

# Minutes of the Annual Meeting

## American Chestnut Land Trust

### March 5, 2022

This meeting was held virtually on the Zoom App.

#### Call to Order

Dawn Balinski, Vice President, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. on March 5, 2022. She opened by reading President Dave Farr's remarks who noted ACLT members' participation and efforts and congratulated them on the progress and accomplishments of the past year. He urged members to "get out there, enjoy the results of their labor, and have fun." Dawn then spoke of her pride in being a part of this "small, but mighty organization that has done so much."

A poll was taken to vote on renewing the expiring terms of office of 6 current Board of Directors: Dawn Balinski, Bob Field, BL Johnston, Ron Klauda, Robyn Truslow, and Randi Vogt. Members voted their unanimous approval.

A stunning introductory drone video of ACLT properties was presented with juxtaposed text summarizing ACLT's activities and accomplishments.

Then Greg Bowen, Executive Director, presented his report, emphasizing that at ACLT we offer "hope, solutions, and actions to combatting the disastrous effects of climate change." Our green infrastructure protects natural land, thereby saving the Bay from polluting runoff.

Greg introduced the first guest speaker, Andrew Szwak, Mid-Atlantic Program Manager of the Land Trust Alliance. He spoke of the Alliance's appreciation of the work ACLT is doing to protect "special places" in Southern Maryland. Andrew noted that while he is greatly concerned re: the unprecedented levels of staff turnover that he is seeing throughout the field of conservation, ACLT has a tremendous staff, "top notch," that makes conservation look so much easier than it really is. The Alliance is trying hard to encourage and directly support organizations that are tackling some of the biggest challenges now, specifically: water, inclusive and community based conservation, and climate change. ACLT, he said, is addressing climate change by: protecting coastal forests, marshes, and other wildlife hubs; and figuring out how to adapt to a changing climate through best meadow practices, green infrastructure, and growing more sustainable food. All of these actions represent the potential that land trusts have nationally to be real game changers on climate. Andrew observed that ACLT distinguishes itself

additionally by advancing social climate actions: forming watershed friends' groups, holding outside events, exploring and expressing a detailed yet achievable vision and giving a voice to that vision, all of which are necessary to overcome the hurdles to achieving meaningful, scalable climate change action. The Alliance supports these actions: offering small grants for climate communications efforts, advocating for federal policies and programs that encourage renewable energy development without despoiling natural areas, etc. The Alliance's climate website ([www.climatechange.org](http://www.climatechange.org)) is becoming a go-to source for how land trusts can and do to address climate change.

Greg introduced the next two guests speakers, Carl Fleischhauer and Kirsti Uunila, researchers for the Parker's Creek Heritage Trail Project. Carl observed that the Project follows in the footsteps of ACLT's long-term interest in local and regional human history. As early as the late 80s, he noted, our trail maps highlighted cultural as well as natural sites: the cemetery and the Wallace house. Additionally, ACLT arranged for the continued cultivation of tobacco in our field by Wallace's grandson, refurbished the barn, interviewed the fisherman who had worked on the pound net fishing operation at the mouth of Parker's Creek in the 40s, and carried out archeological surveys that reminded us that people had been connecting with this land for at least 8,000 years. However, he stated that we have shared this information with visitors in very minimal ways. The Project will enable us to increase knowledge of the area and strengthen communication about regional culture and history. The research phase runs through '21-'22 and overlaps with the interpretative development phase running through '22-'23. The explanatory materials about the Holly Hill property, trail signs, and Web pages are the Project's first public outreach. The next will be the results of studies of land patents from the colonial period, noting the grantees' religious affiliations (Puritans and a few Quakers), and a study of steam boat wharves that served farmers and occasional tourists (Dares Wharf and Governor's Run).

Kirsti elaborated that their research also concerns the mid-19th century farm labor force. For example, they have found that the U.S. Government's "census of enslaved inhabitants" reveals that in 1850 James Chesley (buried in the cemetery on ACLT land) owned 7, providing ages but no names. By 1860 the number had grown to 24. In contrast, the "regular" census for the household of Henry Dare (previous owner of Holly Hill and Quakers) includes the language of "free Colored persons"(2 in 1820 and 1 in 1830). Neighboring farm households, possibly tenants, were also free Blacks (although still heavily constrained by Maryland law and custom).

They are also researching land ownership by African Americans in the decades after the Civil War. Joseph Wallace, a prominent landowner who had served in the U.S. Colored Infantry during the War, bought about 300 acres of land. Wallace helped lead the formation of Brown's

Methodist Episcopal Church, which later became the United Methodist Church. By 1970, after about 75 active years, membership had dwindled and the church closed. However, many people remain in the Church's informal community and family members are still buried in its cemetery. ACLT Board members Darlene Harrod and Shirley Knight are researchers for the Project.

Carl then noted that Brown's Church was given to Gladys Jones, a member of the extended Wallace family, for the purposes of preservation. Gladys leads a community group planning the restoration of the building. ACLT is supporting this effort in agreement with all parties that the refurbished church will be a great site on the Heritage Trail as well as serving as a neighborhood community center.

A series of reports highlighting achievements in 2021 were then presented.

Dawn Balinski presented the Land Acquisition and Preservation Committee Report, highlighting the purchase of the Governor's Run Development Corporation-Yowell property, the imminent purchase of the Yoe property (settlement expected around May), ACLT's work with Calvert Government to expand Rural Legacy areas, the formation of the Sustainable Calvert Network, successfully convincing the TDR Committee of the County to increase funding for their own land preservation program, and ACLT's launch of the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance in October, which has mapped out priority preservation areas for the 5 counties and set a goal of protecting 30% of all lands by 2030.

Cheryl Place presented the Treasurer's Report: ACLT's financial status for '20 and '21 is good. Income was \$448,272 and expenditures \$415,355. The \$46,000 loan that ACLT took out under the CARES Act to pay salaries during the COVID-19 pandemic is forgiven.

Denise Breitburg presented the Science Committee Report, enumerating the breadth of work performed by the Committee, and announcing the good news that Parkers Creek salt marsh surface elevation is keeping up with relative sea level rise and that nitrogen in streams is at safe levels. Denise applauded the work of Birgit Sharpe, who worked to produce the Parkers Creek Report Card.

Brigit described the health of the Parkers Creek watershed, including the lands protected by ACLT, citing the indicators measured to create the report card. She summarized that while currently the Parkers Creek Watershed is in "pretty good shape," it has its share of threats, from climate change to invasive species, and plans to increase the number of households in the county by over 800%. She noted that the Parkers Creek Report Card is available on-line and invited Board members to "check it out."

Next, Autumn-Philips-Lewis presented the Land Management Committee Report, which is chaired by Bob Field. The committee had a busy and productive year in 2021, including: conducting meadow restoration work, completing a 2.2 mile trail traversing the Holly Hill property, stabilizing the Holly Hill barn, removing the collapsed Holly Hill barn, renovating the Holly Hill house, controlling invasive species, monitoring and reporting on properties, working to maintain boundaries and control ATV damage on the Kenwood property, updating the Master Land Management Plan, producing crops on the Double Oak Farm (3,296 pounds) and fruits and nuts in the Food Forest (blueberries, blackberries, persimmons, cherries, figs, peaches, hazel nuts) donated to the food pantry, working towards solutions to prevent massive erosion on the Holly Hill property that is causing nutrients and sediments to be transported from the property down the Horse Swamp Stream into Parkers Creek and the Bay, and finally holding the 9th annual Maryland Master Naturalist class (19 graduates). She also recognized volunteers who had contributed more than 100 hours in 2021.

Miriam Gholi, Community Relations Manager, presented the Outreach and Membership Committee Report. She reported that 2021 was a remarkably successful year with ACLT remaining engaged with and expanding its outreach into the local community—none of which would have been possible without a lively group of volunteers under the leadership of Penny Moran, Committee Chair. Events included: 8 on-site events, 6 virtual events, 5 off-site events, 1 volunteer appreciation dinner, and 2 volunteer training sessions. Interspersed among these events were 12 guided canoe trips, 5 guided hikes, 12 members-only full moon hikes, and the weekend welcome program.

Volunteers also introduced new events: a blog series “The Secret Lives of Insects”, painting and hiding rocks along the trails, and on-line games to guess answers to nature trivia questions. Other new events included a “Valentines Day Hike for your Heart” (hand made recycled paper hearts embedded with native wildflower seeds hidden along the trail) and a 2-day live St. Patrick’s Day Children’s Leprechaun Hunt.

ACLT celebrated Earth Day by hosting a virtual and live 5K race and a trash pickup along ACLT’s 2 segments of roadways adopted through the State’s “Adopt a Highway” Program.

Over 200 people attended the annual “Sip & Save Beer-Tasting” event, the kick-off for the 2021 Land Acquisition and Stewardship Campaign. In October, the Parkers Creek Challenge was held. The winners came from Prince George’s Country after learning about the event on Facebook, thereby demonstrating the role that social media is playing in getting the word out about ACLT. On December 4th, two hundred people attended the culmination of our 35th

anniversary celebration with a Volksmarch, a hike from all three trailheads to the Holly Hill Barn, opening the barn to the public as the first of many stops on the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail.

Over 2,000 people participated in the “12 Hike in ’21 Challenge,” during which 200 champions hiked once a month every month throughout the year. Miriam noted that the ACLT Hiking Facebook has over 750 members. During the pandemic many new participants discovered our trails: approximately 74,000 visited, representing a 9% increase over 2020. And, the year ended with 820 members, a 9% increase over the previous year, thereby contributing to meeting the goal of the 5-year plan to increase membership. A new-member survey provides insight into the background and interests of members.

Miriam introduced the 2022 theme, “We Are the Change,” derived from a saying attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: “Be the Change You Wish to See in the World.” ACLT will continue its efforts to preserve more land and protect our watersheds, serving as an example for others.

Robyn Truslow presented the Administration and Fundraising Report. She reported that in the spring, ACLT started a 3-year Land and Stewardship Campaign to fund the purchase and preservation of 240 additional acres in the Parkers Creek watershed. In just one year ACLT received pledges exceeding its goal and will be able to move forward with installing solar panels at the Farm, the historic Brown’s Church restoration project, and the purchase and stewardship of the additional acres (ACLT will not need to take out a loan to close on the Yoe property). Since donations that rose to the level of streaming rights were received, numbered streams will soon be identified by name. Pledges exceeded goals of the year end appeal, kicked off with the 35th year end celebration at Holly Hill when a paddle raise brought in \$30,000. The Committee also met its goal of increasing the number of new land and general fund donors: 99 new donors of whom 55 were new land preservation donors. Robyn appealed to members to help the Committee grow its supporters. She also mentioned plans for a possible cookbook fundraiser featuring ingredients from Double Oak Farm, local watermen, and hunters and gatherers. She closed by thanking members for their generosity and continued support.

Greg made closing remarks, noting that “We are the change and we are making things happen.” Finally, he urged all participants to respond to a brief survey to let ACLT know how it’s doing. He then thanked members for being a part of ACLT and closed with a land acknowledgement of the indigenous people who initially inhabited and managed our watershed and who would likely approve of ACLT’s work.

Dawn adjourned the virtual section of the meeting at 11:15.

Following the meeting, members gathered in person at the Double Oak Barn for an outdoor picnic lunch from Dream Weaver Cafe followed by a hike on the new Holly Hill Trail. During the hike, presentations were given on two projects being considered for the future: Stream Restoration and Beaver Dam Analogs.

Approved BL Johnston

BL Johnston, Secretary