

Annual Members' Report

July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012



Director's Report

As I read through the individual reports from all the different programs emanating from the Harris Center, I am amazed about how much is going on here. 83 King's Highway is not a sleepy retreat, but rather a bustling center of activity that positively impacts people, wildlife, and places throughout the Monadnock region. The past year has seen many changes at the Harris Center. Jenn Sutton and Laurel Swope joined the staff and have become a big part of the education, camp, and outreach programming. Eric Masterson, our land-protection specialist, moved to full-time status in the spring. This change was critical because we are now monitoring over 100 conservation easements every year. In addition, at the end of June, Laurie Bryan retired from her position as Executive Director. Laurie's management skills, deep institutional knowledge, and sense of humor will be sorely missed. I took over from Laurie in July and have not stopped learning about the quality, scope, and diversity of Harris Center programs since.

In this report you will find descriptions of Harris Center programming that include: Education programs that align with school curriculum requirements, while exposing students to the natural world around them through problem solving exercises; Camp programs that combine fun and learning as kids explore and make connections to the outdoors; Family and Adult programs centered around conservation that range from artistic inspiration to natural history to land stewardship; a wonderfully diverse array of outings exploring conserved lands throughout the Monadnock Region; and a Land Conservation program that focuses on a concise region and emphasizes the development of large conservation clusters. Helping to connect people to their local environment and ensuring that there are plenty of nearby opportunities for people to experience the natural world enhances the region and inspires conservation values that have impacts beyond this region.

In this year's July/August edition of Orion Magazine, David Sobel, an outdoor education researcher, highlighted the Harris Center approach to environmental programs. He wrote:

"One organization that supports children's freedom to roam, play, even build on preserved land is the Harris Center for Conservation Education. The Harris Center is a New Hampshire education center and land trust with one of the most comprehensive family engagement and education programs in northern New England. The staff recognizes that many adults with environmental values speak fondly of childhood experiences like fort building and attribute their land preservation values to these early experiences."



The programmatic reports that follow provide a sense of the range and diversity of last year's Harris Center activities. It is the breadth of and interaction between these activities that provides opportunities for people of all ages to make and sustain connections to the natural world.

In the Schools

School year 2011-2012 found over 2,000 kindergarten through grade 12 students in 27 schools throughout the Monadnock Region learning outside the walls of their classrooms. Each of these 27 schools hosted a Harris Center Naturalist in Residence. Streams, swamps, cemeteries, state parks, and even clear cuts became our outdoor classrooms just beyond the school yard. We began a two year project at Keene Middle School where sixth graders explored the ecology of Tenant Swamp through the seasons as the school community settled into their newly built campus. Meanwhile fourth graders from Hancock produced a trail guide to the Mill Pond Trail at Willard Pond Sanctuary. In Chesterfield we helped the PTO organize a full moon night hike in Pisgah State Park, where we called for owls and they called back. In Jaffrey, students looked at weathering of cemetery tombstones and discovered predictable differences between slate, granite, and marble. In Keene, third graders watched and helped to band migratory birds in wetlands outside their schools. Then they returned the following Saturday with their parents to share with them the exhilaration and awe that they felt as they learned why and how bird banding is done. In Antrim, fourth graders roved the village center while they learned the stories of Great Brook's mill history and looked for clues of the past. These are lucky children stepping out the door and into their communities where their teachers team up with a Harris Center naturalist who joins them to uncover and discover the stories in their school neighborhood.



The Harris Center teaching staff welcomed two colleagues onto our team last fall, Laurel Swope, focusing on middle and high school programs and Jenn Sutton, splitting her time between elementary school, outreach, and camp programs.

Last fall, we celebrated our Teacher of the Year, John Thomas from Wells Memorial School in Harrisville. John was honored for his work with second and third graders who not only studied NH black bears, but wrote letters to the editor which were published across the state urging people to take down their bird feeders from March through November.

We continue to integrate digital technology into our teaching where it seems most appropriate. From projecting the daily hawk migration report from hawkcount.org onto a big screen to look for patterns in the data; to using trail cameras beside bird feeders and school trails to record wildlife visitors; to using aquatic chemical testing probes and digital data loggers in the middle schools; and to using easy to read digital soil thermometers with young explorers, we are blending using our hands, hearts, imaginations, and senses with these new tools that are part of the lives of the next generation. And when something breaks down, there are plenty of experts willing, and usually able, to fix it!

The Harris Center worked with the following schools during 2011/2012:

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 Schools
Jaffrey Grade School
Rindge Memorial School

Other School Districts

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

Land Protection

Eight properties in five towns were newly protected this fiscal year, bringing the total land we've protected to about 17,900 acres. Seven of these properties served to link or build upon existing protected land clusters and the eighth protects important watershed resources.



In Greenfield, a conservation easement on the Mo Belmore Farm creates a protected corridor between Greenfield State Park and Otter Brook Farm lands—and tracks tell us moose find it useful! In Hancock, the gift of a conservation easement by Holly Fincher and Peter Newell abuts our Thorn King Woods-Flagstone Farm block and protects the scenic meadow at the junction of the King's Highway, Eaton and Old Dublin Roads. In Harrisville, friends of Supersanctuary wildlife enabled us to purchase former Willard Richardson land, which comprises an upland-lowland habitat link between our protected uplands in Eastview and the Army Corps protected riparian wetlands along Nubanusit Brook.

Three land protection projects were completed in the eastern part of Nelson. Donated funds enabled us to buy approximately eighty acres. Maury, Martha and Elizabeth Collins donated a conservation easement protecting another 170+ acres on Old Stoddard Road to add to our cluster of protected land along the road and Bailey Brook. Combined with a previous Collins' easement gift, and the bargain sale of a third easement (about a mile and half of Old Stoddard Road) is now protected. The importance of this road for far ranging wildlife crossing was illustrated by Antioch graduate student research showing more utility poles with Black Bear territorial bites per mile than any other road in the Supersanctuary! And in western Nelson, Terry Mednick donated a conservation easement protecting 65 acres, which include most of Hardy Hill, adding to the large cluster of contiguous protected lands around Silver Lake.

In Peterborough, we received two more conservation easement donations. Valerie Smallwood protected her scenic property along Route 136, and Otter Brook via deed restriction and an 18 acre conservation easement abutting our 470 acre Otter Brook Farm conservation easement across the brook. And at the southern tip of the Supersanctuary, Louise Eastman donated a conservation easement protecting 45 acres of permeable forested land fronting on High and Summer Streets. Very strategically located, the property abuts the MacDowell Colony land and slopes down to Summer Street, directly across from an important municipal water well and the town "Common Path" along the Contoocook.

Summer Camp

Another summer of fun, exploration and learning has come to an end as we look out our window and see the beautiful colors of autumn. This year's summer camp program brought returning smiles and new smiles alike, as children from preschool through middle school age explored the outdoors. We are excited to bring back the two-week session to Wol's Nest, which provided a richer and deeper experience socially and educationally.



Fourth and fifth graders were challenged with a hike up Bald Mountain, and were rewarded with a swim at Willard Pond, while other campers enjoyed the traditional swim at Briggs Beach. All campers, from the smallest to the tallest relished opportunities to play games, sing songs, make friends, and embark on wild adventures. Whatever the age, the Harris Center has programs for all to enjoy! We look forward to seeing both new and familiar faces when the next summer season warms us again.

Outreach Programs

Outreach at the Harris Center continues to be all about people making connections to our local environment in the Monadnock Region. From babies in backpacks to adult learner programs such as the Environmental Studies Institute, the Harris Center's outreach programs continue to provide people of all ages the opportunities and experiences to get outside, explore and connect to the natural world. The 2011-2012 year was once again another outstanding year of growth and development for Outreach at the Harris Center, reaching over 1,500 people.



Children as young as a few months old began making connections to the outdoors by hiking with their parents and older siblings in a series of programs with local family centers. This connection is continued at the Harris Center as children grow through a series of afterschool programs from the preschool *Small Wonders Club* to elementary school science clubs all the way through middle school reading/hiking club programs. Snowshoe hikes and full moon rambles invited families to take an active role in engaging with the natural world.

Middle school students revved their engines with the Harris Center for the 5th Annual Monadnock Region Junior Solar Sprint. Over 100 students from 5 area public schools designed and built model solar cars and raced them on a beautiful sunny day in June, demonstrating that we have much reason to hope for a brighter and solar energized future with such creative and inspired children in our world.

Adults also had many reasons to come learn at the Harris Center by participating in the Environmental Studies Institute. Courses this year ranged from learning how to identify trees by bark alone, to a reading group on Aldo Leopold, to snowy owl watching on Plum Island. The ESI courses continue to experience growth and interest from a wide variety of people across the Monadnock Region.

Outreach at the Harris Center stretches its wings and reaches out to people and organizations of the Monadnock Region creating connections, generating interchange, and satisfying our mission.



Outings and Events

Over the past year, we offered 108 programs and outings — at no charge and open to the public. Outings included full moon hikes, kayak paddles, and treks to unique locations throughout the region. The majority of these events were led by volunteers, sharing their love of the outdoors with others. In addition to outdoor events, we hosted a variety of programs including book signings, an apple tasting, workshops for landowners and easement monitors, and presentations by those who had explored Prince Edward Island by bicycle, completed a through-hike on the Appalachian Trail, and another who reached the summit of Mount Everest.

While the Harris Center provides the location and support for these events, we frequently have cosponsors. This year's partners included: NH Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, Society for Protection of NH Forests, Monadnock Conservancy, Slow Food Monadnock, Monadnock Chapter of Trout Unlimited, UNH Cooperative Extension, Hancock Library, Friends of Pisgah, Antioch University NE. and Hannah Grimes Marketplace. Thanks to all who volunteer and collaborate to make these events available to the public.

Citizen Science

Throughout March and April, approximately 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 year's unusually hot, dry, and early spring created some unpredictable migration conditions, but AVEO's extended network of Salamander Crossing Guards still crossed over 850 critters, bringing our five-year total to more than 12,000 amphibians! Quotes from some of our jubilant volunteers best tell the tale: *"I took photos of 7 or 8 different kinds of amphibians!!! All from one night. It was an awesome experience finding all these fascinating creatures, counting them, and taking pictures."* *"Salamander crossing has brought great spring JOY to our family!"* *"We crossed 3 spotted salamanders, 2 newts, 1 wood frog and more worms than I can count...we are frozen, wet and happy."*

This spring, 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**. For the first time, we partnered with the and the Monadnock Conservancy to conserved lands under their steward-crew of 20 citizen science volunteers documenting 25 as active amphibian University New England graduate conservation land, documenting and sites for her master's thesis research



Peterborough Conservation Commission inventory vernal pools on public and ship. In Peterborough, an enthusiastic visited 50 potential vernal pools, breeding sites. In Keene, Antioch student intern Kelly Garner combed monitoring vernal pools as potential field on the impacts of foot traffic on trailside

vernal pools. Sixth graders from the Jaffrey-Rindge Middle School also documented their very first vernal pool in Jaffrey, with a little help from Harris Center teacher/naturalist Laurel Swope. All in all, AVEO volunteers documented 49 vernal pools this spring in Keene, Peterborough, Jaffrey, and Surry, bringing our project total to nearly 80 documented vernal pools on public and conserved land in the Monadnock Region! Along the way, our team of intrepid vernal pool citizen scientists also discovered three previously-unknown Jefferson salamander (a Species of Special Concern in New Hampshire) breeding sites and identified nearly 20 new potential vernal pools to scope out next spring. Data from vernal pools on public land are displayed via a newly-updated, online, illustrated, interactive map at www.aveo.org.

This summer, we again partnered with New Hampshire Audubon on **Project Nighthawk** to monitor the state-endangered Common Nighthawk in Keene, one of the last places in New Hampshire where these aerial insectivores still breed. Project Nighthawk volunteers documented a modest increase in the number of nighthawks in Keene during the breeding season, and their observations led to the discovery of a nighthawk nest on a rooftop at Keene State College – one of only three confirmed nighthawk nests statewide and the first confirmed *successful* rooftop nighthawk nest in New Hampshire since at least 2007. A hopeful story!

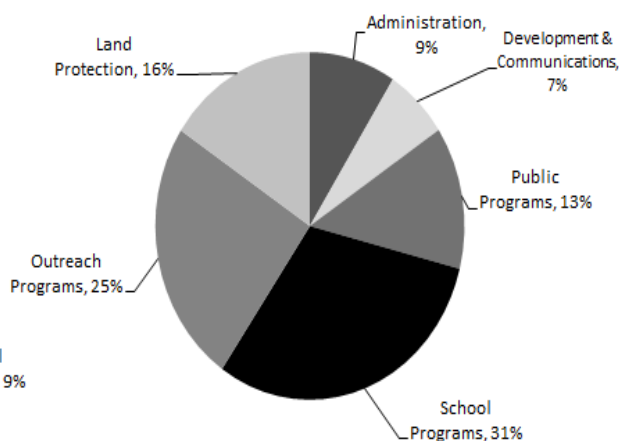
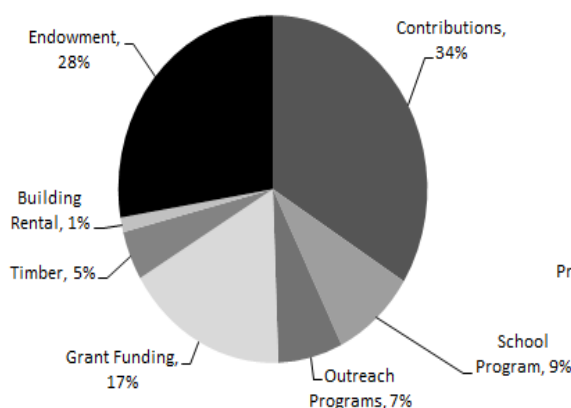


Thank you volunteers!

We can't say enough about our great team of volunteers at the Harris Center. More than sixty volunteers variously cleared trails; stuffed envelopes; served as board, committee, and counsel members; catalogued library materials; graced our events with fabulous flower displays; made building repairs and improvements; prepared and served food; spruced up the Harris Center grounds; built furniture; built trail infrastructure; stuck labels; manned event tables; and so much more! What we *can* say is a huge "THANK YOU!" to all, with our deepest gratitude. We could never reach our goals without your support.

Financial Report: Operating Budget—July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012

INCOME			EXPENSES		
Contributions	\$ 218,113	34%	Administration	\$ 57,238	9%
School Program	\$ 56,200	9%	Development & Communications	\$ 42,268	7%
Outreach Programs	\$ 43,417	7%	Public Programs	\$ 84,376	13%
Grant Funding	\$ 108,955	17%	School Programs	\$ 194,613	31%
Timber	\$ 29,285	5%	Outreach Programs	\$ 156,428	25%
Building Rental	\$ 8,750	1%	Land Protection	\$ 99,829	16%
Endowment	\$ 177,000	28%			
Total	\$ 641,720	100%	Total	\$ 634,752	100%



The financial statements of the Harris Center for Conservation Education are reviewed by Thomas S. Bates, Certified Public Accountant, P.C. of Keene, NH. The reviewed financial statements are available for public view at the Harris Center office in Hancock, NH.

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