

# 2020 Annual Report



## American Chestnut Land Trust



For More Details, View the  
2020 Annual Meeting Presentation at:  
**<https://bit.ly/ACLTAAnnualMtg2020>**

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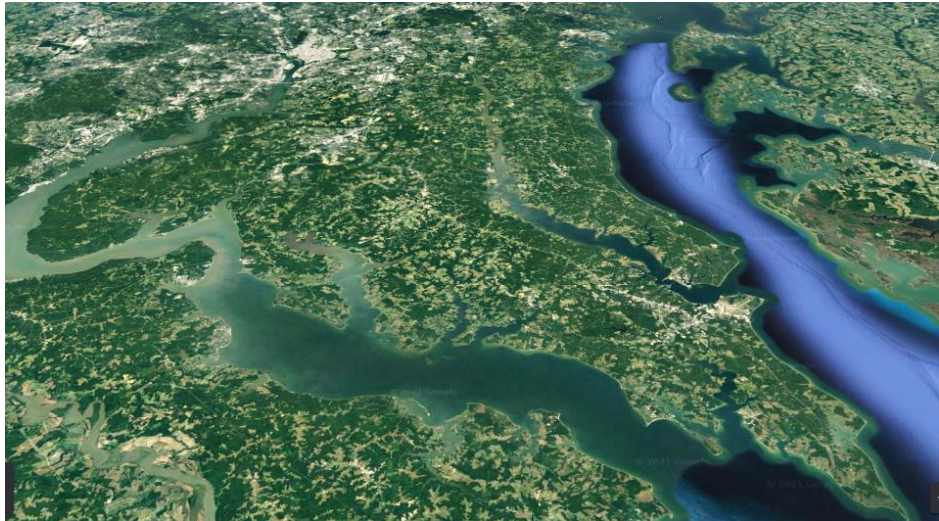
# ACLT Mission

- 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.

## From the Director

Our 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 throughout Southern Maryland.

What would Southern Maryland's landscape look like in the future if a Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance were successful? During the past year, I have been huddling virtually with our partners from the Maryland Environmental Trust,



Forever Maryland, the Land Trust Alliance, US Fish and Wildlife, as well as our fellow land trusts and historical societies in the five-county region. The prospects are interesting and hopeful.

But first, we have been finding common ground, looking at our own collective visions and strategies and trying to figure out what is most important to preserve. For that we are delighted to have access to the resources of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, and Maryland Department of Natural Resources. They have been conducting meaningful research on wildlife diversity and habitat, resilient lands, ecosystems services that natural lands provide, and so on.

We have not finalized a vision for our region, but I can envision working farms producing locally sourced foods; hiking trails connecting all towns; wildlife corridors running along waterways, inland when necessary. Critter tunnels under major highways, "friends groups" watching over watersheds and managing canoe launching sites for all. There is so much that can be done for a sustainable future for Southern Maryland.

# A large landscape to protect

*for species diversity, wildlife corridors, ecosystem services, and climate resilience.*



Through the work of The Nature Conservancy, we now know that Southern Maryland has one of the most resilient landscapes in the Mid-Atlantic region and Calvert has the highest percentage of resilient landscapes in Southern Maryland. The reasons for this high percentage of resilient lands include land elevation (well above the flood plain), soils, hydrology, and slopes that produce thousands of microclimates for a wide variety of species. Another reason is that Calvert was the first County in the state to adopt a land preservation program and has been one of the most successful in implementing its plan. Had all of the preserved properties been subdivided into developments, most of the land's resilience, and its ecosystem services, would have been lost. We would have also lost fisheries, farms, bird-watching areas and hunting areas by now.

What we have is both a blessing and a responsibility. **We have a choice. We can save it or lose it forever.** In 2020, we worked with county staff and the Sustainable Calvert Network to increase land preservation opportunities in Calvert.

# Our Preservation Birthday List!

One of the key conservation objectives in ACLT's Five Year Plan is to "complete, wherever possible, preservation of remaining priority properties in the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds". As we commemorate our 35<sup>th</sup> year, what better way to celebrate than to unwrap two big beautiful properties?

The groundwork for success happened in 2020. The previous year, we had completed contractual negotiations to buy the 78-acre Governors Run Development Corporation (GRDC) property. However, there were unexpected delays, and we had to update appraisals to be in compliance with county law. Undaunted, the Board of Directors continued to pursue the project. Finally, funding for the easement received county approval last November and state approval in February 2021. Our hope is to settle on the purchase of the property before mid-year. Concurrently with the purchase, a permanent conservation easement will be recorded. It will fill a gap in a five-mile stretch of protected lands running from Western Shores to Dares Beach. Upon purchase, it will be known as the Yowell Property.



The northern end of this tract is adjacent to ACLT's first land purchase, the Gravatt East property. The same "Old Growth Forest" conditions on East Gravatt also exist on the north portion of the GRDC property. With this purchase, we are able to extend ACLT trails to Governors Run Road.

Our other conservation project can only be called serendipitous. John and James Yoe approached ACLT about buying the family farm. None of the Yoes live on the land and maintaining it has become a burden. They were intent on selling it but were hoping that it could be preserved. At about that time, a new 2020 Rural Legacy application was being drafted. ACLT was able to help the Yoes request a boundary change so that the land would be included in the Rural Legacy Area. Both the Yoes and ACLT approached the Rural Legacy sponsor about including the land in its application to the state. The state approved the expansion and granted funding that can be used to purchase an easement on the Yoe property. If all goes well, this beautiful property could be protected in the next year.



# Stewarding the Land

Like most things ACLT's land management efforts looked different in 2020, but there was perhaps never a more necessary time to be out working on the trails, growing food, or enhancing the local wildlife habitat. Though we were not able to hold some of our larger group land management work days, that did not stop our dedicated staff and volunteers from keeping our properties in excellent condition as ACLT provided much needed services for our community this year.

Most notably, our trails experienced a significant increase in usage this year as people looked for an outdoor haven to relax and rejuvenate safely. To ensure our visitors had an enjoyable hiking experience and did not negatively impact the ecosystem, ACLT completed many trail improvement projects in 2020. These projects included installing 80' of boardwalk on the North-South Trail and completing a re-route on the popular Ridge Trail to avoid a steep hill that was experiencing erosion. Shorter boardwalk sections were installed on the Flint Trail, Parkers Creek Trail, and Turkey Trail and re-routes were completed to mitigate erosion issues on the Horse Swamp Trail and the Turkey Trail. Many of these projects were identified as areas of concern during the Trail Sustainability Analysis project that was completed by former Chesapeake Conservation Corps member Rachel Delbo with funding from the Chesapeake Bay Trust and the Maryland Environmental Trust.

Tropical storm Isaias also caused considerable damage to the trails at ACLT in August of 2020. Major bridge and boardwalk systems on the PF2Bay (photo right) and Horse Swamp Trails were washed from their locations by high, swift moving water. The incredible force of the water also caused the cable on the



beloved raft to break and the raft was washed down into the marsh of Parkers Creek where it remained until it was finally found weeks later. Twenty two trees also came down on the trails, a few of which up-ended another major bridge on the Flint Trail. Volunteers and staff went straight to work and had all of these problems fixed by October of 2020.



ACLT also continued its efforts to improve the health and wildlife value of the habitat within the Parkers Creek watershed in 2020. This included managing for more diverse meadow habitat through selective mowing to control invasive species and adding native flowers (photo left) which were started from seed. Other wildlife habitat projects included the continuation of ACLT's wood duck, prothonotary warbler, and bluebird nest monitoring programs. A large part of working to maintain and improve resources for our native wildlife consists of ongoing efforts to control invasive plant species such as phragmites, Oriental bittersweet, Japanese knotweed, and bamboo.



Unfortunately, in late 2019, a new and problematic invader was found within the watershed. Wavyleaf basketgrass is a low-growing herbaceous plant that outcompetes native vegetation and spreads rapidly across the forest floor. Two separate infestations have been found within the watershed which may be the first within Calvert County. Early detection and rapid response is key to controlling invasive plants before they spread to a large enough geographic area that eradication is no longer feasible. To address this, volunteers and staff spent many hours hand pulling this perennial grass (photo left) to remove its roots and prevent it from going to seed. At the same time, staff drafted a comprehensive integrated management plan which involves chemical and mechanical removal methods as well as educational efforts, monitoring, and other preventative methods to eradicate this new invasive species. The control plan will be presented to the

Land Management Committee and the ACLT Board of Directors for action in early 2021.

In 2020 stewardship activities were in full swing on ACLT's most recently-preserved property, Holly Hill. Work began on the construction of the new 2-mile trail that will traverse throughout the property from the Griffin Meadow Trail to the PF2Bay trail. The trail will feature two bridge and boardwalk systems and meander past points of interest such as streams, pine-covered ridges, and the historic log barn. Much progress was made on leveling and supporting the barn in 2020 and construction began on the viewing platforms that will allow visitors to see the inside of the barn after the stabilization project is complete. In the agricultural fields on Holly Hill, additional 45' meadow buffers were planted as part of the ongoing effort to mitigate erosion issues that are occurring around the field edges. 2020 was the third of this 4-year project which is funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Services Environmental Quality Incentive Program.

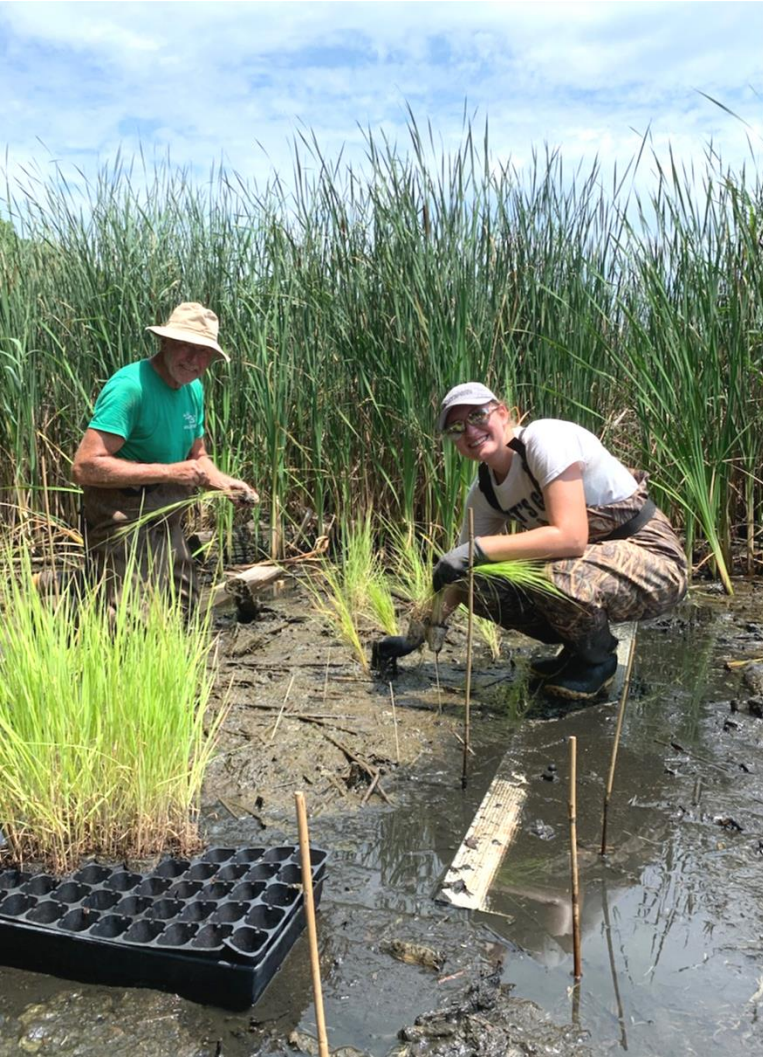
ACLT worked to increase its food production on Double Oak Farm this year to assist the increased number of food-insecure families in our community due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 3,434lbs of food from Double Oak Farm were donated to the St. John Vianney food pantry in 2020. Other noteworthy projects on the farm include the establishment of the native edibles garden by former CCC intern Charlie Kreizenbeck, the construction of a new shed to store equipment, and fully utilizing the high tunnel to extend food production in the winter months.



Finally, ACLT successfully coordinated its 8<sup>th</sup> Maryland Master Naturalist program in 2020. The program began as usual in March of 2020 but was forced into a hiatus while ACLT staff transitioned the program to a virtual format before it resumed in August. Sixteen people graduated from the program in October and will join the ranks of the many selfless and talented volunteers who make so many of ACLT's land management projects possible.

# Research in the Watershed

In 2017, ACLT formed a Science Committee whose mission is to provide insight on ways to collect data to better monitor the watershed and inform land management activities. Unfortunately, many of the research initiatives that were planned for 2020, such as the water quality blitz, macroinvertebrate survey, and the bird diversity survey, were cancelled as they needed to be completed in the spring during the height of quarantine mandates and concern and uncertainty over the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, valuable research efforts were still accomplished in 2020.



In the marsh, ACLT continued to implement the solarization technique to eradicate isolated patches of the invasive plant *phragmites australis*. This effort has been underway since 2017 and has shown very promising results for eradicating phragmites without the use of herbicides. Patches that were treated in previous years have experienced virtually no phragmites re-growth following just a single year of solarization treatment, while native species have begun to reestablish on the sites.

ACLT also assisted scientists from the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in conducting research to increase planting success rates in marsh restoration projects. To do this, multiple native marsh species were planted in areas where phragmites had been removed both in the Parkers Creek watershed and in other areas throughout the region. The plants were planted at varying densities at sites that represented a variety of different salinities and substrate types. The plantings were monitored throughout the year to determine which planting densities resulted in the greatest plant survival and which plant species grew the best at each site condition.

In 2020, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science Chesapeake Biological Lab (UMCES-CBL) continued summer water quality monitoring of three stations along the main stem of Parkers Creek, sampling once in June, July, and August. Measures included surface and bottom dissolved oxygen and chlorophyll concentrations, temperature, salinity, and water clarity. These data are currently being analyzed. Results from the 2019 sampling indicate that as in previous years, compared with other sites on the western shore of Calvert County, Parkers Creek has higher bottom dissolved oxygen and lower surface chlorophyll-a concentrations (indicative of relatively better water quality) but poorer clarity. A briefing for the entire monitoring program was provided to the Calvert County Board of County Commissioners and is available at the following URL (times: 1:17-1:38):

[https://calvertcounty.granicus.com/player/clip/1359?view\\_id=24&redirect=true](https://calvertcounty.granicus.com/player/clip/1359?view_id=24&redirect=true)



UMCES-CBL also continued its ongoing data collection to measure the impact of sea level rise at Parkers Creek. Four rod surface elevation tables (rSETs) were established in the Parkers Creek marsh in 2014 to measure rates of marsh surface elevation change. In 2020, rSET elevation readings were taken in May and October. Including the 2020 measurements, the rates of marsh surface elevation change at Parkers Creek were  $9.1 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$  (rSET 1),  $13.2 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$  (rSET 2),  $13.9 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$  (rSET 3) and  $5.9 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$  (rSET 4). Rates of relative sea-level rise (RSLR) in the area range from  $4.2$  to  $7.3 \text{ mm yr}^{-1}$ , thus the rSET measurements generally indicate that the Parkers Creek marsh is keeping pace vertically with RSLR.



Another successful 2020 research effort was the continuation of the forest diversity survey. Four more  $\frac{1}{4}$ -acre plots were established with the goal of capturing the diversity within the low-lying hydric habitats along stream valleys. These plots were dominated by pawpaw, musclewood, spice bush, American holly, and red maple. Ash trees were also documented within the plots which may provide valuable insight on the continuing impacts of the Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive insect species that has already caused damage to the ash trees within the watershed. ACLT now has data on the number, species, and size of trees in 22 different plots that encompass a variety of elevations, soil types, hydrologic conditions, and historical land uses. This data will provide a valuable baseline assessment of the forested habitats that ACLT manages and allow us to track changes overtime. ACLT plans to resume other baseline establishment initiatives such as the water quality blitz, macroinvertebrate monitoring, and bird diversity survey in 2021.

# Outreach & Membership

At the beginning of 2020, ACLT's Calendar of Events was packed with 10 on-site events, 6 guided hikes, 7 guided canoe trips, 6 off-site events, and 2 volunteer events.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020, the Outreach & Membership Committee (O&MC) was gearing up for its first big event of the year. It was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day and several events were planned – a guided family hike, a community clean-up, and of course our annual Earth Day 5K.

Like everyone else, the committee had to adjust. The O&MC didn't just throw up their hands and cancel everything. They got creative by converting some events to virtual and coming up with several brand-new events that were so popular, they will be added to the calendar every year, even after the pandemic is finally behind us.

The O&MC took advantage of the fact that outdoor exercise was not only still permitted but was encouraged. Because of this, the trails remained open with safety precautions put in place, including mask-wearing and social distancing. A "touchless" way for visitors to sign in using QR codes was also introduced. The number of trail visitors skyrocketed, with numerous reports from people who "didn't even know those trails were there". The number of trail visitors for 2020 is estimated to be over 68,000.



Help ACLT stop the spread of COVID-19!  
Use our new QR Codes to sign-in at our trails!

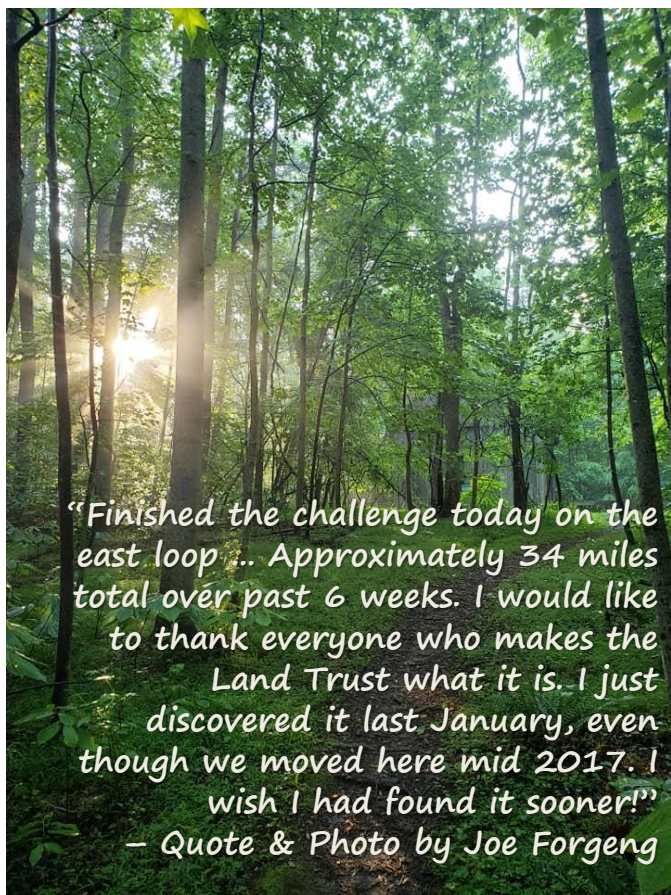
## 2020 Events

The first virtual event held was the Earth Day 5K. Participants were allowed to run, walk, or hike on their own time and in any location. As an additional way to raise awareness of the importance of conservation, a 50-day countdown to Earth Day was shared on social media, including daily posts about how to better care for Mother Earth.



Modern GPS-based tracking technology makes sharing virtual event results easy. Photo credit: Sam Prestidge

The Earth Day 5K virtual event was so popular, a 22-mile “Hit the Trails” challenge was introduced, where participants hiked all 22 miles of ACLT trails over the course of a 6-week period (although there was one brave group of young men who did it all in one day!)



*“Finished the challenge today on the east loop ... Approximately 34 miles total over past 6 weeks. I would like to thank everyone who makes the Land Trust what it is. I just discovered it last January, even though we moved here mid 2017. I wish I had found it sooner!”*  
 – Quote & Photo by Joe Forgeng

For several of the virtual events, private Facebook groups were created for participants. These groups helped build a real sense of community, with hundreds of photos being shared along with personal experiences among the group members. With the increase of trail visitors, the number of followers on ACLT’s social media accounts has also increased substantially. A live Facebook feed was added to ACLT’s website so that non-Facebook users can stay informed about news and events.



When it became obvious that the annual Sip & Save beer-tasting event would need to be canceled, the O&MC created the “Passport to Preservation” event. Participants were issued passports which they took to nine participating local breweries and wineries, where they could enjoy discounted drinks and get their passports stamped. The event was a win-win-win. The venues benefited by increased visitors. The participants discovered a fun way to escape from being couped up at home, and ACLT experienced increased exposure while highlighting the importance of supporting local agri-tourism businesses. At the end of the event, participants turned in their passports for a chance to win generous prizes donated by the participating businesses. Participants were also treated to two private concerts by southern Maryland natives Dylan Galvin and Longman Joseph Norris.



Photo Credit: Christina Castro



Photo Credit: Mark & Kelly Rinaldi



Photo Credit: Marci Phillips

As more became known about the way in which the COVID-19 virus was spread, it was decided that it would be safe to resume the canoe trips that had been planned. Eleven trips were conducted, including a special one for the October Celebration Weekend. A total of 209 people participated throughout the season.

Fifty-one athletes were able to participate in ACLT's immensely popular Parkers Creek Challenge triathlon since it is held outdoors with little or no close contact among participants. A virtual biathlon option was also offered.



Canoeing up Parkers Creek



2020 Parkers Creek Challenge

Another new outdoor event, "ACLT's October Celebration Weekend", was held in lieu of the annual dinner and auction. Since the auction is normally ACLT's biggest fundraiser of the year, the Celebration Weekend was used to launch and promote the fall appeal. The event was held on Saturday at the south side trailhead and on Sunday on the north side. Informational exhibits depicting ACLT's history and wide variety of programs were shared with visitors, as well as family games and another free concert by Longman Joseph Norris.

The year would not be complete without ACLT's annual Wreath and Greens sale, but it was not possible to hold the two-day wreath-making workshops since they were traditionally held indoors. Instead, we were lucky enough that the weekend prior to the sale was warm and sunny, and 20 volunteers gathered in the ACLT office parking lot and made over 50 wreaths, which sold out within the first hour of the sale.



October Celebration Weekend



Wreath-making Volunteers



Throughout the year, the O&MC continued to look for opportunities to engage the increased number of trail visitors. A new “Faces in Nature” photo contest was held, where participants snapped photos of “faces” they saw in the trunks of trees, rocks, etc. while hiking ACLT’s trails. The O&MC chose a photo depicting a smiley face in a log as the winner because who couldn’t use a smile in 2020?

A new digital scavenger hunt was also introduced. Participants use their smart phones to look for several objects along the trails. They are able to upload photos and even draw pictures of things they see during their hike. New winners are drawn each month and receive an ACLT neck gaiter and “Hike Local” decal.

### **Annual Themes**

The theme for 2020 was apropos: “Think Globally, Act Locally”. The global pandemic certainly brought issues of global concern home to all of us. ACLT had many ideas planned for urging people to “act locally” and because of the pandemic, people appreciated their local surroundings more – the ability to explore the 3,200 acres of wildlands that ACLT has to offer was just one.

The theme for 2021 is a celebration of ACLT’s 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, culminating in a celebration event in December.



ACLT’s 2021 Theme

### **Outreach & Membership Achievements & Goals**

The O&MC continues to look for ways to increase ACLT membership. In 2020, special event pricing was offered for participants who joined when registering. We ended the year with a total of 750 members, a 12% increase over 2019.

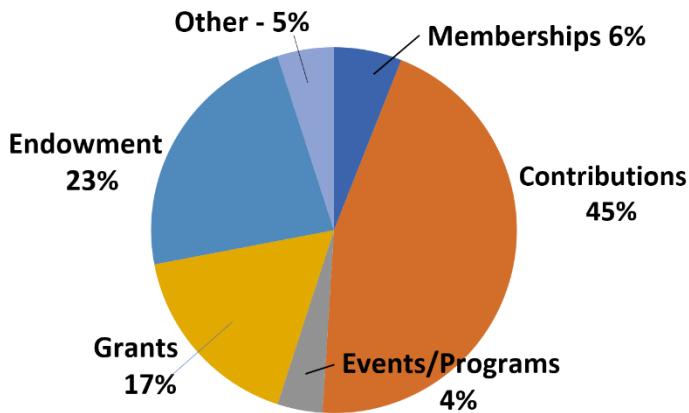
In addition to creating and implementing new events for 2020 and adjusting others to accommodate the COVID-19 restrictions, the O&MC and staff worked on several other projects, including rewriting its Charter, introducing a [new online store](#) that sells ACLT T-shirts, hats, and tote bags, and adopting two segments of roads as part of the State’s Adopt-a-Highway Program.

Despite not being able to hold the annual dinner and auction and other live events, the O&MC was able to increase the number of local business sponsors. In addition to the local breweries and wineries participating in the Passport to Preservation, several businesses sponsored the October Celebration Weekend by donating cash and/or prizes that were raffled off at the event. View our [ACLT Sponsors web page](#).

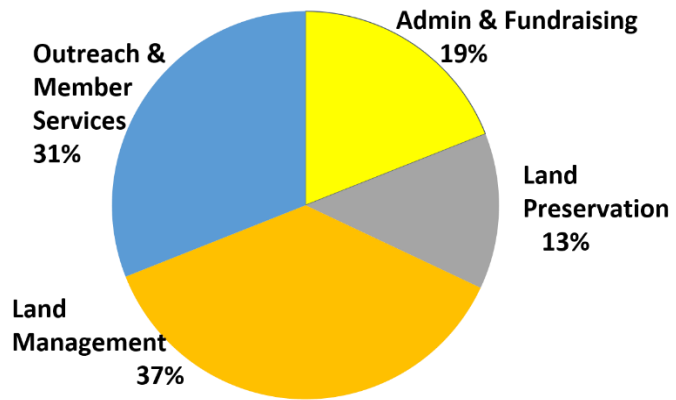
In accordance with the 5-Year Plan, the O&MC’s primary goal for 2020 had been to “pursue engagement of underrepresented communities including students, minority communities, young families, scouts, etc., for the purpose of broader diversity.” While the pandemic stood in the way of achieving this goal, the increased number of visitors has also raised awareness of everything ACLT has to offer to a wide range of populations, including minorities, young families, etc. The O&MC will continue to work toward this goal in 2021.

# Summary of Financial Status-2019 & 2020

## 2020 Revenue



## 2020 Expenditures



Operating Income	2019	2020
Memberships	\$21,090	\$29,920
Contributions & Memorials	129,418	234,710
Grants, General	90,921	89,708
Events Income	63,741	19,145
Endowments	112,100	118,200
All Other	36,224	20,773
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>453,464</b>	<b>\$518,412</b>

Year-End Special Fund Balances		
Funds	2019	2020
Land Management Endowment	\$2,279,395	\$2,489,602
Forever Endowment	714,560	865,439
Land Acquisition	294,804	302,494
Legal Defense	50,000	50,000
Building	54,473	52,820
Easement Monitoring	15,000	15,000
Repair and Replacement	19,450	11,439
Restricted Grants Carryover	54,474	10,368
Undesignated	240,000	240,000

Operating Expenses	2019	2020
Land Acquisition and Pres.	\$44,276	\$49,063
Land Management	127,448	134,193
Outreach and Member service	114,317	115,081
Admin. and Fundraising	69,676	68,789
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$355,717</b>	<b>\$367,126</b>

## **2020 ACLT BOARD OF DIRECTORS**


David F. Farr, President	Bob Field
Dawn Balinski, Vice President	B.L. Johnston
Gary A. Loew, Corporate Secretary	Ron Klauda
Cheryl L. Place, CPA, Treasurer	Steve Kullen
Richard Aldrich	John Little
Joy Bartholomew	Penny Moran
Walter Boynton	Suzanne Shelden
Denise Breitburg	Peter N. Stathis
Steven P. Cloak, Jr.	Robyn Truslow
Karen H. Edgecombe	Randi Vogt

## **2020 ACLT STAFF**

Greg Bowen, Executive Director  
Autumn Phillips-Lewis, Land Manager  
Miriam Gholl, Community Relations Manager  
Janel Young, Office Coordinator  
Rachel Delbo, CCC Intern (8/19-8/20)  
Charlie Kreizenbeck, CCC Intern (8/19-8/20)  
Alyssa Matanin, CCC Intern (8/20-present)  
Nicole Stevens, CCC Intern (8/20-present)

## **2020 ACLT VOLUNTEER STAFF**

Virginia Murphy, Membership Coordinator  
Susan Helmrich, Membership Coordinator



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