

**Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting
American Chestnut Land Trust
January 17, 2026**

Call to Order

Dawn Balinski called the meeting to Order at 9:03 on January 17.

Items mailed to Board Members in advance of the meeting: Board Packet (January 9, 2026)

Board Members Present: Dave Farr, President; Dawn Balinski, Vice President; Cheryl Place, Treasurer; BL Johnston, Secretary; Richard Aldrich, José Ballesteros, Jan Degeneffe, Bob Field, Darleen Harrod, Ron Klauda, Melissa McCormick, Penny Moran, Nate Novonty, Adam Sampson, Mark Smith, Randi Vogt, and John Yoe.

Board Members Absent: Fred Tutman.

ACLT Staff Present: Autumn Phillips-Lewis, Executive Director

Approval of Minutes: (Dawn Balinski, Board Packet pps. 3-7):

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the November 15, 2025 Board Meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report (Cheryl Place, Board Packet pps. 8-14):

Cheryl reported that for the twelve months of 2025, ACLT had operating receipts of \$637,075 and operating expenses of \$574,106 for a surplus of \$62,698. Receipts were 108% of budget. Most major Contributions categories were well over budget. General Contributions lagged because so many donations that would have increased Contributions were designated to the Greg Bowen Memorial Fund. ACLT easily met its \$100,000 Capacity Grant match. In December, ACLT took a \$100,000 appropriation from the Land Management Endowment. Total expenses were slightly under budget at 98%. The expenses incurred to meet the requirements of the \$4,348 in new grants were not budgeted but were covered by the grant monies. In December the Land Management Endowment was reduced by a \$100,000 appropriation to operations. A Board member made a \$20,000 donation to the Land Acquisition Fund. Legal costs related to the Helfrich property purchase and rent payments reduced the Land Acquisition Fund by \$5,651.

Cheryl noted that the final financial statement for the year would be presented at the annual meeting. ACLT's Current Assets listed on p.13 were held in CDs.

Outreach and Membership Committee Report (Penny Moran, pps. 15-16):

Penny commented on previous events, including the annual wreath sale which raised \$4,325. Ninety volunteers attended the annual volunteer appreciation dinner. The 2026 calendar of events has a new look: it has been updated with rack card information printed on the back.

Spanish language rack cards have been printed; Penny requested that we share these with our Hispanic neighbors. She mentioned that the 5-year Committee charters need to be updated. This will be discussed at the March meeting. And finally, Penny noted that in the January 2026 Edition of *The Southern Maryland Equity in History Coalition Newsletter* there is a nice little blurb on the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail.

Cultural Heritage Committee Report (José Ballesteros, pps. 17-18):

José reported that his Committee has been focusing on the Lemuel Wallace House. They are asking that ACLT continue the process in place to save and/or restore that structure because of its historical importance. Evidently there is only one other standing structure in all of Southern Maryland that represents previous Black owners of that time period that lived on the land. The CHC Committee is in ongoing conversations with the Facilities Committee. An ACLT report to the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) regarding preservation planning for the Lemuel site has been submitted. One point of concern is the trees in close proximity to the house which might fall or drop limbs, thus damaging the structure. Autumn's assessment is that we would need professional arborists to do a tree or tree limb removal project.

All Parkers Creek Heritage Trail signs have been installed thanks to Devon and Carl Fleischauer and the land management team. The Committee proposes that ACLT host a launch event in the spring, including a celebration of completion, one to three presentations and panels, and one or two guided hikes. The event intends to be family-friendly, accessible to the highest number of people possible, and to offer a variety of activities. The Committee members are ready to support staff and volunteers in the coordination of this event.

The Committee has a proposal from Raj Raman to do a meditation class at ACLT, some in the office building and eventually outside. The Committee is very excited and supportive and thinks that it will be a popular class. As far as connections with the community, the Committee continues to develop its relationship with Las Flores, the largest Hispanic group in Calvert County. Meetings are held regularly at ACLT; they are now planning their schedule for the year. José's committee recommends that it be understood that once scheduled, it be understood that the space for the meetings is reserved and they not be bumped.

And finally, José noted that a database of photos reflecting the diversity of recent events has been created and shared with staff to add to the ACLT website. The Committee advises that moving forward, any event registration process includes wording that allows ACLT to both document the event via video or photography and to use the material on our website, in social media, and in marketing materials.

A discussion of the Lemuel house followed. John Yoe reported that Adam Sampson had volunteered to help with the restoration, depending on the time he has available. John also noted that we'd have to figure out what things we could afford and what made sense. Autumn reported that there was no grant to fix up the house yet, that we had a grant to do the plan to restore it, and that we're still working on finishing that up, that MHT is very slow at reviewing it, and that we're waiting on them. The big question is, she said, do we get another grant for the restoration and, depending on who it goes through, can really shift what the restoration looks like. If we get it through MHT, they have very strict standards on how it is done. If we don't get it through MHT but other funding, the Facilities and Carl have talked about there are smaller and less expensive bandaids we could do that could keep it in some semblance of stabilization. Autumn observed that some trees that are leaning over the house should be taken down to avoid damage in the meantime. José suggested that we keep moving forward

little by little, knowing that we can't solve all of the problems immediately. The Committee recommends that we use whatever resources we have available because of the historical value of the property. It will be an ongoing process.

Land Management Committee Report (Bob Field, pps. 19-21):

Jan spoke of the Double Oak Farm, where 4,200 pounds of produce were harvested in 2025 and volunteers contributed 2,662 hours of labor. Crops are growing in the high tunnel. Addy Dunbar will hold a planning meeting soon to discuss seed starting, row placement, and row prep. Jan and Judy Ferris have already started planning for flowers and will do seed starting soon.

Bob noted that they have been doing meadow work for 6 years and now need to do some periodic maintenance so that they won't have to cut small trees and bushhog every time on Holly Hill, Yoe, Double Oak, and Hance properties. The final Parkers Creek Heritage Trail signs have been installed along the trails and at the Warrior's Rest canoe launch; one can read about them on our website. Ten to twelve different species of trees have been planted in a section of former ag field on the Goldstein property in an attempt to lessen erosion occurring on the Horse Swamp Trail. DNR has performed site visits of erosion on Horse Swamp Trail and the "Grand Canyon" and may fund design development projects for both. Autumn informed them that the Board would have to approve them before the next steps and that we were interested in low cost and impact, not creating an unnatural system. Bob also mentioned dirt bikers illegally riding on and damaging some of the North Side trails, especially the PF2Bay Trail. With respect to invasive species removal on the Goldstein property, ACLT staff and volunteers spent 344 total hours, fulfilling ACLT's CSP contract and receiving \$42,510 in funding. In 2026, ACLT's CSP contract covers several of the South Side properties, and we are expected to receive \$23,591 in funding.

Land Acquisition & Preservation Committee Report (Dave Farr, p. 22):

Autumn reported that Maryland's Board of Public Works approved the easement value of \$471,397 for the Helfrich Property, which was a lot more than we thought we were going to get. We're still waiting for DNR to do their final review. John Otiff of COA Barrett is currently working to record the survey. ACLT will have to pay \$79,000 out of its planned acquisition fund. Dave commented that this is a lot better than several years ago when it was estimated that it would cost ACLT almost \$200,000.

Regarding the Norman Bowen Property, the County still hasn't decided when it plans to reopen the TDR program, maybe in the first half of 2026. Autumn has reviewed Greg's plan, which had three or four different options, all contingent on a lot of things working out, whether it be the land owner or ACLT subdividing and selling, or TDRs. The Committee will have to get together to decide. Autumn will call Ricky Bowen to find out about their plans and timeline for the property and to see if he's still interested. She reported that the Bowens want ACLT to have the property.

Science Committee Report (Melissa McCormick, pps. 23-24):

Melissa updated the Board on her Committee's on-going projects. Regarding water quality, Mary Hoover and Walter Boyton worked with a grad student at Chesapeake Biological Lab (CBL) to create a spreadsheet that allows us to analyze long-term trends. Mary ran the

program for mainstream data going back to 1998. Notable trends include increasing nitrate at the raft in all four seasons and increasing ammonia near the headwaters of Parkers Creek. The results of the water quality Blitz at 153 sites sampled across all five Southern Maryland counties largely showed decreased nutrient concentration, likely resulting from the drier conditions in 2025. They are planning for the 2026 Blitz with discussions of adding more parameters, such as conductivity.

A research assistant at CBL reported that sediment monitoring identified a 1 cm/year accretion rate in the Parkers Creek marshes, which is good news in that it is keeping up with sea level rise.

Melissa reported that Addie Brown's macro invertebrate sampling on one site at Holly Hill showed a decline while sampling on the South Side showed an increase. Another site on Holly Hill appeared to be increasing over time, possibly due to the newly installed beaver analogue dams.

Addie's tick monitoring across 4 habitat types and 24 surveys found 860 ticks of various types, some carrying pathogens.

Other surveys Melissa mentioned were of birds, beaver dam analogues, herbaceous, herps, and amphibians.

Executive Director's Report (Autumn Phillips-Lewis, pps 25-70):

Autumn reported that they have been addressing a mold problem in the office. They have been running air filters and a volunteer crew has wiped down everywhere on the upper level to be followed by the basement, after which they will retest for mold. John reported that the Facilities Committee has dealt with a lack of heat at the Holly Hill house by having an ignition transformer replaced. A recommended oil tank replacement will be considered by the Committee. John and his brother sealed a foundation hole and made improvements to the dryer duct at the Yoe house. John noted additional work that was needed there, including installing a heat cable and insulating the pipes in the crawl space. Adam Sampson has volunteered to help out there.

Autumn mentioned that we have an unpaid intern for 6 weeks, starting in January, who will help out, including being a big help to Jen's catching up with end of the year tasks.

Regarding SMARTA, Autumn shared Mary's report. Adam Griggs and Clara gave a presentation to the Patuxent River Commission on a proposal to develop an interactive online Patuxent Water Trail map that the Commission supported unanimously. However, the proposal relies heavily on Adam's GIS mapping skills that ACLT no longer has on staff.

Autumn suggests that we should look into better training for staff. Also, following SMCA's recommendations to strengthen the Alliance's structure and decision-making processes by forming a Steering Committee, Mary has begun outreach to potential members; the first meeting is anticipated for January. SMCA continues to track and share prospective properties for conservation with US Fish & Wildlife to try to include them as part of the new Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge.

Autumn then noted that ACLT's phone system was switched from Verizon Business to Comcast because of poor call quality. Jen researched the options and the switch ultimately resulted in overall monthly savings of \$112.64.

And finally, Autumn asked for a motion for **the Board to approve the 2025 Accomplishments and 2026 Goals Document. The motion was made and unanimously approved.**

The next order of business was to vote on members of the Executive Committee. Both Cheryl and BL agreed to stay on as Treasurer and Secretary. **John was nominated as President, and after Penny deferred to Nate as the candidate for Vice President, the Board approved John and Nate.**

A discussion followed regarding the selection of new Board members at this time to replace the 2 retiring members for approval by the full ACLT membership at the Annual Meeting. It was decided to approve the nomination of Dale Hutchins but to hold off on other vacancies until the Board, Executive Director, and committee chairs had time to review their committees' membership and identify missing skill sets.

Before adjourning, Ron noted that he had a matter to discuss that required at least a preliminary agreement from the Board. Hunting Creek Watershed needs some help with a proposal to get a grant to do a restoration project on a segment of Upper Mill Creek that is fairly degraded by "urban stream syndrome". He has been advised to put together a pitch to present to the Board of County Commissioners, asking them to support a grant proposal from the Chesapeake Bay Trust for which they would need Mary's help. The proposal would be for a project design, which would then end up with a design and restoration project similar to the beaver dam analogs, and the associated required permits. ACLT would need to be the grant recipient. **A motion was made and unanimously approved for ACLT staff to provide some support to the Friends of Hunting Creek for this project.**

Adjourn (Dave Farr): **There being no other questions or comments, a motion to adjourn the meeting was unanimously approved at 11:52.**

Approved

BL Johnston, Secretary