



Heartland

CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2021 Heartland Conservation Alliance completed a two year campaign to save 40 acres of oak and hickory forest along the Blue River that was surplus by Jackson County Parks + Rec. The property, affectionately known as the HOP (Heartland Overlook Preserve) was purchased at a public auction, and the final payment was made in October. Honeysuckle removal and trash collection are ongoing, and Urban Trail Co. plans to begin a connecting trail across the property. We continue to raise funds to establish an endowment for the perpetual maintenance of the property, while watching out for other land along the Blue River Corridor that requires our attention as an urban land trust.

The 8th annual Partnership Summit featured Alliance members sharing their stories as part of the Blue River Story Project. Photographs and memories of the Blue demonstrated just how important the river is to Kansas City's history and well being. We heard how nature is threatened by ill-considered development and how members of the community have limited access to the river. We heard the ways nature plays an essential part in mental well being. We were challenged to speak up and encouraged to slow down and take in the beauty around us. Humans need nature, because humans are part of nature.

We also said goodbye to our founder and Executive Director Jill Erickson, who after shepherding this organization for ten years has accepted an opportunity to care for the Tualatin River in Oregon as an employee of Clean Water Services. While Jill will be missed, this is an exciting opportunity for our new Executive Director Logan Heley to lead us into our next ten years of protecting and improving the Blue River Watershed.



SAMUEL J. BENNETT

Interim Executive Director

MISSION

Heartland Conservation Alliance 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.



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

In 2021 we continued our efforts to ensure the Heartland Overlook Preserve (affectionately known as the HOP) would be saved as a sanctuary for everyone to enjoy 40 acres of oak and hickory nestled on the bluffs overlooking the Blue River in south Kansas City. I could not be happier to say that, with the help of our partners, we have paid off the loan for the HOP and taken full possession of the property. Our first big step into the Land Trust space is on the books— and we are just getting started. To everyone who donated to HCA in 2021, whether in big amounts or small, please accept our deepest gratitude. And then head on over to the HOP for one of our events this year!

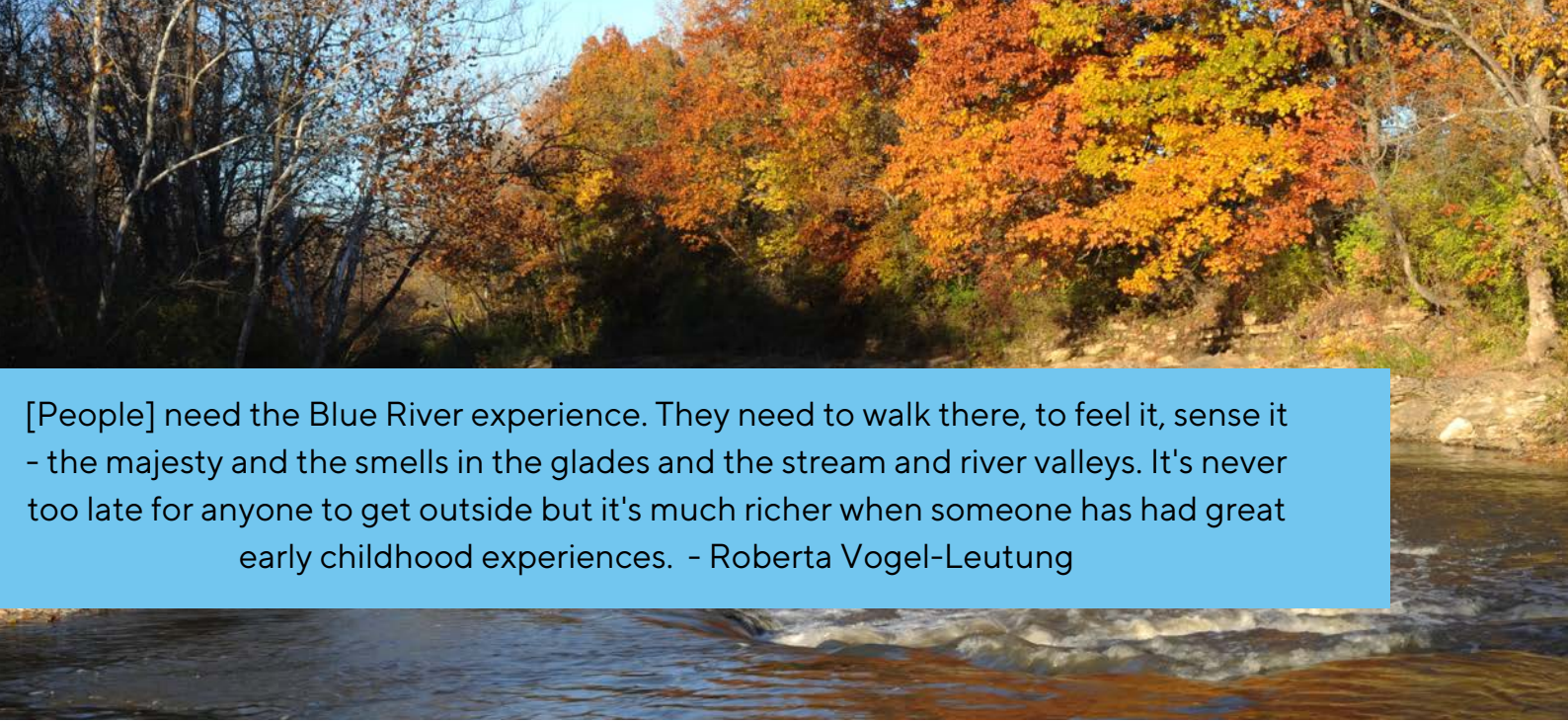
The HOP is not our only effort this year— if you haven't seen the hard work we've put in at the Municipal Farm, I urge you to take a look. The same goes for efforts up and down the Blue River, including some fantastic work at Blue Valley Park in Kansas City. Our Green Guard Stewardship program connects community members to nature in their neighborhoods, and our Nature Action Crew is spearheading on-the-ground conservation and mitigation efforts, such as removal of invasive honeysuckle.

2021 also came with a big change for HCA. Our beloved Executive Director, Jill Erickson, stepped down from her position after ten years leading and guiding us. Make no mistake, HCA is built on the sweat equity and passion Jill brought to the role. But she also left us in great shape, and I'm delighted we found a worthy successor in Logan Heley, who starts us off in 2022 as the newly appointed Executive Director. Logan brings policy know-how, an eye for execution, and a great sense of vision for where we are headed next.

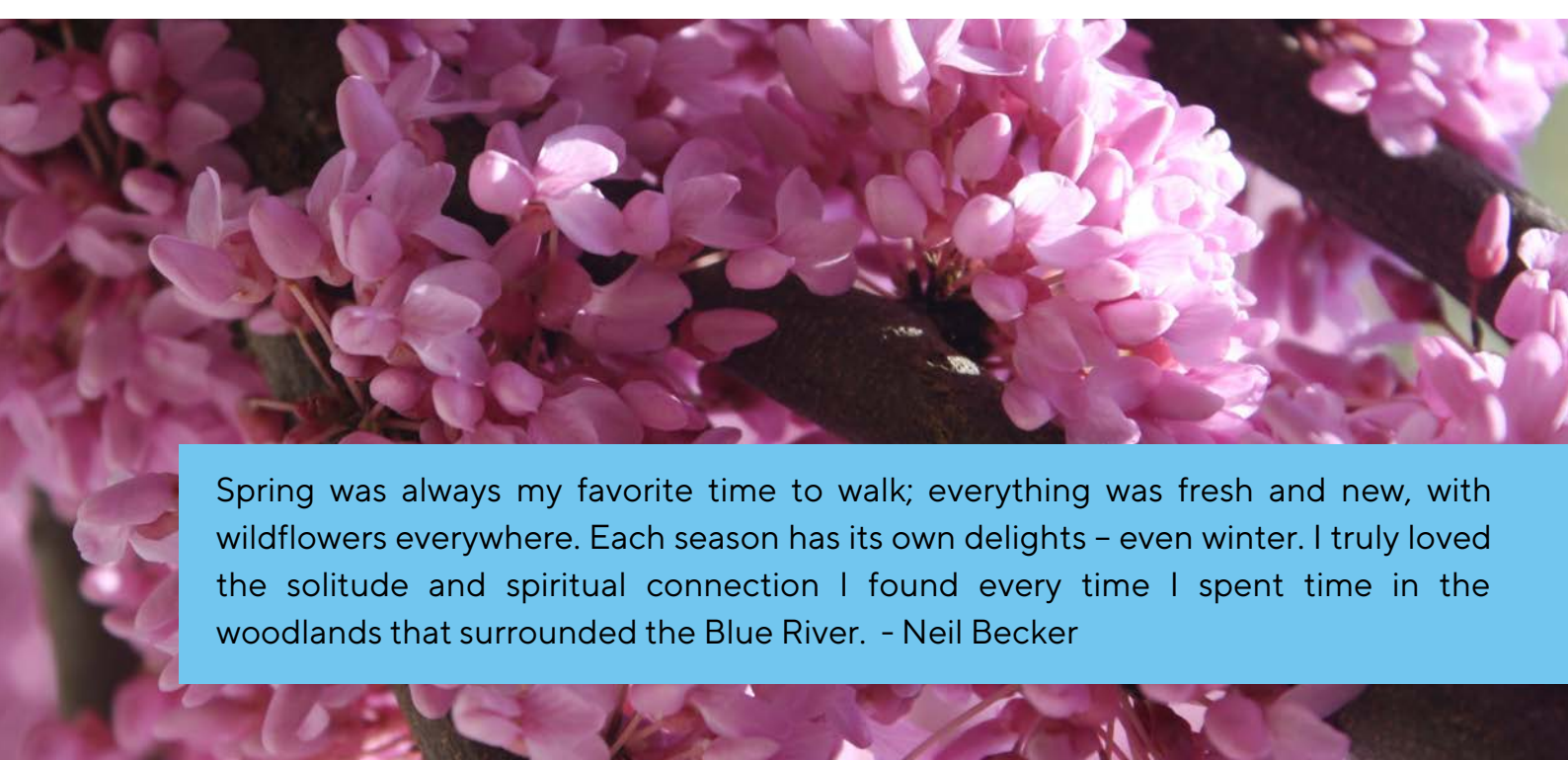
The mission of Heartland Conservation Alliance is to protect places in our city that benefit our community and our ecosystem, and that mission has never felt more valuable than through another year of uncertainty and hardship. Not only do we strive to ensure a beautiful, healthy Blue River ecosystem— HCA represents a larger alliance that truly loves this part of the world. We care deeply for the KC metro area and the humans that choose this place to live. We can't wait to expand our efforts to make our favorite place to live even more liveable.



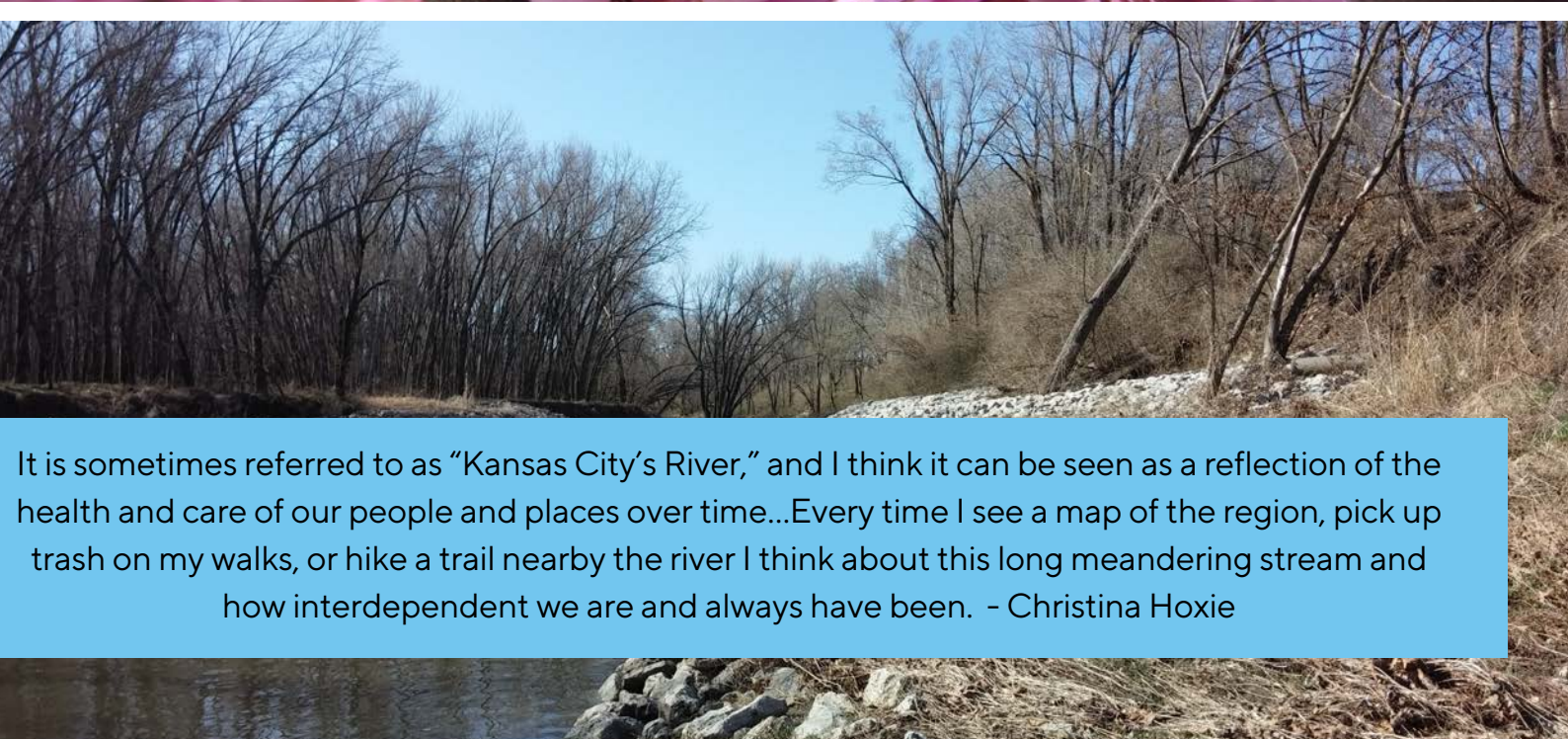
MATT HART
Board President



[People] need the Blue River experience. They need to walk there, to feel it, sense it - the majesty and the smells in the glades and the stream and river valleys. It's never too late for anyone to get outside but it's much richer when someone has had great early childhood experiences. - Roberta Vogel-Leutung



Spring was always my favorite time to walk; everything was fresh and new, with wildflowers everywhere. Each season has its own delights - even winter. I truly loved the solitude and spiritual connection I found every time I spent time in the woodlands that surrounded the Blue River. - Neil Becker



It is sometimes referred to as "Kansas City's River," and I think it can be seen as a reflection of the health and care of our people and places over time...Every time I see a map of the region, pick up trash on my walks, or hike a trail nearby the river I think about this long meandering stream and how interdependent we are and always have been. - Christina Hoxie

CONSERVATION PROGRAM

For the Partnership Summit this year, we set a tall goal of \$22,000 – funds needed to meet or first major milestone in the capital campaign to save the Heartland Overlook Preserve. We soared past that goal because of generous donors and raised \$23,500.

Plans for the HOP include:

- Restoring the forest as outlined in the Blue River Action Plan.
- Removing invasive plants such as bush honeysuckle and cleaning up the illegally dumped trash.
- In partnership with Urban Trail Co., design and build trails for hiking and biking on the property.



THE NATURE ACTION CREW

HCA welcomed Magali Rojas as our new Nature Action Crew Leader. Magali is responsible for managing the natural areas in the Blue River Action Plan and supporting HCA's three programs along with activities for our organization. HCA staff began the initial process of building the Crew in the early summer before hiring Magali in August, who worked closely with MO Hives KC and youth from Build Trybe to develop the Nature Action Crew and build a team to manage HCA's Action Areas and lead restoration workdays.



In October, Budget Dumpster donated a dumpster for the Nature Action Crew and Renew the Blue volunteers to clean up the HOP. 29 volunteers cleared over 1,500 pounds from the area.

Restoring Vacant Lots

FOXTOWN EAST

With funding from the Health Forward Foundation, HCA continued working with Foxtown East Neighborhood Association to acquire and restore four properties in the neighborhood to site a neighborhood center, a porous-pavement parking lot, edible landscaped gardens and forested walking trails. Foxtown East had a previous relationship with Gregory Ridge Living Center to connect the planned trails properties with the Fox Hollow Trail maintained by the City of Kansas City Department of Parks & Recreation.



The restoration addresses:

- Trash accumulating within property boundaries, including plumbing fixtures, electronics, construction trash and tires.
- shrub honeysuckle weakening existing tree stock via toxins emitted through the roots, causing increased limb/trunk decay rates.
- Shrub honeysuckle exacerbating rainwater runoff via shallow root systems.

PALESTINE EAST NEIGHBORHOOD

In the spring we issued a call for community members to serve on a Community Advisory Board, or CAB, to design a re-use plan for ~20 acres of vacant and forested land in the Palestine Corridor. The project is in partnership with Center for Neighborhoods, University of Missouri – Kansas City, Kansas City Neighborhoods and Housing Services, Missouri Department of Conservation, and The Open Table.

The CAB met monthly to learn about the current status of the land, listen from those who live in the area and shared ideas of how they might preserve and use a forest corridor that runs through the neighborhood.



THE BLUE RIVER REPORT CARD

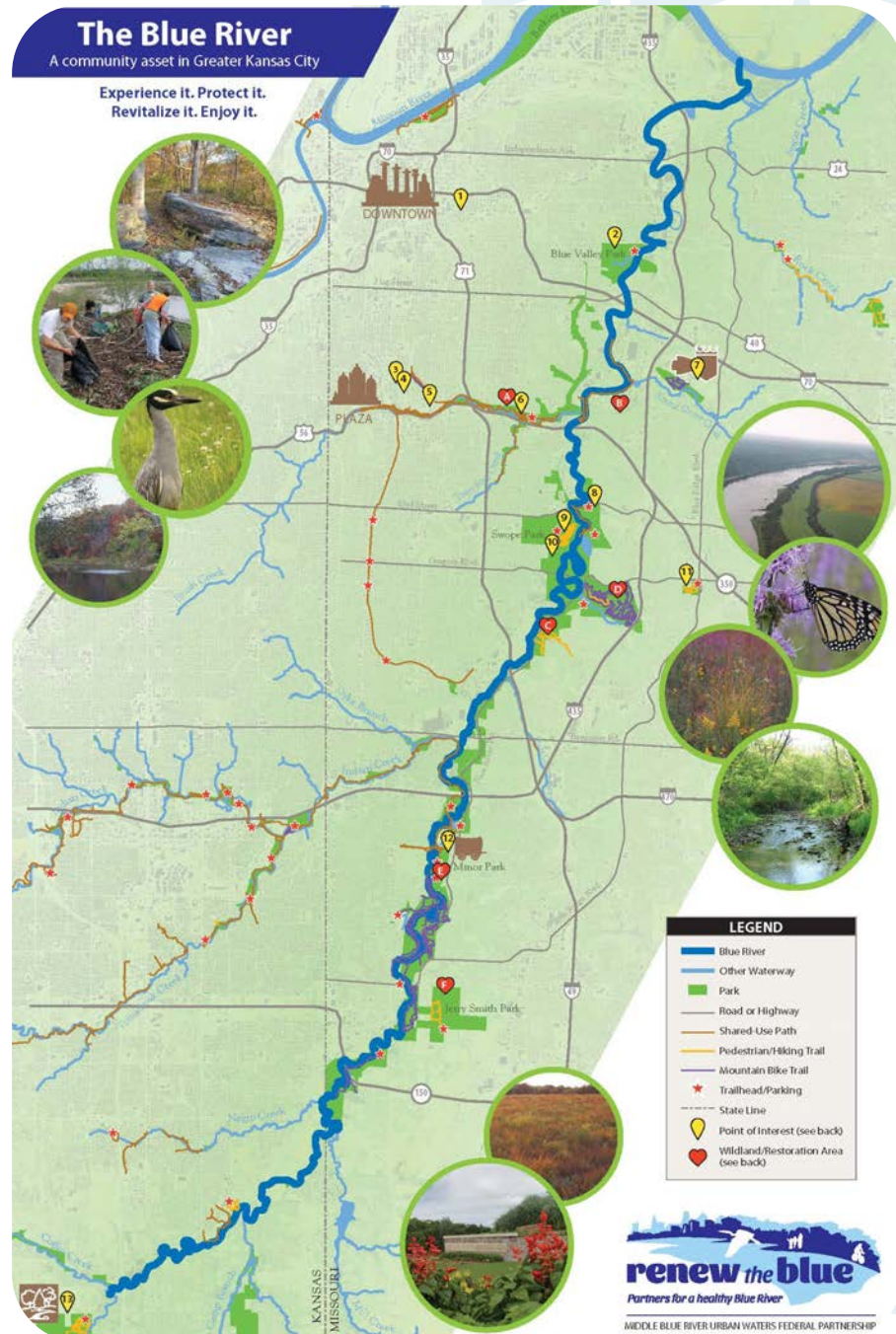
The Blue River Report Card is a unique year-long iterative process with stakeholders that seeks to grade the watershed holistically. This holistic approach takes data from a wide array of categories and indicators to best understand the health of the river as well as the community's connection to the Blue River.

In January, HCA convened six committees to review the methodology and data from the 2019 Blue River Report Card. Each committee focused on one of the indicators of health for the Blue River including Community Connections, Water Quality, Governance, Recreation, Habitat and Development.

HCA tasked Native Lands LLC with the data analysis and with reviewing the current versions of the data on the 2021 Blue River Report Card. Native Lands LLC reviewed the versions of the data and methodology and conducted a review of the methodology for each indicator.

When the final data is collected and assessed, HCA will lead public stakeholder engagement for feedback on the 2021 Report Card. The feedback will be incorporated into the updated Report Card and it will be published in the first quarter of 2022.

There were 37 volunteers representing 35 partner organizations contributing time and resources to serve on the 2021 Report Card Committees.



ALLIANCE SERVICES PROGRAM

On October 5, Heartland Conservation Alliance celebrated our partners and the work being done throughout the Blue River Watershed at our 8th Annual Partnership Summit. Community conservation work is a long - term process where successes, big and small, can get lost. The yearly event allows us to pause and celebrate our Alliance members working to protect and restore our rivers and the land around them.

This year, we brought the Blue River to life with an exhibit featuring stories from our year-long Blue River Story Project. In conjunction with the Renew the Blue Campaign, The Blue River Story Project picks up where the Blue River documentary left off with stories of Kansas Citians and their experiences and reflections about this amazing asset. The Blue River Story Project continues to live on HCA's blog.



FALL FUNDRAISER

On October 17, HCA Board Member Scott Schulte and his wife, Leslie hosted the fall fundraiser at their residence. Current and prospective donors were invited to enjoy refreshments and appetizers featuring local ingredients made by board member, Roberta Vogel-Leutung.

The evening began with conversation and networking, followed by a performance by local Kansas City musician Julia Othmer. Through generous donations throughout the evening, HCA was able to pay off the loan for the Heartland Overlook Preserve and developing a long-term maintenance plan.



MO River Relief

On August 19 HCA staff attended MO River Relief's "Big Muddy BBQ" to celebrate our partners as they began the 20th Anniversary of the Big Muddy Clean Sweep. Kevin Tosie, the MO River Relief Operations Manager, is a member of HCA's Education & Outreach Work Group and plays an important role in keeping the watershed clean. 2021 was an exciting year to support our partners and gather together outside to celebrate what we love the most: nature and the Blue River.

MO Hives KC

This summer HCA's Nature Action Crew had the honor in participating in MO Hives KC's Internship program. The program aimed to educate minority youth in the space of urban agriculture and honeybee conservation, and build their skills and confidence to be active stewards of their environment. The Crew received hands-on experience working with honeybees and their natural ecosystems to conserve and support pollinator habits, the biodiversity and beauty they nurture in our cities.

30 DAYS OF BIKING KC

From April 1 - 30 HCA hosted our first spring fundraiser "30 Days of Biking KC." We challenged community members to ride their bikes every day during the month of April. Participants formed teams and competed against each other for pledges to contribute to funds to save The Heartland Overlook Preserve.

Every ride counted: to the end of a driveway, around the block, through the city or along a favorite bike trail. Teams raised over \$10,000 for future nature programs on The HOP, including biking trails to increase access to the Blue River in South Kansas City.



BikeWalkKC joined HCA to share the ABCs of biking, helmet safety and how to signal. The video is available on HCA's YouTube Channel.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH PROGRAM



SUMMER ADVENTURE CHALLENGE

In April, Exploring Roots merged with HCA to combine resources, talent and experience to improve the quality of life in communities across the metropolitan area. Along with leadership from HCA's AmeriCorps VISTA, the merger helped create the Summer Adventure Challenge. 176 people registered for the program, which ran June - September. The Challenge allowed Kansas Citians to explore beautiful places in the community, helping families discover trails, prairies, glades and other wild areas along the Blue River. Each month highlighted a different park in Kansas City and invited communities to hike the trail and win prizes along the way.

Partners: RoKC - REI - KCMO Parks - Johnson County Parks and Recreation - Betty Raes Ice Cream - Ruby Jeans Juicery - Prairie Fire Museum - Overland Park Arboretum - GoApe, Starlight Theater - Kansas City Zoo - KC WildLands - Moosejaw - Blue Valley Neighborhood Association



June
Rocky Point Glades,
Swope Park 2.2 miles



July
Jerry Smith Prairie
1.3 miles



August
Blue Valley Park
Oxbow Trail
1.1 miles



September
Camp Branch Glades
1.2 miles

GREEN GUARD STEWARDSHIP TRAINING

The Green Guard Stewardship Program connects community members to nature in their neighborhood and teaches them how to take care of it. In turn, preserving their natural areas helps them preserve their local identity. An appreciation for nature is a social value that can be learned from the stewards we train as they work in their community. As one's sense of place evolves so does the pride they take in their community.



Spring Workshops - 11 Stewards

HCA partnered with KC Water Department, Marlborough Green Guard Graduates, Dunbar Farms, Boys Grow, MY REGION WINS!, and the Anita B. Gorman Discovery Center to host the Spring 2021 Green Guard Workshop Series. The program included three Saturday gatherings made up of four educational workshops. They focused on topics such as green infrastructure, soil health and urban farms, native plants and community stewardship. Participants became stewards of local Kansas City parks and green spaces, as well as increased their knowledge about restoring vacant lots in their own neighborhoods and communities.

Foxtown East - 14 Stewards

HCA partnered with Down to Earth Services, KC Water Department and Green Acres Urban Farm and Research Project to host the Foxtown East Green Guard Workshop Series. Residents of Foxtown East Neighborhood attended workshops that focused on restoring the lots at 63rd and Cleveland. The topics included native plant identification and invasive plant removal, a tour of the KC Water sustainable parking lot, and holistic nature protection and biodiversity.



Action for a Healthy Blue River Virtual Series - 4 Stewards

The "Action for a Healthy Blue River" was the first virtual Green Guard Stewardship Program and took place on a community forum and live discussion on Zoom. The Program featured three lessons: "Finding your place in the watershed," "Trees working to restore neighborhoods," and "Stewardship in your community." It included video presentations, discussion questions, and opportunities to continue the lessons in the community such as guided activities and honeysuckle removal restoration workdays, led by HCA's Nature Action Crew.

Stewards had the opportunity to discuss their observations and questions and meet others in the Kansas City community who are working to restore green space and improve the health of the Blue River.

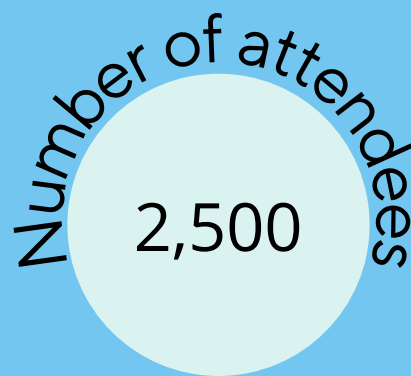
RENEW THE BLUE

HCA's newest Nature Action Crew led a series of restoration workshops at The Heartland Overlook Preserve to remove invasive honeysuckle, cleanup large scale trash and introduce community members to the HOP's natural resources, including critical habitat for threatened species like the tri-colored bat. In addition to critical ecosystem services, this land is a key connector for more than 60 miles of mountain biking and hiking trails along the Blue River.



RENEW THE BLUE NUMBERS

People all over the region are working to revitalize and clean up the Blue River. This year we worked to restore habitat, protect land and water and help more people access and experience the benefits of the Blue River.





If I could share something about the Blue River, I would want everyone to know that it exists. The Blue River is a lifeline for all the residents in the area. It's a great teaching tool. It shows us how water conducts itself in a natural setting. It also allows us to see what happens when humans interfere. - Kate Delehunt



I would encourage people to look at the entire course of the Blue River...go from Overland Park Arboretum and go to different places on the Red Bridge Trail area. Go down to the lower regions like Brush Creek and Blue River to ride the trails and look around and ask questions like "what do you see?" and "what are the differences?" and "what should we be doing to the streams to protect them?" - Don Wilkison



The Blue River is also like a liver, detoxifying a lot of pollutants sourced from its drainage areas including the most densely populated urban center and long-established and heavily industrial bases in the entire metro area. And we have a long road and lots to do to protect the Blue River and treasure it as an important organ to the region. - Jing Tao




HEARTLAND CONSERVATION ALLIANCE SCALES UP

HCA grew as an organization during 2021, and thereby in our Kansas City area conservation impact. As our "clean" audited financial statement and 990 tax return show in detail, we responsibly managed our resources in the midst of pandemic and staff turnover disruptions. At year end our cash and receivables of \$337,573 plus property and equipment of \$195,833 less accounts payable of \$7,636 left us with net assets of \$525,770. This is more than double the prior balance. More than half of HCA's revenues are designated, reflecting the project-specific nature of the \$688,383 of grants and contracts which accounted for 91% of HCA's income. For example, the **Environmental Protection Agency** recently awarded a \$200,000 Brownfield grant for stable funding of three years of our Nature Action Crew which is considered both restricted and deferred revenue. Contributions of \$68,571 from foundations and individuals also provide essential support for HCA's general operations; foundation support included the **Health Forward Foundation** and the **Shumaker Family Foundation**. The majority of unrestricted funding went toward the purchase of the Heartland Overlook Preserve at 9106 Chestnut, allowing us to pay off the related \$152,000 loan.

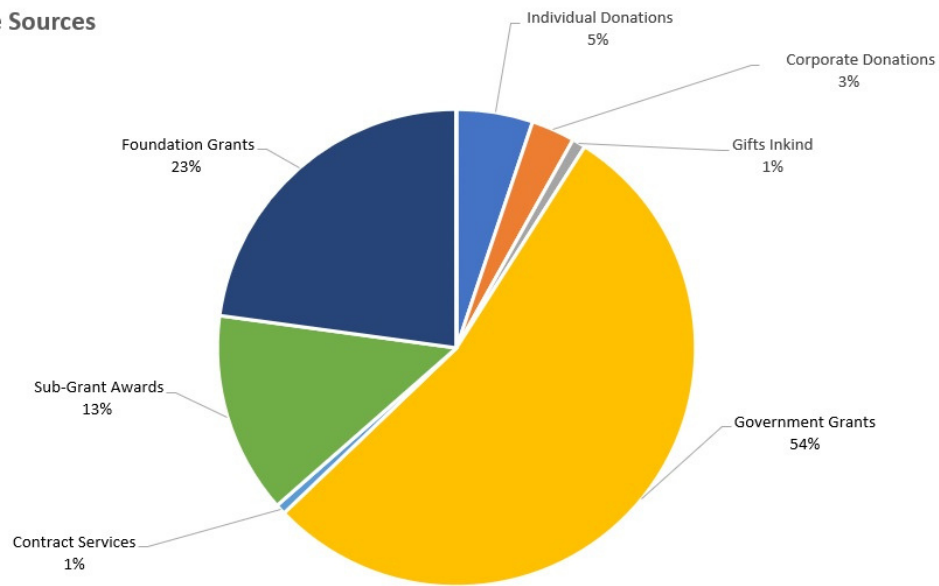
Functionally, 81.4% of HCA's expenses were for salary, benefits, and contract services as we remain an efficient, low-overhead operation. As the table below demonstrates, over 79% of our expenses are assigned to our three program areas. In addition, much of the grants and contract revenues, and the contract services expense are transactions with our conservation partners as we collaborate to benefit the Kansas City human and natural community. As the challenges from development, climate change, and habitat loss continue to scale up, HCA will continue to work with others on effective solutions.

Conservation and Policy Programs	59.5%
Outreach and Education Programs	9.9%
Alliance Services Program	9.7%
Management and Administration	14.7%
Fundraising	6.2%
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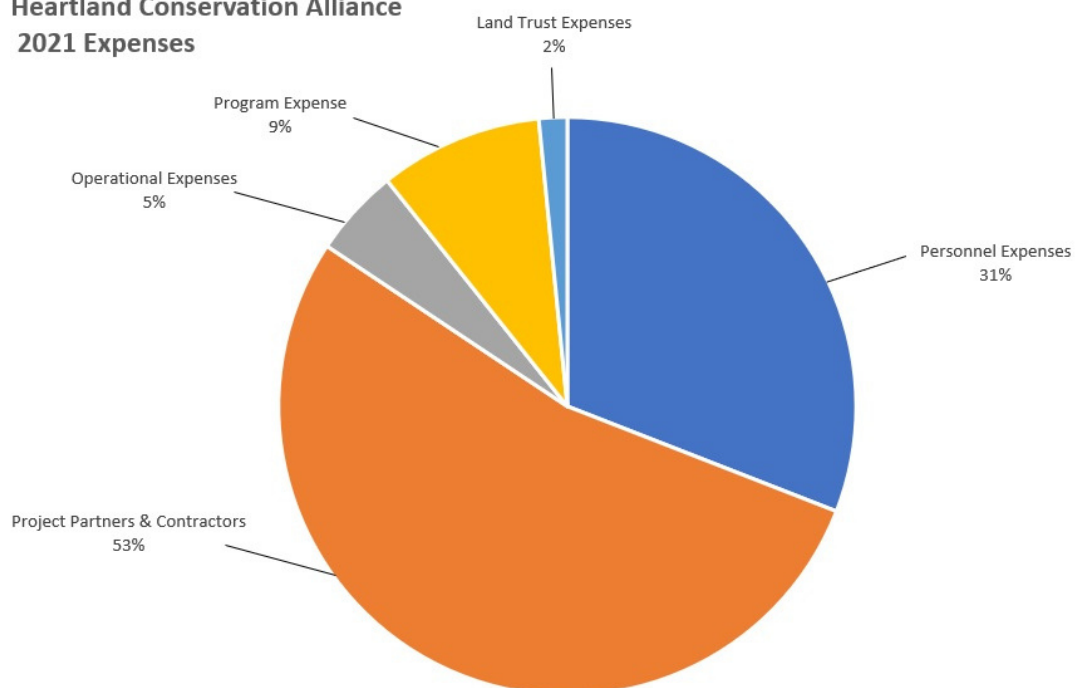

William R Blessing
Board Treasurer

HEARTLAND CONSERVATION ALLIANCE SCALES UP

**Heartland Conservation Alliance
2021 Income Sources**



**Heartland Conservation Alliance
2021 Expenses**



SUPPORTERS

Thank You to Our 2021 Funders!

Altar'd State
Country Club Bank
Emily Johnson Art LLC
Habitat Architects
Health Forward Foundation
Henderson Engineers, Inc.

KC Water
Matchfun Entertainment LLC
Moser Contracting, LLC
StoneLion Puppet Theatre
VMYL&R (on behalf of Jamie
Beard)



SUPPORTERS

Thank You to Our 2021 Funders!

Lynnie AC
Vladimir Adzhigirey
Keith, Beth, Keith and
Michael Alm
Briana Anderson
Mary Anthes
Jim Armer
Arienne Barnes
Jamie Beard
Sarah Beier
Angela Benal
Samuel Bennett
Andre Beskrowni
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David Earls
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Craig Eichelman
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Jill Erickson
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Wendi Fabre
Anna Gilmore
Bill Fessler
Olusola Festus
Katherine Flattery
Beth Flemington
Clare Flemington
Mr & Mrs Michael T White
Amelia Freeman

SUPPORTERS

Thank You to Our 2021 Funders!

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Everett Koehn
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Zachary McCullough
Dayna McDaniel
Kassie McLaughlin
Marilyn McSpadden
Aicha Menendez
Richard Middleton
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Anne Mills
Ginevera Moore
Jen Moreland
Beth Morford
Jana Moser
Elizabeth Mottley
Dina Newman
Rachel North

SUPPORTERS

Thank You to Our 2021 Funders!

TC Odegard
Kathleen O'Donnell
Mary Beth and Robert
Ogle
Sierra Otto
Ann Pai
Russell Pedersen
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Robert Preller
Aaron Price
Henry Puls
Gilbert Randolph
Ann Readey
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Robert Reiman
Frederick Riesmeyer
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Roberta Vogel-Leutung
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Suzanne Welde
Jedidiah West
Megan Wheeler
Michael White
Nell Willis
Amanda Wilson
cheyenne wolfe
Garrett Wood
Terri Woodburn
Nancy Yuelkenbeck

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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.

BILL BLESSING

Board Treasurer, Conservation Work Group Member,
Urban Waters Steering Committee Member

CHANDLER LITTLE EAGLE

Partnership Work Group Member

KRISTEN BONTRAGER

Board Secretary, Partnership Work Group Member,
Policy Work Group Member

SPENCER MARTIN

Education & Outreach Work Group Member

OLUSOLA FESTUS

Finance Committee Member, Conservation Work
Group Member

SCOTT SCHULTE

Conservation Work Group Member, Policy Work
Group Member

MATT HART

Board 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

KYLE JOHNSON

Policy Work Group Member, Conservation Work
Group Member

ROBERTA VOGEL-LEUNTUNG

Education & Outreach Work Group Member

STEERING COUNCIL

Steering Council members are responsible for guiding the implementation of our work. They represent the conservation community while providing leadership and expertise.

JOSHUA ANDERSON

Boys Grow

BRIAN NOWOTNY

Jackson County Parks + Rec

VICTORIA DUNKIN

Student, Oregon State University

DREW PEARSON

Wilson & Co.

IAN FANNIN-HUGHES

City of Overland Park

STEPHEN VAN RHEIN

Missouri Department of Conservation

CHRISTINA HOXIE

Hoxie Collective

SUZANNE WELDE

Horizon Academy

LARA ISCH

City of Kansas City, Missouri

JOE WHEELock

Heartland Tree Alliance

JOHN KEVERN

University of Missouri - Kansas City

DR. TERRI WOODBURN

University of Kansas Edwards Campus

**IMANI MALAIKA-
MEHTA**

STEMS on the VINES/KC Creators Clubs

Heartland

CONSERVATION ALLIANCE



heartlandconservationalliance.org

