

**Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting
American Chestnut Land Trust
July 19, 2025**

Items mailed to Board Members in advance of the meeting:

Board Packet (July 11)

PP Slides (July 16)

Letters to Selection Committee and curriculum vitae of Adam Griggs and Veronica Cristo (June 30)

Letter from staff evaluating key skills and abilities of top candidates for Executive Director's position (July 19)

Call to Order

Dave Farr called the meeting to order at 9:03 on July 19, 2025.

Board Members Present: Dave Farr, President; Dawn Balinski, Vice President; BL Johnston, Secretary; Richard Aldrich, Peter Daly, Jan Degeneffe, Bob Field, Darleen Harrod, Ron Klauda, Shirley Knight, Melissa McCormick, Penny Moran, Mark Smith, Randi Vogt, and John Yoe.

Board Members Absent: José Ballesteros, Cheryl Place, Nate Novonty, Adam Sampson, and Fred Tutman.

ACLT Staff Present: Miriam Gholi, Community Relations Manager, and Autumn Phillips-Lewis, Land Manager.

Approval of Minutes: (Dave Farr, Board Packet pps.3-7):

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the May 17, 2025 Board Meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.

Selection of Executive Director (Dave Farr):

Autumn reported that based on the list of key skills and abilities developed by the search committee and staff at the start of the search process, the staff unanimously agreed that Adam Griggs is the stronger candidate, but that Veronica Cristo would be acceptable. Several Board members mentioned Adam's connections to land trust communities, his strong science background, and his fund-raising experience. Other Board members suggested that Veronica's familiarity with ACLT and land acquisitions and that she was more likely to remain longer in the position were positive assets. Randi asked how the Board would respond to Adam's request for a higher salary. Dave responded that we might offer him the equivalent of Greg's past salary. In response to questions about Adam's salary at EPA, Melissa offered that the salary of the GS13 position that he had held at EPA was between \$120 and \$157 in the DC area. After more discussion, **a motion was made and unanimously approved to make an initial offer to Adam at a negotiated salary and, if he declines, the offer would then be made to Veronica, also at a negotiated salary.**

Dave thanked the Selection Committee, commenting that they were a good group who worked well together and that Robyn had been a lifesaver with her connections to the library that permitted their usage of their facilities.

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

Autumn reported on the financial statements covering ACLT's financial activity for the first six months of 2025 during which ACLT had operating receipts of \$143,826 and operating expenses of \$223,869 for a deficit of \$80,043. With the year 50% complete, revenues are 25% of budget. ACLT received the US Bank Grant. Contributions are only 29% of budget; the Spring Appeal is also under budget. Donations to the Greg Bowen Memorial Fund, which now total more than

\$51,000, have diverted funds from general fundraising, leaving ACLT behind in raising operating budget funds. Total expenses to date are approximately 32% of budget, and expense categories are generally within or below budget. ACLT's invested accounts have benefited from a strong market. \$45,000 of the money donated to the Greg Bowen Memorial Fund have been invested in a CD for a greater return on the monies. The Repair and Replacement Fund was reduced by \$3,000 for the costs of repairs on the Holly Hill house and the tractor. ACLT has secured \$23,845 in restricted grants so far this year.

There was discussion regarding fundraising concerns. Dave offered that we need better communication with donors about what ACLT is trying to accomplish. Robyn and Peter are scheduling a meeting to strategize with our biggest donors.

Autumn reported that ACLT will be receiving one CCCC member this year instead of two. The funding that was budgeted for a second CCCC member will be used to keep Addie, a known staffer who is good and will save Autumn from having to train someone new. ACLT has applied for a grant to install the Yoe trail which includes an additional \$1,200 for Addie's time to construct the trail. For an unknown reason, we were assigned a Maryland Climate Corps member this year instead of the CCCC one we have had in past years, the difference being that the term is for 9 1/2 months instead of 12, ending in mid-June. This leaves us without a farm manager at the height of the growing season. To compensate, Autumn proposed extending Devon's term for 6 weeks (240 hours) at a salary of \$20/hour for a total of \$4,800. Devon will serve as part time Farm Manager during that time as well as work on completing the design work for the newest grant-funded Parkers Creek Heritage Trail signs. Also, ACLT has received \$2,530 in grant funding for Clara's salary, which will save that amount in the capacity grant for the coming year.

A motion was made to approve the 2025 staffing plan as presented and unanimously approved.

Two of the current residents plus the new member will be living in the Yoe house, earning ACLT an additional \$515/month. A lease will be prepared for the new resident, also named Addy. Jan advocated on behalf of the farm volunteers and Devon. She mentioned that she and other volunteers formed a steering committee to help train the volunteers to make them successful. Also, the food forest has been neglected since Birgit left; someone is needed to replace her. Devon, she continued, has wonderful abilities. Dawn suggested putting the food forest on our website. Since food forests are very popular these days, that might entice someone to come on to take charge.

Outreach and Membership Committee Report (Penny Moran, Board Packet pps. 15-16, PP Slides 1-7):

Penny reviewed several activities and events since the March 2025 report, including the Southern Maryland Heritage Festival at Sotterley on May 18, the Mountain Laurel Guided Hike on May 29, the College of Southern Maryland Naturefest on May 31, Children's Day on the Farm on June 1 (where Jen painted faces for 6 straight hours), NAACP's Juneteenth Celebration on June 14, and the Dragon Boat Festival at North Beach also on June 14. where ACLT took first prize. Monthly hikes and canoe trips continue, and Insectival at Annmarie Gardens was taking place concurrently with the Board meeting.

Penny also reported on the Community Heritage Committee's activities for José, who is traveling. Las Flores has held monthly meetings here at Double Oak. Devon has been active on the CHC and recently created a program that utilized healthy cooking demonstrations and outdoor recreation activities to introduce the Latino community to ACLT and nature as her capstone project. The Latino Festival for this year, which was scheduled for September, is canceled.

Land Management Committee (Bob Field and Autumn Philips-Lewis, Board Packet pps. 17-19, PP Slides pps. 8-19):

Bob provided brief updates to the committee's projects, including: production at Double Oak Farm of 750 pounds of fruits and vegetables; an herbaceous vegetation survey in May, where only a few invasive species were found; plans to apply herbicides and mow meadows; grant funded signs, a map, a brochure, and updated web pages for the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail; tree planting on the Goldstein property; "early detection" invasive surveys, the majority of findings being patches of wavyleaf basketgrass; ongoing invasive control efforts; Addie's and Devon's capstone projects; and grants.

DNR staff informed Autumn that they would like to demolish the house and barn at Warrior's Rest because it is slowly deteriorating and filled with lead paint and asbestos. DNR mentioned that they may be able to put up a new building of some sort there. The Committee decided that it was not needed since only 12 canoe trips are held there every year.

Facilities Committee Report (John Yoe, Board Packet p. 20, PP Slides pps. 20-23):

John's team identified the sources of water in the basement of the ACLT office and sealed them; the basement has been mostly dry since. Some additional work will be done to address the residual moisture in two corners of the basement storage area. The cause of drainage failure of the farm's washstand's sink was found and fixed, and plans are to do further work to ensure that the problem doesn't recur. John's team will assess the potential for renting the Helfrich house trailer. Some upgrades would first be needed; the condition and location of the well and septic tank, and state of the HVAC are being investigated. Once determined, John will recommend how to proceed. Power will first need to be turned back on.

Land Acquisition:

Dave updated the Board on the status of the acquisition of the Helfrich property. ACLT will need Rural Legacy funding to purchase the property. Two more consistent appraisals have been completed, and the attorneys are now re-wording the easement. Autumn mentioned that before the property can be sold to ACLT and placed under the conservation easement, ACLT will need to clean up the trash on the property. Wednesday's volunteers will help.

Executive Director's Report (Autumn Phillips-Lewis, Board Packet p.21; Miriam Ghol, Board Packet pps. 21-22; Mary Hoover, Board Packet p. 22)

Autumn reported that work continues on the third phase of the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail. Four additional signs have been drafted, and a total of 12 new signs will be made and installed by November. She briefly summarized several grant applications and awards.

Miriam reported on ACLT's new website using the Wix platform, which will save money. She thanked Dave and Ellen Farr for having developed and maintained the old site; much of its original material is retained on the new site. Parkers Creek Heritage Trail site has its own domain, but visitors can easily toggle between the sites. Carl Fleischhauer developed lots of new material for the Parkers Creek site. She asked the Board to review the website and let her know if any changes need to be made. Miriam also indicated she drafted changes to the Bylaws based on a discussion at the March meeting regarding election of Officers. She has drafted the changes and sent them to Dave, who will schedule a Governance Committee meeting.

Adjournment:

There being no other questions or comments, a motion to adjourn the meeting was unanimously approved at 11:34.

Approved:

BL Johnston, Secretary