



**American Chestnut Land Trust**  
*...Connecting people with the land*

# Five-Year Plan

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2014-2018

**American Chestnut Land Trust, Board of Directors**  
**3/15/2014**

## INTRODUCTION

This new long-range strategic plan, the fifth such planning document to be adopted by the Board of Directors of the American Chestnut Land Trust in its 28-year history, will build on past plans to enhance ACLT's ability to achieve its mission. See Appendix A for a review of significant accomplishments of the Five-Year Plan, 2009-2013.

ACLT and its partners have preserved 3,116 acres of forest, wetlands and fields to create the largest natural area in Calvert County. The Parkers Creek Preserve is visited by thousands of people annually and the popularity of our hiking trails continues to grow throughout the mid-Atlantic area. Researchers utilize the Preserve to determine baseline conditions given that it is the most undeveloped watershed on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.

We anticipate that over the term of this plan, the Preserve will continue to grow in size. Recent acquisitions (2013 and 2014) and projected future acquisitions could easily result in a 20% increase in the amount of land managed by the land trust by 2015. This plan also calls for significant expansion of the land trust's outreach programs to engage and educate members of the community, including: 1) ACLT will take a leadership role in developing a new network of conservation-oriented organizations to work together towards a sustainable future for Calvert County; 2) the board has identified a list of actions to be taken in the short term to grow the membership; and 3) a longer-term Development and Engagement Plan will be adopted to engage members and volunteers in ACLT's mission.

ACLT's anticipated need to grow its human resource and financial capacity in order to accomplish these land management and outreach goals was a central theme of the board's planning retreat. In 2014, the board will develop a Strategic Fundraising Plan for the Future. This plan will determine what additional demands on human resources, both volunteer and staff, will be required to meet the goals of this Plan, what additional financial resources may be required to provide these human resources, succession planning for key positions, and what fundraising tools will be utilized to maintain adequate operating and capital resources.

Patrick J. Griffin, President

## **ACLT Mission Statement**

We promote land conservation throughout Calvert County, Maryland. We provide environmentally sustainable public access to preserved properties for educational, scientific, recreational and cultural purposes. We protect the natural and cultural resources of the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds for the benefit of this and future generations.

## **Vision for ACLT in 2018**

ACLT is a national model for a community-based conservation organization. Robust and financially secure, we share our land preservation and management expertise with others to build a preservation ethic. We are attentive stewards for the watersheds, serving as a catalyst for effective land preservation throughout Calvert County by means of alliances and partnerships with other nonprofit organizations, governmental entities, businesses, and a broad segment of the Calvert County community.

## **ACLT's Vision for Calvert County in 2018**

Our goal is for Calvert County to be a national model for environmental stewardship balanced with a healthy economy. We hope that in 2018 our landscape will be characterized by forests, fields and farms and well-planned and diverse communities, surrounded by a healthy river and bay. Additionally, we envision a future where citizens are educated and active stewards of the land and their daily living is enhanced by the abundance of natural areas.

## MANAGEMENT OF ACLT OPERATIONS

**Goal:** *To retain an effective and efficient operation, guided by the Standards and Practices set by the Land Trust Alliance, with adequate operating and capital funding resources, to carry out the mission and achieve the vision of the ACLT.*

### **Strategies:**

- **Provide adequate human resources, both volunteer and staff, for the organization.**

#### Actions:

- Before undertaking major new actions, determine whether adequate human resources and funding for same exist, or whether they need to be incorporated into the Strategic Plan for Future Fundraising (hereafter, "Fundraising Plan").
- As the land under management increases, increase our human resource capacity accordingly.
- As we commit more resources to outreach, increase our human resource capacity accordingly.
- Implement a succession plan for Executive Director and key volunteer roles.

- **Optimize our facilities to support our land management and outreach activities.**

#### Actions:

- Renovate the existing ACLT office building to incorporate flexible educational/meeting/event space to accommodate events up to 75 people, to improve the building's appearance and to improve its energy efficiency.
- Add outdoor restroom facilities at the North Side Trailhead.
- Implement other facilities and interpretive recommendations of the Master Facilities Plan, as resources become available

- **Maintain and enhance good governance practices.**

#### Actions:

- Include individuals with diverse backgrounds (race, gender, occupation, geographic location, and long-standing members of the Calvert County community) in the pool of potential nominees for board vacancies.
- Annually review the five-year plan and ACLT policies and make adjustments, as necessary
- Operate the ACLT in accordance with LTA Standards & Practices with a goal to maintain national accreditation.

- **Maintain adequate revenue sources and continually cultivate new sources.**

Actions:

- Limit growth of budget to 10% per year.
- A decline in general operating grant income is anticipated during the time frame of this five-year plan. The issue will require significant Board attention. Adopt a Fundraising Plan in 2014 and review and adjust it annually.
- Continue goal of one new grant source per year, or a combination of new grant sources, in the amount of \$10,000 per year with assistance from board members in identifying potential foundation grant sources.

➤ **Derive 1/3 of total income from the endowment, 1/3 from foundations (or other alternative funding sources) and 1/3 from membership by 2018.**

Actions:

- Consider opportunities for additional funding in conjunction with any potential new state acquisitions that would be managed by the ACLT.
- Publicize the Memorial Bench and Planned Giving Programs on the website and in the newsletter to meet Fundraising Plan goals.
- Continue to monitor and revise Land Management Endowment goal, as needed, to fully fund land management obligations.

## LAND ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION

**Goal:** *To preserve land, according to our mission, in Calvert County through acquisition, easements and partnerships.*

### **Strategies:**

- **Complete, wherever possible, preservation of remaining priority properties in the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds**

#### Actions:

- Utilize all available preservation programs such as the state Program Open Space and Rural Legacy programs and the Calvert County Agricultural Preservation Program.
- Continue to work with existing partners and seek new partnerships to preserve targeted properties.

- **Facilitate partnerships to support continued preservation in the county**

#### Actions:

- Work with county and state government and landowners to establish a greenway connection between the Parkers Creek and Battle Creek watersheds.
- Proactively contact other land trusts in Calvert County to develop a vision for preserved land in the county and to seek opportunities for joint efforts.
- Inform landowners of remaining non-priority parcels of options for managing and preserving their land.

## LAND MANAGEMENT

**Goal:** *Manage all of the lands, structures and waters for which we are responsible in an environmentally sustainable manner by which their natural and cultural resources are preserved, sustained, and enhanced to the maximum extent possible.*

**Strategies:**

- **Be effective stewards of ACLT owned and managed lands within the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds, protecting both the natural and cultural resources of these lands and waterways for the benefit of current and future generations.**

Actions:

- For each new fee simple acquisition, ACLT inventories the natural and cultural features, develops an individual written land management plan that describes the resources in need of protection, identifies ACLT's objectives for the property, and implements the management activities recommended in the plan.
- ACLT maintains adequately marked boundary lines for its fee simple properties, regularly monitors (at least annually) each fee simple property for potential management problems, keeps a permanent record of its monitoring reports, and promptly takes action to rectify management problems discovered during regular monitoring visits.
- ACLT maintains an ongoing prioritized wish list of projects relating to invasive control, habitat restoration, and cultural structure stabilization that can be performed by volunteers.
- Requests boundary surveys during the acquisition process for future DNR acquisitions to be managed by ACLT.
- For each new conservation easement, a baseline documentation report is prepared prior to closing and signed by the landowner at closing to document the important conservation values and condition of the property at the time of acquisition.
- ACLT regularly monitors (at least annually) each property for which it holds a conservation easement, keeps a permanent record of its monitoring reports, and promptly takes appropriate enforcement steps in the event of any violation of the easement.
- Continue to reassess and stabilize (slow the rate of deterioration) or restore the cultural resources on ACLT owned and managed lands in accordance with priorities that are established and periodically updated by the Land Management Committee.
- Finalize the new 2013 Invasive Species Control and Containment Plan, including development of priorities and timelines, for both ACLT fee simple properties and DNR-owned properties managed by ACLT. Work cooperatively with DNR to implement the plan. Map invasives in order to assess priorities with support of volunteers.

- Implement individual forest management plans on ACLT-owned properties and work with DNR forestry and heritage officials to revise individual plans as they expire with watershed-wide ecosystem management policies in mind.
  - Review management and enforcement questions on all DNR-owned properties with DNR on a regular basis.
- **Encourage environmentally sustainable public access to ACLT managed lands by maintaining and enhancing the ACLT trail system.**
- Actions:
- Set up a schedule to redo the blazes every other year on the trails – north side one year, south side the next; every 3-4 years redo the sign markers.
  - Continue to maintain trails with two scheduled Trail Maintenance work days and special crews on an, as needed, basis.
  - Build a “Trail Steward” volunteer program.
- **Take an ecosystem-wide approach to management of all lands and waters under ACLT management.**
- Actions:
- Encourage the use of ACLT owned and managed lands for scientific and cultural research and maintain copies of all final research reports produced in the ACLT library.
  - Maintain an ongoing prioritized wish list of scientific and cultural research and/or interpretive projects for ACLT owned and managed lands that can be performed by volunteers or others as resources permit.
  - Work cooperatively with DNR to ensure that ACLT has access to DNR research in order to effectively manage their lands.
  - Enhance meadow and early successional habitat opportunities for wildlife and pollinators.
- **Investigate the feasibility of putting fallow agricultural fields back into production in order to continue the tradition of farming and diversify the ways that people can connect with the land through ACLT.**
- Actions:
- Continue to build CSA; develop a succession plan for CSA operation.
  - Utilize remaining farm fields for wildlife management (e.g., North Side back field - quail habitat; North Side front field - pollinator habitat) and agricultural production (e.g., South Side - orchards, North Side - lease to farmers), depending on available resources.
- **Lead by example in environmental stewardship whenever possible.**
- Actions:
- Strive to use innovative and best management practices.



## OUTREACH AND MEMBERSHIP

**Goal:** *Optimize our facilities and our outreach programs to serve the ACLT mission and the Calvert County community; encourage and support strong growth in ACLT's membership and volunteer programs through enhanced communications, programs and activities.*

### Strategies:

- **Increase Local Awareness of ACLT and its Mission**
  - **Utilize a variety of tools to increase awareness of ACLT and its mission in Southern Maryland, and especially within Calvert County.**

#### Actions:

- Develop clear and consistent messaging about ACLT including a brief elevator speech that board members and others can use to promote awareness of ACLT and its mission. Distribute it to current ACLT members asking them to share it with individuals in their sphere of influence.
- Develop multiple versions of an introductory power point presentation about ACLT and make it available to board members and others to tell the ACLT story by making presentations to a wide variety of groups and organizations.
- Ensure the ACLT message receives broad attention by preparing press releases about ACLT events and accomplishments.

- **Develop Strategic Partnerships**
  - **Build and maintain lasting partnerships with local nonprofit organizations focusing on environmental stewardship, education, community service and other common interests between ACLT and the nonprofit community at large;**
  - **Build and maintain strategic partnerships with local businesses focusing on environmental stewardship, tourism, support for environmentally sound local agriculture, and other common interests between ACLT and the business community; and**
  - **Build and maintain effective partnerships with local, state and federal agencies.**

#### Actions:

- Organize and participate in a countywide network of organizations in Calvert County to focus on issues pertaining to the health of our economy, our society and our environment where we can learn from each other, find common interests and work for our mutual support and advancement.
- Develop and implement a plan for increased participation in ACLT by businesses.

- Contact local schools (at all levels) about collaborative opportunities and projects.
- Encourage ACLT members to be active on appropriate county boards and advisory commissions. Give one presentation to the County Commissioners annually on a land use or conservation issue.

- **Sponsor Educational, Stewardship and Social Events and Activities**
  - **Sponsor annual educational, land stewardship, social and fundraising events bringing together existing and potential ACLT members, supporters and volunteers.**

Actions:

- Maintain a canoe program at Warrior's Rest, including guided trips as well as facilities and equipment useful to provide access to Parkers Creek.
- Host at least one public event annually on a conservation or environmental topic of concern to the community reflective of the ACLT mission.
- Host at least one public event annually on ACLT property to encourage public awareness and enjoyment of ACLT's land and mission.
- Conduct a trail run to supplement or replace the current Earth Day activity.
- Conduct Maryland Master Naturalist training annually.
- Ensure that the ACLT annual meeting is both an informative and social event.

- **Maintain a Dynamic and Diverse Membership and Volunteer Corps**
  - **Expand the individual and corporate memberships each year through personal contact, outreach programs and partnership events.**
  - **Develop a communication program aimed at increasing the ACLT profile in the community and attracting new individual and corporate members and volunteers to the ACLT.**
  - **Maintain and enhance regular and informative member and volunteer communications, including the quarterly newsletter, web site, electronic updates, event publicity, and fundraising appeals.**

Actions:

- In the short term, identify a volunteer leader, other volunteers willing to help, and an ACLT staff point of contact to implement 12 Activities to Increase ACLT Membership in 2014 and Beyond, as approved by the Board, in November 2013.
- In the longer term, adopt a Development and Engagement Plan to enhance the engagement of all of ACLT's current and potential constituencies and provide additional staff capacity to implement it.

- Train all staff and volunteers to actively encourage visitors to become members.
- Sponsor additional annual volunteer trainings to support ACLT programs.

**APPENDIX A  
A LOOK BACK AT SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS  
OF THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN, 2009-2013**

**Management of ACLT Operations**

- **Optimize our facilities to support our land management and outreach activities**
  - Adopted a Master Plan for Facilities and Interpretation
  - Implemented recommendations of the Master Plan to improve directional signage at the north side trailhead, establish a new multi-purpose barn at the north side trailhead, and create a new introductory loop trail and native plant garden at the south side trailhead.
- **Maintain and enhance good governance practices**
  - Included individuals with diverse backgrounds in the pool of potential nominees for board vacancies
  - Awarded accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission
- **Maintain adequate revenue sources and continually cultivate new sources**
  - Exceeded goals to limit growth of budget and seek new foundation funding sources
  - Met goal to provide 1/3 of total income from the Land Management Endowment by achieving long-term goal to the endowment at \$2 million

**Land Acquisition and Preservation**

- **Complete, wherever possible, preservation of remaining priority one properties in the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds**
  - Continued to work with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources towards the preservation of two properties identified as high priorities
  - Acquired in fee simple the 18-acre St. John Vianney property and the 36-acre Harrod property

**Land Management**

- **Be effective stewards of ACLT owned and managed lands within the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds, protecting both the natural and cultural resources of these lands and waterways for the benefit of current and future generations**
  - Instituted annual monitoring of our fee simple and conservation easement properties
  - Developed a master plan for management of ACLT's fee simple properties and individual property plans
  - Completed removal of a 4-acre stand of invasive bamboo at the south side trailhead and adopted new Invasive Species Control and Containment Plan

- **Encourage environmentally sustainable public access to ACLT managed lands by maintaining and enhancing the ACLT trail system**
  - New numbered signposts and corresponding trail guides for both north and south side trailheads
  - Creation of Native Plant Garden and Nature Introductory Loop Trail
  - Creation of new Prince Frederick trailhead and 12-mile round trip Prince Frederick to the Bay Overlook Trail
- **Investigate the feasibility of putting fallow agricultural fields back into production in order to continue the tradition of farming and diversify the ways that people can connect with the land through ACLT**
  - Developed a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program

#### **Outreach and Membership**

- **Increase Local Awareness of ACLT and its Mission in Southern Maryland, and especially within Calvert County**
  - Developed a new interactive website
- **Develop Strategic Partnerships**
  - Developed successful partnership with St. John Vianney Catholic Church in connection with development of the new Prince Frederick to the Bay Overlook Trail
  - Developed successful partnership with The Calverton School in connection with the Double Oak Farm CSA
  - Developed successful partnership with the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension, Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust, and Battle Creek Nature Education Society in connection with development of the Maryland Master Naturalist training program
- **Sponsor Educational, Stewardship and Social Events and Activities**
  - Instituted Maryland Master Naturalist training program
- **Maintain a Dynamic and Diverse Membership and Volunteer Corps**
  - ACLT has maintained a dynamic and diverse membership and volunteer corps, but was not able to meet the ambitious goal of increasing memberships by 5% annually.
  - Conducted a new member “Walk along the Bay” event
  - Created membership decals and new member “green” bags
  - Conducted a membership survey
  - Conducted annual canoe guide, water quality monitoring and invasive plant control volunteer training programs