



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 11, 2021

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**Hudson Highlands Land Trust Announces Leadership Transition
and Promotion of Land Conservation Team**

Michelle Smith, Executive Director of the Hudson Highlands Land Trust (HHLT) since 2016, will step down as of May 31, 2021. Katrina Shindlecker, HHLT's longtime Director of Conservation, has been named by HHLT's Board of Directors to succeed her.

"We are grateful for the five years of Michelle's dynamic and far-sighted leadership and look forward to a new chapter with Katrina and the whole HHLT team, continuing the important initiatives Michelle began and embarking on new endeavors," said Nancy Berner, Chair of HHLT's Board of Directors.

Michelle will remain Executive Director for the next five months, overseeing the changes in the organization's management. During the transition, Katrina's title will be Deputy Executive Director. Nicole Wooten, who has been with HHLT for five years, has been named Director of Natural Resources and will continue leading the New York Highlands Network, HHLT's Preserves, and the organization's Diversity and Inclusion initiatives (the latter with Ashley Rauch, HHLT's Community Engagement Manager). Julia Rogers, most recently Stewardship Coordinator, will become Conservation Manager, assuming much of the land acquisition role previously carried out by Katrina, as well as continuing with her current stewardship responsibilities. To strengthen the organization's financial and operational capabilities, HHLT will hire a Manager of Finance and Operations, who will report to the Executive Director, in the coming months.

Since Michelle became the Executive Director in 2016, she has worked in close collaboration with the staff on critical new developments at the land trust, including the formation of the New York Highlands Network, a collaboration of land trusts and government agencies to accelerate conservation and inclusivity across the NY Highlands; the establishment of Granite Mountain Preserve, the first HHLT-owned preserve; and the launching of Diversity and Inclusion initiatives. Those initiatives include our stewardship intern partnership with the Fresh Air Fund and the new "Relearning Highlands History" series, which shares stories of People of Color throughout the history of the Highlands.

Of her decision to step down, Michelle Smith said: “There is no better time to leave an organization than when your next tier of leadership is ready. I am delighted that the Board of Directors selected Katrina as the next Executive Director, and also excited to see Nicole and Julia move into expanded roles. I know HHLT will continue doing great work under their watch, and I look forward to seeing what they accomplish next.”

Since joining the land trust staff in 2007, Katrina has led HHLT’s acquisition projects, overseen its stewardship portfolio and national accreditation, as well as fostered fruitful partnerships throughout the region. Before joining HHLT, she worked in several roles at the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, including implementing environmental recommendations and projects at parks and historic sites across the Taconic region. Katrina holds an MS in Environmental Science from Pace University and an MS in Environmental Policy from Bard College.

Said Katrina Shindledecker: “After serving as HHLT’s Director of Conservation for almost fifteen years, I am excited by the opportunity to lead the organization as Executive Director. I have worked closely with landowners, donors, municipal officials and residents of the Hudson Highlands for more than a decade, and I look forward to broadening and strengthening those relationships in my new role.”

ABOUT HHLT

The Hudson Highlands Land Trust is a community-based, accredited, non-profit conservation organization with a mission to protect and preserve the natural resources, rural character and scenic beauty of the Hudson Highlands. www.hhlt.org

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