

# Heartland

CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



*Nature is Essential*

# Mission

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Heartland Conservation Alliance (HCA) proactively conserves, protects, and restores natural lands and open space within the Kansas City region, benefiting the community and future generations by improving water quality, creating recreational opportunities, protecting life and property, and preserving our natural and cultural heritage. HCA accomplishes its goals through collaboration with a network of public and private organizations and agencies that share its goals, values, and objectives, and through public outreach and education.

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# Message from the Executive Director



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In 2020 Heartland Conservation Alliance launched a successful two-year campaign to save 40 acres of forest along the Blue River that was surplus by Jackson County Parks + Rec in 2019. The property, affectionately named the HOP (Heartland Overlook Preserve) was purchased at a public auction and became the site for the Annual Partnership Summit. After months of enduring the COVID-19 pandemic, the purchase highlighted one important thing: Nature is Essential.

Humans need nature, now more than ever, was the resounding message echoed by the panelists at the Partnership Summit. We heard how nature is threatened by illegal dumping and how members of the community have limited access to nature. We heard the ways nature plays an essential part in mental well being. We heard from park leaders that our area parks have been bursting at the seams with people getting outside during the COVID-19 quarantine. HCA Board President Matt Hart reflected on how nature means connecting to people we love. We were challenged to speak up and encouraged to slow down and take in the beauty around us. Humans are nature, our emcee Carl Stafford of MY REGION WINS! reminded us.

Humans need nature, and we never realize how much we value these places until they are gone. Cities need vibrant downtowns and shopping centers like the Plaza. We need art museums and schools. But we need parks, rivers and fresh food, too. Nature connects us as humans and keeps us healthy and whole. As we head into 2021 we will not forget what we learned: Nature is essential.

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# Capital Campaign

In 2020 we invited the community to join our efforts to save a very important forest – 40 acres of oak and hickory nestled on the bluffs overlooking the Blue River in south Kansas City. The property, named the Heartland Overlook Preserve (affectionately known as the HOP) was purchased at a public auction in August with help of a loan from The Conservation Fund. We need to raise \$250,000 for debt service and for maintenance of the HOP. We are so appreciative to those who donated in 2020 and helped us start 2021 strong by raising \$57,000. Thank you!

The restoration of the HOP is part of an effort to make our community a beautiful and bountiful landscape. The donations will preserve the HOP and allow us to continue providing high quality, nature focused programs. In addition, this land is a key connector for more than 60 miles of mountain biking and hiking trails along the Blue River.

The mission of Heartland Conservation Alliance is to protect places in our city that benefit our community and our ecosystem. Prior to purchasing the HOP, HCA's Conservation Work Group carefully reviewed the HOP's natural resources, including critical habitat for threatened species like the tri-colored bat, and could see immediately why this land needed to be protected. In addition to the environmental benefits of preserving this special forest, it will also be a new home base where the alliance can actively demonstrate our purpose as an organization, introduce our fellow neighbors to nature, grow awareness, passion and advance our mission.

Nature needs us just as much as we need nature. Nature keeps us healthy and whole, even through the most trying of years. Nature is essential.

-Matt Hart, HCA Board President



# Conservation Program

## 101 acres under active restoration

The Blue River Action identifies eight priority action areas

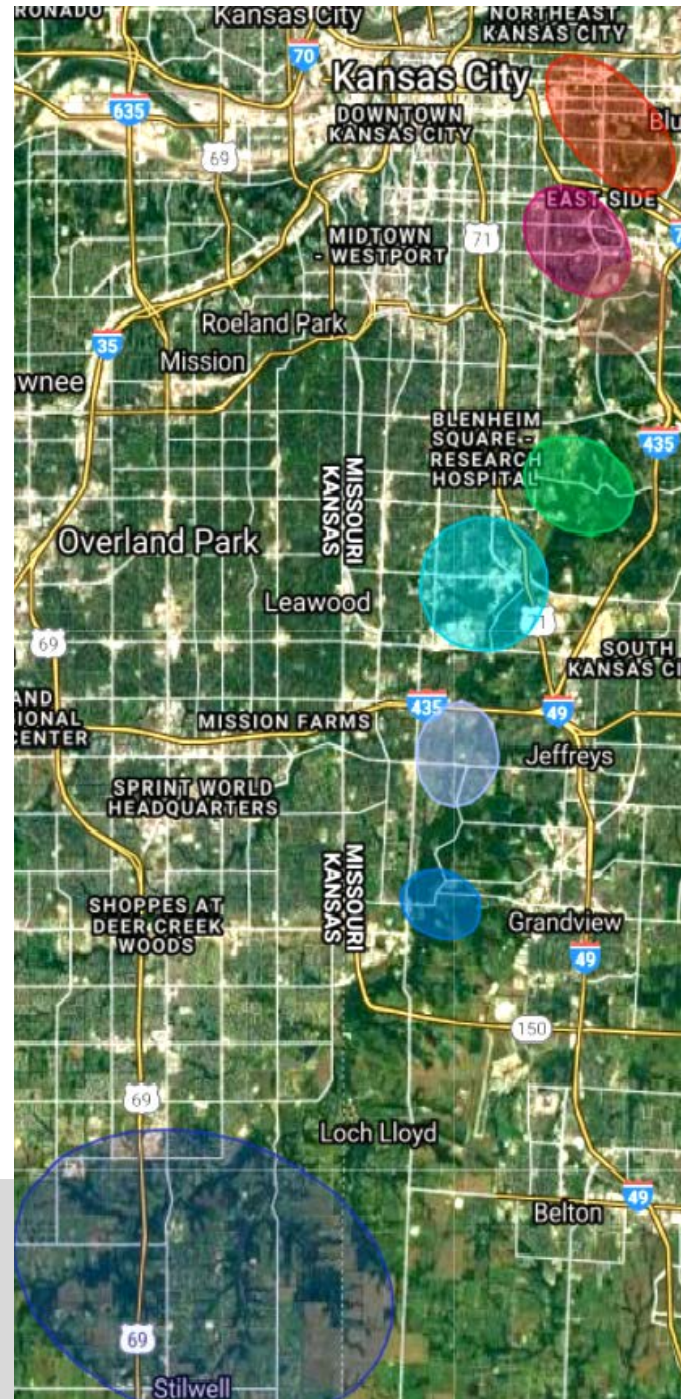
40 acres at Blue Valley Park in partnership with The City of Kansas City, Missouri Parks and Recreation Department, National Recreation and Park Association, and Blue Valley Neighborhood Association

11 acres at 81st and Troost in partnership with KC Water and The Conservation Fund

20 acres at Alex George Park in partnership with Jackson County Parks + Rec

1/4 acre in Dunbar/Leeds Neighborhood in partnership with Heart of the City Neighborhood Association

30 acres at Municipal Farm in partnership with Boys Grow, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and City of Kansas City, Missouri



### Action Areas were chosen because they:

- are highly visible to the public
- offer public access to the Blue River
- represent important habitat
- provide good opportunities to enhance stormwater management
- are located in and will benefit underserved communities
- provide opportunities to advance social and environmental equity



# Conservation Program

## Blue Valley

### ACTION AREA MANAGEMENT GOALS

Building on strong community connections in the Action Area, local planning efforts identified conservation goals for the Blue River, which include improving the urban forest, preventing erosion, increasing biodiversity, and repairing and replanting wetlands, mixed forests, and grasslands. Action area goals include increasing community access to natural resources in Blue Valley Park with events, outreach, training, volunteer workdays, and trails.



**FOCAL SPECIES:** Red-Eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*). These turtles live in a variety of aquatic habitats, including oxbow lakes like the one in Blue Valley Park. They need ample aquatic vegetation for both food and security, and suitable basking sites. A mud bottom is preferred. In their native land, these turtles fill a role of herbivore and mid-level carnivore.

## Oxbow Bluffs Trail



The City of Kansas City, Missouri Parks and Recreation Department has a new urban trail in Blue Valley Park. Thanks to a grant from the National Recreation and Parks Association, HCA collaborated with the Blue Valley Neighborhood Association, Urban Trail Co., Habitat Architects and Nomad Trails to design and build the one-half mile, single track trail. The trail follows the ridge of an old oxbow of the Blue River. It was designed by Urban Trail Co. in partnership with residents in the neighborhood and provides access to a beautiful natural area that allows everyone to enjoy nature safely and get outdoors.

An oxbow lake provides important habitat for many wetland plants and animals.

# Alliance Services Program

## 7th Annual Partnership Summit

### HUMANS NEED NATURE; NATURE IS ESSENTIAL

On October 18th Heartland Conservation Alliance celebrated our partners and the work being done throughout the Blue River Watershed at our 7th Annual Partnership Summit. Community conservation work is a long-term process where successes, big and small, can get lost in the hustle to serve our communities. It is critical that we pause to acknowledge the hard-earned accomplishments of our partners to enable future successes. This year's Partnership Summit was special as it was the first event to be held at the Heartland Overlook Preserve, aka the HOP, HCA's first land acquisition.

Despite the cold temperatures and COVID restrictions, 70 people attended the event, 18 partners participated in the fair. The Summit was split into three ticket frames and each featured a unique panel of conservation experts to answer the question "Can our relationship with nature make a difference?" The panelists are now featured on HCA's YouTube channel to share their advice and encouragement through 2021.

"The more people you get down to nature, the more people are going to give back to their community."

–Derek Buckridge, Urban Trail Co.

"I think what this pandemic has done has stripped a lot of that away and what you have left are your natural settings, the things that everyone connects with, the parks the trails, the things that don't cost anything that are always going to be there for you."

– Roosevelt Lyons, KC Parks



"Being able to touch the soil and feeling connected to the ground...there's nothing more beautiful than that."

–Magali Rojas, HCA Youth Council



# Alliance Services Program

## Our alliance is 109 partners strong



## Vacant to Vibrant Summit

**COMMUNITIES BROUGHT TOGETHER DESPITE COVID**

Heartland Conservation Alliance and the Urban Neighborhood Initiative hosted 75 attendees at The Vacant to Vibrant Summit. The virtual Summit highlighted the work being done to revitalize communities using innovation to turn vacant and unused land into vibrant and beneficial spaces in Kansas City and beyond.

Participants heard from Sandra Albro, the author of *Vacant to Vibrant, Creating Successful Green Infrastructure Networks*, about lessons learned and her experiences restoring vacant lots in Cleveland, OH. The Summit concluded after participants gathered in breakout sessions to discuss concerns about their own neighborhoods and the City of Kansas City's participation in their restoration.





# Education & Outreach Program

## Blue River Documentary

2020 MID-AMERICA REGIONAL EMMY AWARD WINNER

*Blue River* is a documentary film featuring oral histories and the ecological and cultural history of the river. In conjunction with the Renew the Blue Campaign, the film brings attention to the river, its needs, and the many organizations working to improve it. Local renowned filmmaker, Michael Price of English Landing Films, captured the beauty and the challenges of the river in all seasons.

The documentary premiered in January on KCPTV, but due to COVID-19 we had to rethink our in-person screenings. Beginning in July, HCA hosted "Monday Movie Nights." Each month was themed and featured a special showing of *Blue River* and followed by a themed Q&A with conservation experts.



Themes: Recreation, Restoration, Climate Change, Art, Health & Healing

- 232 tickets sold
- 24,000 total engagement
- \$9,300 in donations and sponsorships
- 18 panelists

## Blue Valley Park Celebration



To celebrate Blue Valley Park's improvements, participants drove along a designated path, received supplies for nature-based activities and hiked through the restored woodland

- 30 attendees
- 1,744 total engagement

Partnering with:

- Blue Valley Neighborhood Association
- National Recreation and Park Association
- Local Investment Commission
- The City of Kansas City, Missouri Parks and Recreation Department
- Healthy Rivers Partnership









# Sound Foundation for a Solid Future

Heartland Conservation Alliance has diverse sources of support, including the Conservation Fund, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and local private funders such as the Health Forward Foundation and the Shumaker Family Foundation. We also receive vital government support from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as funding through the Paycheck Protection Program, administered by the Small Business Administration. HCA's development plan continues to focus on diversifying sources of income and increasing contributions from individuals and local businesses. The pandemic offered logistical challenges, but was not overly disruptive to fundraising.

As with most nonprofits, one of HCA's largest expenses is staffing (28%). To continually enhance and improve staff alignment with HCA's programming a review of staff priorities was completed. In 2021, The Executive Director and the Outreach Coordinator will be joined by a Program Manager with some projects being outsourced to local contractors. About 10% of an average grant is dedicated to administration. The staff worked largely from home for most of the year due to the pandemic and the lease for donated office space at the Anita B. Gorman Conservation Discovery Center ended at the end of December. A guiding principle of the organization is to bring new money into Kansas City and to share funding with nonprofit partners through collaborative projects; in 2020, 61% of grant funding passed through HCA to nonprofit peers and local contractors.

In 2020, HCA raised \$57,000 toward the purchase of 40 acres of riparian oak and hickory forest overlooking the Blue River. This tract, designated the HOP (Heartland Overlook Preserve), was purchased from Jackson County with the help of a \$152,000 loan from The Conservation Fund, allowing HCA to begin to fulfill its mission as an urban land trust. HCA will continue raising funds in 2021 for the repayment of this loan and the perpetual maintenance of the property.

The organization's 2020 audit reflected sound fiscal management. The audit provides documented evidence that HCA is well funded and stable.

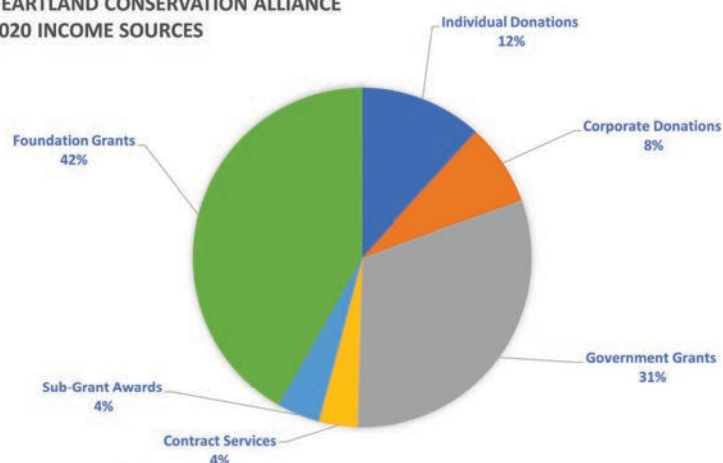
-Samuel Bennett, HCA Board Treasurer



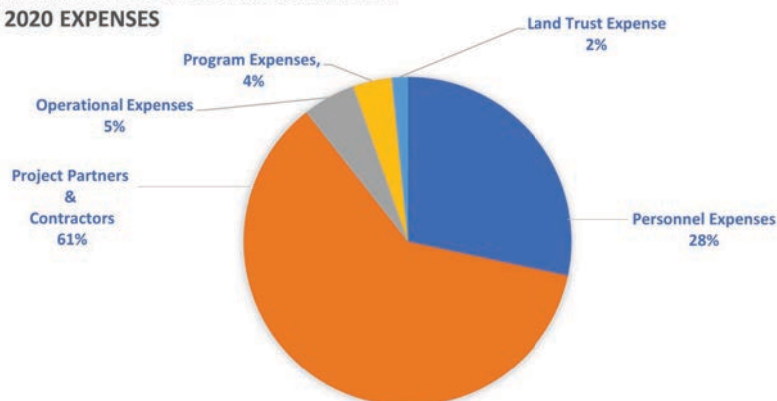


# Sound Foundation for a Solid Future

HEARTLAND CONSERVATION ALLIANCE  
2020 INCOME SOURCES



HEARTLAND CONSERVATION ALLIANCE  
2020 EXPENSES



## Heartland Conservation Alliance Income January – December 2020

Individual Donations	\$36,713
Corporate Donations	\$24,360
Government Grants	\$96,572
Contract Services	\$11,500
Sub-Grant Awards	\$12,821
Foundation Grants	\$130,500
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$312,466</b>

## Heartland Conservation Alliance Expenses January – December 2020

Personnel Expenses	\$168,122
Project Partners & Contractors	\$361,829
Operational Expenses	\$30,947
Program Expenses	\$22,737
Land Trust Expenses	\$9,396
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$593,031</b>

# Supporters

## Thank You to Our 2020 Funders!

Burns & McDonnell  
Bridging the Gap  
Country Club Bank  
Creative One  
Department of Natural Resources  
Gunter Construction Company  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Henderson Engineers

Health Forward Foundation  
KC Water  
Missouri Department of Conservation  
National Recreation and Park Association  
Shumaker Family Foundation  
Trek Bicycles of Lee's Summit  
VMLY & R Foundation  
Wichita State University





# Supporters

## Thank You to Our 2020 Funders!

Sami Aaron	Sarah Daldrup	Jean Gorton	Gary Liberty
Vladimir Adzhigirey	Michelle Daniel	Eric Gunderson	John Licata
Katrena Altieri	Julie Davis	Barbara Hall	Candice Liebert
Briana Anderson	Matt and Julie Davis	Amanda Hamilton	Jennifer Lindsey
Kenneth Anderson	Chris DeLong	Elizabeth Hansen	Dan Loehr
Don Baker	Gunnar Doiron	Trevor Harris	Zac Loehr
Kevin Barb	Brad Dorner	Matthew Hart	Brandon Long
Deborah Barker	Michael Dorrian	Pamela Hart	Jane Long
Mark Beam	Harold Draper	Joy Heaviland	Brandon Martin
Margaret Bell	Angelica Duckworth	Sarah Hemme	Max Mason
Bret Belmore	David Earls	Brian Hendricks	Courtney Masterson
Samuel Bennett	Annabelle Eason	Mallory Herrmann	Lance McLaughlin
Allyson Betzold	Kelley Edwards	Mary Holzhausen	William Mengarelli
Bill Blessing	Sherri Elliott	David Homer	Shelby Merry
Kristen Bontrager	Joy Ellsworth	Christina Hoxie	Douglas Moles
William Brant	Saul Epstein	Jed Huff	Ginny Moore
Susan M Bray	Bradford Epsten	Billie Hufford	Sam Moore
Tonya Bronleewe	Jill Erickson	Lara Isch	Alfred Morales
Laurie Brown	Melissa Estelle	Tom Jacobs	Chris Muller
Megan Burik	Kathy Feist	Samuel James	Michael Noguera
Catherine Bylinowski	Olushola Festus	Kelly Jander	Hilary Noonan
Belinda Caldwell Shelby	Margaretha Finefrock	Emily Johnson	Brian Nowotny
McKensie Callahan	Clare Flemington	Michael Kelley	Robert Ochs
Chris Cardwell	Michael Flynn	Christopher King	Theodore Odegard
Kevin Carrill	Kathleen Foland	Everett Koehn	Drew Pearson
Cameron Chambers	Jill Forrest	June Kowski	Marion Pierson
Doug Chambers	Amelia Freeberg	Daniel Lane	Andrew Potter
Katherine Corwin	Susan Friedrichsen	Colby Larimer	Tim Quinlin
Peter Cuff	Kathryn Gates	Mary Larkin	Benjamin Reed
Sasheen Cutchlow	Anna Gilmore	Brianna Leiker	Deborah Reiman



# Supporters

## Thank You to Our 2020 Funders!

Daryl Riddle  
Nick Rigoli  
David Roberts  
Magali Rojas  
Teresa Rynard  
Sandra Sanders  
Kenneth Schefter  
Pat Schlotzhauer  
Monica Schroer  
Megan Schulte  
Scott Schulte  
Gerald Shechter  
Doris & Bob Sherrick  
Michael Sherry  
Amy Shields  
Merna Siegler

Charles J Sipple  
Sharon Spence  
Jeannine Steinhoff  
Robert Stitt  
Justin Stuedemann  
Lucy Stun  
Phaedra Svec  
Jassma Thomas  
Regan Tokos  
Thomas Tokos  
Leroy Unruh  
Dustin Urban  
Sally Urdang  
Alex VanLeeuwen  
Roberta Vogel-Leutung  
Stan Vogel-Leutung

Michael Wagner  
Colin Weigel  
Suzanne Welde  
Elizabeth Welsh  
Sharon Wiederanders  
Gina Wilkinson  
Donald Wilkison  
Linda Williams  
Amanda Wilson  
Aida Winters  
Christopher Wold  
Frank Womack  
Gwen & Tim Wurst





# Board of Directors

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Members of the Board of Directors are responsible for sound fiduciary oversight and governance of Heartland Conservation Alliance, a 501c3 organization. The Board guides sound business management of and compliance with the organization's Bylaws, ensuring the organization succeeds in fulfilling its mission. Heartland Conservation Alliance believes growth is achieved through a variety of voices and experiences.

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## Samuel Bennett

Board Treasurer, Finance Committee &  
Policy Work Group Member

## Kyle Johnson

Policy Work Group Member,  
Conservation Work Group Member

## Bill Blessing

Conservation Work Group Member, Urban  
Waters Steering Committee Member

## Chandler Little Eagle

Partnership Work Group Member

## Kristen Bontrager

Partnership & Policy Work Group Member

## Spencer Martin

Education & Outreach Work Group  
Member

## Matt Davis

Board President

## GG Owens

Board Member

## Olusola Festus

Finance Committee Member,  
Conservation Work Group Member

## Scott Schulte

Board Secretary, Conservation & Policy  
Work Group Member

## Matt Hart

Board Vice President, Finance Committee  
Member

## Gerald Shechter

Board Member

## Sarah Hemme

Partnership Work Group Member, Education &  
Outreach Work Group Member

## Regan Tokos

Conservation Work Group Member,  
Education & Outreach Work Group Member

## Roberta Vogel-Leutung

Education & Outreach Work Group Member

# Steering Council

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Steering Council members are responsible for guiding the implementation of our work. They represent the conservation community while providing leadership and expertise. Most importantly they act as a voice of the conservation community.

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Joshua Anderson

Boys Grow

Lara Isch

City of Kansas City, Missouri

Victoria Dunkin

Student, Oregon State University

Brian Nowotny

Jackson County Parks + Rec.

Ian Fannin-Hughes

City of Overland Park

Stephen Van Rhein

Missouri Department of Conservation

Christina Hoxie

Hoxie Collective

Joe Wheelock

Heartland Tree Alliance

Suzanne Welde

Horizon Academy











[heartlandconservationalliance.org](https://heartlandconservationalliance.org)