



# The Great Outdoors:

## Never Needed More





# Open Space Goes Viral



## Dear Friends and Supporters,

Over the past months, we've seen many of you out on the local trails, enjoying birdsongs and figuring out who makes what sound in the woods. There is something about being cooped up inside, with everything closed, that heightens our curiosity about the natural world and makes us appreciate it all the more.

While everything was closed, at least open spaces were open. Well, except for the ones that were closed. And they were closed because we live next to a city of eight million people who were also tired of being stuck inside, and our popular trails “went viral” like never before.

Open space is the one place where the coronavirus does not have a stronghold. Sunlight, fresh air and space to distance frustrate the attempts of the virus to leap from person to person. Plus, being in nature is a time-tested and proven therapy to relieve the stress of daily life.

Here's what we know:

- **Open space is more highly valued than ever,**
- **More people want to be in it and live near it, and**
- **We need to make our great landscapes more inclusive.**

Here's how HHLT is responding:

**Protecting More Open Space:** Increasing demand for open space will coincide with increasing pressure to build more houses next to open spaces. We need to be creative with conservation financing solutions and municipal planning tools to accommodate both.

**Increase Human Diversity as well as Biodiversity:** We will broaden our work across a variety of stakeholders by partnering with diverse communities and taking a critical look at our own operations.

**Technology Innovation:** Throughout this crisis, we've seen that technological innovation can overcome physical limitations. So, too, with monitoring and stewardship of protected lands. By using aerial monitoring tools, we can care for the land more effectively than ever.

**Community Engagement:** Here, too, technology is vital to keep us all connected. We hope you are enjoying our webinars and “Nature Time” videos. Plus, we're continuing to partner with State Parks and the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference on the Trail Steward Program, so critical to protecting our parks under the stresses of record-breaking popularity.

**Thank you for your continued support and engagement— not only to HHLT, but across all our communities' needs.**

Please stay safe and healthy, and continue to enjoy the great outdoors as we head into the summer of 2020.

With gratitude,  
Nancy Berner, *Board Chair*  
Michelle Smith, *Executive Director*

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## Your support is more important

**now than ever.** We know many of you are donating time and money to food security programs, small business recovery, and towns and cities across the Hudson Highlands to help neighbors in need.

**Thank you for supporting all the needs of our community—including protecting open space—through this crisis.**

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# Connecting Open Spaces for Wildlife and People

By connecting habitats, you are helping us ensure wildlife will be here for future generations.



As people continue to settle in the Hudson Highlands, we change the landscape by clearing vegetation, and building houses and roads—creating a “patchwork quilt” of land uses that can be seen from ridgeline drives, mountain trails, or the birds-eye view from an airplane.

Over time, natural areas have become separated from each other. But plants and animals can’t thrive in habitats that are fragmented. All species need large and connected areas of natural lands to stay healthy and resilient, and wildlife needs to move through these lands to find food, shelter, and mates. Science shows that many birds and animals can’t, or won’t, move across gaps of open space. The only way they will move is if separate patches are linked by what we call “green corridors.”

Without these pathways connecting our parks and preserves, wildlife populations will become smaller and more isolated, sensitive species may disappear, and critical ecological services like plant pollination could

be lost. **With your support, we are working to conserve and protect key green corridors in the Hudson Highlands**—often in partnership with other conservation organizations and agencies that HHLT has convened as the **New York Highlands Network**.

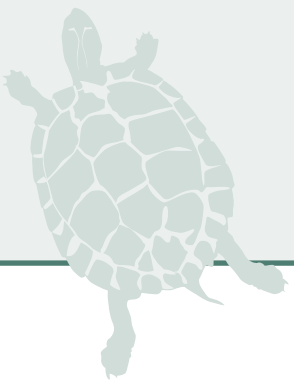
You’ll be hearing more in the coming months about how you can get involved in efforts to secure these corridors. We hope you will heed the call!

## You Can Help Our Wildlife Thrive

There are many ways you can help the efforts of the New York Highlands Network so our wildlife can continue to move across the land and thrive.

Learn more and **get involved with conservation efforts in your town**, like the Philipstown Comprehensive Plan update and/or Climate Smart Communities Task Force, next steps for the Putnam Valley Natural Resources Inventory, and the Cornwall-Blooming Grove Natural Heritage Project.

You can also **contribute to scientific research through community science projects** like the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, Monitoring and Managing Ash Trees, Globe at Night, or North American Butterfly Count. Your contributions of nature observations through nature apps like **iNaturalist**, **Seek** and **eBird** can also make a big impact. You can find many more community science projects listed on the Community Greenways Collaborative website (**communitygreenways.org**).



## Green Corridors in Action

With your support, and partnering with our peers in conservation, we have several examples of connectivity wins from the past year.

First, we joined forces with Scenic Hudson in 2019 to protect around **50 acres in the North Highlands of Philipstown**, adjoining Fahnestock State Park. We provided financing and transaction support to Scenic Hudson so they could permanently protect this **critical connection** between Fahnestock and 345 acres we previously partnered with them to conserve in East Fishkill—including 240 acres of woods and wetlands along Wiccoppee Creek and 105 agricultural acres now sustaining the operations of historic Fishkill Farms. Part of the 50,000-acre Hudson Highlands forest block, the newly protected land provides key habitat for birds and certain threatened and endangered species, and is visible from the Appalachian Trail.

*“My wife and I have always appreciated the beauty and wonder of nature and especially the Hudson Valley,” said John Kincart. “Over the years, we assembled three parcels and for decades appreciated the rugged beauty and spectacular vistas of this land. When the opportunity*

*presented itself to have this land preserved for everyone to enjoy, especially given its proximity to Fahnestock State Park, we were very happy to work with Scenic Hudson and Hudson Highlands Land Trust to make this goal a reality.”*

Next, in 2020, we worked with Westchester Land Trust and a visionary landowner to permanently protect more than **40 acres next to Wonder Lake State Park** in the Town of Kent. Again, we employed a unique partnership model to bring together the human and financial resources of our two land trusts to work toward our shared goal—**creating more linkages to our state parks for people, plants and animals**.

In this case, the partnership also created something deeper for the landowner: a permanent legacy.

*“I’m so happy that the Westchester Land Trust and Hudson Highlands Land Trust protected this land,” said John Armstrong, the landowner. “My family has had a connection to the property for more than 60 years—I roamed its wetlands and uplands when I was a boy. By protecting it, you have given us a great legacy. Thank you.”*





# Tech Tools Help Care for Our Land

Combining tried-and-true practices with new technology for better land stewardship.



Thirty years ago, when HHLT got its start, our staff monitored conserved lands by walking through forests and fields with landowners, making notes with paper and pencil. The only technology we used was a compass, folding map, binoculars, and a 35-mm camera.

Times have changed, and so has the use of technology in land stewardship. Now we can view local landscapes on our office computers, and we use our smartphones and laptops in the field to navigate, collect data, and take digital images that instantly link to maps, mobile apps, and databases.

HHLT remains committed to our tried-and-true stewardship practices and strong landowner relationships.

*“We walk each of our conserved properties at least once a year, often with the landowner,” says Julia Rogers, our Stewardship Coordinator. “It’s a wonderful opportunity to hear the landowner’s vision for their property, to look for any changes on the land, and to exchange information on good stewardship practices.”*

This spring, as a result of the pandemic, we couldn’t make our usual site visits or walk with landowners. To ensure

that we can still meet our stewardship obligations, we adopted some exciting new technology: aerial imagery.

Aerial imagery has been used by land conservation organizations for a decade. In the early days, land trusts sent their stewardship staff up in small planes with local pilots to take pictures. Recent advancements have made aerial imagery more widely accessible and cost effective. Instead of flying over the Hudson Highlands in a plane, Julia is now acquiring recent images taken by a commercial company and studying them on the computer in her home office.

*“Combining aerial imagery with on-the-ground visits provides a more holistic perspective of the land,” Julia notes. “I look for impacts due to climate change, pest outbreaks, and other large scale events. New technologies plus traditional site visits will shape future management practices.”*

Julia and the rest of our land conservation team are looking forward to walking fields and forests with landowners again, as soon as it is safe for us all to meet. Until then, we will continue to use new technology to improve our efficiency, and to give us a more comprehensive picture of conserved lands.

## Do You Want to Become a Land Steward?

We are always in need of enthusiastic volunteers! We have ongoing volunteer needs at Granite Mountain Preserve (that can be done safely while socially distancing), like monitoring trail usage and inventorying plant and animal species. We will also have discrete volunteer projects this summer and fall, like trail maintenance, restoration and re-naturalization of certain areas, invasive species removal, and amphibian monitoring.

Please contact our Community Engagement Manager, Ashley Rauch, at [ashley.rauch@hhl.org](mailto:ashley.rauch@hhl.org) if you'd like to be our next land steward volunteer. Thank you for dedicating your time, skills and energy to HHLT!

## Our Exceptional Stewardship Volunteers



With a small staff, part of our on-the-ground stewardship efforts depends on the hard work of dedicated volunteers. One of these volunteers, **Jason Cohen**, has stepped up over the past year to make Granite Mountain an even better nature preserve for the Putnam Valley

community. As a lifelong Putnam Valley resident and a local biology teacher, Jason has a particular affinity for Granite Mountain. Witnessing a bald eagle soar over the mountain one day last spring solidified that connection for him.

If you've visited the Preserve recently, you may have encountered Jason on the trails. He's spent countless hours blazing the new trails, clearing invasive species around the trail entrance and trailhead kiosk, monitoring and maintaining the trails, and simply offering a friendly face to help orient new hikers to the trails.

*“Volunteering on Granite Mountain gives me an opportunity to do something that I enjoy doing—being outdoors—and a chance to help enhance an outdoor experience for others. It’s a great place to spend time alone with one’s thoughts, or with friends and family.”* Jason also encourages people to visit the Preserve often to observe first-hand the seasonal variations: *“Everyday on the trails is different!”*

**Thank you to Jason, and to all our loyal volunteers, for working alongside us to protect and steward the Hudson Highlands.**

For a complete list of volunteers, please see the online version of this report on our website ([hhl.org](http://hhl.org)).






# Enjoying Open Space from Home

You can enjoy all the natural beauty of the Hudson Highlands from the comfort of your home.



The ways we work, learn, and interact with each other have shifted for the foreseeable future. Fortunately, the natural world is still following its seasonal rhythms and continues to provide a great (and safe) respite.

At HHLT, one of our highest priorities is connecting you and your family with the natural beauty of this place we all call home. Thankfully, there are still many ways you can take advantage of your love for nature, whether you are socially isolating or not.

**iNaturalist**

**Explore your own backyard!** A great way to learn more about the natural wonders all around you is through nature mobile apps, like **iNaturalist** and kid-friendly **Seek**. These popular apps can help you capture and share your nature observations, while contributing to community science. No scientific background required! Head over to our website for handy primers and a live video tutorial that can help you get started.

## eBird

Birding is another engaging outdoor activity that can be enjoyed from anywhere. To get started, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology offers many tips for bringing birds into your own backyard. Two birding apps, **eBird** and **Merlin Bird ID**, can then help you identify the birds you see and transform your sightings into critical data for scientific research and conservation.

**Connect through your screen with our “Nature Time” videos!** Our team has been working hard over these past few months to bring nature to you. Did you know that beavers are great ecosystem engineers? Or that the critters you find in a stream can tell you a lot about water quality? You can learn many more fun nature facts like these in our new series of **“Nature Time”** videos, starring our Natural Resources Manager, Nicole Wooten, and our Stewardship Coordinator, Julia Rogers. These videos are a great learning tool for kids, too!

### Looking for More Ways to Appreciate Nature?

Get started with nature apps using the resources for beginners posted on our website ([hhlt.org](http://hhlt.org)).

Visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s website ([birds.cornell.edu](http://birds.cornell.edu)) to begin your journey into birding.

Follow the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference ([nynjtc.org](http://nynjtc.org)) for the latest trails alerts and hiking safety recommendations.

Be sure to check out the **“Nature Time”** videos and webinars on our website regularly—new videos are being added every week and more webinars are in the works. And follow us on Facebook ([facebook.com/hhlt.org](https://facebook.com/hhlt.org)) and Instagram ([@hhltny](https://www.instagram.com/hhltny)) for more ideas on connecting with nature, and to share your own.



We also have a new series of (free!) **webinars** led by our staff and expert colleagues on topics ranging from amphibians to invasive species. You can sign up for future webinars, or listen to recordings of previous webinars, on our website ([hhlt.org](http://hhlt.org)).

**Hit the trails!** Even with the resources we have to connect with nature from our homes, outdoor experiences are still unrivaled. Fortunately, we can still take advantage of the many beautiful hiking trails in the Highlands, with certain

precautions. Follow these guidelines when you head outdoors, even without social distancing restrictions in place: be prepared with appropriate attire and outdoor essentials (including face coverings), stick to local trails, avoid crowds and groups, maintain physical distancing (at least 6ft.) whenever possible, and help protect our natural resources by practicing “Leave No Trace” principles.

**There’s an advantage to being “Off-the-Map”!** Our nature preserve,

Granite Mountain Preserve in Putnam Valley, is open to the public year-round and hasn’t been as crowded as other parks in the area. We just completed construction of a new trail system within the Preserve, and trail maps are available on our website ([hhlt.org](http://hhlt.org)) or at the trailhead welcome kiosk. Note that these trails are not yet on regional trail maps.





# We Will Always Need Clean Water

By working together, we can keep our water supplies clean and safe.



Our need for abundant, clean drinking water remains paramount. We know our community values clean water—so we have been working with local leaders and neighbors to protect this vital resource in the Town of Philipstown and Village of Cold Spring.

Last summer, we worked with a team of community volunteers to perform water quality sampling at two important water sources: Clove Creek, which runs through Fahnestock State Park then north along Route 9, and Foundry Brook, which provides the water supply for Village residents. We were searching for macrobenthic invertebrates—or bottom-dwelling insects—like mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies, which are indicators of water quality. A team of aquatic scientists at Watershed Assessment Associates then analyzed the samples for us.

We have encouraging findings to report: the testing revealed the water in both streams to be high quality at critical points. In fact, it was nearly pristine in the less developed areas around

Clove Creek. We plan to continue monitoring these streams regularly, and this initial testing provides us with a baseline against which we can compare future results.

We also partnered with The Nature Conservancy this past winter to identify the water issues residents care about most, as well as who can drive action around these key issues. Thanks to many of you who filled out the survey, we learned the full range of your concerns—from droughts to chemical contaminants—all magnified by broader regional concerns around climate change. You also helped us identify more than a dozen connected and influential community members that can play a key role in providing leadership, spreading information, and taking action on priority issues. We'll soon bring these community leaders together to form a water protection coalition. And given the concerns you voiced around future water shortages, we are now working on a water supply and demand study for the Village of Cold Spring, which will be completed later this year.

*This “Land Use Planning for Clean Water” project is funded by the New York State Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP) and New York’s Environmental Protection Fund. The NYSCPP is administered by the Land Trust Alliance, with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.*

## Do You Want to Help Protect Our Drinking Water?

We are looking to involve more community volunteers in future water quality monitoring of local streams. Contact our Community Engagement Manager, Ashley Rauch, at [ashley.rauch@hhl.org](mailto:ashley.rauch@hhl.org) if you're interested.

You can also join us at future Town and Village Board meetings to learn more about the results of our water testing and survey. We'll share our recommendations for practical actions municipal leaders and residents can take to improve water resource management.

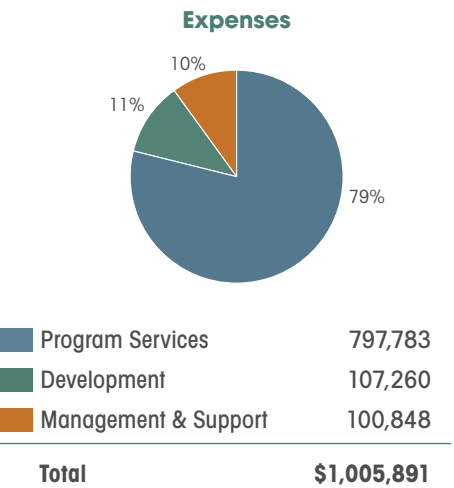
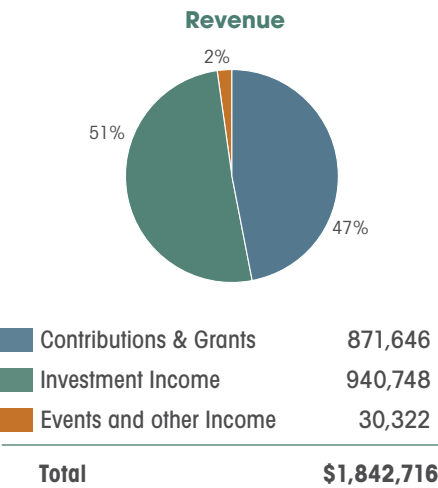
# 2019 Financial Report and Future Outlook

As with many nonprofits, we face great uncertainty around our revenue over the next few years. We approach this uncertainty with confidence in our wonderful community of supporters. For a complete list of donors in 2019, please see the online version of this report on our website ([hhl.org](http://hhl.org)).

Meanwhile, as we hope for your continued support, we also plan for tough days ahead. In 2020, while maintaining full staffing, we've cut

operating expenses around 20%. We're positioning our human and financial resources to be nimble in case more changes are needed in 2021. To date, we have not accessed government assistance from the federal coronavirus stimulus packages.

As for fiscal year 2019, with financial year end September 30, 2019, we report the results below. Full audited financial statements and the IRS Form 990 can also be found on our website ([hhl.org](http://hhl.org)).



Consolidated Statement of Financial Position for FY19 and FY18		
	30-Sep-19	30-Sep-18
Cash and Money Market Funds <sup>A</sup>	2,006,154	1,685,698
Public Securities <sup>B</sup>	6,206,313	6,876,286
Land and Other <sup>C</sup>	2,417,717	1,217,643
Total Assets	10,630,184	9,779,627
Total Liabilities <sup>C</sup>	(1,143,555)	(589,366)
Net Assets	9,486,629	9,190,261

A. Cash and money market funds consist of \$0.4 million in operating reserves and \$1.6 million for pending real estate acquisitions.  
B. Public securities are within our Highlands Steward Fund, dedicated to stewarding conserved lands in perpetuity and for land acquisitions.  
C. FY 19 Land assets consist of our Granite Mountain Preserve and buffers to state and national parkland (financed by \$1.1 million in debt).

In these unprecedented times, the need for open space has never been greater—as is the need to protect it. Please continue your generous support of the humanitarian needs in our community. Please also support the critical open space needs of our region. **With your generosity, we can support ALL our communities, human and wildlife alike.**

You can give using the attached remittance envelope, online at [hhl.org/support](http://hhl.org/support), or by contacting our Operations Coordinator, Jonathan Leitner at [jonathan.leitner@hhl.org](mailto:jonathan.leitner@hhl.org).

Thank you!



# THANK YOU!

*HHLT extends heartfelt thanks to our dedicated friends, supporters, and volunteers for generously donating your time, energy, and resources to our programs and activities. Your strong support and enthusiastic collaboration has made possible all of the work you’ve read about in the pages of this report. We are grateful for your commitment to working alongside us to protect and preserve the Hudson Highlands.*

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Hudson Highlands Land Trust

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