



American Chestnut Land Trust

20

ANNUAL
REPORT

25

676 Double Oak Road | P.O. Box 2363 Prince Frederick, Maryland 20678

info@acftweb.org | (410) 414-3400 | www.acftweb.org



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & PLEDGE

Adopted November 2023

ACLT acknowledges that the land it stewards, including the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds, is the ancestral home of the Peoples of the Piscataway Confederacy and other Indigenous People. Further, we recognize the people of African descent, enslaved and free, who once worked on or owned the farms, the land of which is now stewarded by ACLT. We recognize the contributions made by these displaced and enslaved peoples in the face of injustice and inequity and acknowledge our obligation to maintain the land and educate the public in such a way that their spirit and heritage are not forgotten.

Accordingly, ACLT pledges to continue its fundamental mission of connecting all people to the land by providing equitable and inclusive access to the lands we steward, through ongoing research and education about the land's inhabitants and their history, and through outreach to all, particularly those most affected by societal inequities. As a leader in land conservation and preservation we strive by example to foster a feeling of belonging to this region and at ACLT for all its diverse communities with the hope of a more equitable and sustainable future in Nature for all.

VISION FOR ACLT IN 2028

ACLT is a recognized leader and advocate for land conservation and preservation. It has expanded the land it owns and manages in the Parkers Creek and Governors Run Watersheds, where it employs best management practices to conserve, protect and restore healthy, resilient ecosystems. ACLT connects people to the land by providing public access to its well-maintained trail system and through its broad range of recreational, educational, cultural, and agricultural activities. ACLT strives for diversity, equity, and inclusion in all that it does.

ACLT is a strong advocate for land preservation and conservation in Calvert County and Southern Maryland. It is a model for other land trusts. Robust and financially secure, it serves as a regional center for rural lands stewardship, research, and wildlife observation, appreciation, and protection. ACLT is a catalyst in forming alliances and partnerships with other nonprofit organizations, governmental entities, businesses, and the broader community to build a large network of permanently preserved land and to foster a strong and positive land ethic throughout the region.

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MISSION STATEMENT

The American Chestnut Land Trust (ACLT) preserves and conserves the natural and cultural resources of the Parkers Creek and Governors Run Watersheds for the benefit of this and future generations. We provide environmentally sustainable public access to managed properties for educational, scientific, recreational, and cultural purposes. We promote land conservation and preservation throughout Southern Maryland.

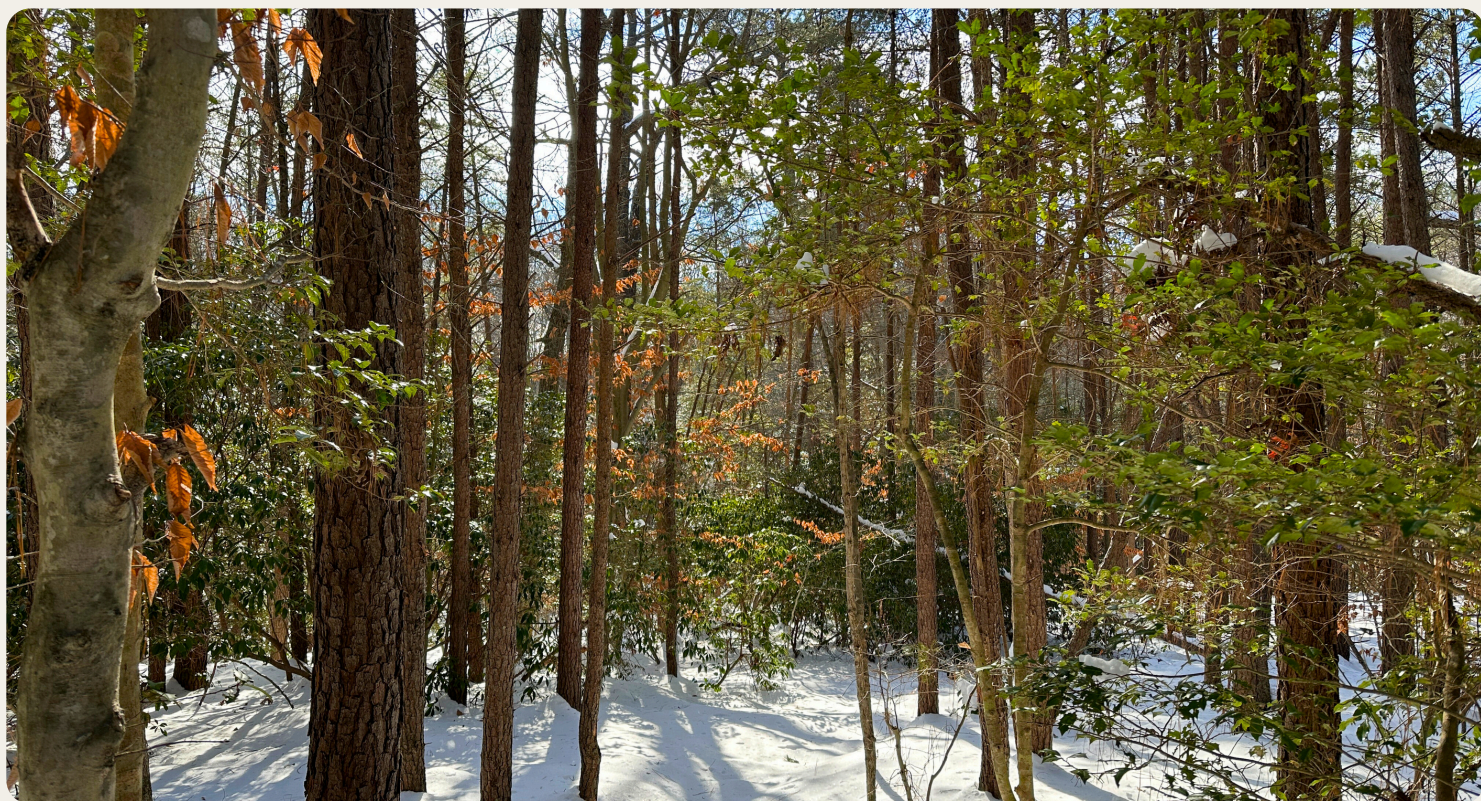


EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

5-Year Plan Goal: Management of ACLT Operations - To retain an effective and efficient operation, guided by the Standards and Practices set by the Land Trust Alliance, with adequate operating and capital funding resources, to conduct the mission and to achieve the vision of ACLT.



2025 was a year of change and challenge for ACLT after our long-time Executive Director, Greg Bowen, passed away suddenly in February. **However, ACLT showcased just how resilient and capable our organization and its people are in the months that followed.** As you will see by reading through this Annual Report, we continued to make great progress on all aspects of our current 5-Year Plan, which was adopted by the Board of Directors in early 2024. We continued to be the **leaders in land conservation and stewardship in Southern Maryland**, and we connected people to the land while working to **ensure our spaces and programs were welcoming and accessible to all.**



A new President of the United States in January meant that 2025 was a year of change outside of ACLT as well. In many ways, this change also resulted in widespread challenges for the national conservation movement as a whole. **At ACLT, we did all we could to support positive change for conservation at a more local level.** Beyond our vital on-the-ground work throughout Southern Maryland, ACLT and its Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance (SMCA) partners pushed back on the Maryland State budget proposal to completely cut funding for Program Open Space for the next 5 years. This program is the primary method for preserving agricultural and natural lands throughout the state, and **thanks to the work of ACLT and our SMCA partners, funding was reduced but not completely cut as originally proposed.**

More locally, ACLT has supported the **re-opening of the Transferable Development Rights program in Calvert County.** After a 13-year moratorium, this program is set to re-open in 2026 and will be a useful tool in the land preservation toolbox. In 2025, ACLT also made substantial progress on **acquiring a 90-acre property** in the Parkers Creek watershed, and we anticipate a settlement in early 2026.



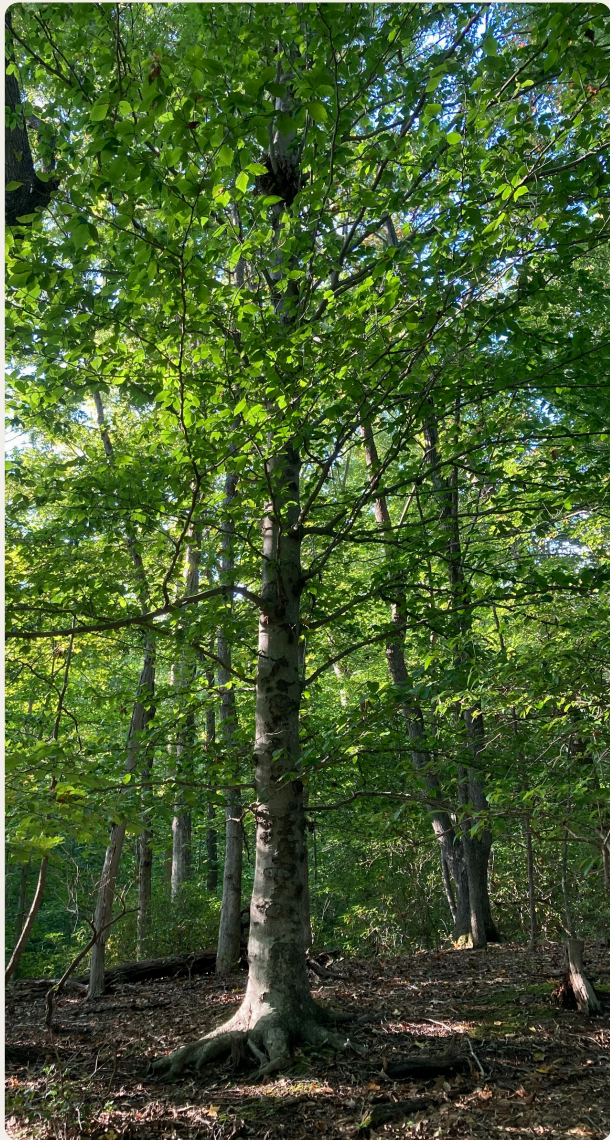
As we look ahead to 2026, we are excited to celebrate ACLT's 40th anniversary. I believe our founders would be proud of the accomplishments and impact of the organization that they created in 1986. **As we take time to reflect on our past, we will also be envisioning the possibilities that this next great era of ACLT will hold.**

LAND ACQUISITION & PRESERVATION

5-Year Plan Goal: To preserve land, according to our mission, in Calvert County through acquisition, easements, and partnerships.



In 2025, ACLT made significant progress towards acquiring the 90-acre Helfrich tract, located south of Parkers Creek, and we anticipate a settlement date in early 2026. ACLT will receive funding from the Maryland Rural Legacy Program for placing a conservation easement on the property, which will limit its development potential and preserve its ecological integrity. The property is almost entirely forested with a mix of younger pine forests and older-growth hardwood forests. It is bisected by a BGE power line right-of-way that provides important early-successional meadow habitat which supports many insect, bird, reptile, and small mammal species. A first-order stream that flows into Parkers Creek runs through the portion of the property that lies to the west of the power lines.

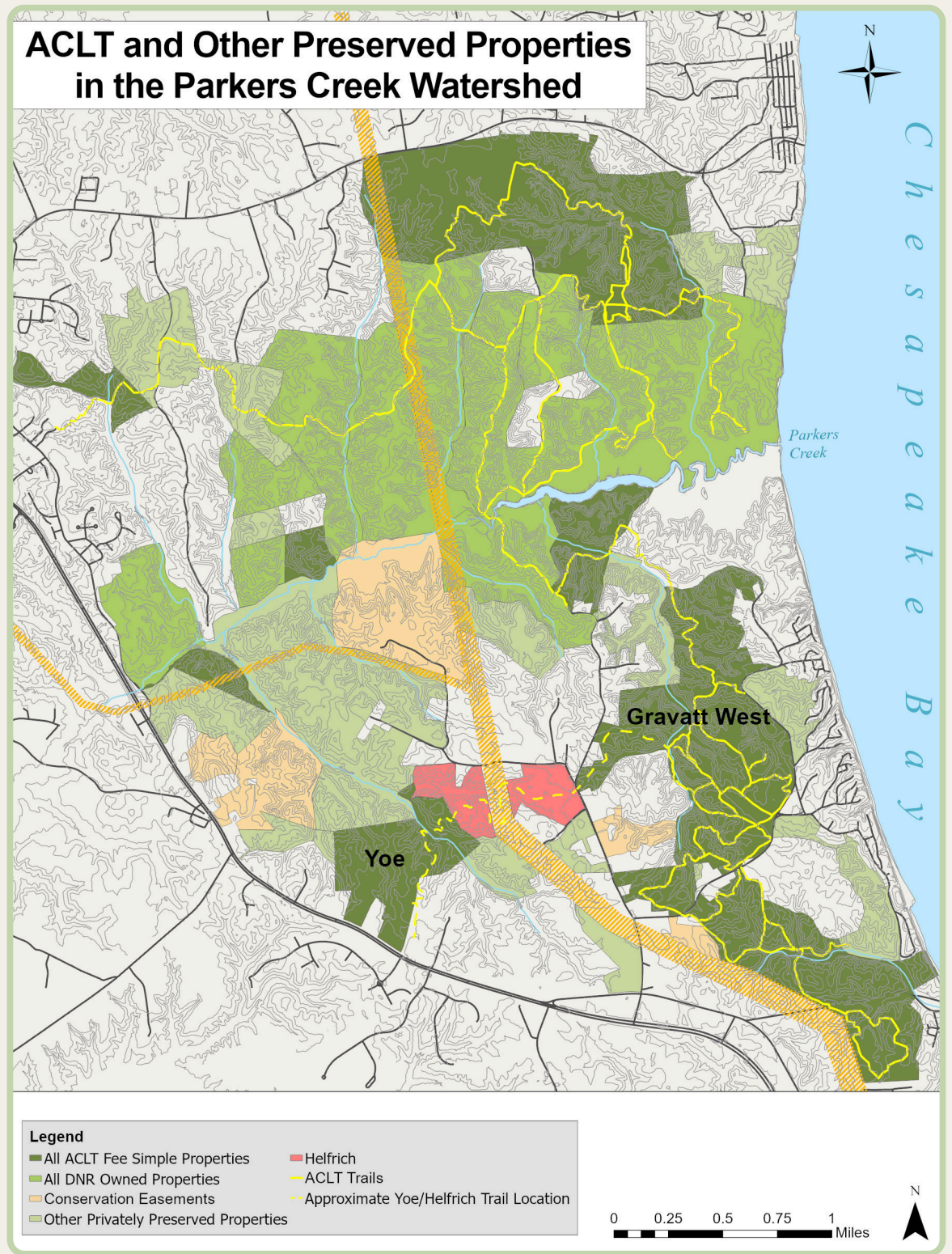


Helfrich

 **90 acres**  **forested**  **1st order stream**

Pictured: Forest and stream on Helfrich property

Besides its significant ecological value, the **Helfrich property is a critical missing puzzle piece that will allow for a hiking trail** from the Yoe property to the rest of the existing ACLT trail system. The Yoe property is currently isolated from the rest of ACLT's owned and managed land and is located along Route 4, which is the major highway that runs through the entirety of Calvert County. The trail connection made possible by the Helfrich acquisition will be key in **connecting the Yoe property to ACLT's other preserved properties**, as well as **increasing ACLT's visibility and accessibility** due to the trailhead's location along a well-traveled roadway.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS

5-Year Plan Goal: To position ACLT as a leader and an educator in land preservation and conservation throughout Southern Maryland in order to develop and strengthen partnerships at all levels of government and with like-minded organizations, encourage unified approaches to environmental challenges within the region, and promote the adoption of innovative and best practices in promoting environmental stewardship for the well-being of all.



Pictured: Friends of Hunting Creek volunteer Ron Klauda retrieves a minnow trap from the stream

Over recent years, the American Chestnut Land Trust has been steadily expanding its regional footprint, **coordinating with like-minded individuals and organizations to advance our shared vision for Southern Maryland.** In 2021, major strides were taken toward advancing ACLT's regional impact. In the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance's (SMCA) early years, efforts were largely focused on strengthening partnerships within regional land trusts and environmental communities. **With these partnerships firmly established, SMCA has begun to shift its focus outward, toward other key actors in conservation.**

Conservation Outreach Campaign

In 2025, SMCA launched a campaign to better communicate with landowners and local officials about conservation. With **\$50,000 in grant funds** awarded by the Chesapeake Bay Trust Outreach and Restoration Grant Program, SMCA worked with Green Fin Studio to complete 25 stakeholder interviews and publish a Marketing and Communication Strategy. The SMCA Core Team weighed in on every step of the process, particularly in creating the tagline and logo for the campaign, pictured below. **Informed by the voices of real Southern Marylanders**, the Marketing and Communication Strategy provides suggested messaging and outreach strategies for each target audience, best practices for outreach with each target audience, recommended outreach materials, and calls to action.



\$50K

CBT grant

25

stakeholder interviews

\$12.5K

matching funds



With an additional **\$12,500 in matching funds** from the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET), the Chesapeake Conservancy, and Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust, SMCA has begun working with Green Fin Studio to create some of the suggested outreach materials, including a short video, written landowner success stories, and logo stickers. These efforts are **laying the groundwork for effective outreach, equipping SMCA partners with unified messaging and bespoke outreach materials** to better communicate with key audiences.

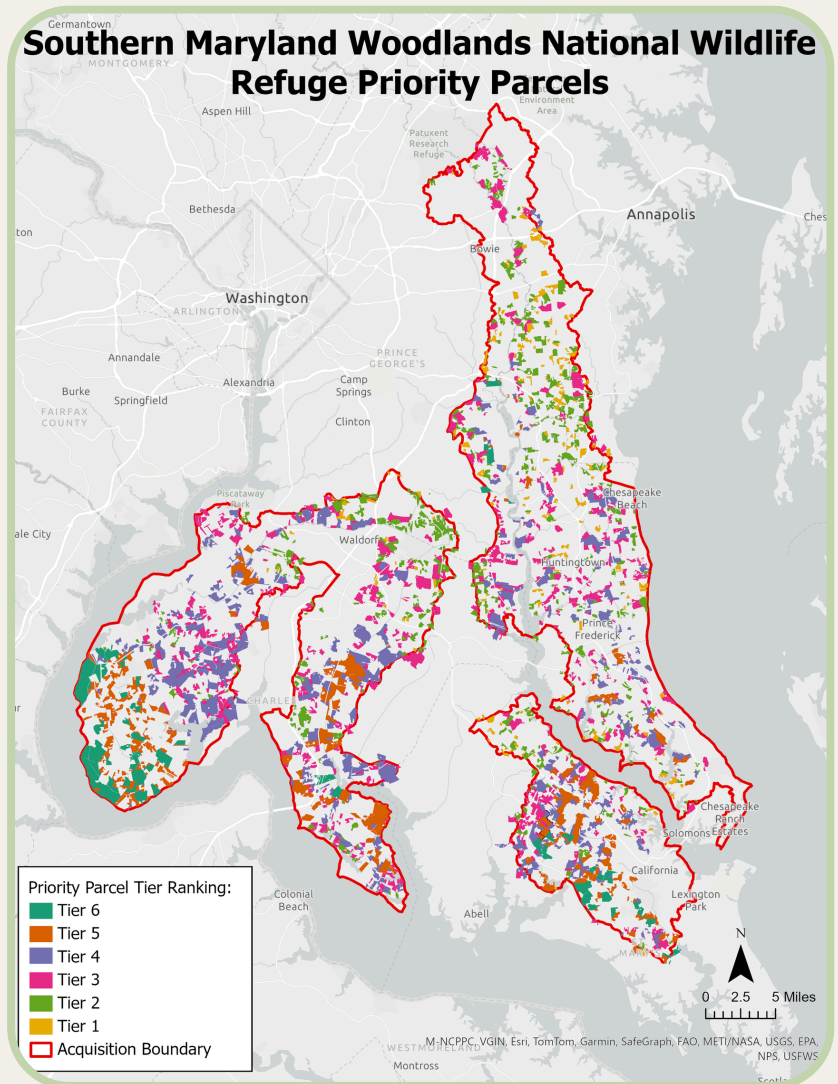
Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge

Since its inception, SMCA has been **partnering with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to create a National Wildlife Refuge for Southern Maryland.** Until 2025, efforts had been directed largely toward establishing the new refuge. With the Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge (“the refuge”) officially established in late 2024, **2025 saw increased efforts to identify potential acquisitions.** SMCA continued monitoring real estate websites and using our network of partners to identify priority properties and willing landowners for potential refuge acquisitions.

Although a change in national leadership in 2025 has complicated the funding for the refuge, **SMCA has been adapting to these federal shifts by exploring alternative strategies.** In 2025, SMCA identified

partners to “buy and hold” properties, laying the groundwork for securing refuge acquisitions quickly when funding becomes available. This strategy also helps willing landowners avoid the long and tedious federal approval process.

Additionally, the scarcity of state and federal funding in 2025 emphasized the need for stronger outreach with landowners and reinforced the value of SMCA’s ongoing conservation campaign. Driven by changes in the funding landscape, SMCA pivoted its campaign to put greater emphasis on fee simple and easement donations. Donating to conservation offers significant tax benefits that many landowners are not aware of. Encouraging donations allows us to maintain momentum for the refuge, securing critical acreage, even in a time of federal uncertainty.



Driven by changes in the funding landscape, SMCA pivoted its campaign to put greater emphasis on fee simple and easement donations. Donating to conservation offers significant tax benefits that many landowners are not aware of. Encouraging Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge donations allows us to maintain momentum for the refuge, securing critical acreage even in a time of federal uncertainty.



RCP Steering Committee

For several years, SMCA has been part of the Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network, which is a coalition of RCPs all across New England and the Mid-Atlantic. In 2025, **the SMCA Coordinator, Mary Hoover, was invited to be on the RCP Network Steering Committee, representing the Mid-Atlantic RCPs.** The RCP Network Steering Committee offers support, guidance, and oversight to the RCP Network activities, including the annual RCP Network Gathering, events, webinars, training, and other activities. In 2025, SMCA helped plan the 2025 Network Gathering and began brainstorming for the 2026 gathering. This group also serves as a forum for knowledge sharing among RCPs, and several of the committee's recommendations have already been integrated to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of SMCA.

Water Quality Webinars



In 2025, SMCA continued its efforts to educate its members and the broader community on topics related to conservation. As follow up to the 2025 Water Quality Blitz and other citizen water monitoring efforts, **SMCA hosted two webinars about the state of Southern Maryland's streams.** The first of the two webinars featured a presentation by Dr. Jeremy Testa from the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory on the most recent tidal creeks report for Calvert County. The second webinar featured a presentation by Mary Hoover and Dr. Walter Boynton about the results and emerging trends from the past 7 years of SMCA's Water Quality Blitz sampling. Together, these webinars served to **contextualize the citizen science monitoring efforts** that have been underway in Southern Maryland, as well as **educate the community about the importance of monitoring local water quality.**

Watershed Friends Groups



In 2025, the Watershed Friends groups continued carrying out citizen science efforts to better understand the health and diversity of their watersheds. All 6 groups participated in the 2025 Water Quality Blitz, sampling their local non-tidal streams for nitrate and nitrite (NO₂) concentrations. Volunteers from the Friends of Hunting Creek and the Friends of St. Leonard Creek continued surveying their creeks for forage fish, partnering with the Patuxent Environmental & Aquatic Research Laboratory (PEARL) on a citizen-science initiative that studies how forage species differ across habitats in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Friends of Hunting Creek and the Friends of Hellen Creek have continued quarterly monitoring of their respective watersheds in an effort to better understand seasonal patterns and identify long-term trends. In 2025, the Friends of Hunting Creek expanded its biological surveys of the creek, conducting a pilot crayfish study to determine the best sampling methods and habitats for collecting crayfish in non-tidal streams. The Friends of Hunting Creek also continued its yearly benthic macroinvertebrate surveys and continued employing environmental DNA (eDNA) methods to gradually assess fish species throughout different parts of the watershed.



Pictured: Friends of Hunting Creek volunteer Ron Klauda conducting a macroinvertebrate survey using a D-net

The Friends also continued **outreach and education efforts**, tabling at the following events in 2025:

- Calvert Science and Engineering Expo
- Southern Maryland Osprey Festival
- College of Southern Maryland's Nature Fest
- Patuxent River Wade In
- Patuxent River Appreciation Day



RESEARCH IN THE WATERSHED

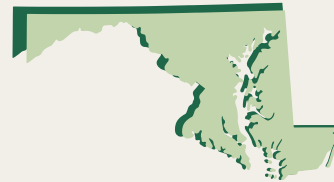
5-Year Plan Goal: Serve as an advisory committee to the ACLT Board of Directors, Land Management Committee, and ACLT staff providing science-based recommendations for the best management of the Parkers Creek and Governors Run Watershed ecosystems as well as advocacy positions for Southern Maryland environmental issues.

Water Quality Blitz

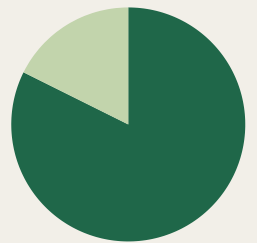
In 2025, ACLT continued to advance **scientific research and citizen science engagement in Southern Maryland**. Building on previous years, the 2025 Water Quality Blitz provided a hands-on opportunity to assess stream health in our waterways. A total of 153 sites were sampled across the five-county region, including 28 sites in the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds. **Of the sites sampled, 82.35% had “good” nitrogen (NO₂3) concentrations.** NO₂3 is an important parameter for monitoring water quality, as excessive levels can degrade aquatic ecosystems.



153 sites
sampled



across 5
counties

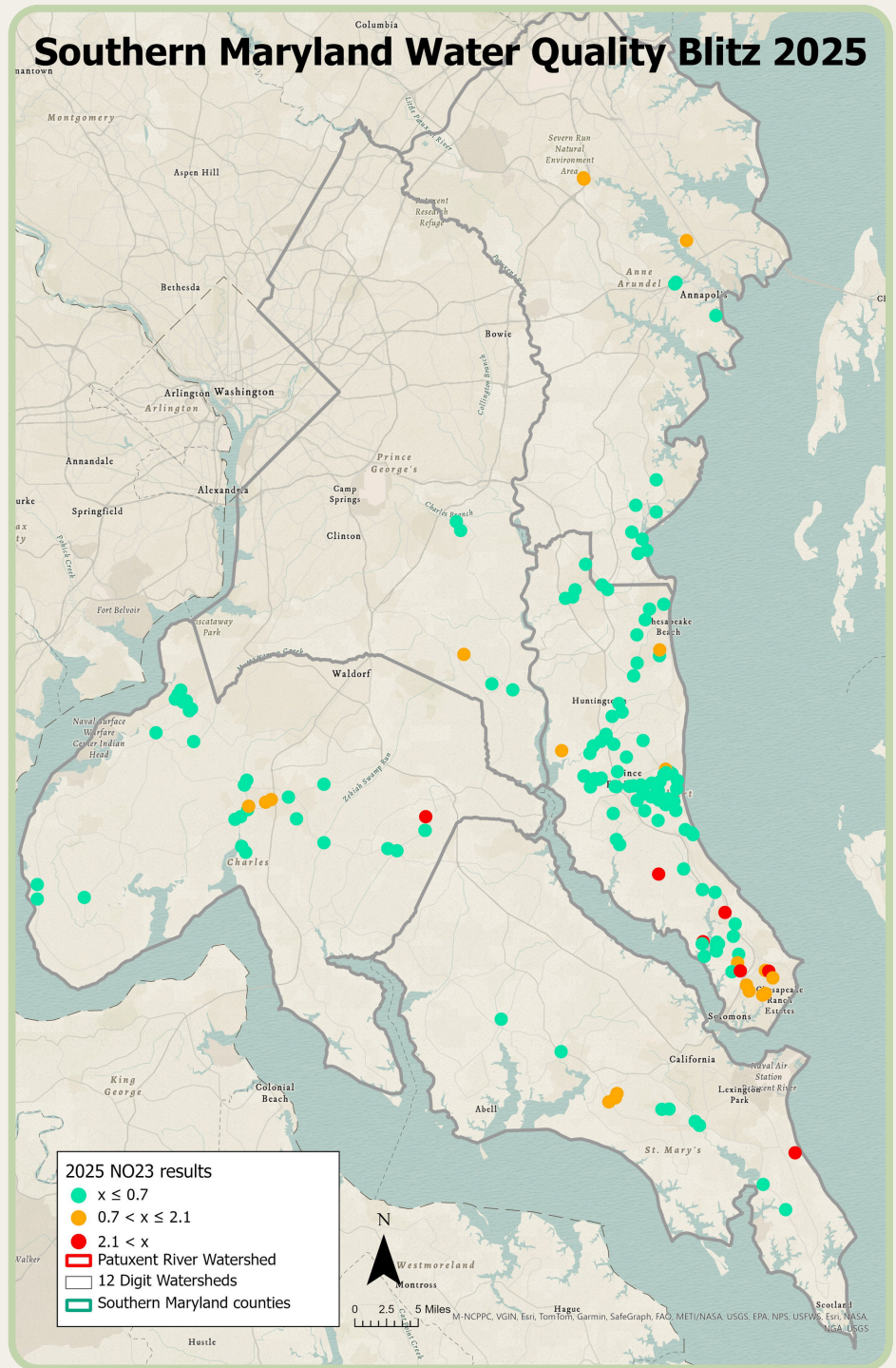


82.35% “good”
nitrogen levels



On the map to the right, sites with “good” NO₂ levels are shown in green, while red indicates NO₂ hotspots that may require further investigation or management. This effort was made possible by dedicated volunteer citizen scientists from Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance organizations and ACLT’s watershed friends groups.

To better understand long-term trends in Water Quality Blitz and Parkers Creek mainstem sampling data, ACLT staff utilized an Excel-based program that was developed in collaboration with Dr. Walter Boyton and a graduate student from the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory (CBL). **This tool allows ACLT to track changes in stream health over time**, combining volunteer efforts with scientific analysis to **identify potential issues early and guide strategies to protect and restore our local waterways.**



Pictured: Kevin Donahue collects a water sample

Macroinvertebrate Sampling



Water quality sampling is just one tool used to assess stream health within ACLT's watersheds. In 2025, ACLT staff and volunteers completed another year of macroinvertebrate surveys, **conducting sampling at four sites in April**. Two of these sites were located in the Horse Swamp Tributary on the Holly Hill property, and the other two sites were located in Clark Creek on the Gravatt West and Commodore East properties.

Collected samples were sent to a laboratory for identification, after which ACLT staff calculated Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) scores at both the genus and family levels for each site. IBI scores provide important insights into the composition and diversity of macroinvertebrate communities, which are commonly used as indicators of overall stream health. **These data will support long-term monitoring efforts and help ACLT evaluate potential changes in stream conditions over time**, including those associated with conservation efforts, such as the installation of beaver dam analogs on Holly Hill.



Pictured: Regional Conservation Partnership Coordinator Mary Hoover (left), Land Manager Clara Brill-Carlat, and volunteers Doug Harbold and Kevin Donahue (right)

Terrestrial Monitoring

In addition to its research involving aquatic systems, **ACLT added two terrestrial surveying efforts in 2025.** In the spring, ACLT conducted an herbaceous vegetation survey with guidance from Dennis Whigham, a retired plant ecologist from the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC). Staff and volunteers were trained to identify native and non-native herbaceous species within existing forest diversity survey plots on ACLT lands. **These surveys provided valuable data on herbaceous species diversity across different forest types and contributed to a better understanding of forest health.** In total, staff and volunteers found 56 herbaceous species, 53 of which were native—a **promising indication of ecological health across the surveyed properties.**



Additionally, ACLT Stewardship Coordinator Addie Brown conducted a tick survey near several of ACLT's trails. The survey established a baseline of tick species present on ACLT lands and provided insights into species distribution and variation in population densities across different habitats. **Between May and August 2025, 24 surveys were conducted, and a total of 860 ticks were collected.** Species collected included lone star, blacklegged/deer, and American dog ticks. A subsample of 64 randomly selected ticks was tested for pathogens associated with common tick-borne illnesses, and only six individuals (9.4%) tested positive for pathogens such as those linked to Lyme Disease and Southern Tick-Associated Rash Illness. **Of the habitats sampled, forests dominated by leaf litter had the highest tick densities, followed by forests with dense understory vegetation, while meadows and low-lying floodplain habitats both had low overall tick counts.** This study provided valuable information to help staff, volunteers, and visitors make informed decisions when working on or visiting ACLT lands.



Other Science Work



Smithsonian
Environmental Research Center



University of Maryland
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE
CHESAPEAKE BIOLOGICAL LABORATORY

- ACLT volunteers continued collecting water quality data from three sites along the mainstem of Parkers Creek. Staff **analyzed long-term water quality trends** to inform conservation practices on ACLT-owned and managed lands.
- Dr. Lora Harris (CBL), along with students from her lab, continued **summer water quality monitoring** at multiple locations along Parkers Creek and tracked changes in sediment levels using Surface Elevation Tables stationed throughout the creek.
- Dr. Chris Rowe (CBL) and Dr. Denise Breitburg (SERC) **surveyed diamondback terrapin nesting** and predation at the DNR-owned, ACLT-managed Warrior's Rest Preserve to determine whether terrapins were present and investigate nesting success.



MANAGING THE LAND

5-Year Plan Goal: Manage all of the lands, structures, and waters for which we are responsible in an environmentally sustainable manner by which their natural and cultural resources are preserved, sustained, and enhanced to the maximum extent possible.



2025 was another remarkable year for ACLT. Land Management staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to care for ACLT's 3,500 acres of preserved land within the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds. Across its diverse landscapes, ACLT made meaningful progress in controlling invasive species, enhancing wildlife habitats, protecting water quality, and providing sustainable public access to nature. **Together, these accomplishments reflect ACLT's continued commitment to responsible land stewardship.**

Property Monitoring

In 2025, ACLT staff and volunteers completed interior monitoring of all **19 fee-simple properties and 5 conservation easement properties**. These efforts covered many miles across expansive tracts of land and focused on assessing overall property conditions while identifying potential concerns such as poaching, illegal dumping, invasive species, and boundary maintenance issues. **Detailed condition reports were completed for each property** in accordance with Land Trust Alliance accreditation standards. This annual monitoring process provides an up-to-date record of property conditions and ensures that ACLT's lands remain protected.



Invasive Species Control

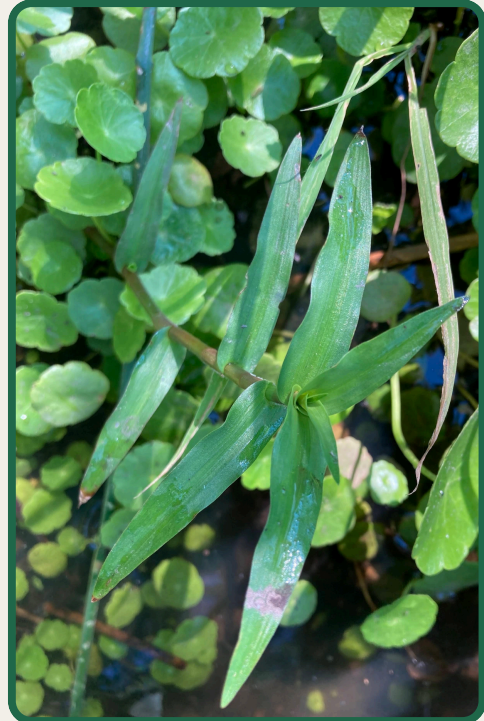


Controlling invasive species remained a top priority for ACLT in 2025, as these efforts are critical for protecting the health and native biodiversity of our preserved lands. Staff and volunteers focused on high-priority species identified in ACLT's Invasive Species Control Plan, including wisteria, wavyleaf basketgrass, phragmites, autumn olive, Japanese knotweed, and bittersweet.

A total of **65 workdays were dedicated to invasive species management**. Phragmites control was a major focus, with staff and volunteers solarizing approximately 8,500 square feet along Parkers Creek and a nearby tributary. Additional phragmites control included cutting regrowth and removing plastic from previously solarized sites, supporting the reestablishment of native vegetation. Wavyleaf basketgrass management was another significant effort, with 18 summer workdays devoted to hand-pulling and weed-whacking, complemented by contractor-applied herbicide treatments targeting larger infestations to ensure comprehensive control. These efforts fulfilled the requirements of an Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract, resulting in **\$6,010 in funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**. ACLT also addressed woody invasive species under a Conservation Stewardship Program contract, **clearing large infestations on the Goldstein property and earning an additional \$42,510 from NRCS**.

Early detection continued to be an important strategy for preventing the spread of invasive species in 2025. In March, staff and volunteers conducted targeted monitoring for two spring ephemeral invasive species—lesser celandine and incised fumewort—across floodplain habitats on the 750-acre Goldstein property. The timing allowed for the detection of these species before they disappeared for the summer. Lesser celandine was found in a single, contained location and was promptly treated to prevent further spread.

Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) Surveys



In June, ACLT completed the second phase of its annual EDRR survey, searching for 20 additional high-priority species. Staff and volunteers surveyed designated monitoring routes across the Goldstein property. Three of the 20 target species were detected, highlighting the importance of early monitoring and rapid response in protecting conserved lands.

3 of 20 high priority species detected





Beaver Dam Analogs

To date, 18 beaver dam analogs (BDAs) have been installed in the Horse Swamp tributary on ACLT's Holly Hill property. **In 2025, staff monitored water and sediment levels at four sites along the tributary, with additional measurements taken behind five BDAs.** In the fall, staff and volunteers revisited the BDAs to reinforce the existing structures, **ensuring continued effectiveness** in slowing stormwater, directing waterflow onto the floodplain, and reducing stream channelization.

Improving Wildlife Habitat

Throughout 2025, ACLT staff and volunteers advanced habitat enhancement efforts across multiple properties. After three years of site preparation, the large 4.8-acre meadow on Gravatt West was planted by ECOBAY Landscape Design. The smaller 0.4-acre meadow on the same property received a second year of herbicide treatment in the summer, following a prescribed burn conducted by the Maryland Forest Service in early spring, to control existing invasive species. At Double Oak, approximately 10,000 square feet of meadow were planted with native grasses and wildflowers, providing essential food and shelter for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. On the Yoe property, staff and volunteers actively managed roughly 13 acres of meadow through tree pressure reduction, mowing, and prescribed burning. Following prescribed burns, contractors applied herbicide treatments to control invasive species and unwanted woody growth. Together, **these efforts support ACLT's long-term management of early successional habitats, helping sustain diverse wildlife populations and resilient ecosystems.**



Pictured: Winter intern Ashleigh Catlett reinforces a BDA, MD Forest service conduct a controlled burn on the Yoe Property



Double Oak Farm & Food Forest

Double Oak Farm had another successful year in 2025, maintaining productive operations and **donating over 4,200 pounds of fresh produce to the St. John Vianney food pantry.** Staff and volunteers continued to employ regenerative farming practices, including cover cropping, crop rotation, and mulching, to maintain soil health and long-term productivity. A major accomplishment in 2025 was replacing the high tunnel's plastic covering, ensuring continued production during colder months.

The Food Forest also yielded impressive harvests, including blackberries, grapes, figs, pears, blueberries, mulberries, peaches, and asparagus.

Both the Farm and Food Forest continued to serve as spaces for community engagement, hosting several volunteer workdays and farm tours that highlighted sustainable agriculture and the value of regenerative land-use practices.

Pictured: "Farm Bros" Jim, Curt, Steve, Karl and Tod, October farm party, New high tunnel cover, Fall harvest



Trail Maintenance



ACLT's extensive trail network continued to provide meaningful access to nature, welcoming an estimated 51,000 visitors in 2025. **Staff and volunteers worked hard to keep these trails safe, accessible, and environmentally sustainable.** Routine maintenance was often completed by Master Naturalist or Parkers Creek Conservation Society volunteers, supported by an active Trail Steward program that helped staff identify and prioritize maintenance needs throughout the year.

Pictured: Volunteers construct a new boardwalk, Newly installed staircase, PCHT sign

In addition to routine maintenance, **several larger improvement projects were completed.** A section of the North-South Trail was re-routed and re-graded to improve water drainage. Multiple boardwalks were replaced on the Parkers Creek Trail, and stairs were built on steep sections of the Ridge Loop, Flint Trail, and North-South Trail. To address an erosion issue that is threatening the Horse Swamp Trail and has been exacerbated by stormwater runoff from the adjacent ACLT-managed farm fields, a small section of farm field was taken out of production. Over multiple workdays, wildflowers, grasses, and 174 trees were planted in this area to reduce erosion and maintain trail access to the Bay and Creek Overlooks.



Additional trail improvements in 2025 included interpretive enhancements through the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail project, which aims to share the cultural history of the Parkers Creek watershed and surrounding lands. To support this project, staff and volunteers installed **20 new interpretative signs throughout ACLT's trail network.** These signs highlight the stories of past landowners, historic land uses, and the long-standing relationship between people and the landscape, encouraging a deeper connection between hikers and ACLT's preserved lands.



Corps Members



Pictured: 24-25 Corps Members Addie Brown and Devon Burke (below) , 25-26 Corps Member Addy Dunbar (above)



Each year, ACLT hosts Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps members—young professionals serving at ACLT for a year through the Chesapeake Bay Trust—to expand organizational capacity. **Two Corps members served from 2024-2025, and following the conclusion of their terms in August, both were able to continue working with ACLT.** In September 2025, ACLT also welcomed a new Maryland Climate Corps member to serve as Farm Manager on Double Oak Farm for ten months, further strengthening ACLT’s stewardship efforts during her time with the organization.



Land Management Volunteers

ACLT's accomplishments in 2025 would not have been possible without the incredible support of its volunteers. Each year, ACLT welcomes new volunteers through the Maryland Master Naturalist program. **In 2025, ACLT hosted its 13th annual Master Naturalist class, with 17 participants successfully completing the program.** Coursework covered a wide range of topics related to Maryland's natural environment and included hands-on group projects such as invasive species removal, enhancements to ACLT's natural play area, and participation in citizen science initiatives, including a tick survey across ACLT's preserved lands.



ACLT's land management crew includes not only Master Naturalists, but also many other dedicated volunteers who generously contribute their time and talents to our work. Together, they play a vital role in all aspects of land management, from controlling invasive species and enhancing wildlife habitat to maintaining trails and operating our farm and food forest. **In total, our land management volunteers contributed 7994.35 hours at ACLT in 2025.** To all of our volunteers, **thank you for your time and commitment—your efforts make ACLT's accomplishments possible!**



FACILITIES



The Facilities Committee had a busy year in 2025. One major initiative was the creation of a database to document the current condition of ACLT's facilities and proactively anticipate upcoming facilities needs. **The database will be integral to tracking and prioritizing infrastructure needs on each of ACLT's properties** and will assist with budget preparation in future years by allowing ACLT to anticipate upcoming expenses.

Another major project was the assessment of the house trailer that is located on the Helfrich property. Since ACLT anticipates acquiring this property in early 2026, the Board of Directors wanted to know whether it would be feasible and economically sensible to rent out the house trailer. The Facilities Committee did some investigative work into county records and found information on the septic and well systems. While preliminary tests on the well indicated that it was functioning properly, a professional inspection of the septic tank showed that it was leaking and would need to be repaired before the house trailer could be occupied. A professional inspection of the HVAC and electrical systems determined that repairs would be needed there as well. Due to the cost of the needed repairs to the septic and electrical systems, as well as other costs that would be necessary to make structural and cosmetic repairs to the inside of the house trailer, **the Committee ultimately decided to recommend that ACLT not pursue renting out the trailer.**



The Facilities Committee also provided recommendations to ACLT's staff and Board regarding the preservation of the Wallace House. Located along ACLT's Wallace Lane trail, the historic, early 20th-century house was owned by a Black family who farmed the surrounding land. **Grant funding enabled ACLT to hire a contractor that specializes in historic home restoration to create a plan for how the crumbling structure could be preserved or reconstructed.** ACLT's Facilities Committee members assisted with this process by inspecting the siding and the collapsing back side of the house and providing recommendations on weather-proofing, repairing, or replacing portions of the structure.



On the Double Oak property, various repairs were made to the ACLT office and farm infrastructure. An abandoned well pipe that was cut off and unsealed was allowing a large amount of water to drain into the office basement during storms. The pipe was sealed in 2025, which solved our long-standing problem of having water in the basement when it rained! Volunteers also cleaned gutters, adjusted the gutter pitch, and laid stone and black plastic near one exterior corner of the office to help drain water away from the building and keep it out of the basement. In another drainage-related project, volunteers also fixed the Double Oak Farm wash stand sink, which had stopped draining properly. **These repairs helped keep ACLT running smoothly throughout the year.**



Pictured: Woodrow Wallace at Wallace House (1989), Office drainage improvements, Digging for Helfrich septic assessment

COMMUNITY HERITAGE

Overall Goal: Improve ACLT's ability to equitably engage with all of the diverse groups in its community, in Calvert County and beyond. Reach out to underserved populations, particularly those impacted by societal inequities or those who have not traditionally been engaged in outdoor recreation and conservation. Promote and implement ideas, programs, and projects designed to welcome these populations and increase their awareness of and access to ACLT.

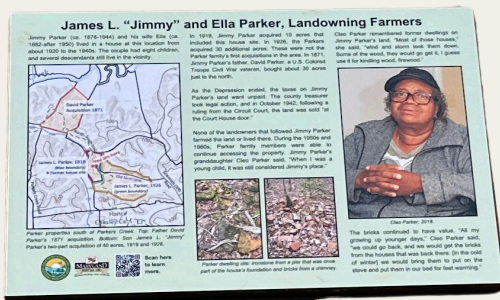


Establishment and Evolution

The Community Heritage Committee (CHC) was established as a standing committee on May 17, 2025. **The committee was formed to better serve underrepresented populations of the community and ensure that ACLT's institutional decisions and programming are informed by inclusivity, accessibility, and equity.** Thus far, the committee has written a charter outlining its vision, goals, and how the committee is to be organized and managed. The committee has also established its first set of annual goals based on ACLT's five-year plan. Going forward, the committee will serve as an advocate for the diverse communities that enjoy all ACLT has to offer. As CHC membership continues to expand, we seek to make space for communities that are underrepresented at ACLT to take on leadership roles in the CHC and Board. By proxy, communities currently underrepresented at ACLT will feel more welcome at ACLT and its events.



Pictured: CHC Members and guests, PCHT sign



Partnerships

This year, the Community Heritage Committee began and continually fostered a relationship with a **local Latina women's group, Las FLOREs**. This is a strategic partnership for ACLT in fostering a safe and inclusive space for our Latino community members. Las FLOREs has been able to utilize ACLT's office space for their regular meetings since September. Former ACLT Farm Manager Devon Burke continued the partnership with Las FLOREs through a three-part event series that introduced members of the local Latino community to ACLT's farm, trails, and food forest. These events were also hosted in partnership with **Latino Outdoors**, a national organization focused on outdoor recreation accessibility, and **K's Lunchbox**, a locally owned, authentic Mexican food truck. In addition to the partnership with Las FLOREs, ACLT worked with Spanish students at **St. Mary's College of Maryland**. Students took a site visit to the Farm and Food Forest and subsequently translated ACLT's programming materials into Spanish.



Some of the most successful collaborations this year happened in canoes! In May, ACLT continued a longstanding collaboration with **DC's Eastern Senior High School**, hosting a group of Black teens for a canoe trip. The trip provided some of DC's underserved youth the opportunity to learn more about the Chesapeake Bay and Southern Maryland watersheds. In July, ACLT hosted a canoe trip in collaboration with **Outdoor Afro** for Black adults from around the DMV. Outdoor Afro has also organized its own group hikes at ACLT outside of our collaboration. In October, ACLT had a final special canoe trip for **Las FLOREs** and the larger Latino community, guided in Spanish. The event was a great success despite strong tides while launching canoes, and participants got to enjoy food and one another's company after canoeing.

Projects

The CHC was involved in several major ACLT projects throughout 2025. One of these was **the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail (PCHT), an extensive cultural history project** that resulted in interpretive panels installed along ACLT's trails, an accompanying series of web pages, a video interview series exploring the family histories of Black community members, and two public presentations about the project at the Calvert Historical Society and Prince Frederick Library. In October, the CHC, in collaboration with the PCHT Subcommittee, especially Carl Fleischhauer, decided to begin planning a PCHT Launch Event for the spring of 2026. The CHC also **advised ACLT staff on the preservation of the historic Lemuel Wallace House**, located near ACLT's south side trailhead. The CHC advocated for preserving or restoring the house to the extent possible based on its unique significance to Black history in Calvert County. Lastly, the CHC provided **recommendations on the development and accessibility of the Greg Bowen Memorial Space**, an outdoor sanctuary that will honor ACLT's late Executive Director. Remembering Greg's vision to have more wheelchair accessible spaces, the committee advocated for the memorial space to be available to people who use wheelchairs.

Pictured: Two PCHT signs, Wallace House
Community Heritage Pg. 29

James L. "Jimmy" and Ella Parker, Landowning Farmers

James L. Parker (ca. 1876-1944) and his wife Ella (ca. 1862-after 1960) lived in a house at this location from about 1920 to the 1940s. The couple had eight children, and several descendants still live in the vicinity.

As the Depression ended, the taxes on Jimmy Parker's land went unpaid. The county treasurer took legal action, and in October 1942, following a ruling from the Circuit Court, the land was sold "at the Court House door."

None of the landowners that followed Jimmy Parker farmed the land or lived there. During the 1950s and 1960s, Parker family members were able to continue accessing the property. Jimmy Parker's granddaughter Clio Parker said, "When I was a young child, it was still considered Jimmy's place."

Clio Parker remembered former dwellings on Jimmy Parker's land. "Most of those houses," she said, "wind and storm took them down. Some of the wood, they would go get it. I guess use it for kindling wood, firewood."

The bricks continued to have value. "All my growing up younger days," Clio Parker said, "we could go back, and we would get the bricks from the houses that was back there. [In the cold of winter] we would bring them to put on the stove and put them in our bed for feet warming."

Woodrow Wallace's Tobacco Operation, 1987-2001

ACLT's South Side meadows were once farm fields. Here, as elsewhere in Southern Maryland, tobacco was the main crop until the early 21st century, when changes in land values and the labor force, together with a government buyout, brought cultivation to an end. Photographs from different years have been arranged to describe a typical single-year cycle.

Woodrow Wallace (1914-2002) was a lifelong resident of this neighborhood. His grandfather Lemuel Wallace once owned the property just to the west.

Late winter and spring: plant seeds, transplant seedlings

Woodrow Wallace prepares the seedbed. Seeds germinate under cover. March 1989. Ready to transplant. June 1987.

Summer: cultivate plants

Transplanting. Woodrow Wallace, William Edward "Bucky" Woods, and Sam Wallace, June 1988. Weeding. Woodrow Wallace, Derrick Parker, and Johnny Weems, August 1988.

Late summer: harvest

Homemade tools. Cutting and spearing the crop. September 1988. Sam Wallace spears a stalk. 1988.

Late summer: hang sticks in the barn to air cure the crop

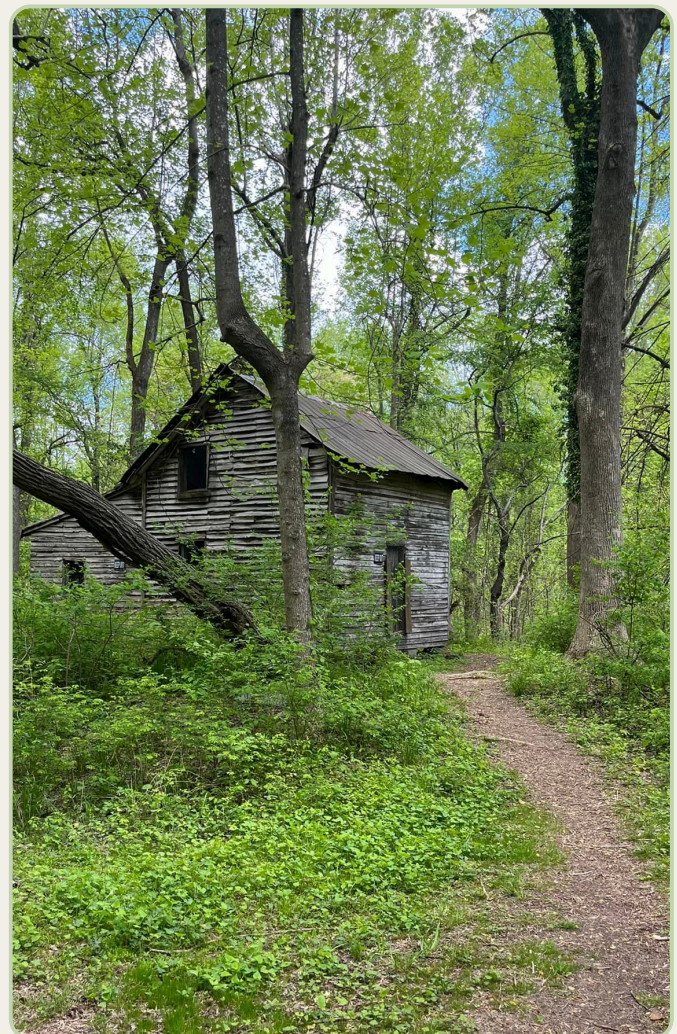
Hanging sticks in the barn, about one mile to the southwest. September 1988. Cured tobacco. January 1989.

Winter: prepare for market

Sam Wallace, George Harrod, Franka Wallace, and Cleve Brooks strip and sort the leaves. March 2001. Sam Wallace ties a bale of tobacco. January 1989.

Spring: sell the crop

Delivering burlap bags of tobacco to Farmer's Warehouse. Hughesville, April 1990. Woodrow Wallace, center, as his tobacco is weighed. April 1990. Auctioneer and buyers move down the row at the auction. April 1990.





Media Inclusivity

In 2025, a primary focus of the CHC was **inclusivity and accessibility in the way that ACLT markets itself and the resources it produces**. In collaboration with ACLT staff and students at St. Mary's College of Maryland, the CHC created a Spanish-translated version of ACLT's informational rack cards for events tabling and general distribution. Additionally, the CHC worked with PCHT Subcommittee member Carl Fleischhauer to draft a 'Black History at ACLT' map and informational pamphlet. CHC Chair José Ballesteros brought his camera to several events throughout the year, including canoe trips and the Sip and Save, to take photos highlighting ACLT's diversity. A media bank now exists, which in the future can be used on ACLT's website, social media, and promotional materials. **The intent of these media inclusivity projects is for members of our community, no matter their identity, to feel welcome at ACLT's events and represented in its communications.**





Events

Committee members attended two regional events this year on behalf of ACLT. In October, members Shirley Knight and Darlene Harrod attended **Lower Marlboro Freedom Day** to welcome Black community members from Lower Marlboro and the surrounding area to ACLT. They shared information about the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail and its focus on Black history. In March, Devon Burke, Shirley, and Darlene attended and staffed a table at the **Taking Nature Black conference in Silver Spring** to share resources about ACLT and the Black history of Southern Maryland with fellow attendees, largely people of color working in the environmental field.

CHC's Vision

Serving underrepresented communities and fostering an equitable, inclusive environment is an ongoing process in any organization. To that end, the Community Heritage Committee and its work would not be possible without the support of ACLT's Board and membership. **Together, we can make ACLT a community space for all to enjoy, now and in years to come.**



OUTREACH & MEMBERSHIP

5-Year Plan Goal: Optimize our outreach programs to serve ACLT's mission throughout Southern Maryland; encourage and support strong growth in ACLT's membership, supporter, and volunteer programs through enhanced communications, programs and activities; and elevate our efforts to reach underserved and underrepresented populations, particularly those impacted by societal inequities or those which have not traditionally been engaged in nature.



To achieve ACLT's 5-Year Plan Goal for Outreach and Membership, the Outreach & Membership Committee (O&MC) **actively engages the local and regional community to showcase all that ACLT has to offer and to encourage individuals and families to visit, support, and become involved.** These efforts include inviting community members to explore ACLT's trail system, paddle along Parkers Creek, and participate in a wide range of events and programs.



Pictured: Truck with Flowers at 2025 ACLT Auction, "Flower Girls" Jan Degeneffe, Liz Laher, and Judy Ferris, along with Mel Ricks, sell flowers at ACLT's Sip & Save

Trail Use

As in previous years, trail visitors also enjoyed discovering the creative and beautiful rocks painted by O&MC member Jan Degeneffe. In February, we once again hosted our annual “Hike for Your Heart” activity, encouraging visitors to search for seed-paper hearts hidden along the trails. Scheduled to coincide with Valentine’s Day and American Heart Month, this initiative highlights the physical and mental health benefits of spending time outdoors.

For the second consecutive year, **a team of ACLT Maryland Master Naturalists generously offered guided hikes at least once a month throughout the year.**

Coordinated by Paul Kachurak and Mari-Ann Sweeney, they donated their time and expertise to lead a total of 16 guided hikes, with 165 participants attending. The hikes varied in difficulty and theme, ensuring that they appealed to a wide audience and no two experiences were alike.



In 2025, we estimate that **51,171 people hiked at ACLT**. Many of this year’s hikers participated in the 2025 Double Hiking Challenge, which challenged participants to hike at least once per month throughout the year and to complete every trail in the ACLT system. Now in its fifth consecutive year, the Hiking Challenge continues to grow in popularity and community enthusiasm. Of the 296 registered participants, 75 successfully completed the challenge and received ACLT merchandise in recognition of their achievement. Many participants have taken part in the challenge every year since its inception.



**51,171
Trail
Visitors**



**296 Hiking
Challenge
Participants**



**75 Hiking
Challenge
Winners**



New in 2025, **two garden tours were added to the guided hike schedule**, along with a special tour for residents of the Asbury Solomons senior living community. The garden tours were led by “Flower Girl” Jan Degeneffe and Farm Manager/Corps Member Devon Burke. Other special hikes included two nighttime hikes and a Halloween-themed hike to the cemetery near the South Side Trailhead.

Canoe Trips



Public guided canoe trips along Parkers Creek offer visitors a unique opportunity to experience ACLT from the water. All trips are led by trained ACLT volunteers who share their knowledge of the watershed’s ecology and ACLT’s history. In 2025, ACLT hosted 11 public canoe trips –enjoyed by 137 participants –along with several special private trips for local community groups.



11 public canoe trips



137 participants

Pictured: OutdoorAfro canoe trip, Las Flores Canoe trip, Farm tour



ACLT-Hosted Events

The O&MC, along with many dedicated volunteers, assists in hosting events throughout the year that introduce hundreds of individuals to ACLT's mission and programs.

In March, ACLT once again hosted the popular Leprechaun Hunt. With more than **300 participants**, this family-friendly event has become an annual tradition for many local families.

ACLT's Sip & Save beer-tasting event, held in early September, has steadily grown in popularity. In 2025, **250 attendees sampled 35 varieties of beer from 18 breweries located within the Chesapeake Bay watershed**, reinforcing our commitment to supporting local businesses and environmental stewardship.



October featured two annual signature events: **the Parkers Creek Challenge and the Dinner & Auction**. The Parkers Creek Challenge attracted 45 participants of all ages, including many athletes from outside the local area.



The Dinner & Auction, ACLT's biggest fundraising event of the year, was once again held at the Pavilion at Jefferson Patterson Park and was a tremendous success. Proceeds totaled just under **\$48,500** from **ticket sales, auction items, experiences, raffle entries, and a record number of local business sponsorships.** An additional **\$62,400** was donated through the annual **paddle raise.** The event's success was made possible by the tremendous efforts of the 28 volunteers who helped ensure an enjoyable evening for the 170 guests in attendance.



\$48,500



28 volunteers



\$62,400



170 guests

We concluded the year with the **always-popular Wreath & Greens Sale at the South Side Trailhead.** The majority of the 50+ wreaths were sold within the first hour. Volunteers crafted the wreaths during the three days following Thanksgiving using greens gathered by land management volunteers the previous week. The sale was further enhanced by handcrafted items from O&MC members. Mel Ricks sold handmade ceramic gnomes and fairies; Beth Nolletti created painted oyster shell ornaments; and Ralph Nolletti contributed a unique driftwood wall hanging resembling a blue heron.



Pictured: Jim Degeneffe and Dan Walker volunteering at ACLT's Annual Auction (above), Ralph (bottom R) and Beth Noletti (top L) sell unique decor at wreath sale, Outreach committee member Liz Laher (bottom L) and 10-year wreath-making volunteer Barbie Hudson (top R) hold their wreaths

Off-Site Events

In addition to on-site programming, **O&MC members and volunteers represented ACLT at 10 off-site events in 2025**, including two multi-day events. These events are invaluable for connecting with individuals who may not yet be familiar with ACLT. At each event, volunteers hosted informational tables featuring general program information, an interactive watershed exhibit, and hands-on crafts for younger attendees.



New this year, ACLT staff and volunteers decided to participate in the **North Beach Dragon Boat Race**, and they won first place! It was a terrific way to introduce ACLT to North Beach residents and event attendees.



Finally, the Sweet Little Shop, located on the corner of Route 765 and Parkers Creek Road, reached out to ACLT staff and arranged for our merchandise to be sold at their store during the holidays – **another way to support local businesses and reach more members of the community.**





Reaching the Community through Email and Social Media



The O&MC continues to expand ACLT's reach through social media and mass email communications. As participation in events, canoe trips, and guided hikes grows, so does our email subscriber list. We also engage individuals who may not have yet visited the trails or attended events in person through an active presence on Facebook and Instagram. **In 2025, our combined social media following and email list surpassed 18,000, reflecting continued growth in community engagement and awareness.**

Plans for 2026



In 2026, ACLT will celebrate its 40th anniversary. Special celebrations will be incorporated into existing events, and a **commemorative anniversary celebration is planned for early December to mark the official anniversary date.** Two new on-site events are planned: The O&MC will assist the Community Heritage Committee in launching the Parkers Creek Heritage Trail at a spring event, and a new October event titled Autumn Adventures, designed to introduce more young families to ACLT through a child-focused outdoor experience, is in the works. Additionally, ACLT has been invited to participate in two new off-site events, further expanding our community presence.

ACLT's outreach success would not be possible without its dedicated volunteers. **The O&MC consists of 16 committed volunteer members and two staff members. In addition, more than 180 volunteers contribute regularly to ACLT's work in various capacities,** including event support and program assistance. In December, we expressed our gratitude by hosting our annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner in recognition of their invaluable contributions.

Volunteers

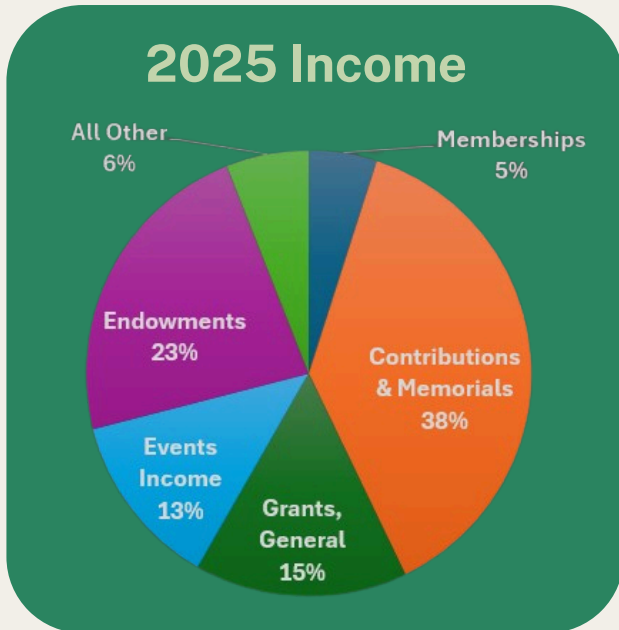
O&MC: 16 volunteer members and 2 staff
> 180 volunteers total

Pictured:
Outreach and Membership volunteers and committee members



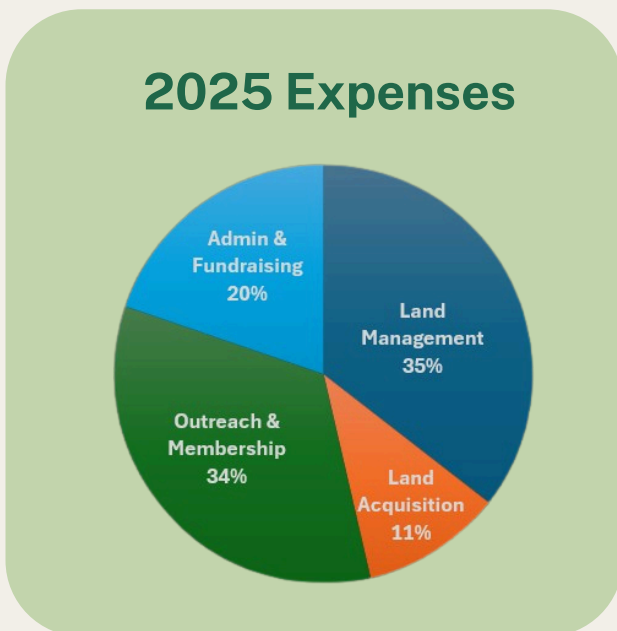
ACLT BY THE NUMBERS

Annual Financial Report



Operating Income	2024	2025
Memberships	\$31,450	\$31,495
Contributions & Memorials	\$219,696	\$241,813
Grants, General	\$106,823	\$98,487
Events Income	\$75,787	\$80,971
Endowments	\$144,400	\$146,700
All Other	\$47,839	\$38,249
Total Income	\$625,995	\$637,715

Operating Expenditures	2024	2025
Land Management	\$189,960	\$203,717
Land Acquisition & Preservation	\$61,636	\$62,528
Outreach & Membership	\$204,712	\$194,331
Admin & Fundraising	\$80,016	\$113,395
Total Expenditures	\$536,324	\$573,971



Year-End Special Fund Balances		
Fund	2024	2025
Land Management Endowment	\$2,675,341	\$2,925,340
Friends Forever Endowment	\$1,258,639	\$1,387,579
Land Acquisition	\$303,126	\$339,548
Legal Defense	\$50,000	\$50,000
Building	\$6,337	\$6,337
Easement Monitoring	\$15,000	\$17,500
Repair & Replacement	\$13,563	\$20,932
Capacity Grant	\$50,920	\$40,703
Greg Bowen Memorial Fund	N/A	\$111,851
Restricted Grants Carryover	\$54,900	\$29,988
Undesignated	\$321,424	\$337,978

ACLT 2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

David F. Farr, President
Dawn Balinski, Vice President
B.L. Johnston, Corporate Secretary
Cheryl L. Place, CPA, Treasurer
Richard Aldrich
José R. Ballesteros
Peter Daly
Jan Degeneffe
Bob Field
Darlene Harrod
Ron Klauda
Shirley Knight
Melissa McCormick
Penny Moran
Nathan Novotny
Adam Sampson
Mark Smith
Fred Tutman
Randi Vogt
John Yoe

ACLT STAFF

Greg Bowen (1/1-2/25), Adam Griggs (9/2 - 12/16), Executive Director
Autumn Phillips-Lewis, Land Manager
Clara Brill-Carlat, Assistant Land Manager
Miriam Gholi, Community Relations Manager
Mary Hoover, SMCA Coordinator
Jen Ludlow, Office & Donor Relations Coordinator
Addie Brown, Stewardship Coordinator
Devon Burke, Farm Manager and Corps Member (August 2024-October 2025)
Addy Dunbar, Farm Manager and Corps Member (August 2025 - June 2026)

VOLUNTEER STAFF

Virginia Murphy, Membership Coordinator
Susan Helmrich, Membership Coordinator

