



Page 4 The lasting impact of HCLT's Kids in Nature program

Page 5 2020 Donors, honors and gifts: the generosity that got us through a difficult year



Highlands-Cashiers LAND TRUST

"Saving Special Places since 1909"

Spring 2021

Blue Ridge Forever
www.blueridgeforever.info

Looking Forward

Dr. Gary Wein, Executive Director

The last 15 months have been truly surreal. The COVID pandemic has put a new spin on everything we do.

I want to personally thank all the many HCLT supporters, the HCLT Board of Directors and my awesome staff, Julie, Kyle, Logan and Sarah, for the heroic performance during the past year.

We survived 2020 and also had a good year for conservation, accepting four new properties (see page 3 for details). We continue to work on an additional eight projects, six conservation easements and two land donations. We anticipate all of these will be completed in 2021.

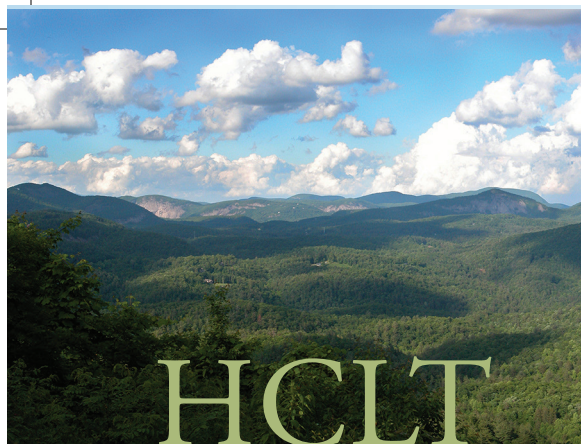
In addition to working on land conservation, the Stewardship staff are hard at work with the Highlands Plateau Greenway, creating a new loop trail at Kelsey Preserve and a second trail at Brushy Face Preserve. They have been treating hemlock trees for the hemlock woolly adelgid and gearing up to treat our invasive exotic plant species such as Japanese knotweed.

We are particularly excited about partnering with Canty Worley and Sonya Carpenter to establish the new pocket meadow at Dixon Woods and continue the plantings at McKinney Meadow. Right now, the pocket meadow looks a bit like a moonscape but I promise there are 20 pounds of wildflower seed in there that should emerge this spring.

The last year has forced us to think about new ways to do things safely. As 2021 moves along we have embarked on the development of educational videos, self-guided nature trails and homework kits as important elements of our Kids in Nature Program. In-person classes are beginning if our staff and participants can do so safely. Look in this newsletter for the Village Nature Series 2021 schedule on the back page.

The HCLT staff looks forward to returning to our work spaces at the Peggy Crosby Center. My home office, the coffee table and couch, is beginning to look a bit overwhelmed with all the unfiled papers. Maybe by the next newsletter we will all be back in our Highlands offices continuing to conserve and protect the special places in our mountains.





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The mission of the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust is to protect valuable natural resources for all generations.

Our Needs Continue

This time last year, I would never have dreamed that the COVID pandemic would be a threat for so long. I suspect that most of you would not have either. But here we are, still contending with it. The available vaccines give us hope, but variants continue to worry the experts.

Your Land Trust has managed to prevail throughout the crisis. Our stewardship, education and outreach programs have continued pretty much unabated, although often in a different format. For example, our Village Nature Series offerings have essentially been virtual, but still operating. As a result, our expenses have continued unabated as well. While we are most grateful for all the financial and other support we received in 2020, we continue to need your help, now more than ever. Last year was the first time in quite a while that HCLT didn't borrow money to provide the necessary cash flow, but only because of the Payroll Protection Plan which is not available to us this year.

We continue to hope that we can initiate an Endowment Campaign in the future, to enable us to avoid having to borrow. To succeed we will need you, and will call on you when we are comfortable launching the campaign.

We also encourage you to urge our business community to provide financial support to our mission. The land available for public use that we own and protect is, we believe, one of the attractions that lure so many people to our plateau, which is undeniably beneficial to our local businesses.

With your support, we can keep on Saving Special Places.

*Yours in conservation,
Carlton King*



Carlton King, President

**Please donate today.
We need your support now.**



Hover phone camera to donate online at hicashlt.org

SAVE MTNS

Want to leave us in your will? Contact your financial advisor. Our Tax ID/EIN # is 56-1216642

Announcing new giving levels for 2021! Please check out the enclosed giving envelope for new levels.

They left a legacy

We lost several friends in conservation recently with the passing of Tim Campbell, Bill Christopher, Bill Ray and Caroline Simmons.

Tim Campbell was a true champion for the land. Tim and his wife Emily, along with a small cast of conservationists, donated six conservation easements totaling nearly 260 acres. Bill Christopher and his wife Lucy conserved a property that is home to old growth trees near one of the most pristine and intact rivers in the eastern US. Bill Ray conserved a property that protects some beautiful and mature northern hardwood forests and other high elevation and rich forest species. Christine Simmons donated HCLT's second conservation easement ever that protects farmland, forest, and a long section of Clear Creek; she occasionally invited kids' camps and school groups to use the property for educational events.

These friends made a lasting impact on the future of our landscape here and we are thankful for them. If you would like to learn how you can leave a legacy through conserving your land contact us at info.hitrust@earthlink.net.

Stewardship Activities

Fighting Fire with Fire: Prescribed Burning

Kyle Pursel, Stewardship Director

Prescribed burns, sometimes also called controlled burns, are a tool used by land managers to reduce fuels, reduce woody vegetation density and release nutrients.

Prescribed burns are done only when the conditions allow, avoiding times when it is too wet, windy, or dry, so that the fire intensity is such that it only burns the materials and area desired. By burning in a controlled manner when conditions are appropriate, land managers can reduce the risks that a burned tract will have enough fuel for a more catastrophic wildfire when conditions are drier and windier. Burning is also important for maintaining open habitats that many species of plants, pollinators, and birds require to thrive, many of which are now rare due in large part to fire suppression. Lastly, burning helps release nutrients locked up in dead wood, leaves, and pine needles that would otherwise take years or decades to be released via decay.

Some species, such as table mountain pine, are so reliant on the type of disturbance that fire creates to germinate, that their cones only open in extreme temperatures to release their seed such as those seen in fires.

After years of hearing about it from friends and colleagues, last year I finally



finished the appropriate training and became eligible to help on prescribed burns in the Southern Blue Ridge. For the past few months, I have had the privilege to help on a number of prescribed burns across the area. Seeing

as fire is an important and useful tool in a land manager's arsenal, I am happy to gain the experience and knowledge necessary to hopefully put to use one day on HCLT lands.

Watching the fire creep through the forest "low and slow", as is desired in prescribed burns, it reminded me of how fire can be thought of like a car. In the hands of the experienced and knowledgeable, both cars and fire are tools that can prove highly useful.

However, if used inappropriately or in a manner that removes the element of control, both can be capable of great destruction and sorrow. Watching the flames can be mesmerizing, but one must always be vigilant. Watching for snags that can cross the fire lines if they caught fire and fell, keeping an eye on the weather and relative humidity to make sure the conditions don't allow the fire to grow too intense, and making sure embers don't float up and cause spot fires outside the desired burn area are crucial. It takes many people to ensure a prescribed burn remains controlled and useful, and I am proud to now be one of them.

HCLT's Newest Land Projects

LITTLE PINES

Tim and Emily Campbell donated a 7.6-acre tract at the corner of Salt Rock and Windover Roads in Jackson County in 2020. The tract is adjacent to Castor Farmstead, a 12.7-acre tract donated to the Land Trust in 2018. We hope to initiate habitat restoration for the golden winged warbler later in 2021 on these two properties.

KELSEY TRACT ADDITION

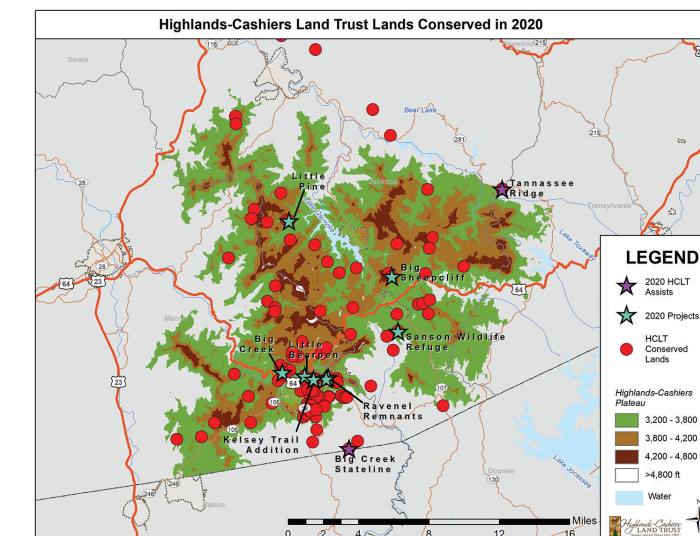
Berryman and Ruth Edwards donated a one acre lot off of Big Bear Pen Road that is immediately adjacent to the HCLT Kelsey Trail Preserve. This additional acre includes a legacy trail, a new Highlands Plateau Greenway trail, and a connection to Big Bear Pen Road right of way.

BARSTOW LOT

David and Marcia Barstow donated a 2.2-acre lot between Laurel Heights and Sequoyah Ridge Roads in Highlands. This is a residential lot that we hope to offer for sale in a couple of years. In the meantime we have to remove some English Ivy; anyone up for a day pulling weeds?

LITTLE BEAR PEN ALONG HWY 64

A coalition of land owners led by Cantey Davis donated 28 acres along the eastern side of Highway 28 between the Town of Highlands Community Center and Sherwood Forest Road. We would like to construct a trail from the Community Center to Sherwood Road that could provide a wonderful loop for the Highlands Plateau Greenway.



Kids in Nature

A lasting impact



I have only been with HCLT as the AmeriCorps Member since September, but I have already seen the impact of Kids in Nature. This program connects children and their local environment through HCLT-protected properties.
Logan Kallam

Sarah Pursel, Education Coordinator, Development Assistant

Since 2013, HCLT has been working with local children's groups to provide environmental education through our Kids in Nature programs. For several of these groups, we've offered monthly programs during the school year. Those programs halted early in 2020 due to the pandemic, but this spring, we were able to get back out on the trail with one of our partners, the Gordon Center, an after-school group for children in grades K-5. The kids that come into the Gordon Center at kindergarten often return year after year until they age out of the group. Since HCLT is now in its eighth year of serving groups like the Gordon Center, we have seen several of these children grow and have observed remarkable gain in their progress toward environmental literacy.

HCLT's Kids in Nature programs play a role within a larger long-term effort toward environmental literacy. According to The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), environmental literacy is achieved over a lifetime. It begins with many opportunities to explore the environment in an equitable and positive setting, which helps develop an awareness and personal connection to

one's local surroundings. Environmental literacy is met through instruction that fosters an active learner's innate sense of curiosity and desire to build on knowledge and skills. HCLT's Kids in Nature programs provide these kinds of positive explorative opportunities for our partners, but it can be difficult to assess the immediate impact of our programs. Sometimes it takes stepping away and coming back to see the progress.

This March, we took the Gordon Center on a walk at Brushy Face Preserve. The kids had all been there before with us, but not since 2019. They remembered significant parts of the trail, like the big "mother" white pine, the streams that cross the trail, and the salamanders and crayfish who call those streams home. Some of the older kids who have been participating with us for several years, impressed us with some of the specific things they remembered: identifying a rhododendron, spotting

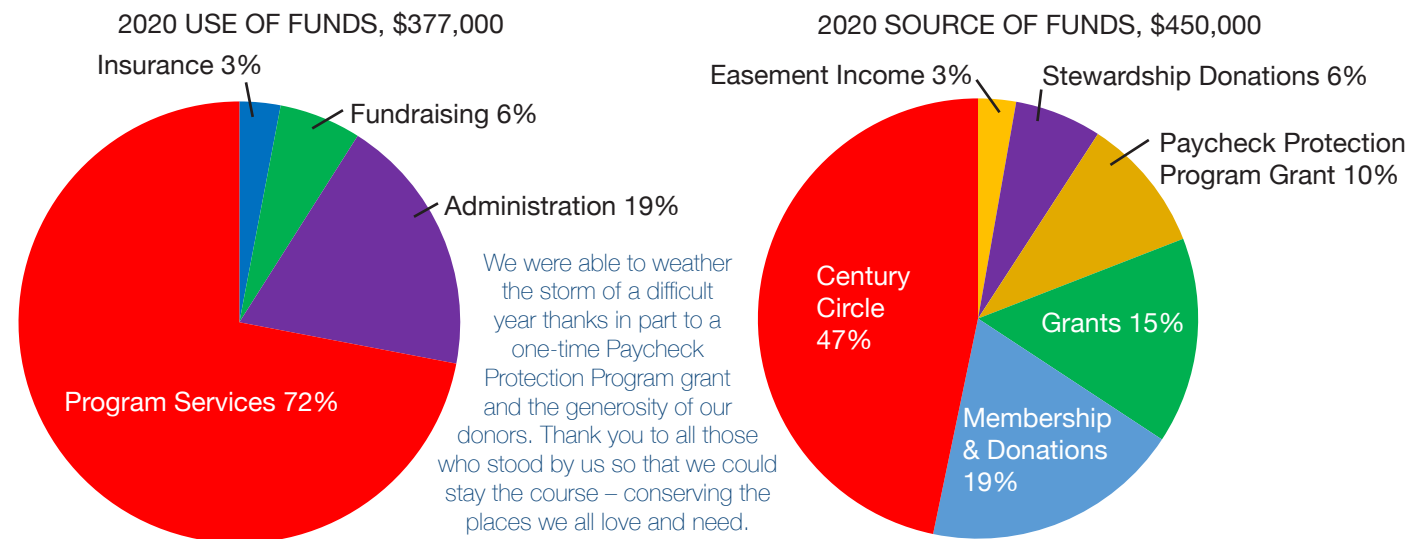
a swallowtail butterfly, recognizing the difference between a hemlock and a white pine, and pointing out the fact that the bright spots on the spotted salamanders indicate that they are toxic to predators. We were blown away with the knowledge that they seemed to have accumulated during our past times together and not forgotten between the gaps in our visits over the last year.

These specific bits of information indicate the first steps toward environmental literacy - developing a sense of place and awareness, and beginning to absorb the information creating a foundation to build on. It is our hope that they will seek to increase their knowledge as they are exposed to other outlets for environmental education, with us and beyond. While the past year may have presented many challenges and fewer opportunities for outreach, it has not set us back. The seeds we have planted continue to grow and we will continue to nurture the growth in environmental literacy we have begun.

We are grateful to our Kid in Nature Grantors (listed on page 7) who continue to see not just the short-term goals, but recognize the potential long-term impact that programs such as ours are likely to have on the future land stewards in our community.

HCLT Financial Statement

January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020



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Our donors make everything we do possible. Thank you!

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In honor of Dr. Charles and Silvia Wilhelm
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To learn how you can honor a loved one with a tree at Elizabeth's Orchard, email julie.hitrust@earthlink.net.



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NATURE
SERIES
2021**

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Final Tues, Apr-Sept
5-6 PM

To receive free Zoom link email:
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April 27: Restoring Our Earth - nurturing life in our backyards
w/Sonya Carpenter

May 25: Hope for Hemlocks w/Hemlock Restoration Initiative

June 29: Take Nothing But Pictures, Leave Nothing But Footprints
w/Friends of Panthertown

July 27: Secrets of Snot Otters w/NC Wildlife Resources Commission

August 31: Along Came a Spider w/Alyssa Fuller

September 28: Howling for the Red Wolf w/WNC Nature Center

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