

Annual Members' Report

July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013



Director's Report

It's hard to believe a year has passed since the last Annual Meeting and Members' Report. Time has flown so quickly I feel it can't have even been half a year. On the other hand, I also can't believe how much the Harris Center has packed into just twelve months.

The program reports that follow provide some sense of all that happens at the Harris Center over the course of a year. You will read about the many facets of this organization: we are a land trust focused on protecting large conservation clusters and responsible for conserving over 21,000 acres in seven towns; our teacher/naturalists travel to nearly 30 area schools, where they offer innovative environmental education in (and outside of) 165 classrooms; our outreach programs provide diverse environmental learning experiences for students of all ages; our calendar of events includes well over 100 lectures, film showings, and outings each year; and our emerging science arm coordinates research and encourages informed land stewardship.

How does a small nonprofit organization manage to have such a transformative impact on our region, across so many program areas? One, the Harris Center has a tremendously talented, dedicated, and frugal staff. Two, we rely heavily on volunteers and interns with an extraordinary array of professional abilities and talents. Three, throughout our long history, we have had wonderfully generous and supportive constituents. Finally, our marvelous mission, *promoting understanding and respect for our natural environment*, inspires the Harris Center community to do more.

The breadth of Harris Center activities and the interaction between our focus areas allows this organization to positively influence communities, wildlife, and the landscape in the Monadnock Region and beyond.

Update on the Meade Cadot Land Conservation Fund

An initiative to build the Harris Center endowment for the land program took shape with a generous gift from longtime supporter Virginia Baker in December 2012. Throughout the late spring, summer, and fall, staff and board members have worked to raise funds for this initiative. The Board set a goal of \$500,000 and we are three-quarters of the way there! Continued donations in tribute to Meade's marvelous conservation legacy are welcome. Thank you for this enduring support!



photo: Bill Fleecker

Land Protection

It was a busy year for land projects at the Harris Center! This year, we added four new properties to the portfolio of Harris Center-owned lands, along with five conservation easements on privately-owned parcels. These newly conserved properties – 665 acres in all – bring our total for Harris Center-conserved lands in the Monadnock Region to over 21,000 acres. The bulk of the newly conserved lands was added to the Bailey Brook Road conservation cluster in Nelson and Stoddard, an ongoing land protection project that was initiated in 1990, and which now includes more than 1,170 contiguous protected acres. The new easements – in Peterborough, Hancock, Nelson, and Harrisville -- include three parcels of high-quality agricultural land, as well as 200 feet of shoreline on Nubanusit and almost 1,000 feet of shoreline on Silver Lake.

Bailey Brook Conservation Cluster

Donated funds allowed us to buy three parcels north of Bailey Brook Road, the largest of which is a 361-acre property that stretches all the way to Route 9 in Stoddard. This area includes a wonderful wetland complex that is a tributary of Bailey Brook on its way to Robb Reservoir, along with an upland mix of oak, birch, beech, maple, pine, and sporadic spruce. A 10-year-old harvest in the center of the property has regenerated beautifully and was home last summer to a pair of Mourning Warblers – a bird of the North Country that breeds in second-growth forest, favoring areas with deadfalls and brambles. This probable breeding attempt was significant because Mourning Warblers are not currently known to breed in New Hampshire south of the White Mountains. Norbert Duggan, inspired by the burst of conservation activity, generously donated nearly 30 additional acres in the heart of the Bailey Brook cluster.

Preserving Peterborough's Agricultural Heritage

In Peterborough, the Crotched Mountain Foundation donated a conservation easement on Sunnyfield Farm. The easement protects 55 acres, including 12 acres of prime farmland, 10 acres of floodplain forest, and 4,000 feet of frontage on the Contoocook River and Bogle Brook. An easement on the Peterborough Community Garden plot at the intersection of Route 202 and Scott Mitchell Road was also donated by Francie and Carl Von Mertens. This fantastic gift ensures that a vibrant community garden and a beautiful field of milkweed (important for the Monarch butterfly) will continue to greet those entering Peterborough from the north.

Stewardship and Monitoring of our Conserved Lands

Our annual monitoring of 91 conservation easements was conducted by tremendously hard-working undergraduate and graduate student interns from Antioch University New England, Franklin Pierce University, and the University of New Hampshire. In addition, a seasoned corps of volunteer monitors is visiting any remaining properties. A huge thank you goes out to these adventurous volunteers and interns for helping us to minimize the cost of this enormous and critical task in our work as a land trust.

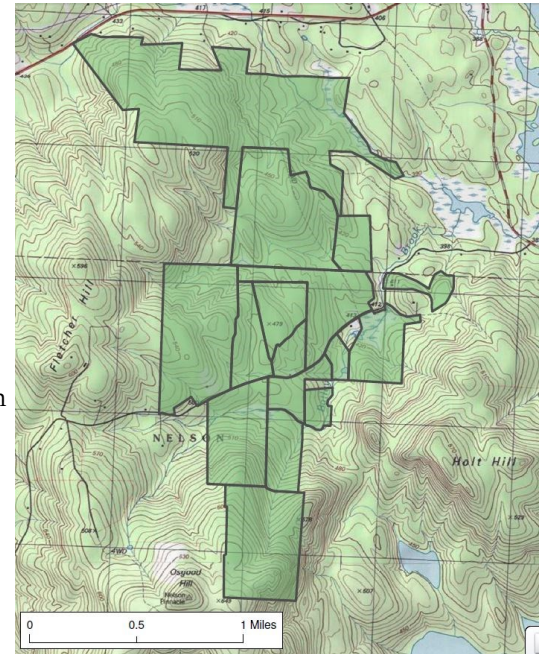


photo: Meade Cadot

Outings and Events

Over the past year, we offered more than 120 outings and events – at no charge, and open to the public – including warbler walks, a “tick talk,” paddles, hikes, and award-winning film showings. We are grateful for the numerous volunteers who led the majority of these events, sharing their love of the natural world with others.

While the Harris Center provides the location and support for these events, we welcome cosponsors. Our partners this year included Antioch University New England, the Grapevine Family Center, Horatio Colony

Nature Preserve, Keene State College, the Monadnock Conservancy, the Nelson Conservation Commission, the Nelson Trails Committee, New Hampshire Audubon, New Hampshire Fish and Game, the Peterborough Conservation Commission, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Sophia's Hearth Family Center, the UNH Cooperative Extension, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

In the Schools

School year 2012-2013 found students in the schools we serve extending their classrooms to include streams, swamps, cemeteries, state parks, and cellar holes just beyond the schoolyard. We completed a two-year project at Keene Middle School, where sixth graders and their teachers explored Tenant Swamp through the seasons. These students documented the presence of Northern Two-lined and Four-toed Salamanders behind their school. Four-toed Salamanders are an uncommon find in New Hampshire, and our kids found four of them! Meanwhile, fifth graders from Chesterfield and third graders from Jaffrey were rolling back rotting logs to study the creatures of decomposition. Third graders in Keene learned all about bird banding outside their school and then returned the following Saturday with their parents to share their exhilaration and awe at seeing songbirds so closely. In Stoddard, fourth- and fifth-grade students matched old maps with cellar holes down the road from the James M. Faulkner School, and then researched the agricultural records of families who lived their lives on King and Queen Streets.



photo: Brett Amy Thelen

In the ConVal school district, administrators and lead teachers worked with the Harris Center and Otter Brook Farm staff to design three new programs that will use Otter Brook Farm as a living laboratory. These programs are being launched in 2013 and 2014 for all ConVal sixth, ninth, and tenth graders. When their teachers team up with a Harris Center naturalist, these lucky children step out the door and into their communities to uncover and discover stories in their own local landscapes.

This year, we also celebrated our Teachers of the Year, Gail Woolridge and Andrea Dube from Benjamin Franklin School in Keene. Gail and Andrea were honored for their skillful and creative work with third graders studying New Hampshire birds through the seasons.

A wonderful donation from Don Nieratko has helped us expand our integration of technology into the school programs. When working with technology, we strive to help students recognize the importance of using both their senses and these new tools when exploring the world around them.

After 30 years, district budget cuts threatened the continuation of our programs in the Keene Elementary Schools. A generous and timely grant from the Henry L. and Patricia J. Nielsen Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation has allowed our work there to continue for at least one more year.

The Harris Center worked with the following schools during 2012-2013:

ConVal Regional School District

Antrim Elementary School
Pierce Elementary School
ConVal Regional High School
Dublin Consolidated School
Francetown Elementary School
Great Brook Middle School
Greenfield Elementary School
Hancock Elementary School
Peterborough Elementary School
South Meadow Middle School
Temple Elementary School

SAU 29

Keene:

Benjamin Franklin School
John Fuller School
Jonathan Daniels School
Keene Middle School
Keene High School
Symonds School
Wheelock School
Wells Memorial School
Marlborough Elementary School
Nelson Elementary School

Jaffrey Rindge Cooperative School District

Conant High School
Jaffrey Grade School
Rindge Memorial School

Other School Districts

James M. Faulkner Elementary School, Stoddard
Monadnock Regional Middle School
Gilsum Elementary School

Outreach Programs *One touch of nature, makes the whole world kin. (William Shakespeare)*

How do we connect people to nature? This is the question that frames the Harris Center's Outreach programs. Through direct experiences in nature as well as talks and courses, Outreach presents a tapestry of ways for people of all ages to engage with the natural world. For adults, Outreach offers lectures, courses, and field experiences. For young adults, Outreach provides mentorship. Children engage in playful outdoor adventures, while the very young explore the seasons outside with their parents.



Over 1,500 people participated in over 30 different Outreach programs during the 2012-2013 year. Programs ranged from monthly offerings in area preschools, to afterschool clubs at elementary and middle schools, to working with pre-service teachers from Keene State College and Antioch University New England, to seniors participating in Elderhostel's Road Scholar programs. All of our summer camps also fall under the Outreach umbrella. Like the streams and rivers that link our communities together, the thread that runs through each of these programs is connection: connecting children to their backyards, schoolyards, and local protected lands; connecting emerging adults to environmental professionals and complex environmental issues; and connecting adults to nature, place, and history.

Highlights this year include the Environmental Leaders Club offered at Great Brook and South Meadow Schools. This program, generously supported by funds from the Monadnock Paper Mill and an anonymous gift from a Peterborough donor, gave middle school students an opportunity to meet local environmental professionals, ask questions about their work, explore the value and importance of their experiences, and for the students to imagine themselves in environmental careers. Students met farmers, artists, nature photographers, writers, foresters, biologists, birders, and conservation officers. Exposing middle school students to real people engaged in real work raises the hope that these young adults might consider environmental professions as a viable and exciting choice for their future. Our future needs more people working with our planet in their minds and hearts.

This year, the Harris Center's Environmental Studies Institute (ESI), which offers courses for adults interested in the natural world, partnered with Keene State College's Cheshire Academy of Lifelong Learning (CALL) and RiverMead to offer an enormously popular course about Mount Monadnock. With speakers including such luminaries as author Howard Mansfield, geologist Dr. Charlie Kerwin, and essayist Edie Clark, over 90 people learned about the history, ecology, and culture of this unique mountain. The interest and number of people who signed up for this course, which included an optional field trip, remind us of the importance of partnerships.

Another summer of Wol's Nest adventures has come and gone far too quickly. In 2013, our campers included children from the Monadnock Region and from as far away as Venezuela! Kids ages 4 through 14 shared smiles as they played the popular game of Bobcat, built forts, hiked, swam, sang songs, and learned about the local landscape. New this year to our suite of summer offerings for children was the White Mountain Wanderers adventure. In this program, kids in grades 5 through 8 had the opportunity to camp in Pinkham Notch and climb one of the famous Presidential peaks. Once in the alpine zone, the group photographed flora for the Appalachian Club's Mountain Watch program. What an amazing opportunity for all who took part!



photo: Erin Ray Marbarger

Conservation Research

In March and April, more than 80 volunteers participated in our **Salamander Crossing Brigades** program, which aims to protect local amphibian populations by training volunteers to identify, count, and safely move salamanders and frogs across local roads during the spring amphibian migration. This spring, our extended network of volunteers collectively crossed over 3,000 critters, bringing our seven-year total to more than **15,000 amphibians** who have been spared the crush of the tire by our Salamander Brigades!

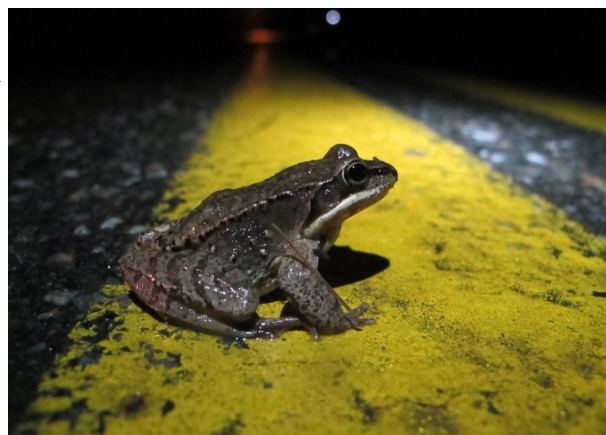


photo: Brett Amy Thelen

Our citizen scientists also searched for and documented vernal pools – which serve as specialized breeding habitat for those migrating amphibians – as part of our **Vernal Pool Project**, a partnership with the Peterborough Conservation Commission and the Monadnock Conservancy. In 2013, 25 volunteers documented 29 vernal pools in Marlborough, Peterborough, Swanzey, and Walpole, bringing our project total to over 120 documented vernal pools in the Monadnock Region. To see photographs and data from vernal pools on public land, visit our interactive, illustrated, online map at www.aveo.org. We are grateful to the Davis Conservation Foundation and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation for their support of the Peterborough Vernal Pool Project this year.

Over the summer, we again partnered with New Hampshire Audubon to monitor the state-endangered Common Nighthawk in Keene, one of the last places in New Hampshire where these aerial insectivores still breed. Heavy rains and cool temperatures in the early part of the summer created challenging breeding conditions for nighthawks throughout the state, but our **Project Nighthawk** volunteers did identify 5 individual birds (4 males and 1 female; the same as in 2012) in Keene. Volunteer observations also led to the discovery of a probable late-season nesting attempt on the roof of a bank in downtown Keene.

In an exciting development, this year our science programming expanded to include undergraduate research on Harris Center lands: in June, as part of a new partnership with the Keene State College (KSC) Environmental Studies Department, four KSC seniors completed a seven-week summer conservation internship program with the Harris Center. Under the guidance of KSC professors and Harris Center staff, the students documented 21 vernal pools, identified 4 invasive plant infestations, sampled 17 forest community inventory plots, and initiated the first-ever wildlife road mortality study of Route 123, which bisects Supersanctuary lands in Hancock, Antrim, Stoddard, and Nelson. For this survey, the students walked 4 transects (totaling just over 3 miles) 14 different times, recording over 730 roadkilled animals of more than 20 different species. The roadkill study will continue in the fall, when the students return — with twenty of their classmates — to conduct natural resource inventory work on Harris Center lands for their capstone research projects. It's a win-win: the Harris Center acquires scientific data that we can use to better steward the natural resources in our care, and the students get an unparalleled, hands-on learning experience.



photo: Jeremy Wilson

Thank You, Harris Center Volunteers!

It would be impossible to either number or credit all of the many ways the Harris Center benefits from our extraordinary volunteers. From office support to trail clearing, from building and grounds enhancement to serving as trustees, our capable and dedicated volunteers tallied many hundreds of hours this past year helping us accomplish the tasks that make what we do both possible and successful. Whether they are providing food, flowers, knowledge, counsel, help with events, or any of myriad other contributions, their support is truly indispensable. Our deepest gratitude goes out to all.

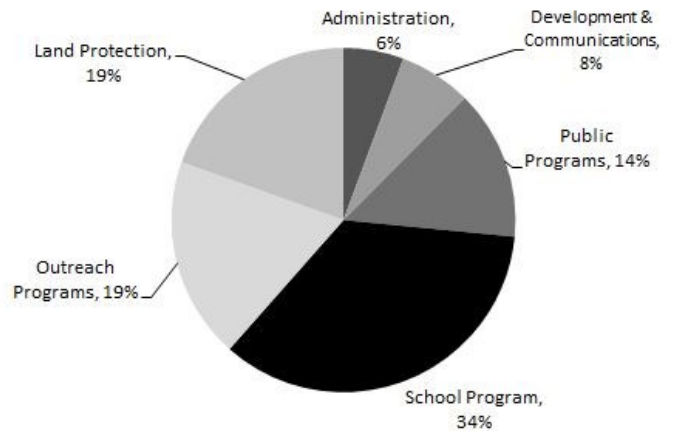
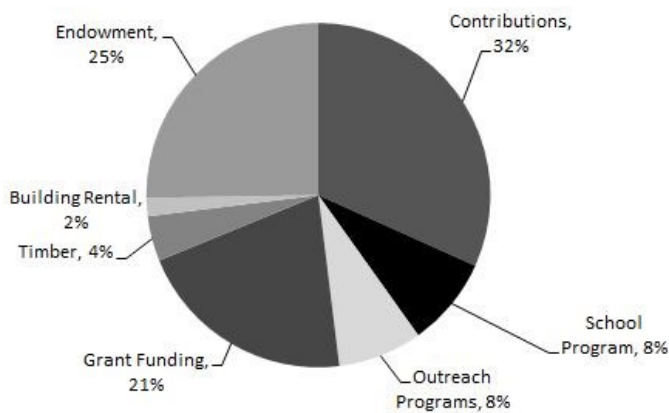
Financial Report: Operating Budget—July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013

Income

Contributions	\$ 220,515	32%
School Program	\$ 58,400	8%
Outreach Programs	\$ 55,004	8%
Grant Funding	\$ 144,244	21%
Timber	\$ 29,408	4%
Building Rental	\$ 11,900	2%
Endowment	\$ 175,500	25%
Total	\$ 694,971	100%

Expenses

Administration	\$ 43,703	6%
Development & Communications	\$ 54,058	8%
Public Programs	\$ 96,270	14%
School Program	\$ 231,259	34%
Outreach Programs	\$ 127,221	19%
Land Protection	\$ 127,040	19%
Total	\$ 679,551	100.00%



The financial statements of the Harris Center for Conservation Education are reviewed by Thomas S. Bates, Certified Public Accountant, P.C. of Keene, NH.

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photo: Laurel Swope

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