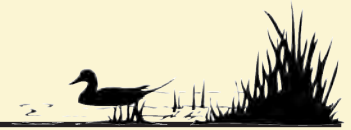


Watershed Observer



NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT LAND TRUST - VOLUME 37 No. 2 SPRING 2023

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Thank you to our members who attended the Annual Meeting on March 4. ACLT views this as an important event since it allows us to review recent accomplishments and inform the members of our plans. This newsletter summarizes the meeting for those who could not attend. We are always anxious to receive feedback which you can provide by completing our online survey. See page 7 for link.

COMING UP ON THE CALENDAR

April

15 thru 23 – Earth Day-Themed
“Story Walk” on Griffin
Meadow Trail

22 Sat – Earth Arts Fest – ACLT at
Annmarie Gardens

22 & 23 Sat & Sun – Earth Day
Highway Clean-ups

See full calendar on page 7 and on
our web site:

bit.ly/ACLTEvents23

ACLT'S 2022 Annual Meeting – Review of Another Successful Year

On March 4, 2023 over 100 ACLT members and supporters gathered at St. John Vianney's Family Life Center for the 2022 Annual Meeting and Luncheon. This was the first time since 2020 that we had been able to gather there. Below is a summary of the presentations made at the meeting. Topics covered at the Annual Meeting are also included in the 2022 Annual Report: www.acltweb.org/2022AnnualReport and newsletter articles referenced throughout this article. The 2023 Report Card prepared by Board member Birgit Sharp and our Science Committee is also available: www.acltweb.org/WatershedReportCard23Update.



Board President Dave Farr Opens the Meeting. Photo by Carl Fleischhauer.

State of the American Chestnut Land Trust Dave Farr, Board of Directors President

ACLT now owns 1640 acres of land, has a lease on 1800 acres of State-owned land, and holds easements on another 375 acres. ACLT is fiscally sound and our budget was in the black in 2022.

Board of Directors Slate of Members: Per ACLT's Charter, each year a Nominating Committee is formed to find candidates who will fill the needs of the Board. This year, the Board was looking for new members who would assist with addressing under-served populations, land management, and ongoing facilities projects.

Before sharing the biographies of the three new members, President Farr expressed gratitude to the two outgoing Board members: Suzanne Sheldon, who served 4 terms, and Walter Boynton, who served two terms. Suzanne is a prolific artist, with some of her paintings displayed in the ACLT office. Walter is retired from the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory and was integral in helping to orchestrate stream monitoring.

The three new member candidates are Jose Ballesteros, Jan Degeneffe, and Darrell Roberts.

Jose Ballesteros is a professor of Spanish and Writing at St. Mary's College and has been active in programs that empower under-represented students to take on leadership roles at the College. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. Jose lives in Dares Beach and has roots in Ecuador. He is a Master Naturalist and a member of the Outreach and Membership Committee and the Equity & Diversity Subcommittee.





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Published quarterly by the American Chestnut Land Trust. The ACLT is dedicated to the preservation of Calvert County, Maryland's Natural and Historical Resources. Since it was established in 1986, ACLT has preserved over 3,800 acres. We own 1627 acres, manage 1,810 acres owned by the State of Maryland, and hold conservation easements on 374 privately-owned acres. — Editors: Ellen and David Farr

Board of Directors

- David F. Farr, President
- Dawn Balinski, Vice President
- B.L. Johnston, Corporate Secretary
- Cheryl L. Place, CPA, Treasurer
- Richard Aldrich
- Jose Ballesteros
- Denise Breitburg
- Steven P. Cloak, Jr.
- Peter Daly
- Jan Degeneffe
- Bob Field
- Darlene Harrod
- Ron Klauda
- Shirley Knight
- Penny Moran
- Nathan (Nate) Novotny
- Darrell Roberts
- Birgit Sharp
- Robyn Truslow
- Frederick Tutman
- Randi Vogt

Executive Director

Greg Bowen

Community Relations Manager

Miriam Gholl

Land Manager

Autumn Phillips-Lewis
Clara Brill-Carlet, Assistant Land Manager

Chesapeake Conservation Corps Members

Grace Mayer
Kassandra Patrick

Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance Coordinator

Mary Hoover

Office Coordinator

Janel Young

Ann White, Contract Accountant

Volunteer Staff

Ginny Murphy,
Susan Helmrich
Membership Coordinators

Jan Degeneffe is one of ACLT's extremely talented "Flower Girls", spending countless hours working in the flower garden at Double Oak Farm. She is a Master Gardener and Master Naturalist and serves on Two ACLT committees: The Outreach and Membership Committee and the Land Management Committee. She has a BA and MBA from Loyola University, served four years in the Navy, and retired in 2012 from the Department of the Navy after 28 years of federal service.



Darrell Roberts is the Assistant to the General President for the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers. Darrell served in the United States Navy and the Army National Guard. He worked for 14 years as the Executive Director of the National Nonprofit Helmets to Hardhats and serves on several federal committees that address the needs of Veterans. He has worked for many years in the construction industry as a union sheet metal worker. He holds an MA from Georgetown University and a BA from the National Labor College.



The current Board of Directors who wish to serve another term on the Board are: Dave Farr, Cheryl Place, Richard Aldrich, Steve Cloak, and Penny Moran. The full slate was approved.

**Executive Director's Report —
We Are the Change
Greg Bowen, Executive Director**

Executive Director Greg Bowen began his presentation by stating that at ACLT, we are the change – the change necessary to address the climate crisis – at the County, regional, and national level.

One of the worst things about climate change is the feeling that what we do as individuals will not make a difference. But success in addressing climate change must happen from the bottom up and from the top down—from grassroots efforts to international agreements. ACLT members and supporters are making a change through volunteer work, financial support, and personal efforts to reduce waste and energy consumption.



ACLT is also making changes in the community through outreach and advocacy. Through our efforts, we have re-energized the land preservation movement and advocated for the elimination of proposed expansions of several Town Centers in Calvert County. These expansions would have had adverse impacts on traffic, the environment and citizens' quality of life. Greg thanked ACLT members who were involved in the efforts to stop the expansions. He also thanked Commissioner Buddy Hance, who was in the audience, for taking the lead on this initiative.

Greg then gave an overview of what is necessary to establish long-term conservation and stewardship of watersheds in Southern Maryland. We must first look at what the state as a whole needs to conserve and how we fit in. Maryland was the first state to set up an agricultural preservation program and it has protected the most land for its size, compared with every other state in the U.S.

The American Farmland Trust projects that we could lose another 178,000 acres of farmland by 2040 to low density residential sprawl, with 67% of it being nationally significant agricultural land. The World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature has called for the protection of 50% of Earth's lands and seas with a minimum of 30% to be protected by 2030 (the 30x30 initiative). Maryland is already close to that goal, having already preserved 29%. Greg believes we could preserve 50% by the year 2067.

To reach this goal, citizens must decide what types of land to preserve: Agriculture, access to nature, particularly in urban areas, protecting more green and blue infrastructure, or more wildlife habitat and corridors. Greg believes it is all of these things. We need to prioritize what needs to be protected and then take action. To really have a chance to slow residential sprawl and protect lands that we need to protect, we need a change in perspectives about land—a new vision of the real economic assets of our region—and an understanding that rural residential sprawl is not inevitable.

Green Infrastructure is The Future: Read more about Greg's proposals for boosting the local economy through green tourism in the Winter edition of the Watershed Observer here: www.acltweb.org/Winter23Newsletter.

Citizen Participation: Greg concluded by stating that citizenship is the cornerstone of society, and to enjoy the benefits of a healthy environment and an equitable, inclusive, and healthy community, we need to do some work. He asked for volunteers who are willing to write letters to elected and appointed officials and who are willing to speak at public meetings on topics of critical importance to land conservation. Members and supporters can sign up via the online survey.

Science in the Watershed

Clara Brill-Carlat, Assistant Land Manager, and Mary Hoover, Regional Conservation Coordinator for the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance (SMCA)

Clara and Mary were Chesapeake Conservation Corps interns last year. The 5-Year Capacity Grant enabled ACLT to hire them both as full-time staff members.

The 5-Year Plan requires that we make decisions about land management practices with science conducted here and elsewhere and to provide

Good News:

Maryland the Beautiful Act

Following the Annual Meeting, we learned that the Maryland the Beautiful Act passed both chambers of the Maryland General Assembly. The purpose of the new legislation is to establish a local Land Trust revolving loan fund which would consist of money from the state budget to the fund, interest earnings, and any other money from other sources accepted for the benefit of the fund. As per the legislation, "It is the intent of the General Assembly that by 2030, 30% of lands in the state are conserved and by 2040, 40% of lands in the state are conserved.

Conservation goals related to the initiative include sequestering carbon and greenhouse gas emissions in lands and waters of the state, focusing conservation work at a large landscape scale that is biologically and ecologically meaningful, preventing the extinction of native plant and animal species, stabilizing ecosystems and ecosystem services, restoring degraded ecosystems and maintaining ecological functions, and increasing economic opportunities for farmers, ranchers, fishers and foresters.

This is a huge win for the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance (SMCA). This group, formed by ACLT and the Maryland Environmental Trust, was one of the early advocates for the establishment of such legislation in 2023. We are also grateful to the staff of Forever Maryland for reaching out to legislators who would initiate such legislation.

Maryland is the 6th most densely populated state in the country and yet it has managed already to conserve 29% of the state's land mass. That work has been critical, but it must continue if we hope to succeed in addressing climate change and slowing or stopping residential sprawl into critical habitat areas. With this legislation it is hoped that land trusts will be able to move quickly when critical properties come up for sale so that the land can be purchased, conserved and resold to conservation buyers, thus returning the money for the next land purchase.

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

Forest Diversity Surveys: In 2022, staff and volunteers set up two forest diversity plots on the Yoe property. Along with existing plots on many of ACLT's properties, these new study areas will help us track the health and growth of our forests over time.

Fish Survey: After a two-year hiatus due to COVID, staff and volunteers conducted a fish survey to find invasive species in the creek.

Herpetology: Researcher and Science Committee member Chris Rowe continued his study of 5 vernal pools at ACLT, collecting data on the pools' physical characteristics and the amphibians found within. Read more about ACLT's vernal pools in a series of three blogs: www.acltweb.org/FrogBlogs.

Macros: ACLT completed the fourth year of our benthic macroinvertebrate survey to assess stream health. Samples were collected from seven stream sites on the Holly Hill property. Staff and volunteers noted disparities between the macroinvertebrate populations at different sites and observed how erosion and high sediment loads can negatively impact aquatic life. Read more in this newsletter article: www.acltweb.org/Winter23Newsletter.

Beaver Dam Analogs: Staff toured several sites in Maryland where these structures have been used to mitigate erosion, reduce sediment and nutrient loads, and improve wildlife habitat. In December, a permit application was submitted to the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Army Corps of Engineers to build beaver dam analogs in one of ACLT's eroded streams. Read more about Beaver Dam Analogs in this newsletter article: www.acltweb.org/BeaverDamAnalog.

Tidal Water Quality: In 2022, ACLT and the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory continued to collect water quality data in Parkers Creek in an ongoing effort to track water quality changes resulting from various external forces, such as climate change and development, as well as our own management practices.

Main Stem Water Quality: ACLT volunteers also collected quarterly samples for the non-tidal portion of the main stem of Parkers Creek. Non-tidal main stem data has been collected for Parkers Creek since 1998, but the 20+ years of data have yet to be analyzed for trends. In 2022, the Science Committee assembled a team to address main stem data analysis, as well as offer recommendations for the future of the program.

Water Quality Blitz: The 5th annual water quality blitz was held in 2022. Volunteers collected samples at 28 sites throughout the watershed. This year, a new site was sampled on Yoe property. The 2022 water quality blitz results for Parkers Creek were similar to the year prior, with only one site increasing in nitrogen concentration and several sites decreasing. The blitz results map shows that 25 out of the 28 sites tested are considered to have "good" water quality, based on the threshold of 0.7 mg/l total nitrogen. The three sites with "fair" NO₂₃ levels are all on the Holly

Parkers Creek Water Quality Blitz 2022 Results (NO₂₃)



Hill property near the farm. To address the issue of "fair" water quality on the Holly Hill property, ACLT land management plants native meadow buffers to capture nutrient runoff before it reaches the water, and conducting the yearly water quality monitoring allows us to track the efficacy of these management practices. Read more about water quality findings in ACLT's Watershed Report Card: www.acltweb.org/WatershedReportCard23Update

Friends Groups Get Involved in the Blitz: In 2022, the Blitz included ACLT's friends groups for Hunting Creek and St. Leonard Creek, along with its newest friends group, the Friends of Mill Creek (FOMC). To view the findings in these watersheds, visit the friends groups' web pages: www.acltweb.org/FriendsGroups

Other SMCA Work: The Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance continues to push for greater land preservation in the five-county region. SMCA has established priority preservation areas and monitors properties that come up for sale within this boundary. SMCA has also identified critical, at-risk properties and rallies support for their protection. In 2022, SMCA agreed on a goal for preserving 50% of Maryland's lands by 2050 and was integral in lobbying for the adoption of the Maryland the Beautiful Act (see sidebar on page 3).

Conclusion: As ACLT navigates the impacts of invasive species, development, and climate change on our ecosystem, knowledge is power, and collaboration is the key to success. The commitment to building multi-year datasets and monitoring long-term trends is critical. So, too, is the strengthening of partnerships like SMCA that address environmental threats from a regional perspective. In 2022, ACLT balanced the old and the new, as well as the local and the regional, thanks to the work of staff, science committee members, and many other dedicated volunteers.

Donor Relations Committee Report

Robyn Truslow, Chair

Robyn reported that the fundraising focus in 2022 was meeting the Capacity Grant challenge, which is \$100,000 per year for five years. We were successful in meeting and exceeding the challenge in 2022.

The Committee is always looking for ways to increase the number of new donors and retain current donors. Annually, ACLT raises about \$30k in new income from new donors but loses about \$40k in income from lapsed donors. Robyn asked the audience for help in answering this question: How can current supporters help bring in new donors? Suggestions included:

- Invite friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues to ACLT events and on hikes
- Share why you support ACLT
- Engage on social media
- Engage with fellow hikers
- Invite friends and family to volunteer with you

A new part-time position was created thanks to the Capacity Grant. Chris Riollano was hired as the Donor Relations Coordinator and will be helping to recruit new donors and retain existing ones.

Treasurer's Report

Cheryl Place, Treasurer

Contributions and event revenue rebounded in 2022 as we were able to hold the auction and other in-person events, resulting in a \$64K surplus. A full financial report is included in the Annual Report: www.acltweb.org/2022AnnualReport

Land Preservation & Acquisition Committee

Dave Farr, Chair

The 162-acre Yoe farm, the largest remaining unprotected property in the Parkers Creek Watershed, was purchased in 2022. Dave recognized John and Jim Yoe, who were in the audience. ACLT also purchased a parcel on tax sale near the end of Parkers Creek Road. The Committee is always on the lookout for properties to preserve through easements and other mechanisms.

Outreach & Membership

Miriam Gholl, Community Relations Manager

For the work of ACLT to succeed, it is critical that we connect with the community and share with them our passion for land conservation and fighting climate change. That's where the Outreach & Membership Committee (O&MC) comes in. Read more in the Annual Report: www.acltweb.org/2022AnnualReport

5-Year Plan Goals: The 5-Year Plan goal for Outreach & Membership is to 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.

Connecting with the Community: Through ACLT's events and programs, we inform & educate people about the importance of land conservation, the benefits of protected lands, and the threats facing natural areas. We involve the community by providing opportunities for them to help us in our conservation efforts by volunteering, attending events, joining one of our various committees, etc. We are constantly working to increase membership and to stay connected with members and donors, frequently letting them know about the work we're doing and getting feedback from them about our progress and programs.

The O&MC strives to connect with underserved communities to ensure that everyone has access to all that ACLT has to offer. In 2023, the O&MC will be partnering with Calvert Family Advocates (CFA), which is a nonprofit that works with the Department of Social Services and the Public Schools to help families in need. We have arranged for CFA to host a guided canoe trip this summer for some of the families they serve. We are also planning a joint event centering around Martin Luther King, Jr. Day next January.

Land Management

Autumn Phillips-Lewis, Land Manager

A land trust is charged with not only preserving land, but stewarding it in perpetuity. At ACLT, our Land Management staff and volunteers work hard to accomplish the hefty task of safeguarding and improving over 3,500 acres of forest, meadow, marsh, and farmland, and providing sustainable public access.

Meadow Restoration: In 2022, the 4th and final meadow buffer was planted around the farm fields on the Holly Hill property. The three meadow buffers that were planted in the last three years are thriving and were successful in attracting pollinators this year.

At the South Side Trailhead, the meadow site preparation process began with a controlled burn to clear thatch and spur the growth of invasive Chinese lespedeza seeds in the seed bank. This was followed by an herbicide application in June to remove invasive plants and prepare the site for planting with native grasses and flowers.

The Yoe property has about 11.5 acres of meadows spread among nine different sites. Meadow areas that have begun to grow up with trees are being reclaimed to maintain them as early successional meadow habitat.

Yoe Property Erosion Project: Since purchasing the property, Land Management has worked with Calvert Soil Conserva-

tion District to address an existing erosion issue caused by stormwater runoff from Route 4. Soil Conservation designed the plans and a contractor will complete the project to stop sediment and nutrients from being washed downstream, and to restore farm road access to the southern portion of the property.

Invasive Species Control: One of the greatest threats to biodiversity in the watershed is the presence of non-native, highly invasive wavyleaf basketgrass, which has already spread across more than 60 acres of forest floor. In 2022, staff and volunteers spent over 300 hours cutting and pulling the grass to prevent it from going to seed. Read more in the Fall 2022 Newsletter: www.acltweb.org/Fall22Newsletter

Invasive control efforts also continued in the marsh in 2022, with work to control a 4th patch of phragmites. We cut 20,000 sq ft of phragmites and laid plastic down to solarize the area. Staff has secured funding from a DNR Aquatic Invasive Species Control grant to cover the materials and staff time to complete this work.

Staff also enrolled ACLT in the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Stewardship Program, which will provide funding for our land stewardship initiatives over the next 5 years.

Property Monitoring: ACLT conducted its annual monitoring of each fee simple property and on properties on which we hold a conservation easement. These annual visits are required to uphold Land Trust Alliance Accreditation standards and are important for helping us identify and address issues on the properties.

Trail Maintenance: Land Management staff and volunteers continued to maintain ACLT's 24 miles of trails in 2022, including completing major re-routes and boardwalk and step construction projects on the PF2Bay trail, Parkers Creek Road Trail, and Cemetery Trail.

Double Oak Farm: In 2022, staff and volunteers installed a new, stronger fence around the farm to protect the crops from deer, ground-

hogs, and other animals. 2,961 pounds of fresh produce were donated to the St. John Vianney Interfaith Food Pantry, and several fruits and vegetables also won awards at the county fair.

Maryland Master Naturalist Class: ACLT hosted its 10th annual Maryland Master Naturalist class in 2022. 18 participants completed the 16-week course and have now joined our excellent group of active Master Naturalist volunteers.

Volunteer Recognition The following volunteers who recorded 100 or more hours in 2022 were recognized:

Jan Degeneffe	Dale Hutchins
Jim Degeneffe	Liz Laher
Kevin Donahue	Penny Moran
Tom Dugan	Pat Morrison
Kathy Ellwood	Ginny Murphy
Bob Estes	Birgit Sharp
Judy Ferris	RT West
Bob Field	Ron Wilson
Susan Helmrich	



Attendees Enjoy Lunch & Fellowship. Photo by Carl Fleischhauer.

Coming Up, A Time to Self-Evaluate!

By Greg Bowen, Executive Director

One of the strengths of ACLT has been its willingness to take the time to prepare and implement five-year plans. Our 2019-2023 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 was a huge step for ACLT but our members asked for it in a workshop held in 2018, and the Board at the time thought that direction was appropriate and included it in the Plan.

The Plan noted that “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.” So how have we been doing?

One way to evaluate our efforts is to look at the summary of key new features in the Five-Year Plan:

- 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.

One of the advantages of preparing a Five-year plan is that it allows us to think big; to look back at what we've accomplished and to decide whether any new directions are required for ACLT to create the change needed to maintain or restore our own watershed and watersheds throughout Southern Maryland.

At the 2022 annual meeting held on March 4th, committee presenters reported on progress being made in implementing the current five-year plan. We have posted a version of the Plan on our website with accomplishments highlighted: www.acltweb.org/5-Year-Plan-Update. Not every action has been implemented but there has been progress on most.

Five-Year Plan Survey: We are in our final year of the 2019-2023 5-Year Plan. Attendees at the annual meeting were asked to complete a survey to answer these questions, among others:

- Is ACLT’s Mission still the right one for the organization?
- Are the goals in the Plan still applicable?
- How are we doing?

We encourage all ACLT members and supporters to complete the survey. Please go to: www.acltweb.org/5-YearPlanSurvey



Fill Out Our Online Survey!

We want to hear what you think!

... not just about the Annual Meeting presentations, but your opinions about what needs to be included in the 5-Year Plan Update.

www.acltweb.org/5-YearPlanSurvey

ACLT 2023 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April through October

Please check website for up-to-date information.

bit.ly/ACLTEvents23

APRIL

- 15 thru 23 – Earth Day-Themed “Story Walk” on Griffin Meadow Trail
- 22 Sat – Earth Arts Fest – ACLT at Annmarie Gardens
- 22 & 23 Sat & Sun – Earth Day Highway Clean-ups

MAY

- 13 Sat – Parkers Creek Challenge (Check-in at 9:00am/Race Begins at 9:30am) at South Side Trailhead
- 27 Sat - Mountain Laurel Guided Hike (Tentative-Based on Bloom Time) on Laurel Trail

JULY

- Date TBD – Guided Early Morning Hike at North Side Trailhead

AUGUST

- 26 Sat – Guided Evening Hike – Farewell to Summer (time TBD) at South Side Trailhead

SEPTEMBER

- 10 Sun - Sip & Save (1pm-5pm) at North Side Trailhead

OCTOBER

- 8 Sun – Annual Dinner & Auction (4pm-8pm) at Jefferson Patterson Park

Change is Coming. Grow Into It

by Cassandra Patrick, CCC Intern/Double Oak Farm Manager

Note: This is an abbreviated version of Cassandra's article. To read the full article (including sources), go to <https://www.actweb.org/blog/ChangeIsComing>.

Our food systems are under threat, and our food systems are threatening us. Threats to us come from agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions, but climate change caused by the emissions threaten agriculture as well, and by extension all food systems, through catastrophic weather changes. Luckily, agriculture has the potential to reverse its own trends by becoming more ecologically friendly.

Changing farming practices across the globe to incorporate perennial crops, cover crops, minimal tillage, and other sustainable practices would not only sequester more carbon but also improve soil health and food production. The problem is the fact that our current food system does not support farmers trying to adopt these practices. Farming careers are undervalued by society, leading to interested young people being discouraged from going into the field and people who do work in the field being subjected to poor working conditions, low pay, and little to no benefits. I love agriculture, and I would love nothing more than to farm for the rest of my life in a way that serves the Earth and the communities around me. If I thought that it was possible for me to start farming as a career and have good working conditions, a living wage, and benefits, I would have already been farming while I was still attending college, gaining the experience to continue in the field as I worked toward my degree in Environment and Sustainability. I may have even chosen to focus my major electives around agriculture and food systems, but farming as a career path just did not seem feasible. Luckily for me, I found a way to start farming by becoming to ACLT's Farm Manager. Working for ACLT has not only allowed me to gain valuable experience necessary to improve as a beginning farmer but has shown me the inherent value of stewarding the land one farms.

As things stand, land is mostly seen through its ability to be exploited, leading to prime agricultural land being degraded or developed before a single crop can be grown. Food systems are disconnected from the people they feed, leaving them incredibly vulnerable to disruptions to supply chains. Food that cannot be moved goes bad and becomes food waste, while people facing food insecurity go hungry. Despite the above systemic issues impacting the food system, a lot of public pressure has been directed towards farmers. Farmers are told that their practices are hurting the planet, and that they need to change and be more sustainable or regenerative, which means different things depending on who is asking. When so many definitions of "sustainable agriculture" and "regenerative agriculture" exist, what are we asking from our farmers, and are the changes we're asking for feasible?

The definitions of "sustainable" and "regenerative" seem to constantly morph. There are widely accepted aspects of both, but there is no standard that says any aspects must be included. Therefore, rather than attempt to craft a universal definition, I aim to argue for what I believe "sustainable agriculture" and "regenerative agriculture" ought to mean. Sustainable agriculture ought to mean farming to sustain public health, environmental health, and farmers' financial health.

To solve the first two issues, sustainable profit for the farmer is key because directing our money toward sustainable agriculture collectively assigns worth to ethically grown, nutritious produce; When our money is put toward resilient food systems, the systems can continue to provide for our communities during times of economic hardship and supply chain shortages. All farmers, whether they own land or work on a farm, deserve fair, livable wages and healthcare.

If separating the term "farmer" from "landowner" confuses you, it's likely because the two have been synonymous in America for decades now. Not Our Farm, a non-profit organization that represents people who have chosen farming for their career but do not own land, has interviewed many farmers currently employed as farm workers, farm employees, members of farm crews, farm managers, and apprentices and interns and asked them who should be considered a "farmer." Quotes from the farmers interviewed point out that the terms "farmer" and "farm worker" perpetuate a class difference and power imbalance between agricultural landowners and people who work for them, that sometimes landowners do not personally farm their land, and that gatekeeping of the term "farmer" is often said to be based on years of experience despite immigrant farmers with years of experience being labeled as "unskilled labor." Devaluing the work required to produce food creates situations where farmers who don't own farms contribute valuable, skilled labor yet still go unprotected by minimum wage laws.

On the land-owning farmers' side of things, profit margins are incredibly slim and getting slimmer as input costs continue to rise. Research on global farming economics has shown that farmer owners receive an average of 27% of what consumers spend on food if the food is sold and consumed in their home country, and the percentage drops if the food is exported, which it often is in the US. In fact, the same 2021 study found that the average return in America is much lower than 27% at an average of 9%. The American Farm Bureau Federation reports an even lower rate of return of only 8 cents per dollar a consumer spends. The infographic puts into perspective just how tight a profit margin that is. Could you survive selling heads of broccoli?

Enter regenerative agriculture, which ought to mean farming to restore and improve public health, environmental health, farmer's lives and livelihoods, and the culture of farming. The American idea of agriculture is dominated by the idyllic vision of small farms centered around the family unit, but this vision is only one way of farming, rooted in cultures in large part due to colonialism. Colonizing countries enforced their model of farming onto new areas while culturally disconnected from the previous history and cultures of the land they were farming, meaning they lacked an essential motivation to foster land stewardship. Regenerative agriculture's fourth goal is to recreate those cultural connections. In the words of Jason Gerhardt, a 2023 Pasa conference speaker who presented on Community Action Farming, "The real point of regenerative agriculture is to regenerate the culture of agriculture." Whether land is farmed by a family or communally, all farms need the support of the people they serve. Like the relationship between agriculture and climate change, the relationship is two-way. Cultural support for farmers leads people to care about the land and its management, protecting agricultural land and farmers' access to it. Farmers who are integrated into a culture of agricultural appreciation can have a dialogue with the people they feed about community needs and the farming practices used to make their products, which creates trust in the farmers' produce and an appreciation of their work, ultimately leading to a dedicated customer-base that will be less phased by higher prices that internalize the full cost of farm production.

How do we rebuild the culture of agriculture? Firstly, we restore the land. Once again, when I say "restore," I am referring to more than just ecological restoration. We need to reconnect the stories and traditions of the landscape with the people living on it, cultivating their appreciation of the land and stimulating their imagination with ideas for a future in harmony with the land. Doing so also serves to connect people within a community through a shared local culture. Secondly, we empower communities to create robust local food systems. Reconnecting people not only to their neighbors, but also to their food and the land that they inhabit is essential to rebuild the value of farming within American culture. Finally, we mobilize as communities in financial support of agricultural practices that serve the goals of the first two steps. The food systems these practices support will create long-term, fresh, nutritious, and local yields of produce and animal products that can meet community needs. These financial systems won't be one-size fit all. In some places, there may be family farms, while in others, there may be community gardens. Some communities may utilize land protected by conservation easements, while others may participate in co-op farming. Whatever works best for the people involved is fine, as long as it stabilizes the profit of agriculture, allowing for farmer owners to live well despite incurring extra costs to farm in an ecologically and public-health conscious way, for farm-employed farmers to receive a living wage and other neces-

BROCCOLI BREAKDOWN

Could you survive selling heads of broccoli?



431,610 HEADS AS A FAMILY OF 4

— TO CLEAR MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME —

169,208 HEADS AS A FAMILY OF 4

82,866 HEADS AS A SINGLE PERSON

— TO CLEAR THE POVERTY LINE —



\$0.08 PER DOLLAR
RETURN TO PRODUCERS



SOLD FOR \$2.05 PER
CROWN ON AVERAGE



6TH MOST POPULAR
VEGETABLE IN 2021

sary benefits, and for the community to directly benefit from the extra dollars they choose to spend on food grown and raised fairly and consciously.

A transition is coming whether we want it to or not. 50% of agricultural land is set to change hands in the next two decades. 78% of young farmers do not come from farming families. Luckily, if anyone has experience adapting to dynamic, ever-changing systems, it's farmers. But they are not well prepared for the coming change. They can't be, because their level of preparedness depends in large part on the support from the people they feed. The best thing that all of us can do to create change is to buy local. It's the key action to create the financial conditions for regenerative agriculture and resilient food systems. The second-best thing we can all do is grow some of our own food. Doing so will protect us from the next break in the global food chain, will help us understand the time commitment and skilled labor of farmers, and will create a personal connection to the land literally in our own backyards. These actions will defend our food systems from threats of all nature, from climate change to pandemics, and they will demand that our food systems no longer threaten our health and instead increase our quality of life. If change is inevitable, then let's take a lesson from our farmers and grow into it.



Do you know what farming practices are used to grow your food? Education, communication, and trust between producers and consumers are essential to rebuilding the culture of agriculture.

ACLT's Wildfire Response Plan

By Clara Brill-Carlat, Assistant Land Manager

Although they are typically small, wildfires can and do occur in Maryland. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) Forest Service fights an average of 123 wildfires each year, many of them covering less than 10 acres. If a wildfire broke out at ACLT, the response would require collaboration between the Forest Service, ACLT, and our local fire departments. ACLT currently owns and manages over 3,500 acres of land, some of which is adjacent to homes and communities like Scientists Cliffs. To protect our land and keep our neighbors safe, ACLT and MD DNR began developing a fire plan this past fall for ACLT's owned and managed property.

The goal of the plan is to ensure that a wildfire response at ACLT is as efficient and successful as possible. The plan contains maps and descriptions of the locations of trail access points, structures, and water sources. Since many of ACLT's trails are too narrow for ATV access, this information will assist the Forest Service with taking the quickest route for personnel and equipment in the event of a wildfire. The plan also outlines evacuation routes from different areas of ACLT.

In addition, the plan includes information about how a wildfire at ACLT might behave. For example, topography influences fire behavior, so a fire would be expected to burn more erratically on steep slopes and more slowly in flatter areas. The Forest Service also uses "fuel models," which are estimates of how quickly and intensely a wildfire will burn based on the types of fuel (vegetation, trees, woody debris, and leaf litter) available. In a hardwood forest, which makes up the majority of ACLT's land, a wildfire would be expected to burn slowly and close to the ground with low flame heights.

Of course, fire can have many benefits for ecosystems, such as spurring seed growth, clearing excess thatch and underbrush, and creating meadow habitat. For example, if fires are suppressed, meadow habitat will diminish without active management as trees like sweetgums and tulip poplars spring up and the meadow turns to forest. ACLT has recently used a combination of controlled burns (completed by the Forest Service) and herbicide applications to preserve meadow habitat and control invasive species. However, an uncontrolled, unwanted fire can be far more destructive than beneficial. In the event of such a fire, ACLT and the Forest Service have a plan.

Sources:
"Wildland Fire in Maryland," Maryland Department of Natural Resources. <https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/pages/wfm.aspx>

Thank you for your support

New Members

ACLT welcomes the following new members since the Winter 2023 Newsletter:

Joe Cholka & Katherine Lambert
Amanda & Eric Christensen and Family
Erik Cribbs
James Earp
Susan Farnsworth
Jeannie Howe & Alan Kreizenbeck
Jacqueline & Alexander Jaffe and Family
Kim Jones & Peter Legg
John & Sherry Kirby
Cindy Pearson & Jerry Wilkinson
Christopher Rodkey

Memorial Donations

Thank you to the following who made a memorial contribution since our last newsletter:

In memory of **Paul, Doris & Don Berry:**
Marsha Berry

In memory of **Tina Boesz:**
Sondra Pace

In memory of **Robert Davis:**
Brett & Janice Davis
Carolyn Keefe

In memory of **James B. Greene, Jr.:**
Toni & David Boughton
Twin Hickory Elementary School

In memory of **Daniel Head:**
Greg and Linda Locraft

In memory of **Alberta Moran:**
Mary & Stephen White

In memory of **Amy Platnick Bonham:**
Kathleen McGillicuddy

In memory of **Jonathan Warner:**
Nancy Warner

In Honor of Donations

Thank you to the following who made an "in honor of" contribution since our last newsletter:

In honor of **ACLT Staff Members:**
Judith & Donald Dahmann

In honor of **Joy Bartholomew:**
Samuel Berson
Andrew Edmondson

In honor of **Mary Ellen Boynton:**
Jessica Boynton

In honor of **Jeff Buyer & Molly McCarty:**
Susan & Toby Buyer

In honor of **Margaret Dunkle:**
Barbara & Samuel Dyer

In honor of **Marie and Randy Estabrook:**
Irmela Levin

In honor of **Janis Hurst & David Elington:**
William & Jacqueline Sasser

In honor of **Ken & Mary Ellen Romney:**
Kathy Daniel

In honor of **Peter Vogt:**
Volker Vogt

In honor of **Peter & Randi Vogt:**
Miriam Gholl

Gift Memberships

Thank you to the following who donated a gift membership since our last newsletter:

Andy Berlett
Greg Brown
Nancy Klapper

Sustaining Membership

Congratulations to those who have reached the level of Sustaining Membership:

Darlene Harrod
Ron & Kathy Klauda
Brian "Keith" Linville
Merrily Smith

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Why does it say "Or Current Resident" in my address?

In order to use your donations as efficiently as possible, we use USPS Bulk Mail and this statement is now required in the address. Thank you for understanding!

Help Us Grow!

Thanks to your support, ACLT has grown into a vibrant land conservancy with a bright future. For this year's Spring Appeal, we are focusing on growing our donor and membership base and we're asking for your help by ...

- talking us up to your friends and family - tell them why you support ACLT
- inviting them to hike with you or attend one of our many events
- inviting them to volunteer with you at ACLT
- following us on Social Media and sharing our posts or sharing your own photos of the beauty of ACLT with friends and family
- Giving the gift of an ACLT membership (go to www.acltweb.org/membership)

Please use the form below to send in your Spring Appeal Donation. Make checks payable to ACLT and mail to: P.O. Box 2363, Prince Frederick, MD 20678

Or donate online at www.acltweb.org/donate

Your Name	
Your Address	
Your Email	
Your Phone #	
Donation Amount	\$

The American Chestnut Land Trust is a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. A copy of the current ACLT financial statement is available on request. Requests should be directed to the American Chestnut Land Trust, Inc, P.O. Box 2363, Prince Frederick, MD 20678 or call (410) 414-3400. For the cost of copies and postage, documents and information submitted under the Business Regulation Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland are available from the Secretary of State.