work collaboratively rather than competitively
- Share a similar mission and vision with the Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve
- Create a caring workplace fostering high morale, flexibility, and leadership
- Use a positive approach to catalyze change and to lead by example
- Work directly with rural landowners and citizenry to understand how their local environment works and to communicate its value in being maintained and kept whole
- Empower the community with tools for environmental awareness and ecologically sound handling of natural resources economic and environmental sustainability particularly given what MTRI has learned through its research and monitoring
- Use a place-based model with active citizen engagement, mentorship, training, and co-operative knowledge-building to advocate for a similar approach nationally and globally
- Use social media and new technologies to effectively reach a large audience
- Model green technology in buildings and operations

-Be accountable to the membership, open and receptive to new ideas, and transparent in decision-making

History of MTRI Business and Planning

MTRI was incorporated in November 2004 with a board of directors consisting of 18 members. One staff person was hired to co-ordinate projects associated with a contract with Parks Canada. In 2005, MTRI consulted with stakeholders and founding partners to develop its first strategic plan to guide the development of the organization. Between 2005 and 2010, MTRI's annual revenue grew 265% to \$470,000 (Figure 1). MTRI has also grown its assets by purchasing its field station in 2006, renovating and expanding the facilities in 2011, and keeping the organization's debt load at zero (Figure 1).

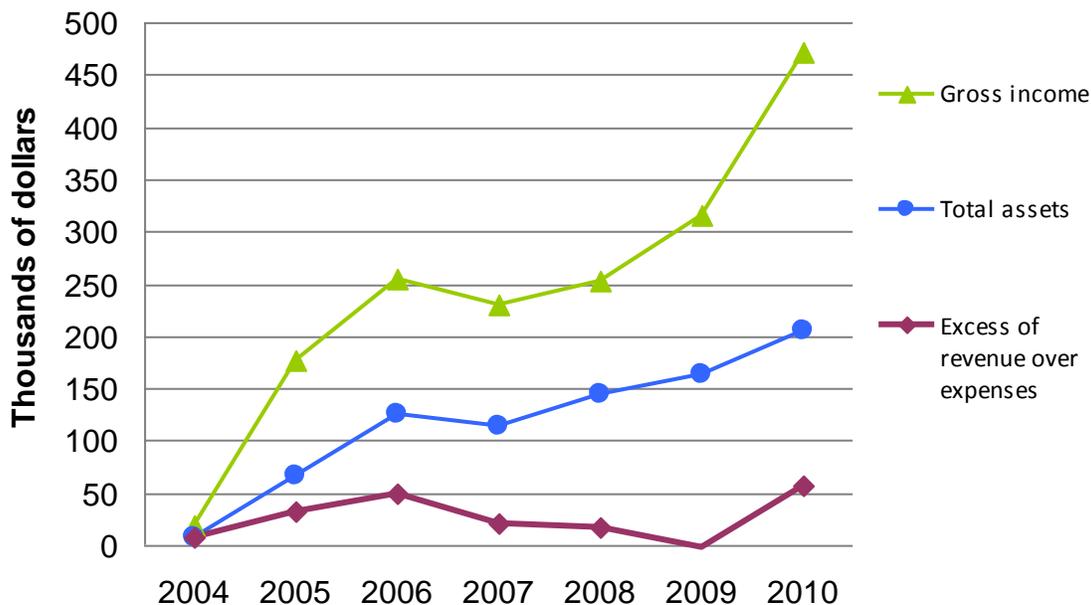


Figure 1. Income, assets, and retained earnings for MTRI over its history (from audited financial statements).

In 2006, MTRI developed a sustainability plan to help guide the diversification of revenue. The proportion of revenue from grants, donations, and merchandise sales and revenue from non-federal sources increased over the last five years so that grants and contracts from the provincial government, industry, and other non-profit organizations now contribute almost half of MTRI's revenue (Figure 2). Most of MTRI's revenue has been through grants and contracts (49% and 42%, respectively). Revenue from donations has grown to about 4% of MTRI's overall revenue while revenue from rent and merchandise sales has remained consistent at about 3% and 1% of overall revenue for the last five years.

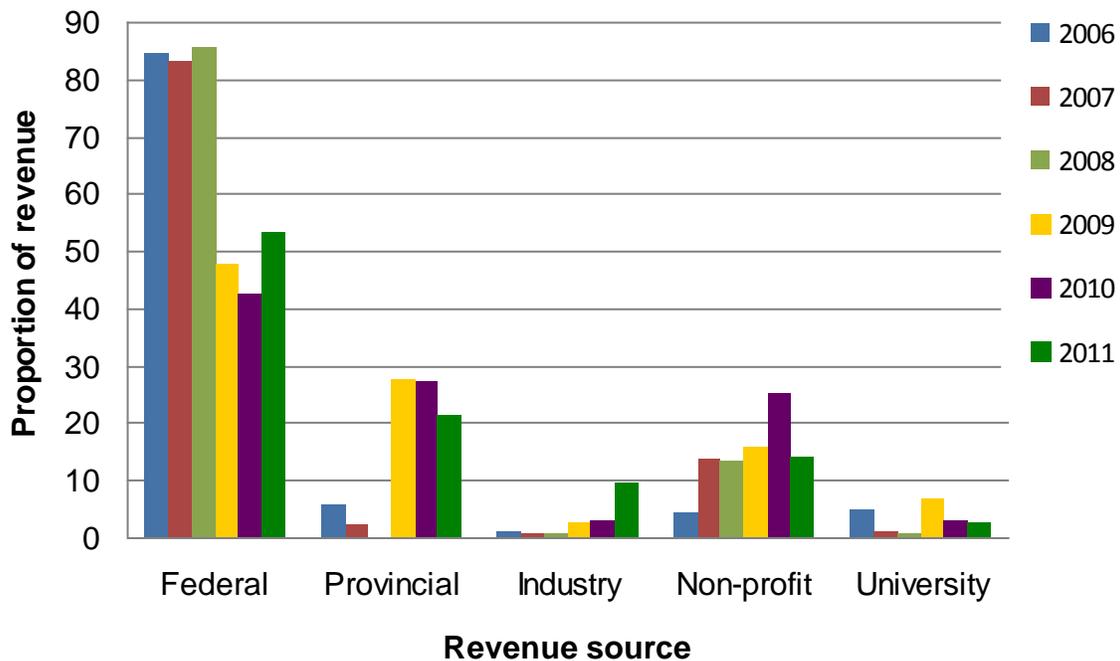


Figure 2. Proportion of revenue from grants and contracts by source. Federal revenue includes that from grants and contracts with partners such as Parks Canada, Environment Canada, and Service Canada. Provincial revenue includes that from grants and contracts with partners such as Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Nova Scotia Department of Environment. Industry partners providing revenue include NewPage Corporation, Nova Scotia Power Incorporated, and Bowater Mersey Paper Company. Non-profit partners who have contributed revenue include Nova Forest Alliance, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Nova Scotia Salmon Association, and Bird Studies Canada. University partners who have contributed revenue include Acadia and Dalhousie universities.

In 2007, the Acadia Centre for Social and Business Entrepreneurship was contracted to develop a business plan for MTRI. The plan recommended that MTRI track financial ratios and revise cash flow budgets. As a charitable organization funded mostly by projects, MTRI has kept its retained earnings low (Figure 1). Its liquidity ratio and return on assets are enviable and it has managed cash flow by securing a line of credit at the local credit union. While payroll and project-related costs have grown with the organization, MTRI has done a remarkable job of keeping its office and general expenses low at an average of \$26,000 ± \$5000 over the last five years while project expenses have more than doubled from \$42,000 in 2007 to \$107,000 in 2011. For the last few years, MTRI has retained a staff compliment of approximately twelve year-round staff (many of whom are part-time) and an additional eight summer students (Figure 3).

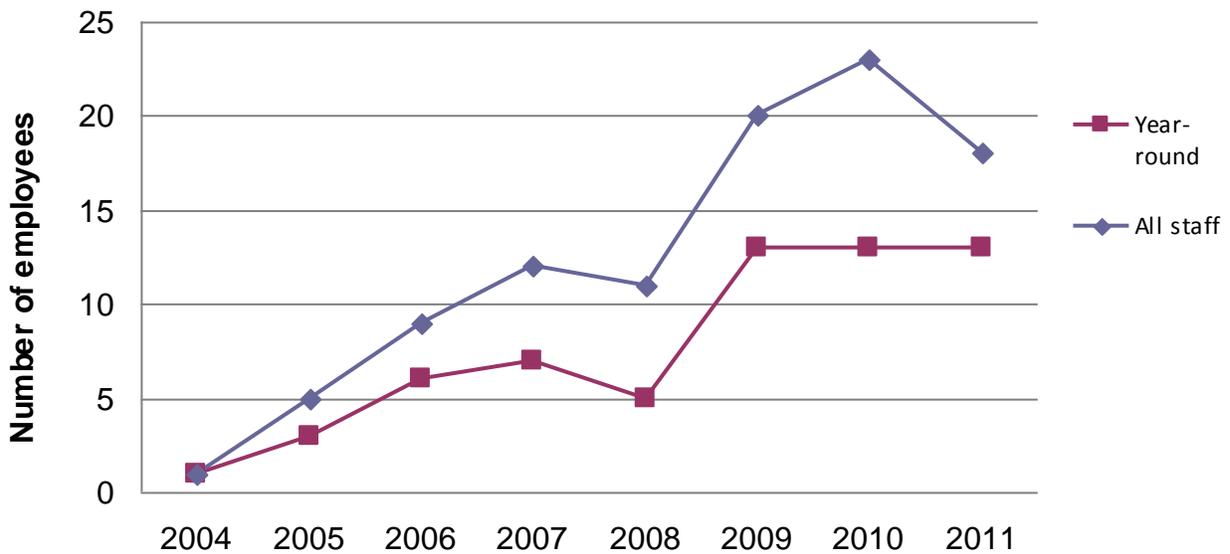


Figure 3. Number of employees over MTRI's history. Information is provided for total number of individuals employed by MTRI in a given year which includes summer staff, as well as number of employees who worked year-round which includes all part-time staff who worked through the summer and winter.

Current Planning Process & Scan of Strengths-Challenges

In 2011, MTRI undertook a strategic planning process which included an online survey for members, two day-long workshops, and several committee meetings dedicated to strategic planning. One-hundred and twenty members participated in the online survey and indicated in the survey and at workshops that they have a high degree of satisfaction with MTRI's overall performance (Figure 4). Respondents to the online survey reflected the geographic distribution of the membership well. Eighty-six percent indicated that they were likely to continue volunteering or working with MTRI and almost half of respondents suggested that they were likely to donate money to MTRI in the next 12 months.

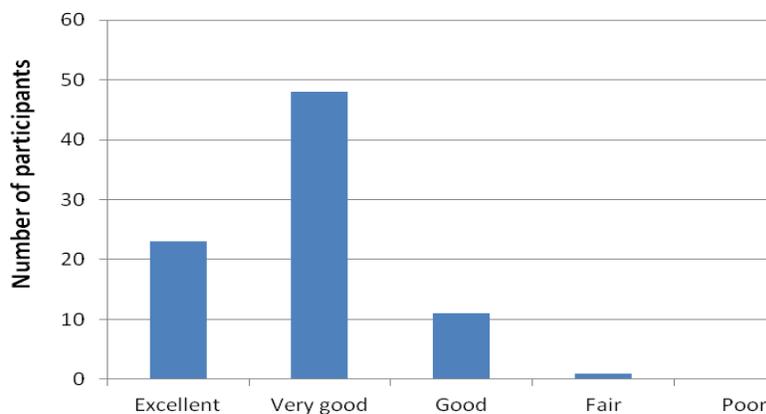


Figure 4. Rating of overall performance of MTRI by participants in online survey November 2011 (83 responses were provided for this question).

The keywords that online respondents most commonly provided to describe MTRI's strengths were collaboration, education, and research. When ranking multiple aspects of MTRI the following aspects were ranked the highest: friendliness of staff, caliber of board and staff, working collaboratively rather than competitively, flexibility of staff, and living up to its mission and vision. As part of the online survey, board members and staff noted the following internal strengths: workplace flexibility, staff morale, staff supervision, leadership from the Chair of Board of Directors and Executive Director, and the board's clarity about its purpose.

The keywords that online respondents most commonly provided to describe MTRI's challenges included funding, remoteness, overambition, and public recognition. When ranking multiple aspects of MTRI the following aspects were ranked the lowest: outreach and publication, cohesion, and focus. Internal challenges noted by board members and staff included the following: training for staff, heavy workloads, attendance at board meetings, the connection between board and staff, orientation materials for board members, and the effectiveness of committees and working groups.

This new strategic plan considers how these strengths and challenges help position MTRI to be successful in the future. With clarity and transparency, MTRI will work towards improving itself and achieving its mission by building on its strengths and addressing its challenges. For example, Objectives 5.1 to 5.7 (on pages 13-14) describe how the co-operative will improve its organizational development and increase capacity and thereby acknowledge the tremendous power of people at MTRI. To improve funding, this plan adds the goal of achieving financial stability which was not previously described. To improve the focus of the organization, the plan lays the groundwork for six objectives for research, monitoring, and management which will be addressed in detailed action plans. To increase public recognition, the plan reiterates objectives that have guided MTRI since its inception while action plans detail new and exciting ways to achieve these objectives.

MTRI Growth

By almost every measure, MTRI's growth since it was incorporated has been impressive, and can be related to people who share a powerful vision. The people behind MTRI have been a commanding force of volunteers, members, partners, staff, and board. Over the last few years, the charity's membership has grown to over four hundred members most of whom live in southwestern Nova Scotia (Figure 5). In partnership with Parks Canada, Bird Studies Canada, Trout Nova Scotia, and the Friends of Keji Co-operative Association, MTRI volunteers have contributed over 10,000 volunteer hours for the past five years working on wildlife conservation in southwestern Nova Scotia. As discussed on pages 4-5, MTRI's revenue, staff, assets, and number of projects have all grown substantially over its seven year history.

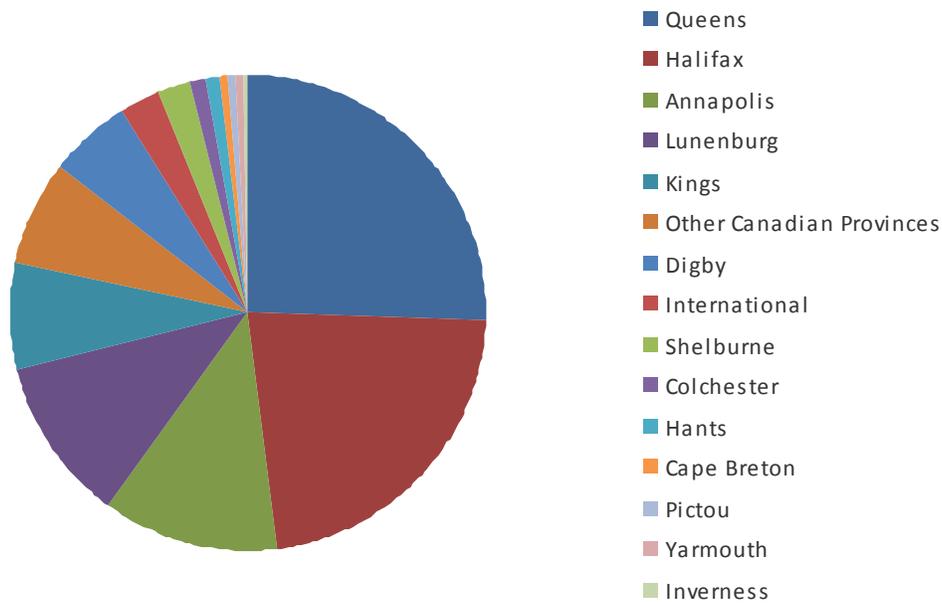


Figure 5. Proportion of MTRI members by county of residence (384 members have provided an address).

In a workshop for board members and staff, the question of growth was explored in depth and there was consensus that with MTRI’s past successes but also a slowing economy, the focus for MTRI over the next few years should be to strengthen its business by growing volunteers and diversifying membership, retaining core staff, maintaining existing projects, and securing multiple-year funding.

Organizational structure

MTRI is a dynamic organization driven by human beings. MTRI’s connection to its community is very real and it ripples out from relationships the organization holds between members, partners, a board of directors, multiple committees and working groups, staff, and volunteers. The staff of the organization has grown substantially since 2004 and follows a classic leadership model with an executive director who is the gate-keeper between the board of directors and other staff. The executive director supervises core staff some of whom supervise students and interns. The board makes big-picture decisions for the organization ensuring that the business of MTRI is bringing it closer to its vision and mission and adheres to its guiding principles. Five or more committees report to the board, each helping guide MTRI’s work towards a particular goal. Some committees oversee working groups which provide advise on a focused objective (Figure 6).

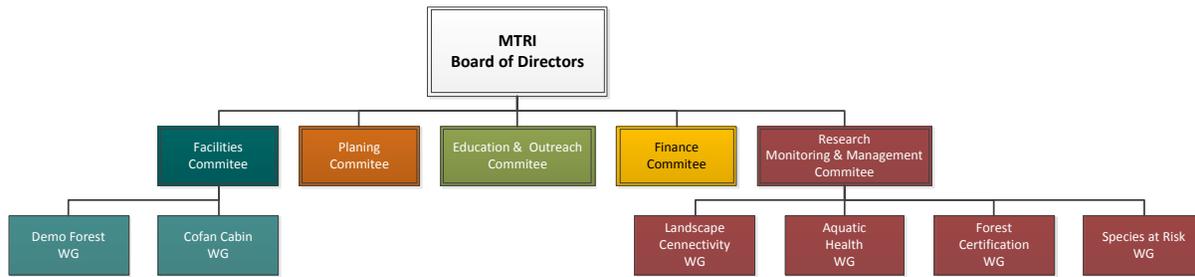


Figure 6. Schematic showing the relationship between MTRI's board of directors, committees, and working groups which are all made up of and accountable to MTRI members.

Roles and Responsibilities

Board of Directors

Oversee organizational development and effectiveness and provide broad direction for the organization. The board is responsible for overall safety and due diligence. The board delegates and directs work to committees and reviews advice and recommendations from committees. All authority and responsibility rests with the board but delegation is innovative and effective with active committees made up of staff, volunteers, and members. The board hires its Executive Director and the board executive participates in staff reviews with the Executive Director. The board oversees and ensures the following:

- MTRI's strategic plan represents the membership and that the organization is following its strategic plan.
- MTRI is carrying out its stated mission, moving towards its vision, and adhering to its guiding principles.
- MTRI remains transparent and that documentation is available to any member who asks for it and that if issues arise, their resolution is clear and transparent
- The MTRI membership can vote at the Annual General Meeting on any changes to by-laws and on the election of the board of directors.
- MTRI operates within applicable laws, is fiscally sound, accountable, and transparent.

Planning committee

Advise the board of directors on progress made towards capacity-building objectives.

Activities include the following:

- Integrate planning input from all committees and oversee long range organizational direction and development.
- Provide support to the board of directors on planning-related issues as requested.
- On a five year rotation: design a strategic planning process, engage members and partners, develop a plan, monitor and evaluate the successful implementation of the plan.
- Ensure annual updates of action plans at Annual General Meetings.

Finance committee

Inform the board of directors on progress made towards financial objectives. Activities include the following:

- Report on the organization's finances to the board on a quarterly basis (support the treasurer who reports to board monthly).
- Advise the treasurer, board on financial matters as required including budgeting, fundraising, accounting, and financial policies.
- Provide long-term financial planning to meet strategic goals and objectives (includes decisions about borrowing and investments).
- Oversee financial management system including income, expense, project and budget reporting.

Education committee

Inform the board of directors on progress made towards strategic education and outreach objectives. Activities include the following:

- Provide oversight for MTRI's educational programs, public communication, learning initiatives, and publications.
- Provide advice on funding proposals for stewardship and education projects.
- Provide support, advice, and assistance to staff for funded projects and evaluate the success of projects in reaching strategic objectives.
- Develop seminar, workshop, and March Break program topics and oversee their organization, promotion, and delivery.
- Review press releases.

Facilities committee

Inform the board of directors on progress made towards facilities objectives. Activities include the following:

- Oversee maintenance and improvements to MTRI facilities and assets.
- Guide the development of MTRI's property and facilities for education and demonstration.
- Help provide facilities to attract researchers to work in remote areas within southwestern Nova Scotia.

Community Forest Working Group

Provide advice and guidance in developing a Community Demonstration Forest in North Queens on Crown land which would provide research and educational opportunities in forest ecology and woodland management whilst incorporating a variety of values and uses.

Cofan Cabin Working Group

Work with Nova Scotia Department of Environment and other partners to help facilitate the maintenance and restoration of Cofan Cabin, a unique and historic warden's cabin found near Sand Beach Lake, Tobeatic Wilderness Area, which benefits outdoor recreational users and researchers.

Research, Monitoring, and Management Committee

Inform the board of directors on progress made towards strategic research, monitoring, and management objectives. Activities include the following:

- Identify research, monitoring and management priorities that fit MTRI's mandate.
- Provide oversight to MTRI's current research, monitoring and management activities.
- Provide expertise to researchers at MTRI. Take a critical view of projects (e.g., the questions, methodologies, their scope, depth, directions, and focus) and help to find solutions for problems that are identified.
- Review final reports of projects and provide critical and useful feedback.
- Identify priorities for project publication and assist with manuscript preparation.
- Direct long-term monitoring projects.
- Oversee the activities of the working groups.
- Oversee the integration of cooperative research projects.
- Organize an annual research, monitoring and management conference.
- Facilitate development and maintenance of a centralized information system for research, monitoring and management activities in the area.

Certification Working Group

Provide advice and guidance in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation for MTRI's Small Woodland Owner Certification project. The aim of the working group and the project will be to increase woodland owner knowledge and understanding about existing certification programs in Nova Scotia while also providing technical and logistical resources to implement certification on small private woodlands.

Landscape Connectivity Working Group

Share and provide information on current and potential future landscape connectivity activities. Build opportunities for partnerships and the development of consistent protocols for landscape connectivity research. Provide information and support to develop project proposals. Provide oversight, direction and support for landscape connectivity projects and activities.

Aquatic Health Working Group

Share information on current and potential aquatic health projects. Build opportunities for partnerships and the development of consistent protocols for aquatic health research. Provide information and support to develop MTRI project proposals.

Species at Risk Working Group

Share information on current and potential species at risk projects. Identify current gaps in species at risk research. Build opportunities for partnerships and the development of consistent protocols for species at risk research. Provide information and support to develop MTRI project proposals.

Goals & Objectives

Goal 1: Research, Monitoring, and Management

Develop and implement co-operative multidisciplinary research, monitoring and management programs through collaboration with members, partners, and communities.

Objective 1.1: Research, monitor, and encourage appropriate and informed management of aquatic health.

Objective 1.2: Research, monitor, and encourage appropriate and informed management of forest health and landscape connectivity.

Objective 1.3: Research, monitor, and encourage recovery of species at risk.

Objective 1.4: Research, monitor, and encourage appropriate and informed management of invasive species.

Objective 1.5: Support multidisciplinary research about the human dimensions of sustainable resource management.

Objective 1.6: Integrate research projects through collaboration, volunteer management, mapping, data sharing, and logistics.

Goal 2: Facilities

Maintain, develop, and operate research facilities for members.

Objective 2.1: Provide accommodations, workspace, and meeting space to members.

Objective 2.2: Reduce power consumption by 75% in 2013, by 80% in 2014, and by 85% in 2015 compared to 2010 levels.

Objective 2.3: Achieve at least Gold *LEED for Homes* certification for the renovation construction.

Objective 2.4: Provide facilities to attract researchers to work in remote areas.

Objective 2.5: Develop MTRI facilities for demonstration and outreach.

Goal 3: Education and Outreach

Increase knowledge and inform decision makers about biodiversity and sustainable resource use.

Objective 3.1: Foster environmental stewardship by informing decision makers.

Objective 3.2: Improve understanding of biodiversity and sustainable resource use.

Objective 3.3: Increase participation in research and encourage citizen scientists.

Objective 3.4: Increase familiarization with MTRI and its programs.

Goal 4: Finances

Achieve financial stability.

Objective 4.1: Increase revenue by 5% by year.

Objective 4.2: Keep retained earnings within 5% of zero.

Objective 4.3: Diversify revenue sources.

Goal 5: Capacity

Improve organizational development and increase capacity.

Objective 5.1: Retain core staff from year to year.

Objective 5.2: Engage membership in MTRI programs and events.

Objective 5.3: Increase support to volunteers.

Objective 5.4: Strengthen staff and board relationships.

Objective 5.5: Maintain professional knowledge and qualifications of staff.

Objective 5.6: Strengthen governance.

Objective 5.7: Develop formal partnerships.

Action Plans as addendums

Evaluation

Each year at MTRI's Annual General Meeting, summaries will be provided to members describing progress towards goals and objectives in the previous year. Committees and working groups will oversee and critically evaluate the progress made towards annual action plans and they will report this to the Board of Directors quarterly. The membership will be consulted annually in December to provide input on action plans for the next year.