



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

Five Year Plan

2019-2023

American Chestnut Land Trust Board of Directors
3/16/2019



ACLT FIVE YEAR PLAN
2019 – 2023
INTRODUCTION

This new Five Year Plan strategic plan, the sixth, builds on past plans to enhance ACLT's ability to achieve its mission.

ACLT and its partners have preserved 4,572 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.

Through its implementation of the 2014-2018 Plan, ACLT has developed a larger presence in the Parkers Creek and Governor's Run watersheds and in the County at large:

- With the purchase of Holly Hill, ACLT and its partners have preserved 60% of the Parkers Creek watershed further assuring the protection of the watershed in the future.
- The creation of the Sustainable Calvert Network (SCN), of which ACLT is a member, could not have come at a more critical time. SCN has been working to increase funding for land preservation programs and to end the moratorium on new agricultural preservation districts. It has been proactive commenting on the new County Comprehensive Plan draft which will have a significant impact on land preservation programs. SCN also held a Rural Lands Forum and two Candidates Forums as a means to raise awareness of the importance of rural lands.
- The addition of the Science Committee has enhanced ACLT's stewardship by using research and testing to influence policy and management decisions in the face of impacts from invasive species, climate change, and humans.
- The Watershed Awareness Program promises to be an effective tool in increasing the appreciation for, and advocacy for, watersheds throughout the County and the region.

This Five Year Plan calls for ACLT to embrace a leadership role in the long term conservation and stewardship of watersheds not only in Calvert County but all of Southern Maryland. This parallels the direction of our national member organization, the Land Trust Alliance. The mission of the Land Trust Alliance is "to save the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America". There are many places in our region that need to be conserved. By example, by leadership, and by collaboration, ACLT has the opportunity to help maintain fishable/swimmable waterways throughout our region,, to provide good habitats for wildlife, to provide opportunities for young people of all ages to get access to wildlands and waterways, and to reduce the impact of climate change in Southern Maryland.

A summary of key new features in the Five Year Plan are as follows:

- Embrace a leadership role in the long term conservation and stewardship of watersheds in Calvert and Southern Maryland

- Address long term budget issues and staffing needs
- Advocate for re-institution of land preservation tools and increase Rural Legacy Areas
- Continue managing our preserved properties to maintain diverse and healthy ecosystems and evaluate long-term sustainability
- Inform land management practices with science conducted here and elsewhere
- Embrace and support our volunteers
- Connect more people (of all backgrounds) to the land and instill a conservation ethic.

ACLT Mission Statement

We promote land conservation and preservation throughout Southern Maryland. We preserve and conserve the natural and cultural resources of the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds for the benefit of this and future generations. We provide environmentally sustainable public access to managed properties for educational, scientific, recreational and cultural purposes.

Vision for ACLT in 2023

ACLT is rooted in all aspects of land conservation and preservation¹ and connecting people to the land in Calvert County. It serves as an advocate for land conservation and preservation throughout Southern Maryland. It is a regional center for rural lands research and wildlife observation, appreciation, and protection. Aficionados value the well-marked, well-maintained deep woods trails. Robust and financially secure, the land trust and its members are able to convey the passion for land preservation and active land management, through art, music, verse, and sweat to build a conservation ethic. We are attentive stewards for the watersheds, serving as a catalyst for effective land conservation and preservation by means of alliances and partnerships with other nonprofit organizations, governmental entities, businesses, and a broad segment of the community. We represent the diversity (age, race, gender, and ethnicity) of our community in our membership and on our Board. We are proactive in welcoming everyone to be a part of ACLT.

ACLT's Vision for Calvert County in 2023

In 2023 our landscape continues to be characterized by forests, fields and farms and well-planned and diverse communities, surrounded by a healthy Patuxent River and Chesapeake Bay. Additionally, citizens are educated and active stewards of the land in all of the watersheds of Calvert County and their daily living is enhanced by the abundance of natural areas. More watersheds in Calvert County have a community of “friends” similar to that which made the effort to preserve Parkers Creek such a success. Seeds are sown to do the same throughout Southern Maryland.

¹ Land preservation is the reduction or elimination of the development potential of a property. Land conservation is related to the proper use of nature through active land management.

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 to 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. If not, develop a plan to raise the necessary resources through the operating budget, a grant, volunteers or other means to insure the resource is available to enable success.
- 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.
- Conduct a review and analysis of current staffing vs. current and foreseeable needs to determine whether our existing paid staff and volunteers are sufficient to ensure operational and strategic success.
- Implement a succession plan for the Executive Director and key staff and volunteer roles.



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

Actions:

- Implement other facilities and interpretive recommendations of the Master Facilities Plan, as resources become available
- Plan any capital fundraising efforts as needed to finance major facility changes approved by the Board such as a new or renovated office, a new pavilion at Double Oak or Holly Hill, a new entrance and parking area at Holly Hill, a Memorial area, major capital improvements to new trails or others.
- Insure that any needed major renovations to facilities are properly financed.

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

Actions:

- Include individuals with diverse backgrounds (e.g. race, gender, occupation, sex, age, 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 the goal to achieve and maintain national accreditation
- **Maintain adequate revenue sources and continually cultivate new sources.**
- Actions:
- Limit growth of budget to no more than inflation plus 5% per year. Insure that any budget proposed with growth in excess of this amount is thoroughly justified and discussed by the Board prior to approval.
 - A decline in general operating grant income is anticipated during the time frame of this five-year plan. This issue will require significant Board attention. Adopt a Strategic Plan for Future Fundraising in 2019 and review and adjust it annually.
 - Consider an action to seek grants, or a campaign for a permanent grant to endow a specific position or internship.
 - Continue the 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.**
- 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 Strategic Plan goals.
 - Continue to monitor and revise the Land Management Endowment goal, as needed, to fully fund land management obligations.
 - Initiate a capital fundraising effort to increase the Friends Forever Endowment to approximately \$2 million over the next 10 years.

LAND ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION

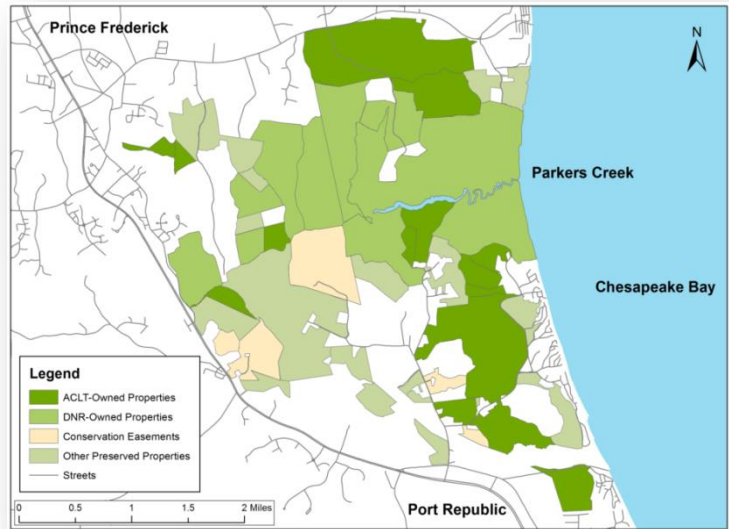
Goal: *To preserve land, according to our mission, in Calvert County through acquisition, easements and partnerships.*

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's 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. Consider establishing a greenway connection to the Hunting Creek and St. Leonard Creek Watersheds.
- Work with the Sustainable Calvert Network 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.
- Continue to work with the Sustainable Calvert Network and regional organizations to increase advocacy for land conservation in Southern Maryland and increase our presence in the region.
- Utilize the Watershed Awareness Program to increase the affection for, and advocacy for, specific watersheds.
- Advocate for re-institution of Calvert County land preservation tools and increase Rural Legacy Areas

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:

- Within one year of 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 describes a process to implement 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, trail maintenance, and cultural structure stabilization that can be performed by volunteers.
- ACLT 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, document, 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.
- Maintain an 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. As time allows, map invasives in order to assess priorities.
- Implement individual forest stewardship 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 issues on all DNR-owned properties with DNR on a regular basis.
- Land Management staff will utilize data collected from hunter sign-in sheets and any other data sources available to gauge the deer population and update the deer herd management program protocols as necessary.

➤ **Encourage environmentally sustainable public access to ACLT managed lands by maintaining and enhancing the ACLT trail system.**

Actions:

- Periodically redo the blazes on the trails as needed.
- Continue to maintain trails with two annual Trail Maintenance work days, two weekly volunteer workdays, and special crews on an “as-needed” basis.
- Maintain a “Trail Steward” volunteer program.
- Proactively address potential trail issues from bigger storm events that will increase in frequency and intensity due to climate change.
- Consider climate change effects when planning new trails and assessing current trail conditions and recognize the costs associated with major projects.
- Consider limited canoe/kayak access from the Russell tract provided that the environmental impact and view from the creek can be minimized.



➤ **Focus agricultural efforts on Holly Hill and Double Oak Farm. Continue to seek out ways to reduce the environmental impact of agriculture through sustainable agricultural practices.**

Actions:

- Continue to maintain and support the Agriculture to Support Community Program on Double Oak Farm; continue to support volunteer leadership on various portions of the farm. Continue to use regenerative practices.
- Consider leasing farmland on Double Oak farm to beginning vegetable farmers using organic practices, so long as the total land in agricultural use on Double Oak Farm does not exceed approximately 2.5 acres.
- Consider leasing a portion of the land currently being farmed on Holly Hill to beginning vegetable farmers using organic practices, so long as conventional grain farming continues on the property. The total acreage in agriculture must remain at 60 acres, as mandated in the conservation easement for the property.
- Continue to press for more sustainable farming practices on leased farm land.
- Work with Calvert County Soil Conservation District to monitor the erosion around the Holly Hill farm fields and implement measures to minimize erosion when possible.

- **Recognize and focus on the importance of meadows for the wide variety of species which are threatened by the disappearance of meadows which has occurred over the last century.**

Actions:

- Establish permanent meadows on the Southside fields (approximately 5.25 acres) and actively manage for native herbaceous vegetation.
- Establish approximately 7.10 acres of permanent meadow habitat on the Northside fields on the Double Oak property and actively manage for native herbaceous vegetation.
- Work with BGE to establish and maintain meadows in the powerline right-of-way across the Parkers Creek Preserve.
- Consider creating a meadow walking trail around Double Oak Farm.
- Enhance meadow and early successional habitat opportunities for pollinators and other wildlife.



- **Lead by example in environmental stewardship whenever possible.**

Actions:

- Strive to use innovative and best management practices.
- Inform land management practices with science conducted here and elsewhere.

- **Continue to work to increase and diversify land management volunteers.**

Actions:

- Work with scouts to complete projects when possible.
- Continue hosting the Maryland Master Naturalist program at ACLT.
- The Land Manager will continue to oversee the deer herd management program and work with the ACLT hunters to complete land management tasks.

SCIENCE COMMITTEE

Goal: To conserve, protect, and restore, the natural resources of the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds and identify threats to their ecological integrity.

The ACLT Science Committee will:

Provide advice to ACLT Staff, the ACLT Board, and the Land Management Committee on steps required to maintain Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds as dynamic and well-functioning systems that: support and provide suitable habitat for diverse plant and animal communities dominated by viable populations of native species; have good water quality, maintain ecological processes and evolutionary potential, and are resilient to natural disturbances, low-impact human use, and well-managed agriculture at designated sites.

Generate and provide information that will help ACLT take an ecosystem-based approach to all lands and waters under its management.

Actions:

1) Generate and identify information that can be used to inform conservation and management:

- Help initiate and sustain monitoring programs to determine the status and trends of natural resources under ACLT Management. To do this the Science Committee will:
 - Train staff, help with analysis and interpretation of data, and may participate in monitoring activities;
 - Help to identify experts on particular issues that are not well-represented by committee members;
 - Facilitate continuation of monitoring programs that have been established, including: (1) tree abundance, species composition and health (detection and action, where possible, to minimize effects of pathogens), (2) nitrogen concentration and other water quality parameters in Parkers Creek, Governors Run, and their tributaries, (3) benthic and fish abundance and species composition of Parkers Creek and its tributaries, (4) *Phragmites australis* location and control, and (4) bird abundance and species composition;
 - Identify additional monitoring targets and develop appropriate monitoring methods. These additional targets may include, but are not limited to: sea level rise, amphibians, understory, herbaceous and wetland vegetation, native bees, pathogens and other taxa and habitats for which expertise can be identified, plus items of geological, and paleontological importance as resources are available; and
 - A goal is to have a comprehensive monitoring program for biota and habitat developed by the end of the 5-year period covered by this plan.

- Establish conditions and detect trends with emphasis on potential drivers (i.e. land use, climate change, overpopulation of deer herds, invasive species) and ecosystem components that respond to those drivers or are otherwise deemed valuable. A goal is to be able to establish baselines and track changes in forests, fields, marshes, meadows, wildlife and pathogens. This will be facilitated by increasing use, accessibility and analyses of current and past data collected on ACLT managed land, mapping spatial extents and locations, and archiving of reports in easily accessible digital or hard-copy formats.



- Encourage the use of ACLT owned and managed lands for scientific research and, where possible, make protocols compatible with those used and accepted by others in the science community to facilitate comparisons with other research sites and studies. One strategy the committee will employ is to establish relations with college groups to promote the potential of the Parkers Creek Preserve as a site for graduate student projects.
- Develop, in collaboration with ACLT staff, an ongoing prioritized wish list of scientific projects for ACLT owned and managed lands that can be performed by volunteers or others as resources permit.
- Work cooperatively with DNR and other regional research organizations to ensure that ACLT has access to research that can inform sound management of both ACLT-owned land and land that ACLT manages for DNR.
- Identify information on techniques to meet ACLT conservation and management goals such as enhancing meadow and early successional habitat opportunities for wildlife and pollinators, managing deer herds, and creating quality habitat for other native species.

2) Communication

- Provide science-based guidance on the magnitude of threats, the likelihood of potential benefits of various management options, and the magnitude of action required to achieve those benefits.

- Inform ACLT staff, Board and relevant committees of findings published in the scientific literature that may be of help in managing and protecting ACLT managed lands.
- Provide updates on results of monitoring and research activities conducted on ACLT-managed land.
- Participate in outreach to the broader Calvert County community on issues that may improve protection and management of natural resources.
- Help organize and interpret ACLT scientific data and present to the Board, the membership and the general public. A goal is providing brief updates at each Board meeting.

3) Staff and volunteer training

- Continue to engage regional scientists in staff and volunteer training.
- Identify opportunities for staff training, participation in regional peer science groups and attendance at relevant scientific meetings.
- Support funding for staff memberships in science groups and participation in workshops and conferences.

OUTREACH AND MEMBERSHIP

Goal: *Optimize our outreach programs to serve the ACLT mission throughout Southern Maryland; 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:

- Maintain clear and consistent messaging about ACLT.
- Maintain materials and tools about ACLT and make it available to board members, staff 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 and developing and maintaining relationships with local press
- Expand social media and general online presence as a method to connect to a broader audience,



➤ Develop Strategic Partnerships

- Maintain lasting partnerships within the Sustainable Calvert Network and with other local nonprofit organizations focusing on environmental stewardship, education, community service and other common interests between ACLT and the nonprofit community at large;
- Maintain effective partnerships with local, state and federal agencies.

Actions:

- Continue to participate in the Sustainable Calvert Network and with other regional organizations that 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.
- Build relationships with local education communities and youth organizations 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.
- Reach out to neighbors and neighboring communities and seek their involvement.

➤ **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, 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 regular public events annually on ACLT property to encourage public awareness and enjoyment of ACLT's land and mission.
- Conduct trail runs and other athletic events as staffing allows
- Consider holding orienteering and other events that go "off-trail" on a limited basis, respectful of the times that will least impact the flora and fauna.
- 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.**
- **Maintain 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 regular and informative member and volunteer communications, including the quarterly newsletter, web site, social media and emails, event publicity, and fundraising appeals.**

Actions:

- Adopt an updated 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.
- Develop an enhanced volunteer program which includes orientations, advanced training, and regular appreciation activities.
- Engage interns through local colleges and Chesapeake Conservation Corps.

➤ **Reach out to underserved populations**

Actions:

- Pursue engagement of underrepresented communities including students, minority communities, young families, scouts, etc., for the purpose of broader diversity.
- Expand participation in events and activities sponsored by diverse community populations.
- Expand committee representation to include underrepresented communities.