



Strategic Plan 2020-2023

“In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we have been taught.”

— Baba Dioum, Senegalese Conservationist

I. Introduction

Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is one of the world's premier specialized botanical gardens. Located in the small resort town of Vail, Colorado which attracts a global audience for its skiing and outdoor recreation, Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is the highest elevation botanical garden in North America situated at 8,200 feet (2,700 m) in the central Rocky Mountains. The Gardens attracts more than 100,000 visitors annually to see its unique collection of alpine and mountain plants collected from around the world.

Former first lady of the U.S., Betty Ford, is the namesake of the Garden. Mrs. Ford was a key inspiration for the Gardens when she lived in the Vail Valley, and her spirit of generosity and commitment to the natural beauty of the Valley lives on in the Gardens.

II. History and Highlights

In 1986 Betty Ford Alpine Gardens began as a small display garden envisioned to demonstrate the variety of perennials that would grow at 8,200ft to the new and rapidly growing ski resort community. Thirty years later the Garden has grown to a five-acre botanical garden with a visitor center, alpine house and active conservation and education programs.

In 1988 the Gardens were named in honor of Betty Ford, located in Ford Park and next to the Gerald Ford Amphitheater it was an obvious decision. Mrs. Ford embraced the opportunity and for many years was an active participant in special events and garden planning. Over the next 12 years, the Gardens grew in increments with new gardens added every few years. Docent tours and workshops were added and education became an integral part of the mission.

In 2000 the magnificent Alpine Rock garden transformed the Gardens into a showcase both for using native plants in the landscape and for educating about the different ecosystems of the Rocky Mountains. The Rock Garden is home to the nationally accredited "Alpines of Colorado" plant collection. During this time staff began to take an active role in plant conservation, partnering with federal agencies to monitor rare plants in the wild and collect seed for land restoration. In 2015 the Education Center was probably the most critical addition to the Gardens, providing an opportunity to tell the story behind the Gardens and a learning center for exhibits and special educational events.

Now the Gardens are recognized nationally and internationally for the commitment to conserving the beauty of the alpine environment through the displays, educational exhibits and conservation programs. With increased awareness about climate change and its impacts on mountain environments these gardens are becoming ever more relevant and critical.

III. Mission

Among the nearly 2,000 botanical gardens in the world including the 700 in the North America, only a small number are focused on alpine and high mountain plants and habitats. Yet, between climate change and development, few environments are as vulnerable to loss and destruction as are these high altitude ecosystems. Since resident human populations in these environments are relatively small, the knowledge of the public about these environments and the concern for them are highly limited.

Vail, Colorado is one of the most widely known and visited high elevation mountain towns in the world. Our visionary founders understood the unique opportunity to create an important, inspiring, and unusual botanical garden in Vail. Thanks to First Lady Betty Ford, the vision became a reality as Betty Ford Alpine Gardens.

The mission of Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is:

“To deepen understanding and promote conservation of alpine plants and fragile mountain environments.”

We do this by inspiring people with exceptional displays and collections of alpine plants and science-based conservation and education programs.

IV. Vision

Botanical gardens are science-based institutions that exist to expand human appreciation and understanding of plants through excellence in display, living collections, educational programs, and conservation research. Betty Ford Alpine Gardens has become one of the premier cultural attractions in Vail serving both residents and the global audience attracted to the Vail Valley.

Because of Vail’s global prominence as a mountain resort community with a national and international following, BFAG is uniquely situated among smaller botanical gardens to have a global reach while continuing to deepen its services to the Vail Valley.

The vision of Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is:

“To be the leader in North American alpine conservation through:

- ***Our Vail Gardens that inspire people***
- ***Our conservation research programs and partnerships to conserve alpine environments***
- ***Our education and interpretation programs to expand public understanding and appreciation of alpine environments and to promote community and personal action for conservation of these vulnerable landscapes***

V. Scope

Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is an exquisite garden of alpine and mountain plants located at 8,200 feet (2,700 m) elevation high in the Rocky Mountains in Vail, Colorado. The plants in the garden include ones that are native to Colorado and the Vail Valley and other plants from similar environments around the world. Ecologically, the plants are from many mountain environments in addition to true “alpine plants” which grow above timberline.

From its inception, the purpose of Betty Ford Alpine Gardens has been more than a public garden - education and conservation are central components of our mission. In order to do that, our vision goes beyond our Vail garden to reach people through programs, through digital means, and to add additional sites strategically as feasible.

VI. Guiding Principles

Excellence – We are committed to a standard of excellence in all we do. This requires being focused on our priorities where we can use our resources both effectively and efficiently.

Impact – We create, develop, and improve our gardens and our programs with the over-riding purpose of profoundly affecting people’s understanding and behaviors.

Beauty – Our gardens will be inspirational because we show the beauty of alpine and mountain plants and habitats.

Ethics – We believe that internally and externally our actions must be of the highest ethical standards.

Expertise – We achieve our goals and our local and national standings through our scientific expertise in horticulture, education, and conservation.

Relevance– We must be vigilant that our programs are always relevant to our many stakeholder communities.

VII. Strengths and Opportunities

Strengths

- We have a clear niche with our focus on alpine and mountain environments
- We are the leader for the North American Strategy for Alpine Plants
- Our location in Vail which gives us a worldwide audience and a base for major support
- We have excellent and constantly expanding plant collections
- We are free to the public
- We have a highly dedicated staff
- We have a board that is committed to our mission and our success
- Our gardens are beautiful and unusual, providing unique experiences and a strong sense of place
- Our gift shop is recognized as outstanding in a highly competitive environment
- Our education and interpretation programs are high quality and constantly evolving
- We have an outstanding local, national, and international reputation
- Betty Ford, the namesake of our Gardens, continues to be a beloved model of focused work on key issues
- Our Education Center has quickly become a centerpiece of Ford Park
- We have a group of generous committed donors
- We have a strong group of excellent volunteers who are committed to our mission
- We have strong institutional stability

Opportunities

- The North American Strategy for Alpine Plants provides us with great opportunities for programs and projects of national, even global importance *and* support of these programs
- Our high-altitude location allows us to grow and display plants that few other botanical gardens in the world can exhibit
- There are additional spaces in and near Ford Park that would be highly suitable for us as expansion areas for gardens, programs, and conservation sites
- There are sister institutions and agencies with whom strategic partnerships would be mutually beneficial

VIII. Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The statement of Sustainable Competitive Advantage describes the most compelling distinguishing aspects of the Garden that not only separate us today from other organizations, but also are vital characteristics that would be hard for others to duplicate in the future.

Betty Ford Alpine Gardens' **Sustainable Competitive Advantage** is:

Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is recognized as a global leader among high altitude botanical gardens. Our gardens, programs, and exhibits inspire, inform, and promote conservation of alpine plants and mountain environments. High altitude environments are among the most vulnerable landscapes in the world due to climate change and other human activities, which make our programs and projects ever more critical to help us lead in the protection of these unique environments.

IX. Transformative Goals, Strategies, and Priorities

Goal I. CONSERVE and EDUCATE

Dramatically expand our conservation and educational impacts through innovative research, exhibits, educational and interpretive programs.

Strategies:

BFAG is dedicated to the conservation of alpine and other high-altitude environments. Our multi-pronged strategies include:

- Focus on the North American Strategy for Alpine Plants, in conjunction with Botanic Gardens Conservation International, cooperative efforts with other botanical gardens, conservation NGOs, and governmental agencies
- Presentation of innovative educational programs and exhibits at our Education Center
- Build the capacity for Alpine Conservation in or near Ford Park

Priorities:

- Publish, disseminate, and communicate the North American Strategy for Alpine Plants
- Implement key aspects of conservation and education efforts of the Strategy including seed storage and evaluation of Important Plant Areas (IPA's)
- Build the capacity Alpine Conservation in or near Ford Park for public education and research facilities
- Become a digital center for information about alpine plants, ecosystems, and their conservation

- Continue to evaluate and refine innovative interpretation and educational experiences for visitors throughout the Gardens
- Create a long-term education plan
- Publish a book on the origins, mission, and vision of the Garden

Three-Year Objectives

I-1 Publish the North American Botanic Garden Strategy for Alpine Plant Conservation (Strategy) by the end of the 2nd quarter, 2020.

Responsibility: Executive Director
Assisted by: Director of Education

I-2 We will procure funding and hire a conservation biologist by the end of the 2nd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Executive Director

I-3 We will Present our conservation work at the Center for Plant Conservation Annual Meeting, end of 2nd quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Conservation Biologist

I-4 Edit a book on Alpine Plant Conservation for publishing in the Usher series by end of 4th quarter 2023.

Responsibility: Executive Director
Assisted by: Conservation Biologist

I-5 As part of the ‘Strategy,’ we will collect and bank 15 additional wild alpine species by end of 4th quarter 2020, adding at least 10 more each year.

Responsibility: Conservation Biologist
Assisted by: Horticulturist

I-6 As part of the Strategy, gain permit and plan for rare seed collections by end of 2nd quarter 2021 and make at least one collection each year.

Responsibility: Conservation Biologist

I-7 We will create a conservation and research plan including facility needs for a Conservation Center by end of 4th quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Conservation Biologist
Assisted by: Executive Director

I-8 Significantly increase alpine-related resources on the website by end of 3rd quarter 2021 and then become the main resource for alpine information by end of 4th quarter 2023

Responsibility: Executive Director
Assisted by: Conservation Biologist and Operations Manager

I-9 Create a long-term education plan by the end of 1st quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Education Director

I-10 Make the rooftop deck into a family multi-use classroom by end of 2nd quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Executive Director
Assisted by: Education Director

I-11. Create a plan for redevelopment and expansion of the Children's' Garden by end of 2nd quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Education Director
Assisted by: Executive Director

Goal II. GROW

Present inspiring displays of alpine plants at Betty Ford Alpine Gardens in Ford Park and develop additional public sites to expand our living collections and conservation efforts.

Strategies:

Continuously improve Betty Ford Alpine Gardens as a professionally curated garden with the most diverse and most aesthetic displays of alpine and mountain plants in the world. The space in Ford Park currently allocated to BFAG. This impedes our ability to showcase a greater diversity of plants and educate the public about mountain habitats. To overcome this space limitation, we will explore the expansion of our gardens in Ford Park and develop additional sites or gardens that enhance our conservation efforts and diversify our collections.

Priorities:

- Develop our Nationally Accredited Plant Collection of "Colorado Alpine Plants" to the highest curatorial standards
- Create and implement a new comprehensive Living Collections Policy
- Create and implement a new state-of-the-art Plant Collections Policy
- Renovate selected gardens at BFAG every year
- Study the feasibility of expanding our gardens in Ford Park which will require new resources
- Ensure excellence of our gardens and collections through a peer review process
- Evaluate new satellite sites that expand our conservation and science efforts and public reach
- Develop a plant propagation plan and expand our plant propagation program

Three-Year Objectives

II-1 Evaluate the Nationally Accredited Plant Collection “Alpines of Colorado” and create a detailed development plan by end of 3rd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Curator

II- 2 Invite a team of third-party peer reviewers to visit the Gardens and write a report by end of 3rd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Curator

II-3 Create a written plan for garden renovation and budget for it by end of 3rd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Curator

II-4 Renovate Mountain Perennial Pond and Caucasus Garden by end of 4th quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Curator
Assisted by: Horticulturist

II-5 Write a new Living Collections Policy by end of 4th quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Curator

II-6 Create a plan for potential garden additions in Ford Park by end of 4th quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Curator
Assisted by: Executive Director

II-7 Write a propagation plan to assess the requirements for an internal propagation program and assess the additional needs for a site to work on propagation protocols by end of 3rd quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Horticulturist

II-8 Add additional propagation facilities by end of 4th quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Horticulturist

Goal III. SUSTAIN

We will build our organizational excellence to have all the financial, board, staff, and volunteer resources needed to meet our mission and vision.

Strategies:

To build and sustain BFAG as a major conservation, scientific, and educational institution we must expand our revenue sources and continuously expand our capacity to meet our needs and aspirations.

Priorities:

- Build the endowment to at least \$3 million to meet the Liebhaber Fritch Challenge
- Enhance our prominence by showcasing our name on the Education Building
- Substantially increase the support from the Town of Vail to provide the on-going maintenance of BFAG in Ford Park as a key town amenity
- Triple the number of \$10,000 annual donors to provide a key base of financial sustainability
- Create a new gift shop strategy to improve its net revenue
- Explore seasonal food service to Ford Park
- Explore potential for focused, fee-based landscape services for both net income and conservation/educational potential
- Study potential for earned revenue through admissions
- Regularly review best practices for board effectiveness
- Increase the horticulture staff, including interns, as garden areas expand
- Expand the number and hours provided by volunteers with a focus on the docent program
- Rebuild the website to reflect a world-class botanical institution

Three-Year Objectives

III-1 Rebuild website by end of 2nd quarter 2020

Responsibility: Operations Manager

III-2 Write a detailed fundraising plan for 2020 including a case statement for giving by end of 2nd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Director of Development

III-3 Continue to promote planned giving and develop a legacy society by end of 2nd quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Director of Development
Assisted by: Executive Director

III-5 Add name to education center by end of 2nd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Executive Director

III-6 Write a detailed strategy for improving gift shop revenue including analyzing profit margins, merchandise and staffing by end of 2nd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Retail Manager

III-7 Explore the potential for food service in Ford Park starting with an evaluation of existing facilities by end of 2nd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Retail Manager

III-8 Review and update volunteer plan for recruiting new volunteers especially docent by end of 2nd quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Volunteer Coordinator

III-4 Follow up on potential leads for endowment gifts and include in fundraising plan by end of 4th quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Director of Development

III-9 Create an ad hoc Board committee to work on messaging to TOV, including one on one visits and written information by end of 4th quarter 2020.

Responsibility: Executive Director

III-10 Review options for providing paid landscape services beginning with VRD and VFF in Ford Park by end of 4th quarter 2021.

Responsibility: Curator

III-11 Review the option of admission fees. Starting with a review of other gardens that have gone from free to fee and then understanding physical barriers to a fee-based entry by end of 4th quarter 2022.

Responsibility: Executive Director