

Annual Report



July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018

Director's Report

As the Harris Center starts the countdown to our 50th anniversary in 2020, the pace of exciting events and achievements hasn't slowed.

On the land front, the Jaquith Rail Trail bridge was successfully installed last fall, opening another fantastic trail segment in Hancock and Harrisville. We also began work — and fundraising — for two big land protection projects that will help to ensure water quality in Silver and Granite Lakes for generations to come.

During the school year, our team of talented teacher-naturalists engaged more than 3,000 students throughout the Monadnock Region in immersive, hands-on experiences with nearby nature. Learners of all ages enjoyed our packed and diverse calendar of over 140 lectures, workshops, films, outings, courses, afterschool programs, and camps.

Last spring, Keene became the first community in New Hampshire to close a road on "Big Nights," ensuring the safety of migrating amphibians and the many families who come to watch. The decision was based on the data collected by our network of dedicated citizen scientists, who have moved more than 42,750 amphibians to safety at dozens of road crossings since 2007.

Thanks to a generous bequest, we were also able to replace our antiquated solar panels with a brand new rooftop array last spring. The new panels should produce two-thirds of the electricity needed to power our building, saving the Harris Center money while reducing our reliance on fossil fuels. What a wonderful gift that keeps on giving.

You can read about these achievements, and many more, in the pages that follow. Through it all, we strive to ensure that our programs support and build upon each other. Our land conservation work protects a diversity of local ecosystems and models exemplary stewardship; our educational programming helps create future stewards; and our research activities provide exciting learning opportunities and inform the stewardship of our lands.

A huge thank you to our volunteers, supporters, and staff who accomplish so much each year as we work together to build a bright future for the people, wildlife, and landscapes of the Monadnock Region.

Jeremy Wilson, Executive Director



▲ **Tree Coring**
Jeremy Wilson teaches the 2018 KSC conservation internship team how to collect tree cores. photo: Brett Amy Thelen

HARRIS CENTER
FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Partners and Cosponsors

We work with many others each year to connect people to the natural world. Our partners and event cosponsors this year included:

Antioch University New England	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee	Nature Groupie
Avenue A Teen Center	Nelson Conservation Commission
Bentley Commons	Nelson Town Library
Cheshire County Conservation District	Nelson Trails Committee
City of Keene	NH Audubon
C&S Wholesale Grocers	NH Department of Environmental Services
Connecticut River Conservancy	NH Fish and Game
Ducks Unlimited	Norway Pond Commission
Fitzwilliam Town Library	Nubanusit Lake Association
Francestown Land Trust	Peterborough Conservation Commission
GEP Dodge Library	Peterborough Town Library
Hancock Conservation Commission	Piscataquog Land Conservancy
Hancock Town Library	Quabbin-to-Cardigan Partnership
Harrisville Public Library	Rindge Conservation Commission
Harrisville Trails	RiverMead
Historical Society of Cheshire County	Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests
Horatio Colony Nature Preserve	SPARCnet
Dr. Jon Atwood	The American Chestnut Foundation
Keene Middle School	The Caterpillar Lab
Keene State College (KSC) Environmental Studies and Biology Departments	The Grapevine Family and Community Resource Center
KSC CALL Program	The Hancock Inn
KSC Film Society	The Nature Conservancy
Local Girl Scout and Boy Scout Troops	Town of Swanzey
Loon Preservation Committee	Trout Unlimited
Monadnock Conservancy	UNH Cooperative Extension
Monadnock Waldorf High School	UNFI United Natural Foods
	US Army Corps of Engineers

Thank you to all!

“Children need to breathe fresh air and engage personally with a real world where their minds and bodies can develop and bloom, burst into life, and inspire them to love life.”

– Chris Packham, naturalist and author

Environmental Education in the Schools

Janet Altobello, School Program Coordinator and Teacher-Naturalist

During the 2017-2018 school year, Harris Center teacher-naturalists engaged more than 3,000 students from 28 schools in exploring the wilds of the Monadnock Region.



▲ **Investigating the Forest Floor** Great Brook School students search for invertebrates with teacher-naturalist John Benjamin. photo: Ben Conant

laying the groundwork for studying the Contoocook River at Jaffrey Grade School; helping 4th graders across the ConVal School District design and conduct winter mammal investigations outside their schools; and introducing Nelson Elementary School students to the joys of mushroom foraging.



▲ **Wonderful Worms** Robin's Nest Nature Preschoolers dig in to the fascinating (and squirmly!) world of worms. photo: Ben Conant

Some highlights of the past year include: guiding Marlborough's 5th graders in a water quality study of Minnewawa Brook, and then sharing their data with the town conservation commission; supporting Chesterfield 6th graders to take the lead in mapping the land beside their school and designing two outdoor classrooms, which are now in use;

An ongoing goal of the Harris Center's school program is to build the capacity of classroom teachers to bring students outside, even without us by their side. To that end, our naturalists wrote a monthly newsletter for 3rd grade teachers, which included tips and encouragement for getting outside with their classes to observe



▲ **Discovering Local Waterways** Dublin Consolidated School 4th graders trace out local streams and lakes on a topographic map as they prepare to make a 3-D watershed model.

bird behavior through the seasons. We also provided preschool teachers with “lending bags” filled with natural history information about a topic, a read-aloud book or two, and suggestions for age-appropriate outdoor activities to help young children discover nearby nature.

These are just some of the ways we inspire children and teachers to awaken their inner naturalists and burst into the life of the real world just outside our doors. To learn more about this vitally important work, visit harriscenter.org/school-programs. ➔

▼ **Birds in Our Neighborhood** Keene 3rd graders search for birds near their school during a spring outing with Harris Center naturalist Polly Pattison. photo: Ben Conant



The Harris Center for Conservation Education partnered with the following schools in 2017-2018:

Antrim Elementary School
Benjamin Franklin School, Keene
Chesterfield Elementary School
Conant High School, Jaffrey
ConVal High School, Peterborough
Dublin Community Preschool
Dublin Consolidated School
First Friends Preschool (in three towns)

Francestown Elementary School
Fuller Elementary School, Keene
Great Brook Middle School, Antrim
Greenfield Elementary School
Hancock Elementary School
Harrisville Children's Center
Jaffrey Grade School
James Faulkner Elementary School, Stoddard

Keene Middle School
Marlborough Elementary School
Nelson Elementary School
Peterborough Elementary School
Pierce Elementary School, Bennington
Rindge Memorial School
Robin's Nest Nature Preschool, Peterborough

South Meadow Middle School, Peterborough
Symonds Elementary School, Keene
Temple Elementary School
Wells Memorial School, Harrisville
Wheelock Elementary School, Keene

Thanks for exploring nature with us this year!

Community Programs

Susie Spikol, Community Programs Coordinator and Teacher-Naturalist

This was another exceptional year for the Harris Center's community programs. We worked with town libraries, family resource centers, retirement homes, colleges, preschools, local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and other partners to offer a wide variety of nature-based programs for people of all ages. Developing and deepening our connections with these partners enabled us to offer more learning opportunities for the community than we ever could have offered on our own.

With over 550 participants this year, from babies in backpacks to residents in assisted living, the Harris Center's community programs helped people connect to the natural world in active and creative ways. In any given week with the Harris Center, parents might accompany their babies and toddlers on a naturalist-led ramble,



▲ **LAB GIRLS** This afterschool program connects middle school girls with high school mentors and women working in science, technology, engineering and math. photo: Susie Spikol

Summer Camps

Jenna Spear O'Mara, Camp Director and Teacher-Naturalist

In our 43rd year of offering hands-on, nature-inspired summer camps, 130 eager kids joined skilled Harris Center naturalists for six different adventures. Our youngest campers, the preschool Explorers, collected insects, roamed forests and meadows, and "became" wild animals. Elementary-school-aged Woodlanders hiked, built forts, and reveled in classic camp games. Rovers, Paddlers, and Voyagers traveled further afield, seeking out mountaintop blueberries, discovering woodland vernal pools, and canoe camping on beloved Spoonwood Pond. Wanderers spent a week learning low-impact hiking, camping, and cooking skills in a true SuperSanctuary hike from the Harris Center, up Thumb Mountain, down to Lake Skatutakee, up Cobb Hill, and home again along the rail trail. Cheers for another fun summer exploring the great outdoors! ➡



▲ **Thumbs Up for Summer Camp!** photo: Ben Conant



▲ **Babies in Backpacks and Toddlers in Tow** Slow rambles – specially designed for babies, toddlers, and their caregivers – introduce our youngest naturalists to the wonders of the wild world. photo: Ben Conant

elementary school students might learn how to use a compass and build a flint fire at an afterschool program, middle school "LAB GIRLS" might discover a new career path after talking with an environmental toxicologist, and retirees might dig in to the science of songbirds during a hands-on bird banding demonstration. With the Harris Center in this region, there is no reason anyone at any age should be bored. Opportunities abound!

The Harris Center's community programs are made possible by our partners, volunteers and, of course, our participants. Let us know if you have an idea for a new program for the next year. We welcome your suggestions! ➡



▲ **Bird Banding Demonstration** An intergenerational audience gets an up-close look at local songbirds during a bird banding demonstration with Jon Atwood and Polly Pattison. photo: Ben Conant

Outings and Events Again this year, we offered more than 140 outings and events – all open to the public and most of them free of charge. We included hikes on trails both old and new, paddles, snowshoe treks, cross-country skiing, hawk watches, bird counts, film showings, presentations, and more. We're grateful for the many volunteers who led these events, sharing their love of the natural world. We encourage any outing suggestions you may have, and welcome new volunteer trip leaders, as well.

► **Shinrin-yoku (Forest Bathing)** Through yoga poses, outdoor meditation, and quiet observation, these workshops offer an opportunity to slow down and take solace in nature. photo: Ben Conant



Planned Giving You can help ensure a grand future for the Monadnock Region by naming the Harris Center as a beneficiary in your will or estate plan. Anyone can make a bequest, and no amount is too small. For more information, contact Jeremy Wilson at (603) 525-3394, or wilson@harriscenter.org. ➡

Land Conservation

Eric Masterson, Land Protection Coordinator

One of the most exciting developments in 2018 was enabled by previous land protection efforts dating back to 1986, when Harris Center supporters donated the Merrill and Sawyer land that borders a portion of the old Manchester and Keene railroad line. These gifts laid the foundation for a trail that now connects Jaquith Road in Harrisville with Jaquith Road in Hancock along 1.5 miles of former railroad bed.

The final pieces of the puzzle were completed last fall and spring with the installation of a repurposed and restored 50-foot iron truss bridge over Jaquith Brook. This joint project with the **Harrisville Trails Committee** was made possible through the generosity of truly extraordinary individual and business volunteers, several grants, and many generous donors who provided the bridge, funds, and land. Thank you to all who were involved in creating this terrific recreational resource for the region!

New and Ongoing Projects

In December, friends of the SuperSanctuary joined together to fund the purchase of a 20-acre conservation easement on a wooded parcel near Hancock Village. Abutting Valley Farm to the west, the new **Blanchette conservation easement** protects the scenic approach to Hancock on Route 123, as well as the slope above — and views from — a popular walking route.

We're also working diligently to ensure that two important conservation projects can be completed later this year and in early 2019. In Harrisville, we're working closely with the **Silver Lake Land Trust** to raise funds to protect 47 acres of land located on the south side of Silver Lake. This "Westside" conservation easement will protect 800 feet of undeveloped lakeshore and 1,350 feet of frontage on Westside Road and Wells Lake Road. Upon successful completion of this project, an astounding 80 percent of the Silver Lake watershed will have been conserved.

And finally, pending conclusion of fundraising efforts, the **Granite Lake Headwaters** project will protect 515 acres of highland overlooking Granite Lake in Stoddard. A Keene State College study documented many wildlife species using the property this summer, including moose, bear, fisher, and bobcat. The land also directly abuts a 2,259-acre wildlife



▲ **Rail Trail Bridge Over Jaquith Brook** photo: Jeremy Wilson

corridor stretching south to Spoonwood Pond, which the Harris Center has been working to protect and grow since 1983.

Thank You

Our land protection and stewardship work was made possible this year through the New Hampshire Recreational Trails Program, the Quabbin-to-Cardigan Partnership, the Harrisville Fund, the Caswell Family Foundation, and remarkably generous donations of land, time, expertise, labor, and funds from many friends of the SuperSanctuary. Heartfelt thanks to all! ➡

Thank You to Our Hard-Working Volunteers

So much of the Harris Center's success is due to the work of our fabulous volunteers. In addition to our board members — who all serve as volunteers — and our volunteer outing leaders, many others help us to achieve our important mission. Volunteers monitor and clear trails, assist our teacher-naturalists, document amphibian road crossing sites, care for gardens, provide food and flowers for events, help with mailings, provide legal counsel, keep our grounds safe and beautiful, conduct citizen science, and much more. We appreciate their efforts more than words can tell. ➡

Conservation Research

Brett Amy Thelen, Science Director

Citizen Science

In the spring of 2018, 200 **Salamander Crossing Brigade** volunteers moved a record 7,799 amphibians to safety at more than 30 sites, bringing our project total to nearly **1,000** citizen scientists and an astonishing **42,750 amphibians** since 2007! In an exciting new development, we also worked with the City of Keene to close the North Lincoln Street crossing to vehicle traffic on migration nights — the first and only time (so far) a road has been closed to ensure the safe passage of migrating amphibians in the Granite State.



▲ Helping Hands

A Salamander Crossing Brigade volunteer tallies spotted salamanders on a “Big Night” in 2018. photo: Amy Unger



▲ Road Closed for Amphibians

This spring, the Harris Center worked with the City of Keene to close a section of North Lincoln Street to vehicle traffic on warm, rainy nights. The temporary road closures protected thousands of migrating amphibians and provided a safe space for families to witness the spectacle of the amphibian migration. photo: Brett Amy Thelen

In April and May, our **Vernal Pool Project** volunteers documented 22 new vernal pools — which serve as specialized breeding habitat for those migrating amphibians — for a project total of 308 vernal pools in 16 towns.

Over the summer, we once again partnered with New Hampshire Audubon's **Project Nighthawk** to monitor the state-endangered Common Nighthawk in Keene, where our volunteers documented two breeding pairs — but, sadly, no surviving chicks.



▲ Camera Trapping at Granite Lake Headwaters

A black bear walks past a trail camera placed by KSC student researchers on the Granite Lake Headwaters land. photo: Taylor White

Research on Our Lands

This spring and fall, we worked with community volunteers, 8th graders from both Great Brook and South Meadow Schools, and graduate students from Antioch University New England to monitor six study plots in the Harris Center woods as part of **SPARCnet**, a collaborative research effort aimed at understanding the effects of climate change on woodland salamanders.

In the sixth year of an innovative partnership with Keene State College, four undergraduates participated in an eight-week summer **conservation internship program** with the Harris Center. Together, the interns documented vernal pools, monitored chestnut seedlings, initiated a tree core study in the woods surrounding Norway Pond, surveyed and removed hundreds of invasive plants, and collected data on road-stream crossings, among other tasks.

They were also given the memorable assignment of retrieving and transporting not one, but two dead Bald Eagle chicks — two weeks apart — from Lake Nubanusit to a wildlife rehabilitation center to be necropsied.



▲ Culvert Surveys

KSC conservation intern Audrey Kaiser measures water depth at a road-stream crossing in the SuperSanctuary. photo: Brett Amy Thelen

Several KSC students are also conducting **capstone research** projects in the SuperSanctuary, assessing wildlife use of the Granite Lake Headwaters property, conducting butterfly surveys, and searching for rare plant communities.

In addition, Dr. John Gunn of UNH **inventoried mature forest stands** on Harris Center-conserved lands, and independent researchers Eric Aldrich and Dallas Huggins continued to track **bobcat activity** in the hidden corners of the SuperSanctuary.

Thank You and Next Steps

We're grateful to the Caswell Family Foundation, Keene State College, and all of our citizen scientists, researchers, and project partners for their invaluable contributions. We also look forward to reporting next year on our brand new partnership with New Hampshire Audubon's Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory. Here's to more science in the SuperSanctuary — and beyond — in 2019! ➡



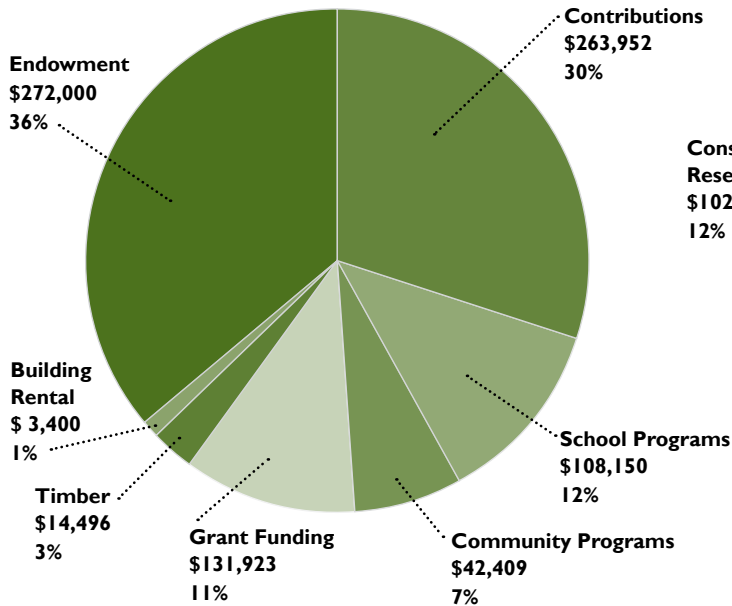
Harris Center Financial Report

Operating Budget – July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018

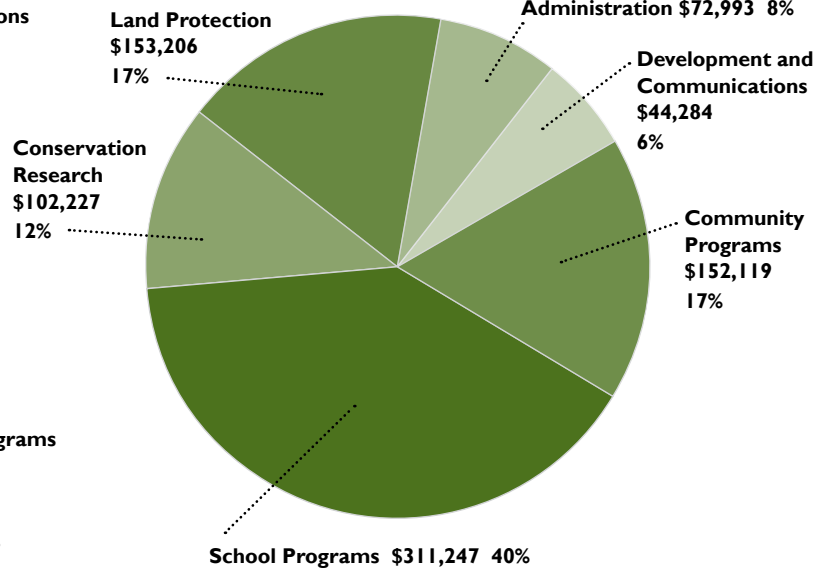
The financial statements of the Harris Center for Conservation Education are reviewed by Thomas S. Bates, Certified Public Accountant, P.C. of Keene, New Hampshire. The reviewed financial statements are available for public view at the Harris Center office in Hancock, NH.

The Harris Center for Conservation Education is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

photo:Tianne Strombeck



INCOME TOTAL: \$836,331



EXPENSES TOTAL: \$836,075

During the 2017-2018 fiscal year, the Harris Center received an additional \$619,634 in donations for land and easement purchases, and \$63,978 in donations and bequests for our endowment. We're grateful for this tremendous support.



Harris Center Staff

Jeremy Wilson, *Executive Director*
 Janet Altobello, *School Program Coordinator and Teacher-Naturalist*
 Margaret Baker, *Communications Specialist*
 John Benjamin, *Teacher-Naturalist*
 Meade Cadot, *Naturalist Emeritus*
 Michael Hightower, *Teacher-Naturalist*
 Jaime Hutchinson, *Teacher-Naturalist*
 Diana Jacobs, *Membership Coordinator*

Sara LeFebvre, *Finance Administrator*
 Eric Masterson, *Land Program Coordinator*
 James Newsom, *Land Protection Specialist*
 Polly Pattison, *Teacher-Naturalist*
 Jenna Spear O'Mara, *Teacher-Naturalist*
 Susie Spikol, *Community Programs Coordinator and Teacher-Naturalist*
 Brett Amy Thelen, *Science Director*

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Canoeing Silver Lake, with a view of the undeveloped northeastern shoreline, which has been conserved by the Harris Center and the Silver Lake Land Trust. photo: Brett Amy Thelen