



Page 3 The Value of Non-Forested Landscapes

Page 5 Our new Brushy Face Preserve Trail Guide & Map is here!



Highlands-Cashiers LAND TRUST

"Saving Special Places since 1909"

Winter 2020-2021

Blue Ridge Forever
www.blueridgeforever.infc

Acre by Acre

Dr. Gary Wein, Executive Director, HCLT

LET'S FACE IT, 2020 HAS BEEN A weird year. One might expect people to be more interested in remembering to wear a mask than placing their land into a conservation easement.

Apparently that was the thinking back in March, but this September that thinking changed. We are currently working on four fee simple donations, three new conservation easements and three conservation easement amendments. The latter category is usually reserved for minor adjustments to an easement but this year we will be adding significant acreage and natural heritage to three existing easements, making them even larger.

Any good conservation easement agreement allows for change, as protecting conserved areas into the future may require adjustments. Even though we don't often do easement amendments, we are currently working on three conservation easement amendments to make existing easements even bigger by adding additional conserved lands.

Tim and Emily Campbell, long time conservation partners, are donating a 6.7-acre farmlet on Salt Rock Road next to an existing 12-acre tract we already



Horse Cove and Blackrock Mountain from Sunrise Rock.

own, Castor Farmstead. We hope to begin to manage both of these neighboring sites sometime in the future for the rare golden-winged warbler habitat.

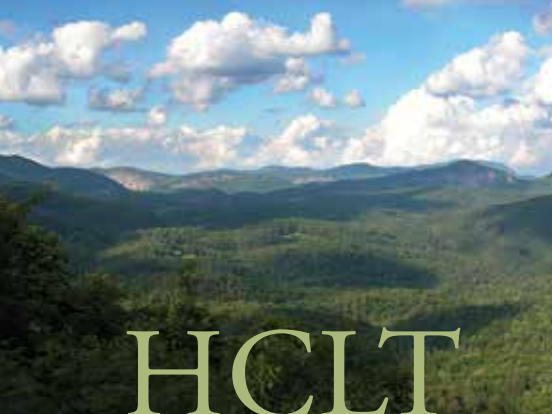
A generous donor is giving us a small but important one-acre tract that will continue to expand the lands that protect the historic Kelsey Trail and the more recent Highlands Greenway.

It's a bit early to announce details on the third land donation but if completed, this will protect a significant portion of the lands at the entrance of Highlands, much as our land at Brushy Face along Highway 28 south of Highlands helps to maintain the forested areas as you approach town from the south.

The fourth property is a two-acre donation by David and Marcia Barstow between Laurel Heights and Sequoyah Ridge Roads.

I am not sure what's in the water in Horse Cove but we have three conservation easements in motion in Horse Cove that we are very excited about. It's too early for details, but these three easements will protect significant Natural Heritage areas of the historic Horse Cove Bog.

So, despite the unusual time, there is some normalcy in that we continue our mission to protect valuable natural resources for all generations — and we still need your support!



HCLT

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The mission of the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust is to protect valuable natural resources for all generations.

Continuity in a Crisis

Dear Land Trust Friends,

In my last letter, I expressed the hope that by the time it reached you, the pandemic situation would have improved. This time it seems virtually certain that by the time you get this letter, things will not have improved, and may be getting worse. COVID 19 has had an impact on HCLT just as it has most organizations and businesses everywhere, but our devoted staff have continued their efforts to keep us on mission. We have had to be flexible and sometimes innovative, but we believe that our mission has not suffered.

Our publicly accessible properties, such as Sunset Rock and Satulah Summit, have seen substantially increased use. In this time of social distancing, outdoor recreation has taken on new meaning and importance. Additionally, this year we have increased our fee owned properties, so your continued financial support is critical.



Carlton King, President HCLT

We were able to obtain a Payroll Protection Plan loan, but whether there will be further relief is anything but certain. Grant money has diminished, as has donor giving in some categories, we hope only because of the economy in general.

Thanks to those of you who have been able and willing to support our cause this year. Any additional support that we receive as a result of year-end giving will allow us to enter the new year with the hope of avoiding cuts to our already tight budget, so remember us if you can.

Yours in conservation,
Carlton King

The CARES Act passed in response to the COVID crisis. Here are some provisions that increase the tax-deductibility of donations you make to charities in 2020.

- For individuals who don't itemize deductions: If you're one of the 9 out of 10 people who no longer itemize your charitable giving you may now deduct donations up to \$300 on your 2020 federal tax return, even when you take the standard deduction (\$600 for married-filing-jointly taxpayers).

- For individuals who itemize: The limitation for cash contributions to public charities was raised to 100% of an individual's adjusted gross income for 2020 (up from 60%).

The tax information provided is general and educational in nature, is subject to change, and should not be construed as legal or tax advice. The Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust does not provide legal or tax advice. Always consult your financial advisor.

Our mountains have never been at higher risk as demand on our resources skyrockets.

Now is the time to act and we need you.

Your investment will support the organization that continues to work non-stop to preserve these places we all love and need.

Donate today:

P.O. Box 1703, Highlands, NC 28741
www.hicashlt.org



Stewardship Activities



The Value of Non-Forested Landscapes

HCLT is dedicated to conserving and expanding a diversity of habitats on the plateau including early successional habitats. One of the most rare and vital habitats on the Plateau, and Southern Appalachians more broadly, is quality early successional habitat or ESH.

ESHs are places where the growth of trees and shrubs, known as woody plants, are suppressed by some sort of disturbance, thus allowing grasses and small flowering plants to flourish under little to no canopy. ESHs include mountain meadows, beaver wetlands, abandoned fields, and grassy balds. Historically, fire, grazing, rotational farming, beavers, and other such disturbances opened up and kept these places from becoming young forests.

Many plants and animals require

these open places to survive or flourish, including golden-winged warblers, numerous butterflies like the monarch, and showy wildflowers like Gray's lily, as well as game species like turkey and roughed grouse.

Sadly, due to a lack of ESH locally, we have already lost from our area at least one species that was ESH-dependent, the Appalachian Bewick's wren.

Not all ESH is good. Lawns provide little to no value to most species that depend on ESH because the grass is generally kept too short to provide shelter and the lack of plant diversity means they provide limited food sources for animals that depend on specific plants.

The Land Trust protects ESH on several properties. You have probably read and even seen our efforts with the

McKinney Meadow in Cashiers, but that is not the only ESH we have been working on. In Highlands, HCLT is working to create a half-acre "pocket meadow" at Dixon Woods that will provide butterflies, birds, wildlife and people a small serene opening in the woods. Northeast of Lake Glenville, HCLT is working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and other groups to create and expand ESH for golden-winged warblers and other species at Castor Meadow and nearby properties.

To learn more about early successional habitats and what you can do to expand them in our area, including converting lawn areas in pollinator hot spots, contact stewardship coordinator Kyle Pursel, at stew.hitrust@earthlink.net.

HCLT continues to map and tackle invasive plants on Land Trust properties and help with community-wide efforts to manage invasive species on the Plateau. In September, HCLT partnered with RotarACT and other nonprofits to participate in an invasive species removal event. The event was sponsored by the Mountaintop Rotary Club, and benefitted members of the community by offering volunteers a gift card to Ingles in exchange for helping to remove invasive species from several local nonprofit-owned and public spaces, including an HCLT-conserved property.

Want to Help with the Trails?

HCLT is looking to restart our volunteer program as we work to finish two new trails: the "Phase III Loop" at Brushy Face and a new section at the Kelsey Trail that will create a loop there as well. We are looking at ways to safely hold small-group workdays; details to come.

We are also seeking qualified volunteers for our Ranger program, where you can adopt a trail to help clean up branches, trash and other small things.

If you are interested in helping out with trail workdays or becoming a trail Ranger, contact Logan Kallam, AmeriCorps Member, at logan.hitrust@earthlink.net or 828-526-1111.



The invasive multiflorarose.



Canty Worley and Kyle Pursel dig in at Dixon Woods.

Pocket Meadow at Dixon Woods

You may have noticed recent clearing activity next to the pond at Dixon Woods. We are creating a pocket meadow there to diversify habitat and provide a place to enjoy the sunshine. There is already plenty of forest and rhododendron understory at this site, but no early succession habitat which encourages native wildflowers. (Read about early succession habitats on page 3).

The site is dominated by rhododendrons, so we did not have to take down any trees to create the meadow.

Over the next few years we will be planting wildflowers and would also like to add a picnic table and a bench or two. Any help would be appreciated. To find out more, email development director Julie Schott at info.hitrust@earthlink.net.

Elizabeth's Orchard

We are often approached about tribute opportunities for donors to honor both the living and those who have passed. Frequently folks ask about planting a tree.

To that end, HCLT has recently established a fruit-bearing orchard at one of its properties, Sassafras Gap Farm, located approximately six miles south of Highlands on Highway 28. Elizabeth's Orchard, named after Elizabeth Mauldin, is currently home to eight heritage apple trees all dedicated to remember special people. We think there is room for an additional 32 trees.

The site has been an orchard at least since the 1940's as evidenced by 1954 aerial photography and the existence of a large apple tree that provides an anchor for the new orchard.

To request a tree, contact Julie at julie.hitrust@earthlink.net. The cost to have a tree dedicated to a loved one is \$1,000 per tree.

Stewardship

Sunset Road Upgrade

Stewardship coordinator Kyle Pursel and summer stewardship intern Savana Kelley worked over the summer to improve Sunset Road (right), the road leading to Ravenel Park, thanks to the donation of a tractor that came as a package deal with the Quin Farm property donated in 2019.

Although the road is much improved, if you choose to drive up Sunset Road, it is advisable to use extreme caution, watch for pedestrians, and only drive in a vehicle with high clearance. Hikers are always welcome to park at the bottom and walk up!



Volunteers Work On Brushy Face Preserve

Earlier this year, work began on the new extension trail at Brushy Face Preserve. In February, Ivori Schley, 2019-2020 AmeriCorps Member, led a group of local Boy Scout volunteers for a trail-building work day (left).

Kyle Pursel as well as a few dedicated volunteers continued to work on the trail over the summer, completing the first section of new trail.

Volunteer trail work days will hopefully resume in early 2021 to work on the next section of trail.

Saving the Hemlocks

HCLT continues to fight the battle against the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). HWA is an insect native to East Asia and is a major threat to our native Eastern and Carolina hemlock trees, as they feed by sucking the sap out of the tree, eventually killing it.

In 2020, HCLT treated approximately 200+ trees, many of which are old growth trees, on Land Trust conserved properties.

Several of these trees have been treated for a number of years and are doing quite well, including the world record Eastern hemlock known as The Cheoah.



A great place to explore with family and friends during the holidays

Nestled amongst some of the world's oldest mountains, located on the Atlantic Ocean side of the eastern continental divide, Brushy Face Preserve is home to diverse flora and fauna including old growth forest, which contain some trees estimated to be over 200 years old. Hikers can enjoy this moderate trail which offers a gentle grade, two creek crossings via a rock hop, a lush fern glade and forest understory largely populated with flame azaleas.

Many of us are finding comfort these days by spending more time enjoying the outdoors. And now, one of Highlands lesser known treasures, Brushy Face Preserve, can be explored using our brand new trail guide and map!

You can download yours directly from our website at hicashlt.org. Illustrations by Ken Czarnomski. Cultural history provided by Lance Hardin. The trail guide and map were made possible thanks to the generosity of Glenda Bell and Nancy Nichols.

To learn how you can help us produce more of these guides for our other public access properties, contact Julie Schott at julie.hitrust@earthlink.net.

THE NEW BRUSHY FACE PRESERVE TRAIL GUIDE & MAP



Village Nature Series Brings Experts to Your Living Room!

For over a decade, we've enjoyed gathering at the beautiful Village Green to explore our rich natural and cultural heritage from experts in their fields during our Village Nature Series (VNS). We missed gathering in person this year but there is always a silver lining. What a treat it was to pour a glass of a favorite beverage, cozy up on the couch and learn from these fascinating presenters about everything from geology to edible fungi — right from the comfort of home.

While we are looking forward to being together again in person for VNS when

we are able to do so safely, we hope to continue to capture our programs on video for your enjoyment and convenience. All the season's offering, such as "Edible Fungi" presented by Joey Kyle of The Mountain (image of chanterelles at left), are available for viewing now on the HCLT website so you can enjoy them any time.



Many thanks to Cedar Creek Club for sponsoring our 2020 Village Nature Series! VNS is hosted annually from April through September in partnership with The Village Green.

Kids in Nature

A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. Rachel Carson

Get Outside!

We have missed the smiling faces and bright eyes of our community youth that have participated in our Kids in Nature programs in past years. This year, we were unable to run Kids in Nature programs as usual, as the world shut down due to the pandemic. Back in the spring, when the stay-at-home order was issued in NC, the Land Trust began producing activity sheets that families could use as a guide to explore their backyards. We knew that it would be important for people to get outside, wherever they were.

So many people this year have turned to the outdoors for entertainment, exercise, adventure, and serenity, as well as a place to more safely interact with others. Participating in environmental activities and learning about and connecting to the natural world, can provide many benefits. On a personal level, engaging with the outdoors can lead to improved health and wellbeing including reduced stress and anxiety, increased physical activity, improvement in mood, and a longer attention span. On a societal level, exploring a local area can lead to a sense of place and desire to protect the surrounding flora and fauna. And on a global level, connecting with nature can lead to respect for the natural world including appreciating biodiversity and sustainability. There are so many reasons to encourage people to get outside!

This fall, we have been able to provide outdoor programs for a few after school groups including Gordon Center and Sunshine School. We have also provided nature activity sheets and adventure kits for Literacy Council and Boys and Girls Club. These guides and materials were designed so that kids could use them on their own with the help of an adult to learn about and explore nature. We have also installed short-term, self-guided tours on Land Trust properties including the Satulah

Mountain Natural History Tour and the Halloween Kelsey Trail Trivia Hike. Don't worry if you missed those, this spring, we hope to provide more self-guided tours as well as in-person family programs on Land Trust properties (stay tuned!).

In the meantime, we hope you will find a way to get outside this winter and take advantage of those winter views you can only get when the leaves are all gone from the trees. Check out our website to learn more about HCLT public access hiking trails.

We are so grateful to the following funders who will help us continue our efforts in 2021: Church of the Good Shepherd, Colony Club Community Fund of High Hampton, Cullasaja Women's Outreach, Macon County Community Foundation, and Wade Hampton Foundation Fund.



As an alternative to in-person nature programs education coordinator Sarah Pursel made take-home nature activity kits for some of our community partners including Literacy Council and Boys and Girls Club.



HCLT celebrated Halloween with a self-guided trivia hike

on our Kelsey Trail. AmeriCorps Member Logan Kallam created 13 spooky trivia questions about local flora and fauna and posted them as well as decorations along a quarter mile of the trail. Families were encouraged to walk the trail and answer the questions at their own pace. Thanks to the International Friendship Center, a Spanish version of the questions and answers was made available for download!



This fall Sarah Pursel and Logan Kallam were able to do limited outdoor programs for some of our community partners. Pictured above and at left are the Gordon Center students enjoying a leaf hunt at Dixon Woods.

Sunshine School photo by Marty Boone.



Children at the Sunshine School learn about wild local canids on the outdoor patio at the First Presbyterian Church of Highlands.



We are excited to announce that this fall, Ravenel Park (Sunset and Sunrise Rocks) was designated an ecoExplore Hotspot! EcoExplore is a citizen-science program for children in grades k-8 developed by the NC Arboretum. Kids are encouraged to explore the outdoors in designated safe places (called hotspots) and take pictures of plants and animals they find. The photos are uploaded online and identified. Kids can earn points and prizes for their photo observations. This is a fun activity to share! Visit ecoexplore.net to find out more.



Meet Logan Kallam our new AmeriCorps Member

I am a Greensboro native who graduated in December 2019 from North Carolina State University with a B.S. in Plant Biology and a B.S. in Environmental Sciences. My focal area was plant ecology, but I also studied natural resource conservation, permaculture and sustainability.

At NC State I took part in two study abroad experiences. One focused on international sustainable resource use in Sweden, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The other was spent in Australia learning of botanical and coastal ecology and conservation.

Diverse work experiences during college include teaching a field lab of a general ecology course, working in two labs on molecular plant biology, and a month of data collection on wildfire sites through partnership with the US Forest Service in the Nantahala National Forest. My favorite positions were the ones which allowed me to explore the outdoors. The position in partnership with the Forest Service made me eager to do field conservation with HCLT, although I am pleased to be teaching again as well!

I have always enjoyed hiking and gardening. Additionally, I love visiting new places, reading, and trying new things. My career interests include habitat conservation, botany and ecology. After my AmeriCorps term I plan on pursuing graduate school in these areas so that I can hopefully one day lead conservation projects and discover things about ecosystems.

During my AmeriCorps term I am excited to become more familiar with the landscape and species in this region of North Carolina. I hope to inspire individuals towards environmental stewardship while also aiding in the direct preservation of the wonderful properties of Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust.



Highlands-Cashiers
LAND TRUST
"Saving Special Places since 1909"

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Photo of Dixon Pond by Peter Ray



Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.

Aldo Leopold