

**Minutes of the January 20, 2024 Board of Director's Meeting
American Chestnut Land Trust**

Call to Order

Dave Farr called the ZOOM meeting to order at 9:05 am on January 20, 2024.

Items mailed to Board Members in advance of the meeting: Packet1 (January 11), Packet2 and Power Point Slides (January 18), Donor Relations Report (January 20).

Board Members Present on Zoom: Dave Farr, President; Dawn Balinski, Vice President; Secretary, BL Johnston; Cheryl Place, Treasurer; and Members Richard Aldrich, José Ballesteros, Denise Breitburg, Father Peter Daly, Jan Degeneffe, Bob Field, Darlene Harrod, Ron Klauda, Shirley Knight, Penny Moran, Nate Novotny, Birgit Sharp, Robyn Truslow, Fred Tutman, and Randi Vogt.

Board Members Absent: Darrell Roberts.

Recognition of Service of Board Members (Dave Farr)

Dave acknowledged the years of valuable service by Board members rotating off the Board this year: Denise, Robyn, and Birgit.

Approval of November 28, 2023 Minutes: (Dave Farr - Packet1 pps. 3-7)

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2023 Board Meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.

Approval of March 4, 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes: (Dave Farr - Packet1 pps. 8-9)

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the March 4, 2023 Annual Meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report (Cheryl Place - Packet1 p. 10-14)

Cheryl noted that the financial reports are very preliminary and will probably change: the 2023 statements will be presented at the Annual Meeting. Major contribution categories were well over budget and included a \$50,000 anonymous gift. Because of robust contributions, ACLT took only \$85,000 of its appropriation from the Endowment and no appropriation from the Forever Fund. Expenses were slightly over budget (102%) primarily because of the expenses incurred to meet the requirements of almost \$20,000 in new grants that were not originally budgeted. Invested funds benefited from a positive market; the Forever Fund is now over \$1,000,000. In December, the Land Management endowment was reduced by the \$85,000 appropriation to operations. The Forever Fund received a \$140,680 bequest. Costs related to the new roof and solar panels at the Yoe house decreased the Land Acquisition Fund by almost \$25,000, and the Repair and Replacement Fund was reduced by almost \$7,000 in costs related to the siding project and painting.

Edit Committee (Greg Bowen - Packet1 pps. 15-33)

Greg thanked the Edit Committee for their contributions to editing the Five-Year Plan, especially the revisions of the Mission and Vision statements. He also recognized Penny's contribution in suggesting that all of the advocacy work be compiled into a new separate Advocacy Section that includes: SMCA's work, Sustainable Calvert's work, and the Board's active involvement on the Zoning Ordinance, etc. Penny pointed out that ACLT's Land Acknowledgement Statement & Pledge has been added on the first page of the Plan.

A motion was made to adopt the draft Plan. The motion was unanimously approved.

Nominating Committee Report (BL Johnston - Packet1, pps. 34-35)

Denise asked if she should recuse herself: her husband, Mark Smith, was one of the final nominees. Since the vote had already been finalized, and Denise had recused herself from that vote, it wasn't deemed necessary.

BL presented the process and procedures for selecting the top candidates to join the 2024 Board. Of 24 candidates suggested by Board members and gleaned from lists of suggested candidates from previous years, the top 6 candidates were selected in ranking order based on their skills and experience. Although only four positions will be vacant, the additional two were included should one or even two of the top candidates decline Greg's offer to serve. Greg noted that the prioritized list submitted by the Committee is actually much longer, but should 3 or more refuse, he would come back to the Board before proceeding.

A motion to accept the Committee's recommendations was made and unanimously approved.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Report (José Ballesteros)

José noted that his Committee is excited that the Land Acknowledgement Statement was approved and that they are now in the implementation phase. The Committee is developing a plan to see how the Statement will be used to inform the internal work we do at ACLT. The action item is to decide when the formal Statement will be read at **public** events and when at **member** events. After discussion, two statements were proposed: "The reading of the Land Acknowledgement shall take place at any and all **public facing** events sponsored by ACLT that include welcome remarks" and "The reading of the Land Acknowledgement shall take place at any and all **member** events sponsored by the ACLT that include welcome remarks."

A motion to adopt these 2 statements was made and unanimously approved.

Land Management Committee Report (Bob Field - Packet1, pps. 36-56 and Packet2, pps. 1-18)

Bob presented a slide of topics from the Land Management Committee Report submitted at last month's meeting including: Double Oak Farm, Science Committee, Meadows Update, Parkers Creek Conservation Society Update, Oriole Trail opening, Grant applications, Property monitoring, Invasive control on the Yoe property, Office siding, Dorsey easement violation, and Emily's Capstone. He reported that his Committee had developed goals for 2024 that support the Five-Year Plan, a lot of which are continuing efforts regarding the trail system and invasive removal, meadows establishment, agriculture, etc. Some new specific goals were added: installing beaver dam analogues in the headwaters of the Horse Swamp and then working with the Science Committee to evaluate their effectiveness, designing and building a three some mile standalone trail on the Yoe property with a trailhead and parking in the adjacent property, and hosting the 12th Maryland Master Naturalist class.

The Committee has approved the updated Invasive Species Control Plan; Bob asked for Board approval.

A motion to approve the updated Plan was made and unanimously approved.

Bob noted that:

The Farm provided over 3,600 pounds of fresh food to the pantry this past year.

After several years of preparation, they plan to plant the small meadow behind the Double Oak property. The Soil Conservation District will use “no-till drill” to prepare the meadow for planting. In the last couple of months they have done a lot of work to get the new Oriole Trail open. It has 4 bridges and will eventually be opened up to cycling.

They completed the monitoring of the easement and fee simple properties using volunteers.

Eventually they plan to monitor the DNR managed properties as well using volunteers.

They have spent a lot of time this fall working on the Yoe property, removing Chinese Privet and Bittersweet along Route 4 and have started on the edges along the fields, which will be ongoing work.

They have installed the siding on the Office and painted it; “It looks beautiful!”

They are continuing to work with the County on the Dorsey easement violation. Wentworth Nursery has been dumping things there for years. Wentworth has cleaned up a little, but not the brunt. The County attorney has met with the owners and Autumn is putting together an onsite visit with the Natural Resource Division, the County attorney, the owner, and ACLT.

Outreach and Membership Committee Report (Penny Moran - Packet1, pps. 57-58)

Penny reviewed the Committee’s activities and events since our last meeting:

The Wreath-Making Workdays were a big success; 15+ volunteers over 2 days created ~55 wreaths (“some gorgeous”), and they sold out almost everything within the first hour, making a net profit of about \$4,500.

Almost 32 artists have registered for Plein Air; Penny read Mimi Little’s comments posted on Facebook.

The Volunteer Appreciation dinner was held at the Scientists’ Cliiff’s Community House on December 7; 65 volunteers came.

She then reviewed 2024 activities:

The first day hike has already taken place. Trailhead parking lots were full all day.

So far there are 364 participants in the ’24 Double Challenge, which has raised \$4,300 in donations.

Upcoming calendar events are posted on the Website of which she highlighted several, including: the Oriole Trail Opening & Volksmarch, the Valentines “Show Some Love”, the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail presentation at the library, the Annual Meeting & Luncheon on March 2, and the Leprechaun Hunt on March 16. Five people have registered for the Master Naturalist Class; it usually requires 17 to make it work.

Facility Committee Report (Greg Bowen for Darrell Roberts - Packet1, p. 59)

Greg reviewed projects:

The Yoe House’s ground-mounted solar array is being designed.

Progress on the Double Oak Offices includes painted siding and new lighting in the unfinished basement.

Darrell is trying to find the cause of the basement leak, and gutter guards have been installed. They are trying to determine if mold is still a problem and need to repair the slab under the porch.

Remaining work on the Holly Hill House involves work on the front steps, a new electric box, and stopping the leak after big rainstorms. They are looking into a sump pump for the basement.

Land Acquisition and Preservation Committee Report (Dave Farr - Packet1, p. 60)

Dave presented a map showing ACLT's preservation priorities for 2024-2028. He asked for a motion to approve the priority list of preservation properties in the Parkers Creek Watershed.

A motion was made and approved to adopt the prioritized list.

Dave reported that the Vaughan property is under contract with Calvert Farmland Trust. Greg interjected that he is very excited about this project because they are following the technique that ACLT proposed: buy, conserve, and then resell to conservation buyers. They already have a good contract on the property to buy it. They have worked out an agreement with Southern Maryland RC&D for how to move forward with the Legacy Program to conserve it: they have come up with contracts to sell the 40 acres on the west side of the road as one lot and 176 acres on the east side as another lot, and that would be all the development allowed. It would have not just the basic easements conditions; they're proposing to put in protections for habitat, increased buffers for streams, and other protections so that it will remain very good habitat for wildlife, birds, etc. It is also within Fish and Wildlife's area of interest so it helps advance their work as well. This is very important and ACLT got it started. Greg is glad to see that Calvert Farmland Trust took our idea and went with it. It was actually their idea originally he noted, as they used it for TDRs; we showed them how to make it work with Rural Legacy.

Dave then reported on the 550-acre Girl Scout property in Prince George's County, known as East Marlton, now owned by the Prince George's County of Department of Parks and Recreation. It was originally purchased by the Girl Scouts who had plans to develop it.

Donor Relations Committee Report (Robyn Truslow - January 22 e-mail)

Robyn reported that the end of the year appeal was a success after the great start with the paddle raise. They used a very soft approach, she said, not wanting to imply that there was an urgent need for funding. Donations to the General Fund by December 31 were ~ \$183,000. They received an additional 24 in the new year. Robyn credited Penny and Miriam and the Outreach Committee members for their great work. She also credited Darlene's cookbook initiative for reaching new audiences that will make a long-term difference for ACLT as long as we maintain relationships. She dubbed Father Daly's video "Brilliant" and Greg noted that there have been 88,000 visits to that site. She is hoping to host another workshop about wills sometime soon. They will probably postpone the next donor update meeting until April or May.

E-Tapestry's count of new donors in 2024 is 103, probably slightly inflated.

Darlene estimates that ~ 239 cookbooks have been sold. Robyn added that Darleen had talked to a lot of people at the King's Day Program who hadn't heard of ACLT before and ~ 7 copies were sold there. The Committee met the 2023 Challenge Grant.

She mentioned the February 15th Local Black History meeting, where Carl, Darlene, and Shirley will present *Family Highlights from the Parkers Creek Heritage Project*. Next Sunday is the "big conversation" about the racial wealth gap, which focuses on land and home ownership and the impact that this gap has had on the Black community. ACLT's topic is heritage trails; Robyn loves that we have the new land acknowledgement statement that will be included.

Science Committee Report (Denise Breitburg - Packet2 pps. 19-20)

Denise noted that the Science Committee had the first of their 2 annual meetings a few weeks ago, where they went over everything that had been done in the past year. Next month they will be having their planning meeting.

She quickly summarized the previous year's work:

The marsh restoration research project led by Melissa McCormick is complete. The "take home" message is that when phragmites are eradicated in the fresh water areas, native plants will tend to come back on their own, but in the saltier parts of the system, it is important to replant the area with natives using large plugs as soon as possible to stabilize the sediment.

During a night-time visual count of snakeheads in Parkers Creek to determine whether they are abundant enough to worry about, Autumn and her team only saw three. They know that they are out there but don't have sufficient data to determine their abundance. They will plan to do a nighttime survey every couple of years.

Data collected from the installation of poles with heights marked will be a fairly low cost/labor intensive way to help figure out how the beaver analogues affect water levels and sediment accumulation. Data collected at a control site and 3 places that will be affected by the analogues once they go in will determine if they are meeting goals. The magnitude of this study will require some external grant funding, so hopefully the data collected this way will be helpful for a proposal.

A macroinvertebrate survey was completed in the streams near Holly Hill and another at a little distance where the stream communities are showing up as fair to poor with one being very poor, probably reflecting severe erosion problems at the Holly Hill edge. Denise clarified that a fair rating doesn't necessarily mean that there's a problem, it can just be that it's not great habitat for stream macroinvertebrates. But the areas downstream of the grand canyon that are showing up as very poor are probably reflective of real problems.

The water quality blitz reveals that, in general, nitrogen concentrators in nearly all streams are very good with the exception of some slight exceedances of desired levels near the Holly Hill farm.

However, the results of the Friends' groups show lots of indications of high nitrogen levels that probably warrant attention.

Statistical analyses at 24 forest diversity plots have so far been completed, which will allow ACLT to track changes in tree abundance, diversity, size distributions, and growth over time for the effects of climate change.

New reports are being incorporated into the ACLT Report Card for the Annual Meeting. As Birgit rotates off the Committee, a new lead will be needed for this effort. Denise emphasized that the report card is as much a communication tool as a science report and could be done by someone from the Outreach Committee with the help of people from the Science Committee.

A bird survey was done this year but data haven't been analyzed. Bob Boxwell is stepping back and Denise has been talking with Sherman Suter, who is an avid birder with lots of science background: he has some ideas as how eBird can be used to continue the bird surveys.

Best estimates are that deer are currently near, or may exceed, sustainable levels. Denise is talking with drone experts about the possibility of using drones to conduct future surveys.

Executive Director's Report (Greg Bowen - Packet1, pps. 61-61)

Greg informed the Board of several FYIs:

A proposal to create the Harriett Brown Park, which includes a trail head for our trails, has been drafted. This is not a sure thing yet as the trail will have to cross open space up from a subdivision that goes between us and *the PF to Bay Trail*.

Greg has received a report from Terraforma, a group that provides insurance for ACLT on properties that we hold easements on. There are concerning trends nationwide about condemnations, for oil pipes for example, on conserved properties. There are also attempts to extinguish these easements that are already in place, not in Maryland so far, but that could be problematic for us. Terraforma is keeping an eye on it and they're fighting their fights for us at the national level.

Greg then turned to our Capacity Grant work. He briefly reported on the highlights: SMCA's success with the Girl Scout property, Calvert Farmland Trust conservation properties, SMARTA actions sending recommendations to County staff on ways to promote bicycle safety on County and State roads, a new Friends of Halls Creek group, working with Chesapeake Beach for the Fishing Creek World Legacy area, and the Beaver man analogue cameras for which we have good background data thanks to an additional staff person, Clara.

Greg reported on the status of the proposal to work with Scientists Cliffs on the Steve Easter Trail. The Scientists Cliffs Association voted to come up with an MOU for ACLT to take over management of the trail, which gives us access to the property. Otherwise we would have to create a new trail to get access down to that area so we could monitor it. It also gives us the potential for being able to have a trail that would take us to the top of the cliff. There are concerns that this trail would have an impact on a Bald Eagles' nest that has been there for a number of years. Greg had discussions with Fish and Wildlife; A Fish and Wildlife expert on Bald Eagles has assured him that since ACLT's property is 2,000 feet from the nest, it is not within the recommended protected area of a 330 foot radius where human activity might disturb the nest.

With regard to the off-site trail head at the Yoe property, our attorney has said that our proposed wording is legally sufficient. Greg was supposed to meet with the owner of the church property, but Covid prevented that. Greg thinks that we are close to signing the agreement that will give us a nice parking area off the Yoe property.

Greg mentioned our watershed stewards in action. At Prince Frederick Boulevard where it intersects with MD 231, there is a project that has been under construction. A lot of dirt has been bulldozed since a permit was issued in 2017, but work and inspections have stopped. The storm management device has failed, resulting in a river of sediment flowing down into Hunting Creek for the last 7 years. Ron Klauda and Bob Estes brought this to the attention of the County who committed to taking action. If they don't, some Friends' members are going to follow up. In the Parkers Creek watershed, Bob and Ron have been working to protect the upper reaches of our watershed: first to try to get the County to work to get a shared parking agreement at the site where the County administration will be located, doing their own survey for 6 months, and submitting data proving that additional parking is not needed, with no effect. The site plan was approved, showing additional cleared forest land. Additionally, the plan did not seem to realistically show that the slopes, which are on a steep grade, could be controlled. The land was cleared and made open for water to drain down into one of the main tributaries of Parkers Creek. The first storm came, blowing out a number sections through there. After the County was informed, they did make more significant improvements to control the water. Greg concluded by saying that it takes watershed stewards to get this hard work done.

Further to the interest of the Board, Greg was able to reach the owner of the Helfrich property, who was receptive to our creating a trail across his property to connect to the trail on the Yoe property to the West Gravatt property. He asked Greg to come up with a couple of plans as to where we would like to cross his property. He also didn't rule out the possibility of selling the property. Autumn will come up with a couple of design options.

Ann Swanson will be the keynote speaker for the Annual Meeting. She was the Director of the Chesapeake Bay Commission when it was set up. She's pressed forward continuously to do what she could to save the Bay. She's a great communicator who knows how to relate to citizens who don't have all the same science understanding. "She can tell the story so that we know where we are and what needs to be done." And her view is optimistic. Greg thinks she will give us a hopeful presentation and also how we fit into the picture.

In response to a question from Dawn, Greg spoke of the Patuxent River Commission and his excitement about what they're doing: coming up with their own Report Card which he thinks will be a good analysis of the current situation. He asked Fred Tutman to chime in. Fred said that there's an effort to resuscitate the Patuxent Summits on an annual basis, which will be an opportunity to convene real strategy talking and "holding feet to fire". He emphasized that there's a need for some kind cohesive game plan because we are in real "crunch time" in terms of population growth and the unwillingness of various jurisdictions to say "no" to much of anything that might bring new tax revenue. "We're dealing with a finite resource without a really coherent game plan."

Adjournment

There being no other questions or comments, a motion to adjourn the meeting was unanimously approved at 10:43 am.

Approved:

BL Johnston, Secretary