

# Annual Report

## HARRIS CENTER 50 YEARS

FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION

July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020

## Director's Report

Last October, the Harris Center launched our **50th Anniversary** celebration with an Annual Meeting featuring an inspiring interview with our founder, **Eleanor Briggs**. This kicked off a fantastic array of events, art shows, outings, and many other 50th-themed activities. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic derailed many of our spring and summer plans; however, watching the Harris Center staff adapt to this new reality was truly inspiring and makes me so proud to be part of this organization.

Through the fall and winter, our teacher-naturalists worked in classrooms across the Monadnock Region. When the pandemic closed schools in March, Harris Center teaching staff coordinated with classroom teachers to offer remote alternatives. Creativity flourished with **"Wild at Home"** videos, a frequently updated blog with ideas for activities that kids can do outside, scavenger hunts along our trails, and virtual book groups, story hours, and nature sing-alongs.

Our community programs went remote as well, with online lectures, **Environmental Studies Institute** courses, **"Ask a Naturalist"** virtual happy hours, curated **"Harris Center Reads"** book lists, and many other popular offerings. A silver lining to the pandemic is that speakers and attendees have been able to join us for these virtual programs from further afield, and that the presentations are easily recorded and shared via the Harris Center's **YouTube** channel — which is now a full-fledged extension of our work with the community.



photo © Ben Conant

season at the **Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory**. We also worked with partners to offer the first **Monadnock Region Natural History Conference** for a sold-out crowd. During the pandemic, we ran socially-distanced citizen science projects, including the Salamander Crossing Brigades, Project Nighthawk in Keene, Norway Pond water quality sampling, and red-backed salamander surveys.

As always — but most especially for this past year — a tremendous **thank you** to our volunteers, supporters, and staff, who are helping the Harris Center build a grand future for the people, wildlife, and landscapes of the Monadnock Region!

**Jeremy Wilson**, Executive Director

Our land program finalized six easements in Antrim and purchased a property in Harrisville, totaling more than 900 acres of newly conserved land. The land staff also spruced up our trail network with new kiosks and signage in response to the dramatically increased trail use during the pandemic.

On the conservation research front, fall brought a very successful

## Partners and Co-sponsors

We work with many others every year to connect people to the natural world. Our 2019-2020 community partners and event co-sponsors included:

American House	Nelson Conservation Commission
Andorra Forest	Nelson Town Library
Antioch Bird Club	Nelson Trails Committee
Antioch University New England	NH Audubon
Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee	NH Department of Environmental Services
Avenue A Teen Center	NH Department of Health and Human Services
Cheshire County Conservation District	NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
City of Keene	NH Fish and Game
Connecticut River Conservancy	NH Humanities
Dublin School PTO	NH State Parks
Electric Earth Concerts	Northern Woodlands
Eyes on Owls	Norway Pond Commission
Francetown Land Trust	Nubanusit Lake Association
Francetown PTO	Orchard Hill Breadworks
Franklin Pierce University	Peterborough Conservation Commission
Hancock Conservation Commission	Peterborough Recreation Center
Hancock Town Library	Peterborough Town Library
Harrisville Conservation Commission	Pierce School PTO
Harrisville Public Library	Piscataquog Land Conservancy
Harrisville Trails	Post and Beam Brewing
Hawk Migration Association of North America	Quabbin-to-Cardigan Partnership
Hawk Mountain	Rindge Conservation Commission
Heartwood Media	RiverMead
Hillside Village	SALT Video Productions
Historical Society of Cheshire County	Scott-Farrar at Peterborough
Horatio Colony Nature Preserve	Seaver Silver Lake Farm Trust
Inside-Outside Advisory Group	Silver Lake Land Trust
Jaffrey Historical Society	Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests
Dr. Jon Atwood	Southwest Regional Planning Commission
Keene State College	SPARCnet
Local Girl Scout and Boy Scout Troops	Stoddard Conservation Commission
Loon Preservation Committee	Surry Village Charter School
Miller State Park	The American Chestnut Foundation
Monadnock Conservancy	The Caterpillar Lab
Monadnock International Film Festival	The Grapevine Family and Community Resource Center
Monadnock Region Harvard and Radcliffe Alumnae Chapter	The Hancock Inn
Moosewood Ecological LLC	The Nature Conservancy
Native Geographic	The Well School
Native Plant Trust	Toadstool Bookshop
Nature's Green Grocer	Town of Surry
Nature Groupie	Trout Unlimited
	UNH Cooperative Extension
	US Army Corps of Engineers
	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

photo © Michael New

# Environmental Education in the Schools

Janet Altobello, School Program Director and Teacher-Naturalist

The first semester of the 2019-2020 school year started out with the familiar rhythms that Harris Center teacher-naturalists know and love: hawk migration lessons and hikes with elementary school classes; setting up a 10th grade salamander population study; discovering the forms and functions of fungi with middle schoolers; launching a year of mammal investigations for 4th grade classes in Keene and a water quality study of the Contoocook River with Jaffrey 5th graders. In Nelson, students continued weekly nature study classes and their monthly Forest Club, in which they enjoyed self-directed play in the school woods.

At our Annual Meeting, we honored **Morgan Cooper**, 4th grade teacher at Jaffrey Grade School, as our **Educator of the Year** for her dedication to including outdoor explorations in her curriculum all year long.



▲ **Slow Birding** This spring, Harris Center teacher-naturalists introduced students to the concept of "slow birding" — which is focused on careful observation of bird behavior, rather than quickly identifying a bird and then moving on to the next species.

photo © Ben Conant

Over the winter, we launched a new series of monthly "**More Time Outside**" professional development study groups for preschool and elementary teachers.

Then, on March 13, schools abruptly closed in response to the unfolding COVID-19 global pandemic, and everything turned inside-out and upside-down.

The following week, the Harris Center teaching staff

## ► Go Wild

Our new "Go Wild" blog provided dozens of ideas for activities kids could do as a break from screen-based remote learning — including detailed instructions for how to conduct a rotting log investigation. photo © Jenna Spear

regrouped and adjusted our ways of supporting teachers in getting students outside. The Harris Center's "**Go Wild: Things Your Kids**

**Can Do Outside**" blog was born, with new activities added each week. Many teachers included those ideas in their weekly remote lesson plans. We designed lessons and created slide shows related to nature topics that kids could investigate in their yards, on their front steps, or from a window — rotting log ecology, dandelions, worms, and the spring bird migration, among others.

Then we began weekly Zoom meetings with classes to encourage their explorations of backyard nature. Students were introduced to "slow birding" and began watching, mapping, photographing, and describing the behavior of birds in their yards.

It's a whole new world for education, but nearby nature has never been more important — and we're here, working side by side with students and teachers, to introduce them to the solace, wonder, and

inspiration that can be found just outside their doors. ♡



## ◀ Wild at Home

Through videos and Zoom meetings, Harris Center naturalists encouraged children to explore nature in their own backyards. photo © Ben Conant



**"Sustained, close attention to the physical world and extended interaction with it are fundamental to science inquiry."**

— ELLEN DORIS, *Doing What Scientists Do: Children Learn to Investigate Their World*

## The Harris Center for Conservation Education partnered with the following schools in 2019-2020:

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 Director  
and Teacher-Naturalist

The 2019-2020 year was unlike any other in the Harris Center's history. Whether we were celebrating our 50th Anniversary by walking in the footsteps of the Harris Center's first naturalist or hosting a Zoom presentation featuring photos and videos from the Hancock Wildlife Cam during quarantine, our community programs have proven to be adaptable, creative, and engaging — even in the midst of a global pandemic.

Our year was filled with commemorative events as we acknowledged our golden anniversary. We hiked through the decades with Meade Cadot and Jeremy Wilson, listened to an opera based on an original tale by Odds Bodkin, read the forested landscape with Tom

Wessels, and even hosted our first-ever Harris Center "Trivia Night."

In the fall and winter, our **Babies in Backpacks** and **Toddlers in Tow** programs guided parents with young children on explorations of our conserved lands, a **before-school walking club at Pierce School** helped elementary school students and teachers start their days outside, and the **Yeti Club** and **Lab Girls** after-school clubs continued to inspire local middle schoolers.

In addition to our 50th Anniversary events and programs for families and students, we offered more than 100



▲ **Yeti Club** This Harris Center after-school club at Great Brook and South Middle Schools helped middle schoolers learn how to hike smart in the winter woods.

## Winter Camps

Jaime Hutchinson and John Benjamin, Teacher-Naturalists

February's great weather was just right for **Winter Adventures** at the Harris Center. Thirty elementary school children spent three fun-filled days during their school vacation exploring the woods, learning about New Hampshire wildlife, making nature crafts, and singing songs. As part of a lesson on animal feet, we closely inspected the Harris Center's mount collection, used rubber molds to make plaster casts, strapped on snowshoes, and searched the field and woods for animal tracks. And no Harris Center camp experience would be complete without the Mystery Animal and "the Squeeze!"

**Winter Survival Skills** was once again a popular way for middle schoolers to spend a day of February break. After reviewing all our necessary gear and winter safety precautions, we headed out on snowy trails for a day of connecting with our inner Yetis. A highlight of the day was building a campfire as a group and enjoying toasted s'mores and wild edible tea made from hemlock needles, birch bark, and winter-green leaves. Delicious! ➦



photo © Jaime Hutchinson



▲ **Hiking Through the Decades** To celebrate our 50th Anniversary, Harris Center staff led several hikes tracing the history of our land protection efforts.

other outings and events for the general public — most of them free of charge. Hiking, running, biking, and paddling moved our bodies; lectures and presentations inspired our minds.

Whether working with bird-watching teens, Keene State College's CALL program for retirees, the Hancock Town Library, or Hillside Village — in person or through virtual programs — we shared our knowledge and passion for the outdoors with thousands of people.

Our response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that our community programs still do what the Harris Center has done so well for the past 50 years: connect people of all ages to this place we call home. ➦

▼ **A New Way of Gathering** After canceling all in-person spring programming due to the pandemic, Harris Center staff began to offer small-group outings — incorporating COVID-19 precautions such as mask wearing and physical distancing — over the summer. photos © Ben Conant





# Conservation Research

Brett Amy Thelen, Science Director

This past year was an eventful one, as the challenges of adapting to COVID-19 were met with creativity and dedication by our many citizen scientists and research partners. There were also several exciting developments before the world changed — including welcoming **Karen Seaver** as the Harris Center's first-ever staff ecologist, which has greatly increased our conservation research capacity. Read on for other highlights from this extraordinary year...

## Citizen Science

The pandemic began to unfold right at the start of salamander season, forcing us to scale back our **Salamander Crossing**



▲ **Pickerel Frog on Big Night**  
One of 5,797 amphibians moved to safety by our socially-distant Salamander Crossing Brigade volunteers in 2020.  
photo © Rebecca Coleman

Over the summer, we also partnered with NH Audubon's **Project Nighthawk** to monitor the state-endangered Common Nighthawk in Keene, where our socially-distant citizen scientists kept close watch over a rooftop nest that successfully fledged one chick.

## Research on Our Lands

Last fall, community volunteers and graduate students from Antioch University New England monitored six study plots in the Harris Center woods as part of **SPARCnet**, a regional research effort aimed at understanding the effects of climate change on woodland salamanders.

Spring saw the launch of a new partnership with Hawk Mountain focused on **Broad-winged Hawk tagging**. The goal:

outfit one or more hawks with satellite transmitters to help better understand the ecology and migration of this iconic species. We convened a team of volunteers to search



◀ **Red-backed Salamander Surveys** Harris Center Science Director Brett Amy Thelen trains a team of citizen scientists at our SPARCnet research plots. photo © Ben Conant



▲ **September at the Hawk Watch** Birders gather at the Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory (pre-pandemic) to scan the skies for migrating hawks. photo © Raven.Digital

SuperSanctuary lands for Broad-winged Hawk nests — which is where the tagging happens — but unfortunately the project ultimately had to be delayed until next summer due to COVID-19.

## Research in the Region

In the fall of 2019, the Harris Center and NH Audubon conducted the 15th consecutive season of hawk migration monitoring at the **Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory** in Miller State Park in Peterborough. Staff and volunteers tallied 10,503 migrating raptors, documenting declines in Cooper's Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Northern Harrier, Osprey, and Red-tailed Hawk numbers — strengthening the case for more research and conservation efforts on behalf of these species.

In November, we convened the first-ever **Monadnock Region Natural History Conference**, in collaboration with Keene State College, Antioch University New England, Franklin Pierce University, and UNH Extension. This full-day conference featured 33 presentations on topics ranging from Mount Monadnock to forest management, wildlife to water quality, and was attended by more than 160 people.

We also partnered with the **Norway Pond Commission** for a second summer of cyanobacteria monitoring at Norway Pond in Hancock, and to host a one-day symposium highlighting findings from this and other recent studies of Norway Pond.

## Thank You

Heartfelt thanks to all of our project partners and citizen scientists. Here's to more science in the SuperSanctuary — and perhaps a slightly less eventful year — in 2021! 🐸



▲ **Norway Pond Cyanobacteria Monitoring**  
H. Marie Lawrence collects a water quality sample as part of our cyanobacteria monitoring program at Norway Pond in Hancock. photo © Tom Shevenell





▲ **Protecting Gregg Lake** A summer view from the newly conserved Caughey Forest, which includes 2,000 feet of shoreline along Gregg Lake in Antrim.

photo © George Caughey

## Land Conservation

Eric Masterson, Land Program Manager

### Land Protection

This year, the Harris Center completed six conservation easement projects and one land purchase, for a total of 948 acres of newly protected land. The bulk of this activity was in Antrim, with five of the easements protecting a large swath of Bald Basin from further development beyond the Antrim Wind Energy facility. This area has long been a conservation priority for the region.

In addition, **George and Michelle Caughey** donated a conservation easement on a forested parcel abutting Gregg Lake, also in Antrim. The 58-acre property, which has not been logged in 80 years, contains approximately 2,000 feet of shoreline along Gregg Lake. It was conserved for the express purpose of protecting the scenic beauty of the lake and associated wildlife habitat. Although the easement was donated to the Harris Center, it was truly a gift for all who love Gregg Lake.

Finally, thanks to generous support from the Friends of the SuperSanctuary, the Harris Center purchased 41 acres at the corner of Hancock Road and Route 137 in East Harrisville. This mostly forested parcel abuts Harris Center-conserved land on its western and northern boundaries, and contains 2,250 feet of road frontage on Route 137. We have been protecting land in this area since the early 1990s. As a result, this new project adds to 6,000 acres of contiguous conserved land in Harrisville, Hancock, and Nelson.

All of the projects help to ensure abundant wildlife habitat and a wealth of wonderful outdoor recreation opportunities in the

Monadnock Region, now and into the future. The Harris Center has now protected more than 24,000 acres!

### Stewardship

Conserving land is just the beginning. Good stewardship is vital to ensure that the land continues to serve the needs of wildlife and people. Easement monitoring is especially critical. Our two land interns, **Alivia Acosta** and **Ian Aldrich**, monitored most of the Harris Center's 118 conservation easements this year, with a few monitored by staff and volunteers. Thanks to all for your wonderful work.

### Trails

The Harris Center maintains more than 24 miles of hiking trails, which are open to the community free of charge. Some of our newest trails — along the old Keene-Manchester railroad bed — were badly damaged by torrential downpours in the late summer of 2018. This year, thanks to hard work by volunteers and staff and the wonderful generosity of the Friends of the SuperSanctuary, we finally completed all of the key storm damage repairs. We also upgraded our trail kiosks, and added new ones, to meet the dramatic increase in trail use that has occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are so grateful to the volunteers who monitor and maintain our trails and kiosks, even more so during this time of increased visitation. 🐾



▲ **A New Trail Kiosk**

photo © Brett Amy Thelen

## Thank You to Volunteers

Thank you to all the volunteers who lent a hand to the Harris Center this year, clearing trails, helping with mailings, maintaining the pollinator garden and grounds, leading hikes, and much more. Although some volunteer tasks have been curtailed due to the pandemic, many activities have continued, either at home or outdoors. *Thank you, one and all!*

Our **2020 Volunteer Extraordinaire Award** was given to **Richard Haskins** and **Peter Harrison**, who have worked as a team throughout much of the year doing weekly trail maintenance.

We would also like to express our sorrow in learning of **Jean Harrison's** passing; Jean volunteered in our office for many, many years and will remain in our hearts for many more to come. 🐾



# The Year in Giving

Lisa Murray, Outreach Manager



**The Harris Center is profoundly fortunate to have such a loyal and generous community of supporters.**

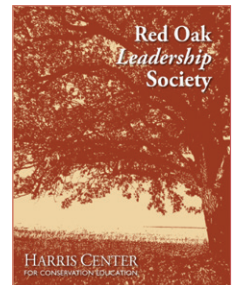
## 50th Anniversary Fund

We are overjoyed to report that we exceeded our 50th Fund goal in gifts and pledges! This fund allows the Harris Center to move into its next 50 years on very firm ground, enabling us to embark on innovative projects and to weather unforeseen challenges with assurance. Several hundred donations came in from Harris Center supporters committed to the work we're doing and to a healthy future. While we cannot celebrate the success of our 50th Anniversary Fund campaign in person, please know that each and every contribution is greatly valued. *Thank you.*



## Special Thanks to:

- Those who led the way in our **Red Oak Leadership Society** by giving at the \$1,000 level or above.
- Those of you who have joined our **Bobcats Forever Legacy Society** by naming the Harris Center in your will or including us in your planned giving. Beloved member Elsie van Buren recently passed away and left the Harris Center a very generous bequest. Planned gifts were also received from Thomas Casey and Ann A. Eaton, who passed away in April and June of 2019, respectively. Elsie, Tom, and Ann will always be remembered.
- Our **Business Partners**, who continue to support our work:



Monadnock Paper Mills



NextEra Energy



C&S Wholesale Grocers

NHTrust Financial Advisors

Nature's Green Grocer

Eversource

Froling Energy

Harrisville Designs

RiverMead

Fenton Family Dealerships

Timken

Bar Harbor Bank & Trust

UNFI

South Pack Solar

## Annual Giving

We also achieved our Annual Fund goal, which allows us to meet our operational costs for the year. Thank you for giving so generously! It is remarkable how many people in the Harris Center community truly care about the environment and have been making an annual donation for decades. Your loyalty is deeply moving.

## CARES Act Tax Info for 2020 Donors

*Did you know?*

- Taxpayers can claim up to \$300 for cash donations to charitable organizations on their federal income tax return, even if they do not itemize deductions.
- The 50% adjusted gross income limitation is suspended for cash contributions to charitable organizations by individuals.
- The 10% limitation for corporations is increased to 25% of taxable income.



[harriscenter.org/donate](https://harriscenter.org/donate)

[harriscenter.org/50th-anniversary-fund](https://harriscenter.org/50th-anniversary-fund)

[harriscenter.org/business-partners](https://harriscenter.org/business-partners)

# Harris Center Financial Report

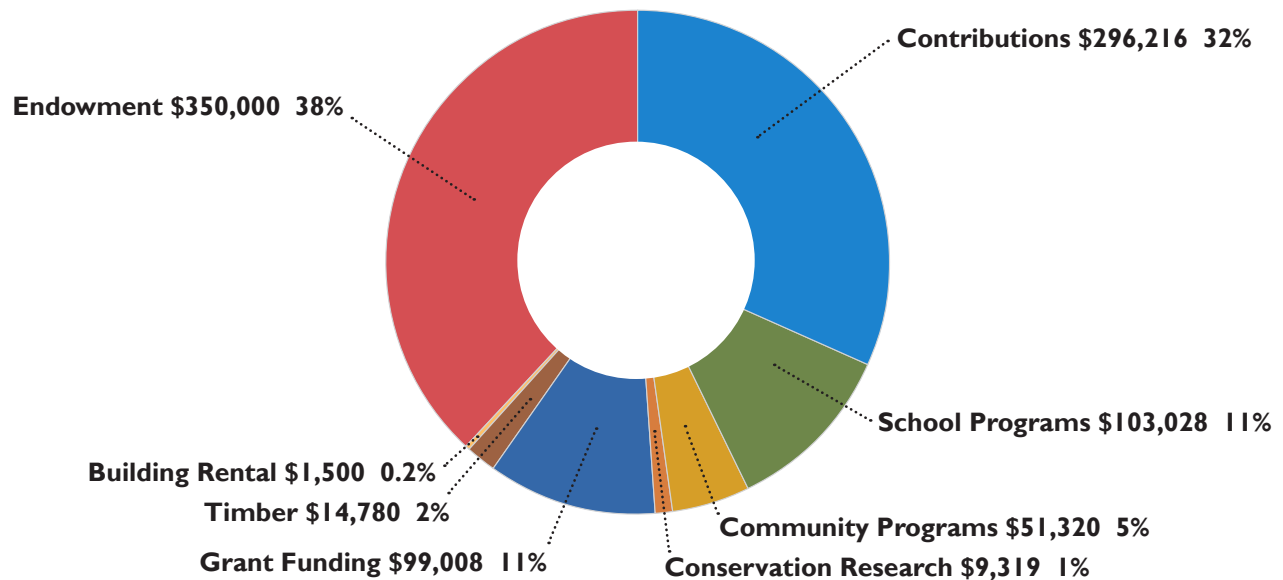
## Operating Budget – July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020

The financial statements of the Harris Center for Conservation Education are audited by Nathan Wechsler & Company, P.A. Certified Public Accountants, Concord, New Hampshire. The audited financial statements are available for public view at the Harris Center office in Hancock, NH.

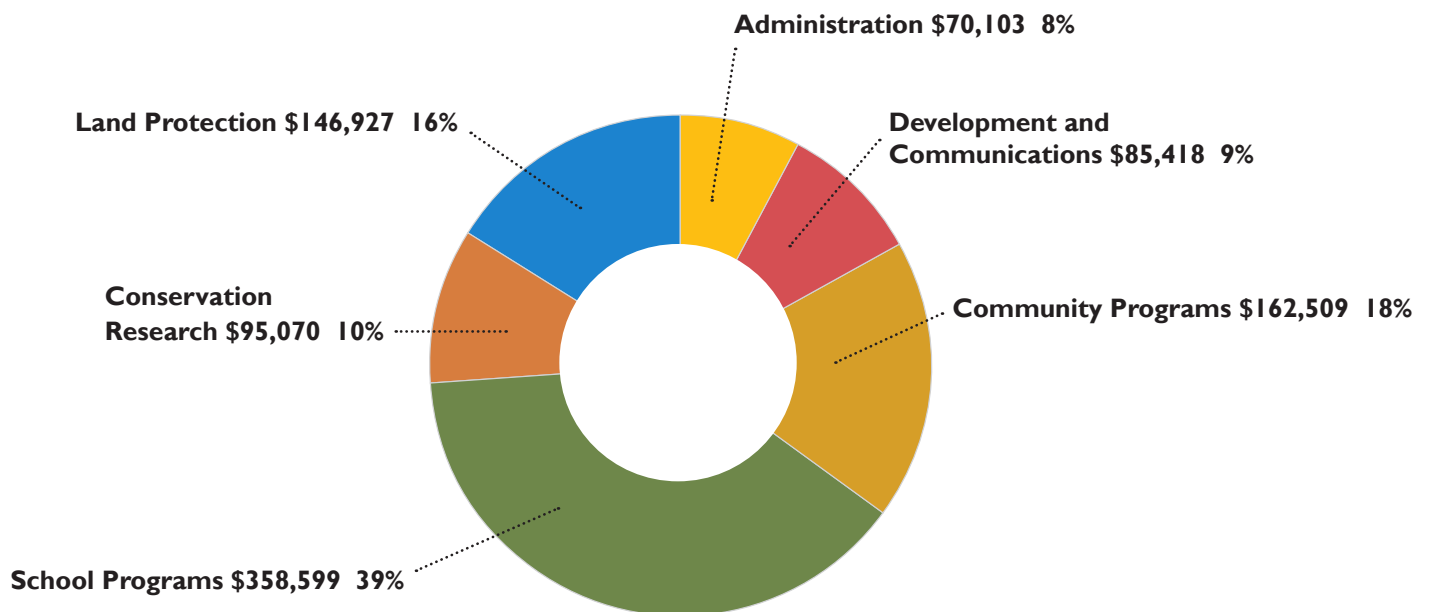
The Harris Center for Conservation Education is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



photo © Andre Moraes



**INCOME TOTAL: \$925,171**



**EXPENSES TOTAL: \$918,626**

During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the Harris Center received an additional \$175,000 in donations for land and easement purchases, \$170,367 in donations to our 50th Fund, and \$538,000 in bequests for our endowment. We're so grateful for this tremendous support.



# Annual Report

July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020

## Harris Center Staff

Jeremy Wilson, *Executive Director*  
Janet Altobello, *School Program  
Director and Teacher-Naturalist*  
Margaret Baker, *Print Communications*  
John Benjamin, *Teacher-Naturalist*  
Phil Brown, *Hawk Watch Coordinator*  
Levi Burford, *Seasonal Raptor Ecologist*  
Meade Cadot, *Naturalist Emeritus*  
Jaime Hutchinson, *Teacher-Naturalist*  
Diana Jacobs, *Donor Coordinator*  
Sara LeFebvre, *Finance Administrator*  
Eric Masterson, *Land Program Manager*  
Lisa Murray, *Outreach Manager*  
James Newsom, *Land Protection Specialist*  
Karen Rent, *Teacher-Naturalist*  
Karen Seaver, *Staff Ecologist*  
Jenna Spear, *Teacher-Naturalist*  
Susie Spikol, *Community Programs  
Director and Teacher-Naturalist*  
Miles Stahmann, *Office Manager*  
Brett Amy Thelen, *Science Director*

## Board of Trustees

Karen Bennett, *Antrim*  
Beth Corwin, *Peterborough*  
Michael George, *Jaffrey*  
Nathanael Greene, *Treasurer, Peterborough*  
Lois Haskins, *Hancock*  
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Dan Langille, *Secretary, Harrisville*  
Richard Pendleton, *Chair, Peterborough*  
Tim Riley, *Peterborough*  
David Sobel, *Harrisville*  
Carol Young, *Hancock*

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