



Haliburton
Highlands
Land Trust

Haliburton Highlands Land Trust Annual General Meeting 2024 – Chair’s Report

*Protecting the land we love
for future generations*

The year 2023 was an exciting and fruitful year for HHLT. Our organization was successful in stewarding our properties, raising funds, securing grants, conducting research, and engaging the community with educational opportunities and materials – all of this aimed at protecting the lands and waters we love for current and future generations. We also made encouraging progress on significant initiatives like the Highlands Corridor project, the Partners in Conservation program, and the updating of governance documents to align with Canadian land trust standards.

Grants and associated projects

We were once again granted funds by the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation in support of our 2023 Land Trust Discovery Days educational programming. We offered a geology walk at Barnum Creek Nature Reserve, a bat walk at Dahl Forest, a plein air painting session with Harvey Walker, along with March break programming for kids and the annual Don Smith birding hike in the spring. We will run our Discovery Days programs in 2024 with the support of generous donors, and work to secure grant funding again for 2025. In early 2024, we ran an animal tracks and scat program for kids, and a spring wildflower walk. Plans for the coming summer include a dragonfly workshop and part two of the geology program. A big thank you goes to Joan Duhaime for planning and implementing this iconic Land Trust program for many years.

We continue to extend our Habitat Stewardship Program grant from Environment and Climate Change Canada. We have successfully secured funds from ECCC for several years now, with grant funding now extended into 2025. The grant funds will in part support continued work in biodiversity surveys, wetland mapping and evaluation. Through this work, we continue to improve our understanding of the biodiversity of the highlands – for example, our partner Paul Heaven discovered several previously unknown populations of the Chorus Frog (a species at risk) in local wetlands. Crucially, the funds also support the continued development of our Partners in Conservation (PIC) program, through which we aim to protect more private land through partnerships with private landowners (including offering property management plans and enrolling landowners in a tax incentive program to promote good stewardship). In one of the year’s most important developments for HHLT, we were able to hire a part-time PIC Coordinator, Rick Whitteker, to help propel this project to a higher level. We now have more than 30 private landowners enrolled in the Partners in Conservation program, providing good stewardship on 2500 ha of private lands and waters in the Highlands Corridor. The ECCC grant funds that support this work were enhanced by significant donations from the Schad Foundation, the McLean Foundation, and the Harbinson family. A grant from the Haliburton County Development Corporation allowed us to purchase signage for our ‘PICs’ to display their involvement in the program.

The PIC program and wetland mapping and evaluation are key components of our work on the Highlands Corridor initiative. Many of you are well-versed on this project as it has garnered a great deal of interest over the past few years. As a brief introduction for anyone just learning about this project, the Highlands Corridor is an area rich in wetlands and species at risk that stretches between three provincial parks (Queen Elizabeth II Wildlands, Kawartha Highlands, and Silent Lake), and contains a high proportion of unceded Crown Land. Over the past several years, HHLT has been instrumental in taking stock of the natural heritage in this area through wetland mapping, etc., in fulfillment of our mission to protect nature in the Highlands beyond the borders of our properties. We have collaborated with other organizations such as Ontario Nature and have opened lines of communication with Ontario government officials (for example, in 2023 we presented a well-received briefing to the Policy Director in the office of the Premier and met with staff from the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Parks), all to ensure that the Highlands Corridor remains front and centre in discussions of land protection in Ontario. In 2023 the Highlands

Corridor initiative received endorsements from organizations such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Many thanks to those who have been acting as an advisory committee for this initiative, and special mention to Sheila Ziman and to Paul Heaven for their hours of hard work on this project!

We continue to collaborate and strengthen our partnership with U-links, as well as Trent University and Fleming College. We benefitted greatly from work completed by students for the land trust and look forward to further enhancing these connections. Through a partnership with the Ontario Land Trust Alliance, we have undertaken several projects focused on species at risk on our properties. These projects help us identify species and plan appropriate stewardship activities. Special thanks to Ralph Baehre as he ably manages all our student U-Links and OLTA projects.

In another very exciting development, in 2023 we successfully applied for funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Resilient Communities Fund which has allowed us to create a full-time, two-year Land Stewardship Manager position, with the successful candidate starting this summer. This is an important step for HHLT – bolstering our human resource contingent will help us to fulfill our goals and sustain and grow our land stewardship activities.

Fundraising

We opted not to plan large fundraising gala events in 2023 and 2024 due to the lack of capacity on our fundraising committee. After some long-time, hardworking committee members moved on from HHLT, we were challenged to recruit new volunteers to help us with fundraising, and so we feel very fortunate that Terry Carr and Keith Farlinger have now joined the fundraising committee. Our new fundraising initiative - the 'Be a Land Trust Star' campaign - which is targeted to local businesses, is now up and running and starting to generate results.

Governance updates

Behind the scenes, our board has been working hard over the past few years to update and develop policies and practices that aim to conform to the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices, currently overseen by the Centre for Land Conservation (CLC). We are 1 of 5 land trusts from across Canada who have volunteered to take part in a pilot project for certification of land trusts. Certification will provide third party assurance that our management system controls (policies and procedures) are robust and conform to The Centre for Land Conservations Standards and Practices. We are scheduled to undergo assessment over the next few months. A big thank you to board members Mary-Lou and Todd, with support from other board members, for their efforts in writing and revamping countless policy and procedure documents in 2023, making us a stronger organization in the process.

Land stewardship and acquisition

In another glimpse behind-the-scenes, 2023 was a busy year for land donation inquiries and offers. Our updated land acquisition policy and associated checklist of criteria has made the process of evaluating potential land acquisitions more consistent and transparent. Board members invest significant effort into considering each inquiry, ensuring that any new acquisitions will make significant contributions to the protection of ecologically significant land in Haliburton County and will be manageable in terms of long-term stewardship by the land trust. We will keep the HHLT membership abreast of any serious land acquisition news as it arises.

We continue to practice good stewardship of our properties including ongoing property monitoring, trail maintenance, etc. We are pleased to report that the Haliburton Rotary-supported bench project has successfully come to fruition with 8 new benches installed along the trails at Barnum Creek Nature Reserve and Dahl Forest.

Thank you to our volunteers, members and other donors

HHLT's many activities and accomplishments over the past year would not have been possible without our dedicated volunteers, including hardworking members of our board, tireless trail monitors, caring committee members, and many others. We would simply not be able to function without the efforts of our volunteers, who are critical to our fundraising, research, and education initiatives, and do the important work of keeping an eye on our properties and trails to ensure their safety and maintenance. We also extend a warm thank-you to our members and other donors, whose financial contributions give us the support we need to carry out all of our activities and initiatives.

You may have noticed that our social media posts have been looking extra polished these days – a big thank you to Adrian Martin for his work on putting HHLT out there in the best possible light and keeping followers engaged and informed. Special thanks also to our intrepid office staff person, Christel Furniss, for her steady presence, insights, enthusiasm and dedication to the land trust this past year.

In closing, HHLT is grateful for the support of the community, our volunteers, members, and donors, without which we would not be able to accomplish our mission of protecting the land that we love. We are looking forward to another exciting and eventful year. On behalf of the board, thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shelley Hunt', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Shelley Hunt
HHLT Board of Directors Chair