



Annual Report

10 years of protecting
the places we love.

www.heartlandconservationalliance.org

2022

Letter from the Executive Director, Logan Heley

When HCA and Climate Action KC took peers from Metropolia GZM, Poland on a tour of the Blue River last spring, it hit home the amazing opportunity we have with this natural resource for our own community members and also for visitors from around the world – especially as the region welcomes a new KCI Airport and the World Cup in 2026. As a city of rivers that we have historically turned our backs away from, we are making progress on reconnecting people with the Blue River and our region's natural resources.

One way we've helped reconnect our neighbors with nature is through our Exploring Roots Summer Adventure Challenge. The Challenge encourages you to run, hike, bike, jog, and explore Kansas City's parks and trails along the Blue River. Beginning in 2022, HCA partnered with local Girl Scout and Kansas City trail expert, TakeAHikeKC, to provide patches for participants. 2022's Challenge saw 376 registrations (some individuals, many families) from 95 zip codes, a significant increase from 2021.

We also welcomed new staff and promotions in 2022! Mid-year we were glad to promote Sarah Benal to become our Education & Outreach Program Manager. Kristina Williams was hired in March as our Program Manager before being promoted to Finance & Operations Director by year's end. And we were excited to hire Laura Phillips as a Nature Action Crew Leader. We are fortunate to have an excellent staff supporting our conservation alliance!

Our close partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) earned us the honor of their 2022 Conservation Impact Partner Award. We could not champion the Blue River in the way we do without partners like MDC – and supporters like you!

We are excited to expand our conservation, environmental justice, and outdoor recreation programming in 2023. Thank you for your continued support!



Our Vision

We want a healthy sustainable watershed with healthy natural functions and uses sustained in the face of alterations to its landscape. We want a watershed where life and property are protected. We want a community that can actively connect to and benefit from high quality natural resources in the watershed.



Our 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.

Letter from the Board President, Kristen Bontrager

2022 was a time to be grateful. Heartland Conservation Alliance is extremely grateful for the work that Samuel Bennett put forth as our interim Executive Director. Sam graciously served as interim Executive Director while we waited to fill the position that Jill Erickson formerly held. Today, Sam continues to serve Heartland Conservation Alliance as our Board Treasurer.

Heartland Conservation Alliance had the privilege of hiring Logan Heley as our new Executive Director in February of 2022. Logan came to us with exceptional experience in both policy and community engagement. With Logan's leadership Heartland Conservation Alliance has expanded its staff and worked with our partner, Bridging the Gap, to advance restoration and conservation goals for the Blue River Watershed as prioritized in the 2022 Blue River Action Plan. Logan also represented Heartland Conservation Alliance by serving as the co-host for the 2022 Climate Action KC Summit.

In 2022 HCA received the U.S. EPA Environmental Workforce and Job Training Brownfields grant, in partnership with Cornerstones of Care, to solidify the Conservation and Landscaping apprentice program with their Build Trybe cohorts under Logan's leadership. Additionally, with help from partners such as MARC, Bridging the Gap (BTG), and the Conservation Fund, KCMO Parks was awarded a \$5 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) stormwater grant from the state of Missouri.

All of these accomplishments were achieved in only one year of Logan leading HCA, and I can speak for us all when I say that I cannot wait to see what we can accomplish in the coming year!



Photo by U.S. EPA

The Blue River Report Card and The Blue River Action Plan

The Blue River Action Plan was first created in 2017 by a coalition of non-profit, municipal, and private agencies with vested interests in the health of the Blue River watershed. The document guides the work of Heartland Conservation Alliance and their partners as they collaborate to protect the land, water and communities of this important region. Courtney Masterson from Native Lands Restoration Collaborative was hired as a contractor to evaluate seven of the eight Action Areas and offer her recommendations for restoration plans. The recommended work focuses heavily on the ecological restoration of each area while encouraging stakeholder engagement and community outreach. The updated information was reviewed periodically by the Conservation Work Group.

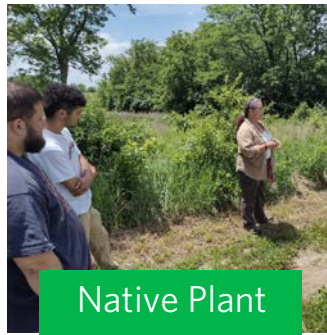
The updated Blue River Report Card and Action Plan was published in August 2022. Results show the Blue River Watershed received a “C” letter with an overall score of 46%. The grade reflects the combined scores of the six categories. Four categories (Water Quality, Development, Recreation and Community Connections) received “C” letter grades; two categories (Governance, and Habitat) received “D” letter grades; an improvement from the 2019 Report Card. This evaluation and review are critical to ensuring our ability to target and protect land in the Blue River Watershed.

The Action Plan identifies 36,000 acres of land to protect and conserve. The plan identifies eight key areas and active champions working along the Blue River corridor. Today HCA is actively working on 220 acres of conservation projects to improve the health of natural areas and underserved neighborhoods in the Blue River Watershed.

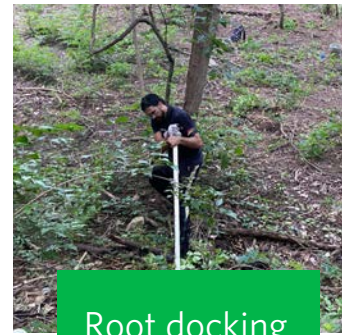




Prescribed
Burning



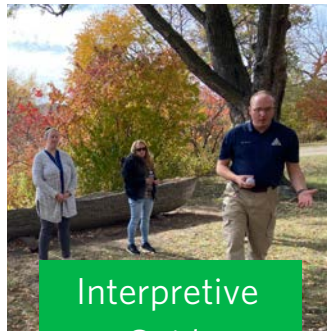
Native Plant
Identification



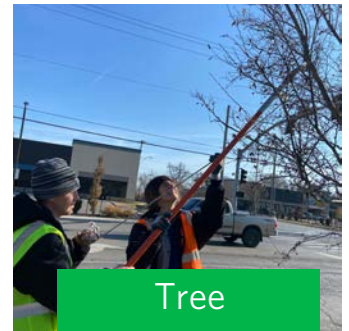
Root docking



Bee Keeping



Interpretive
Guide



Tree
Maintenance

Conservation Program

The Nature Action Crew

The Nature Action Crew is a full-time, paid position with Heartland Conservation Alliance. The Crew supports conservation work throughout Kansas City and the Blue River Watershed, particularly ongoing projects at HCA's Action Areas and projects led by our Alliance partners. Nature Action Crew members are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities to further their conservation careers.

In 2022 HCA received the U.S. EPA Environmental Workforce and Job Training Brownfields grant. We received this grant in partnership with Cornerstones of Care and solidified the Conservation and Landscaping apprentice program with their Build Trybe cohorts. This grant funds the Build Trybe 10-week training program, which provides environmental restoration training to at-risk youth in foster care, ages 18-24, with a goal of placing students in environmental careers in the Kansas City areas impacted by brownfields. Each training cohort consists of 36 classroom training sessions and 12 hands-on learning in the field for a total of 180 hours of intermediate training, including 54 students receiving OSHA 29 CFR 1910.120 40-hour HAZWOPER and OSHA 10 training. Graduates from Build Trybe have the opportunity to join HCA's Nature Action Crew.

979.5 lbs of trash collected

135 trees planted

43 acres of invasive species removed

HCA is especially grateful for the significant funding and support from the Missouri Department of Conservation. Along with the experts at MDC, The Nature Action Crew and Build Trybe learn valuable skills and have the opportunity to work with a variety of invaluable partners including:

- Deep Roots
- Full Employment Council
- Habitat Architects
- Health Forward Foundation
- Kansas City Parks and Rec
- Mid-America Regional Council
- MO Hives KC
- National Fish & Wildlife Foundation - Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration
- Native Lands Restoration Collaborative
- Urban Trail Co.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Forest Service
- Shumaker Family Foundation



Alliance Services

Palestine East Restoring Vacant Lots

On August 25 Heartland Conservation Alliance, The Center for Neighborhoods and Vireo hosted a public meeting for the Palestine East Community to discuss draft concepts for the vacant lots located between 33rd and 39th Streets and bordered by Mersington and Norton. The project goal was to create and adopt a re-use and maintenance plan for the 20 acres of vacant land that includes long-term programming and strategies for community ownership. Nine community members serve on a Community Advisory Board to design this plan.



Each draft concept presented at the public meeting included one of two focuses: Economic Opportunities or Ecological Services. Economic Opportunities focuses on community investment and entrepreneurship. Specifically providing areas where community members can grow and sell fresh produce. The Ecological Services concept focus is pollution removal, carbon storage, oxygen production, and avoided runoff—all the "services" that the urban forest provides the neighborhood.

The project began in 2014 when a 40-acre corridor in the Palestine East neighborhood was brought to HCA's attention. The corridor was largely owned by the Kansas City Land Bank. HCA began working with residents to learn how we might work together to re-purpose the land through a series of community workshops as well as a community survey that revealed community members care deeply for environmental issues and have pride in the place where they live.

"Nature grounds us and provides a connection with the earth and our neighbors. Trees are one of our greatest resources for tempering climate change, including managing stormwater runoff and heat islands."

Sherri Elliot, Community Advisory Board Member

HCA and our partners will continue to gather feedback from community members and residents about how they would like to see this space repurposed. Following feedback from the public meeting, HCA plans to work with Vireo and create a preferred draft concept. Once there is an agreement, HCA will share the plan with the City and strive to collaborate on its implementation.



"The best way to impact the community is using your voice. This project will benefit the Palestine East Community with much needed improvements...as well as a safe and clean area for the community to enjoy freely."

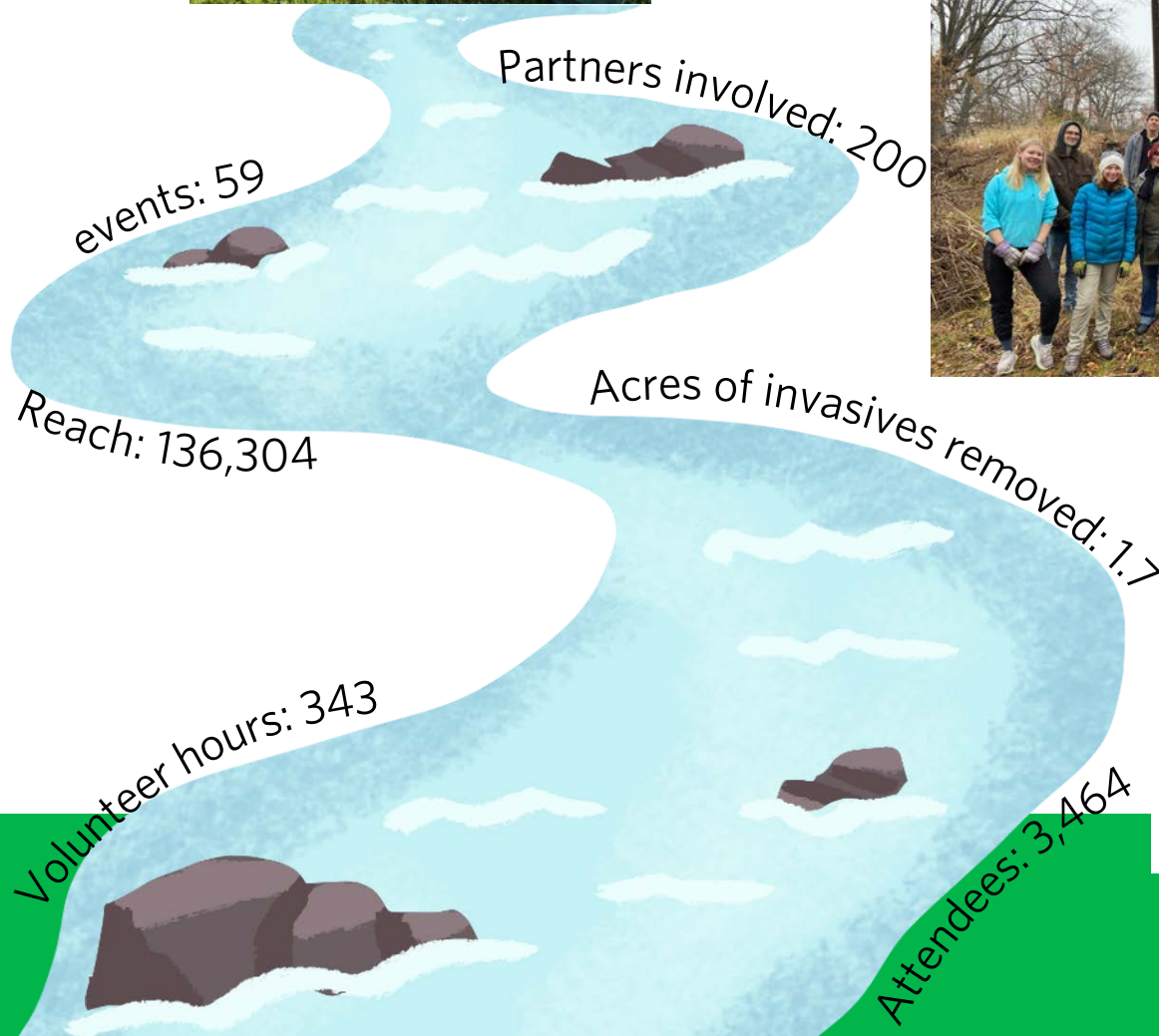
Erika Bush, Community Advisory Board Member

Outreach & Education Program

Renew the Blue



As a proud member of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, Renew the Blue reconnects urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with the Blue River by improving coordination among federal agencies. The Partnership also collaborates with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our Nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits. There is an enormous opportunity to involve residents, community organizations and businesses in efforts to "Renew the Blue," reinforcing the value of nature in an urban setting.



Green Guard Stewardship Training

Funded by KC Water, the goal of the Green Guard Stewardship Training Program was to increase community understanding and awareness of issues facing the Blue River and offer hands-on training to empower people to take action by serving as stewards. The training focused on water quality education and engaged new stewards with ideas for behavioral change across multiple generations.

Green Guard offers fellowship and positive experiences with nature to help change how people perceive nature, care for nature and interact with nature. Green Guard equips Stewards with the right resources and empowers them to address their needs for years to come through exposure to the positive health benefits of nature.



TOPICS

- Introduction to MO Stream Teams, Water Quality Issues in Kansas City - MO Stream Teams, KC Water, LDB Consultants
- Water Testing and Biodiversity - Ian Fannin-Hughes
- Kayaking adventure - KC Kayak and Canoe and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Native and Invasive Plants Identification - Parkville Nature Sanctuary

Environmental Educators Discussion

On November 12, HCA's Education & Outreach Work Group organized a discussion session to explore ways of increasing environmental and conservation education to all age groups, both in the classroom and in the field. Conservation and environmental educators will build professional communities with classroom teachers looking to increase engagement practices for their students. Discussions will focus on localized phenomena, practical and long-term climate change solutions, and conservation resources and practices.



Exploring Roots Summer Adventure Challenge



The 2022 Summer Adventure Challenge ran June 1 - September 30 and featured four trails located in Kansas City. The Exploring Roots webpage provided rules and trail guidance, as well as the Challenge rules, prizes and prize pick-up locations. The webpage also has contact information for the Outdoor Education Coordinator. Initial planning work and support was provided by former HCA AmeriCorps VISTA/Outdoor Education Coordinator, and completed with the assistance of HCA's Nature Action Crew members.

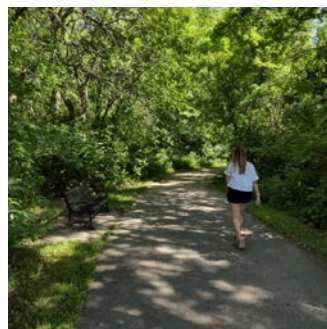
Participants had one month to visit and hike the featured trail. The trail was scouted, plotted, and marked with signs designed by HCA and placed by the HCA Nature Action Crew. Small signs provided navigation assistance with arrows pointing in the correct direction and placed approximately every 15 feet. Large signs holding the keychains were placed approximately every 1/3 of the route. Participants were encouraged to hike to their choice of sign, collect a keychain, and bring the keychain to the designated location to select their prize.

68% of surveyed participants said that their reason for participating in the Summer Adventure Challenge was to "learn more about Kansas City's parks and natural spaces," and 59% said Cliff Drive Scenic Byway was their favorite trail. In response to the question "What did you like best about the Summer Adventure Challenge?" 64% of surveyed participants answered their interest in exploring the new trails they had never seen before.

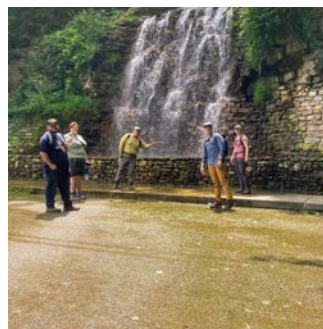
376 registrants, 95 zip codes, 49,000 reach, 37 partners and local businesses contributed over \$3,000 worth of prizes



**June: Hidden Valley
Park**



**July: Little Blue
Valley Park**



**August: Cliff Drive
Scenic Byway**



**September: Alex
George Wetland at
Blue River Parkway**

"[I enjoyed] Finding new beautiful places right under our noses, definitely will go to Cliff Drive again."

Event Participant

Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Nature Walk

The event is hosted by HCA, Kansas City Parks & Recreation, and Missouri State Parks. Each year we gather with our partners and the Kansas City community for a walk that elicits listening, reflecting, and honoring the words of Dr. King. His words resonate with us today and we use a walk to highlight them because for many, nature is a place of peacefulness, awe, and inspiration. We hope the walk can be restorative and provide a serene tradition for Kansas Citians. The MLK Jr. Nature Walk is in person and will follow a paved path beginning at the "15 and the Mahomies" Playground at Martin Luther King Jr. Square Park and will conclude at the Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Center.

At the Cultural Center, participants are invited to enjoy light refreshments and hear from local community leaders about their insights on environmental justice.



Rev. Antoine Lee from Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) led the group in thoughtful reflection



Nova Clarke of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services and the Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge led the nature walk



Bill Coe, the Director of the Green Acres Urban Farm and Research Project was the event's keynote speaker

Heartland Nature Celebration

The Heartland Nature Celebration is one of a variety of events part of the Greater Kansas City Metro Area City Nature Challenge. It was open to the public and included environmental education opportunities and guided flora and fauna identification hikes. Every discovery made on the hikes contributed to the global City Nature Challenge effort. The City Nature Challenge is a world-wide collaboration that encourages communities to connect with nature in their own backyards.



Partners that provided expertise and fun outdoor education opportunities at the event: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, KC Water, Mad Hatter Tea Compost, KC Public Library, TakeAHike, KC, The Nature Conservancy, MOHives KC, The Resilient Activist, Botanical Belonging

The Heartland Overlook Preserve

In 2021 HCA completed a two-year campaign to purchase our first piece of property: 40 acres of oak and hickory forest along the Blue River that was surplus by Jackson County. The property, just north of the intersection of Bannister Road and Blue River Parkway, is known as the HOP.

Through the hard work of our volunteers, partners, and Nature Action Crew 32,898.46 square feet of habitat improvement has been conducted at the HOP. With help from Native Lands LLC and Kansas City Parks & Rec, HCA's HOP Property Management Committee plans to conduct prescribed burns on the site to restore the natural landscape. The prescribed burns will be important, cost-effective, and healthy ways to restore landscapes and create healthy ecosystems for wildlife and natural resources.

Kansas City is filled with a variety of natural landscapes such as glades, prairies, and grasslands that future generations can enjoy if the proper maintenance strategies are taken and more communities learn about the benefits of their application.



Photo by Regan Tokos

"Fires are a natural part of our local ecosystems. And when we can put that back on the landscape, it has benefits to both plants and animals."

Larry Rizzo, biologist at Habitat Architects

Letter from the Treasurer,

Samuel Bennett

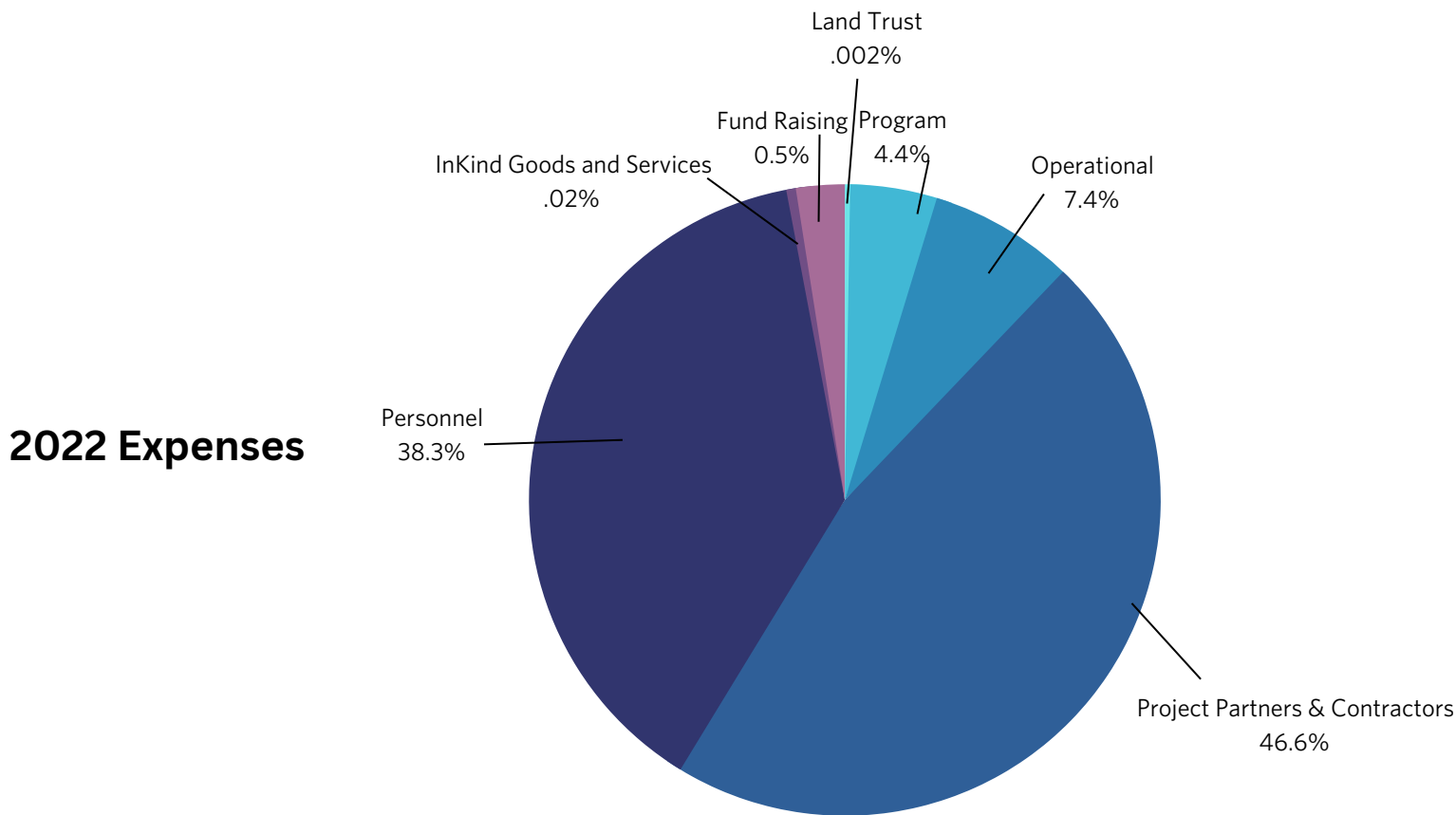
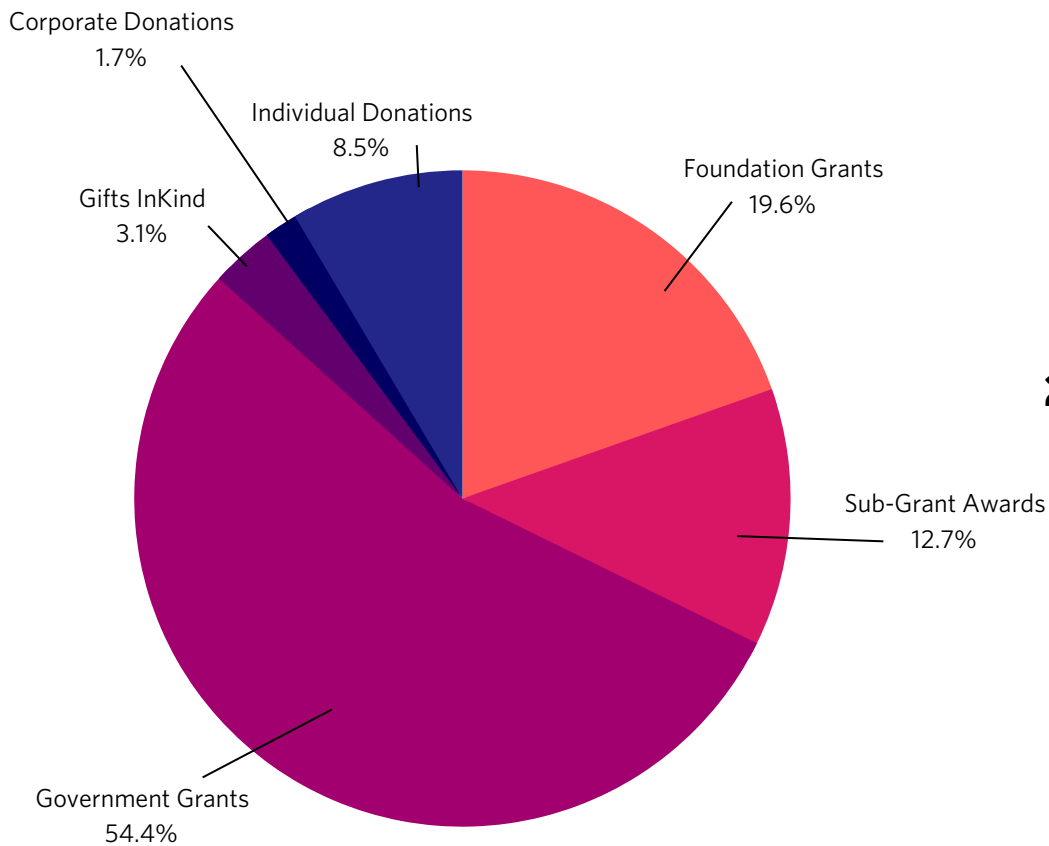
Heartland Conservation Alliance is able to provide a variety of environmental programs in the Blue River watershed with the help of diverse sources of financial support. These include the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Nature Conservancy and KC Water, as well as local private funders such as the Health Forward Foundation. We also receive vital government support from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Environmental Protection Agency. HCA's development plan continues to focus on diversifying sources of income, as was evident from the significant increase in individual donations in 2022.

As with most nonprofits, HCA's largest expense is staffing (38%). In 2022, a new Executive Director was hired and a second Nature Action Crew Leader was added to the staff. The Program Manager and the Outreach Manager took on additional responsibilities, and plans were laid for three new staff to be hired in 2023, reflecting the Conservation, Environmental Justice, and Education and Outreach programs. Staff salaries are paid through specific programmatic grants, with about 10% of an average grant dedicated to administration. 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 2022, 41% of grant funding passed through HCA to nonprofit peers and local contractors.

HCA ended 2022 with annual income totaling \$645,740 and expenses of \$612,331. Net operating income was less than in the previous year, due largely to increased personnel costs. Operating expenses were also generally higher in 2022. An overall decrease in state and federal grant income was partially offset by unrestricted individual donations and gifts in-kind. HCA ended the year with net assets of \$559,166, including land valued at \$190,301. Our cash reserves, in addition to anticipated funding of \$192,453, ensures our operation well into 2023, even with a significant planned expansion of staff and programs.

The organization's 2021 audit reflected sound fiscal management, with no significant issues reported by the auditor. The audit provides documented evidence that HCA is well funded and stable.





Thank you to our 2022 Funders!

Individual & Corporate Donations

Susan Ahearn	Mark and Emily Johnson	Alex VanLeeuwen
Briana Anderson	Brianna Leiker	Roberta Vogel-Leutung
Neil Becker	Jane Long	Nicholas Ward-Bopp
Joseph Beeson	John and Robin Maiale	Amanda Wilson
Sam Bennett	Amanda Allison Martini	KB and Carol Winterowd
William R Blessing	Cathy Matlack	Terri Woodburn
Bill Brant	Arianna McAnulty	Jami and Colin Woods
William Brant	Kara McKeever	Inas Younis
Susan M Bray	Eric Mikkelson	Nancy Yuelkenbeck
Eliza Cantlay	Peggy Miles	
Melissa Cheatham	Kaylie Miller	Amazon Smile
Maryann Coffman	Ginevera Moore	Boeing
Jared Coleman	Kirstie Mosher	Burns & McDonnell
Stephanie Crawford	Taylor Neff	Community Capital Fund
Katie Grace Deane	Lydia Palma	DuBois Consultants
Carla Dods	Ed Peterson	JE Dunn
Brad Dorner	Julie and Kent Peterson	Maiale Family Charitable Fund
David Earls	Sheryl Raineri	Network for Good
Amy Eastin	Ben Reed	Purcell - Hustead Fund
Jill Erickson	Robert Reiman	REI
Tim Eshleman	David Roberts	RoKC
Timothy Eshleman	Magali Rojas	The Blackbaud Giving Fund
Ryan Everoski	Kaitlyn Salamone	The Prosser Mather Charitable
Susan Friedrichsen	Andy Sauer	Foundation
Leslie Harris	Monica Schroer	United by Blue
Matthew Hart	Gerald Shechter	Westport Garden Club
Jason Hatley	Carl Stafford	
Kay Heley	Phaedra Svec	
Sarah Hemme	Jason Sweet	
Lacey Henggeler	Margaret Thomas	
DannyHewett	Amy Tokos	
W Kay Hopkins	Regan Tokos	
Leigh Huddleston	Nancy Tunell	
Gail James	Dustin Urban	
Elizabeth Jamison	Stephen Van Rhein	

Thank you to our 2022 Funders!

In-Kind Gifts

Kristen Bontrager
Eliza Cantlay
David Earls
Sarah Hemme
Steve Phillips
Regan Tokos

Budget Dumpsters
KC Royals
KC Library
The Pitch
GoApe Zipline Adventure
Starlight Theater
Moosejaw Mountaineering
Campbell Dome House
Jason Domingues Photography
Louis Austin Trust

Local Government Grants

City of Kansas City - Neighborhood Tourism Development Fund
KC Water

State Government Grants

Missouri Department of Conservation
Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Federal Government Grants

Environmental Protection Agency - Environmental Justice
Environmental Protection Agency - Brownfields
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Sub-Grant Award - Federal Grant

Wichita State University

Sub-Grant Award - State Grant

Bridging the Gap

Sub-Grant Award - Private

The Conservation Fund

Foundation Grant

The Health Forward Foundation
The Nature Conservancy - Kansas
The Nature Conservancy - Missouri
The River Network

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.



Sam Bennett

Board Treasurer
Community Volunteer



Bill Blessing

Board Vice President
Retired, Sprint/Embarq



Kristen Bontrager

Board President, 2023
Parkville Nature Sanctuary



Matt Hart

Board President, 2021-2022
PTC, Chief Information
Security Officer



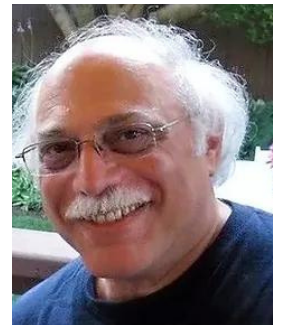
Sarah Hemme

Community Volunteer



Spencer Martin

Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools



Gerald Shechter

Retired, KCMO
Sustainability Coordinator



Scott Schulte

University of Missouri - Kansas City,
Vireo



Regan Tokos

Board Secretary
City of Kansas City Sustainability Analyst



Roberta Vogel-Leutung

Community Volunteer

Steering Council

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



Victoria Frank
SES Inc.



Ian Fannin-Hughes
Johnson County



Christina Hoxie
Hoxie Collective



Lara Isch
City of Kansas City, MO



John Kevern
University of Missouri -
Kansas City



Imani Malaika-Mehta
STEMS on the VINES/KC
Creators Clubs



Brian Nowotny
Jackson County Parks + Rec



Drew Pearson
Wilson & Co.



Stephen Van Rhein
Missouri Department of
Conservation



Suzanne Welde
Horizon Academy



Joe Wheelock
Heartland Tree
Alliance/Bridging the Gap



Dr. Terri Woodburn
University of Kansas -
Edwards Campus



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