



2025 Annual Report



Heartland
CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

A Message from our Executive Director and Board President

Dear Friends and Partners,

In the heart of Kansas City, the Blue River flows as a vital lifeline—a 40+ mile ribbon of nature that connects our urban landscapes to the wild spaces we all need to thrive. For the Heartland Conservation Alliance (HCA), 2025 was a year of deepening these connections. We recognize that the health of this watershed is inseparable from the health of our community. When we protect the river, we protect our neighbors, our wildlife, and our shared future.

Evidence-Based Impact

Our work this year was defined by a commitment to scientific rigor. Through the Renewing the Blue project - together with the City of Kansas City (MO), Bridging The Gap, Mid-America Regional Council, and Deep Roots KC - we launched a collaborative effort to restore over 240 acres of riparian habitat. By partnering with University of Kansas interns to analyze soil and vegetation across 16 critical tracts of the Blue River, we are building a "Foundation of Data" that ensures every restoration dollar is placed where it will have the most significant ecological impact.

Growth on the Ground

Our 40-acre Heartland Overlook Preserve (HOP) has become a beacon of community-led stewardship. Through 38 volunteer events, 140 dedicated participants helped us reach a major milestone: approximately half of the property no longer requires initial invasive species removal. This physical transformation is mirrored in our Blue River Nature Guide (BRiNG) program, which saw a 22% increase in participation. By providing free kayaking, birding, and hiking experiences to over 270 neighbors, we are helping Kansas Citians rediscover nature's beauty in their own neighborhoods and backyards.

Empowering the Next Generation

Conservation is a multi-generational relay. We were particularly inspired this year by young leaders like Elise Odegard, whose award-winning research on the Blue River Report Card reminds us that the future of our watershed is in capable hands. While our latest Blue River Report Card - published in October 2025 - issued an overall grade of "C," we view this not as a setback, but as a roadmap. It provides the scientific clarity needed to guide the actions that will ensure the Blue River remains a protected asset for generations to come.

A Legacy of Trust

As we grow, so does our responsibility to you. Earning the 2025 Candid Gold Seal of Transparency reflects our promise to be faithful stewards of your support. We want our donors to give with the utmost confidence, knowing that HCA operates with the highest standards of accountability. As we embark upon 2026, we invite you to continue this journey with us. Together, we are not just watching the river flow; we are ensuring it flourishes.

With deepest gratitude,

Logan Heley Executive Director

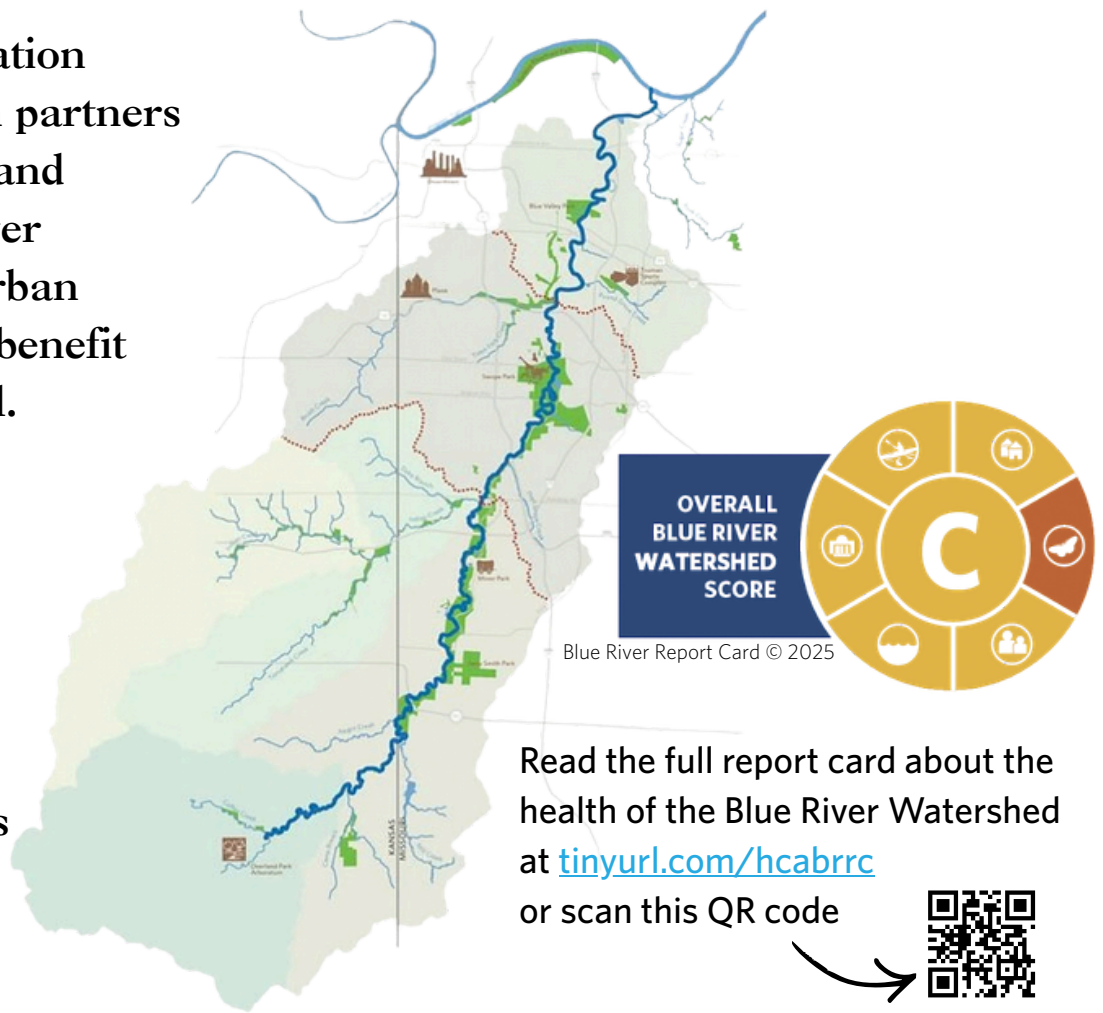


Ian Fannin-Hughes Board President



Heartland Conservation Alliance works with partners to protect, connect, and restore the Blue River watershed and its urban greenspaces for the benefit and enjoyment of all.

We envision a sustainable environment that supports the health of all human and natural communities in the Kansas City region.



Our Focus Areas

Heartland Conservation Alliance aims to advance strategic actions and partnerships to achieve measurable improvements in the Blue River Report Card.

We do that through:



Conservation and Policy



Education & Outreach



Alliance Services & Environmental Justice



Funding & Organizational Health

Renewing the Blue: Restoring Land, Water, and Community Canopy

Collaborative Blue River initiative restoring 250 acres of riparian habitat, strengthening green infrastructure and stormwater policies, expanding neighborhood tree canopy, providing technical training, and engaging communities to build a healthier, more resilient watershed for Kansas City.



Partners involved



KANSAS CITY



Bridging The Gap



Riparian Restoration

We're restoring natural systems along the Blue River Greenway to protect both neighborhoods and riparian ecosystems — because everyone deserves access to clean, safe, and healthy natural spaces and waterways.

Community Canopy

We're hiding a forest in plain site by planting trees where they are needed most — making neighborhoods cooler, helping to reduce flooding, and keeping our rivers cleaner.

Native Planting Solutions

We're encouraging more native garden development in urban spaces to create functional landscapes. Native plants are essential for supporting healthy ecosystems that provide vital services.

Policy and Practice

We're increasing the scale of Kansas City regional restoration through policy, planning, best management practices, and skill-building.

Partnership

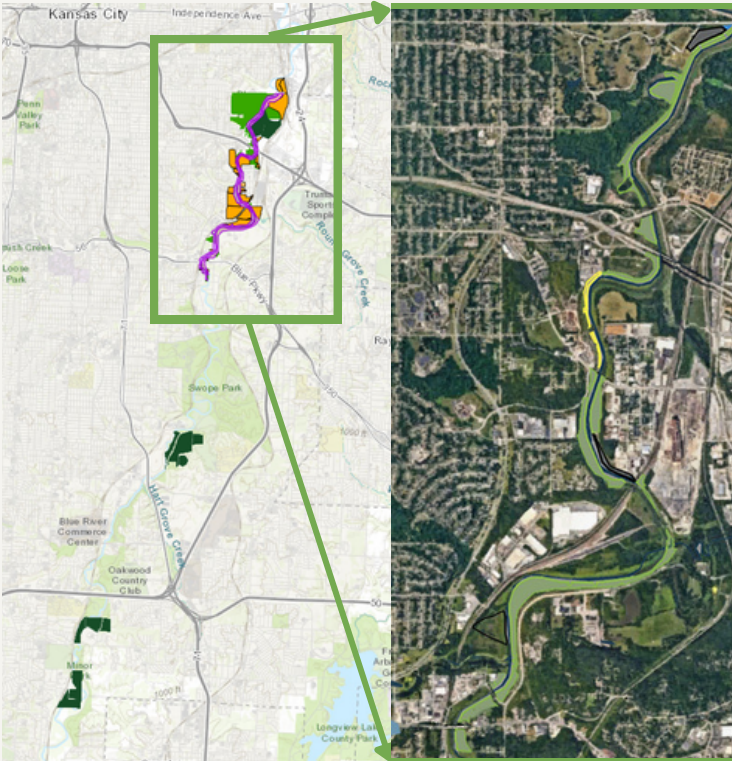
We're bringing together public, private, and nonprofit partners to advance climate resilience, improve water quality, and restore natural systems across the Blue River corridor.

Community Engagement

We're growing community ownership through education and outreach — empowering those closest to the problem to lead the solution. See event calendar on project webpage.

Supported by funding through the American Rescue Plan Act awarded to the City of Kansas City, MO from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

Our Part in Renewing the Blue



-  **2 new project staff hires**
-  **1 competitive RFP release**
-  **1 contractor project site tour**
-  **7 lead contractors hired**
-  **148 riparian acres slated for restoration (see map)**
-  **62 native food trees planted in community food forest at Blue Valley Park**
-  **1 Blue River tree watering irrigation system installed**

Learn more about the project at joinrenewtheblue.org/current-project or scan this QR code



Lead contractors involved



HCA Project Goals

BUILDING COMMUNITY



GROWING FOOD



REDUCING TRASH



RESTORING HABITAT



Conserving and Protecting the Watershed as a Land Trust

Heartland Overlook Preserve (HOP)



40 acres acquired in 2019



2.2 miles of public use trail



13.4 acres restored to date



37 Woodland Restoration events



140 volunteers engaged



950 plugs planted



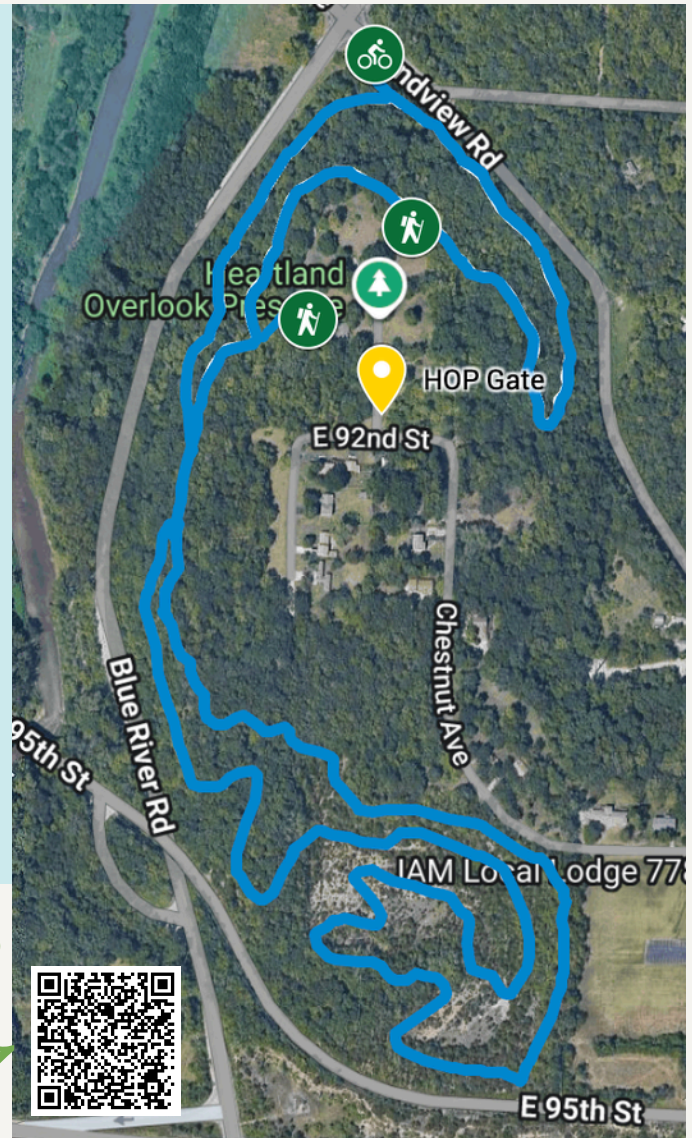
40 trees planted



8,582 pounds of trash removed



8 forest steward graduates



Partners involved



Scan this QR code to access the trail map

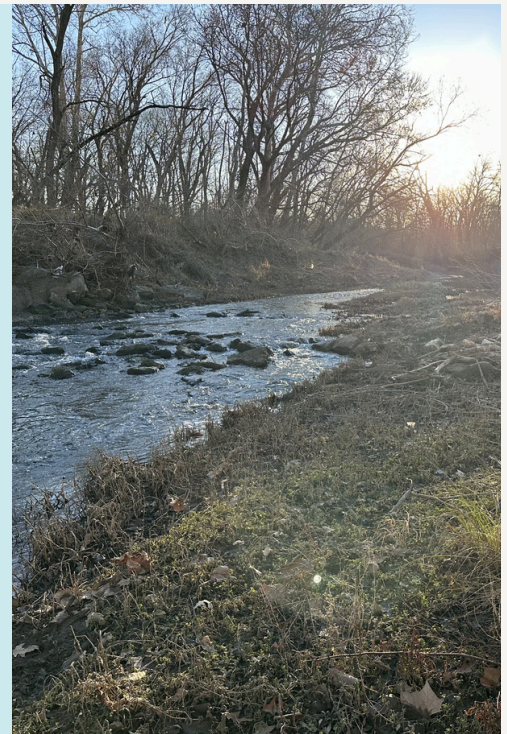


Nestled along the scenic bluffs of the Blue River, this publicly accessible haven invites you to explore an oak-hickory forest rich with spring ephemerals and teeming with life. With ongoing ecological restoration, it's the perfect place to hike, mountain bike, explore, reflect, and reconnect with nature in every season.

Supported by funding from the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation via U.S. Forest Service and Southern Company.

Heartland Flats

Acquired in late 2024, the Heartland Flats is a 98-acre floodplain habitat along the Blue River, consisting of bottomland forest and former cropland. Build Trybe's Conservation Landscape workforce development program - part of Cornerstones of Care's workforce training initiative for youth transitioning out of foster care - utilized the site for eight training and recreation field trips, engaging 65 apprentices. Looking ahead, the Flats is scheduled for restoration and expanded programming in 2026.



Partners involved



Often I hear about issues in nature like coral reefs dying or forest fires. And I feel powerless. Organizations are set up to help the environment, but just donating a couple dollars doesn't really do much for me. When I learned about volunteering for HCA, I realized the biggest impact I could make on the environment was right here. Not only do I feel like I make a difference, but working at the HOP has helped me understand more of the local ecology and I appreciate it so much more. ~ Rhett Neuer, 2025 Volunteer of the Year



Municipal Farm Conservation Easement

This 28-acre Conservation Easement adjacent to the Blue River is part of the 440-acre City-owned Municipal Farm— one of the largest contiguous open spaces in Kansas City, MO south of the Missouri River. In 2025, HCA transitioned from restoration manager to easement monitor. Under HCA's supervision, Bridging the Gap's KC WildLands program carried out restoration maintenance, including a prescribed burn.

Partners involved



Engaging Communities

The mission of the Blue River Nature Guide (BRiNG) program is to equitably connect people and communities to the Blue River and its tributaries through accessible, recreational, nature-based guided experiences. In its second full year, the Blue River Nature Guide (BRiNG) program expanded its reach to a more diverse range of Kansas Citians. The program works to reduce barriers to the watershed for people of all backgrounds and abilities. New programming like expanded kayaking opportunities and partnerships with the Jackson County Parks + Rec Special Populations group helped facilitate this inclusive access.

Blue River Nature Guide (BRiNG) Program



350 participants at monthly guided nature experiences



11th annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Nature Walk with **60** participants



60 participants at the annual Blue River Kayak Experience



3rd annual Blue River Discovery Days Festival with **60** attendees



16 stewards in the Green Guard Environmental Stewardship Training Program



Release of the BRiNG Strategic Plan 2026-2028

Read the plan at bit.ly/BRiNGplan or scan this QR code



Supported by funding from the Jackson County Parks + Rec, REI Cooperative Action Fund, Hallmark, Bass Pro Shops, Missouri River Bird Observatory, and Terracon.

Serving as the Blue River Ambassador

As part of the EPA's Urban Water Federal Partnership initiative, HCA serves as the local convener of the various stakeholders in the watershed collaboration across, working federal, state, and local agencies to achieve community-driven goals.



37 partners
organizations



11th annual Partnership
Summit with **56**
attendees



1st annual Watershed
Tour with **32**
participants



1 interactive training



6 meetings convening
partners

URBANWATERS
FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP
Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities



Presenters at the Annual Partnership Summit

Partnership Summit Sponsor

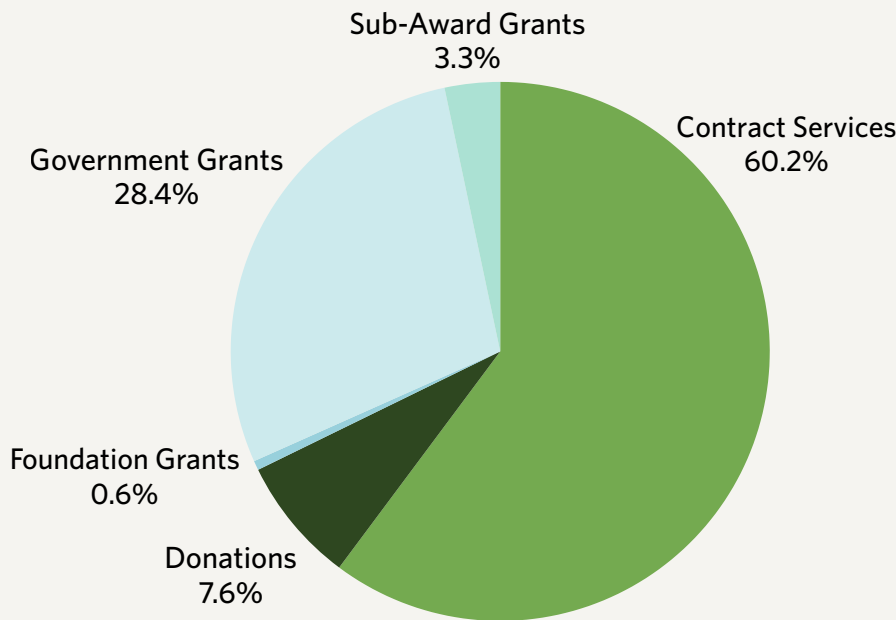


Blue River Watershed Tour at Lakeside Nature Center

Supported by funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Forest Service.

Funding & Organizational Health

Humans need nature more than ever, and the need to expand our work has never been more pressing. Conservation needs are at an all-time high while the federal funding landscape has changed. HCA's top priority is securing new capital and diversifying our funding sources to ensure we can meet this critical moment.

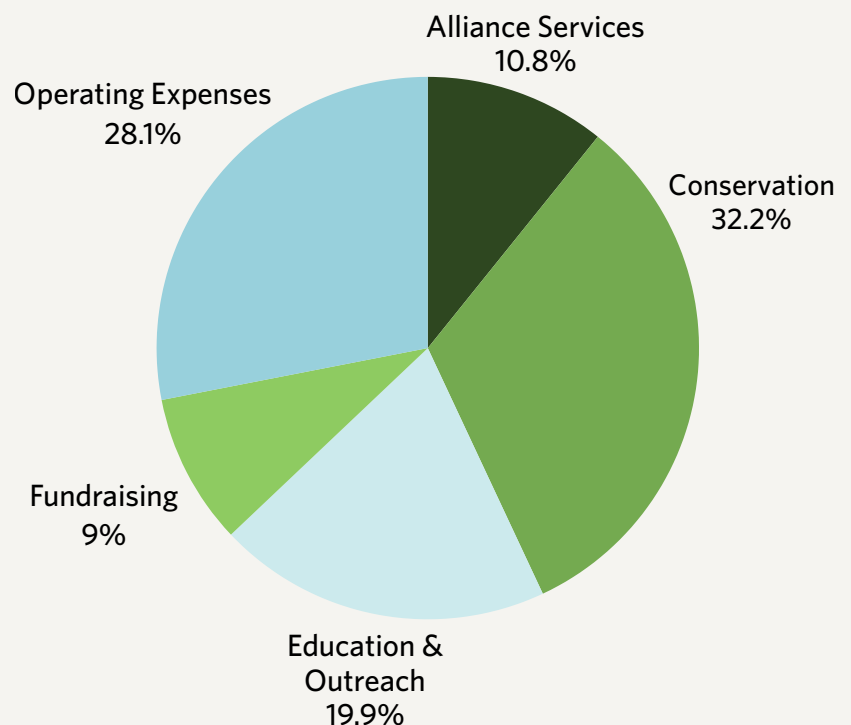


Income

Our work is made possible through a strategic blend of funding sources. While much of our support has traditionally come from service-based contracts and government partnerships, contributions from foundations and individual donors are becoming increasingly essential in helping us respond quickly and effectively to the evolving conservation needs of our community.

Expenses

We remain committed to maximizing mission-driven impact, with more than 50% of our expenses directly supporting conservation, education, and community outreach efforts. This ensures that the majority of our funding is invested in protecting natural areas and fostering meaningful community engagement.



Grant Funders



Thank you to our sponsors and program supporters!

- Affinis
- Bass Pro Shop
- Black & Veatch
- Compass Realty Group
- Country Club Bank
- Curtin Property Company
- Evergy
- Hallmark Family Foundation
- Hoxie Collective
- Marr & Company
- Missouri River Bird Observatory
- PortKC
- REI Cooperative Action Fund
- Seigfreid Bingham PC
- Sidekick Solutions
- Southern Company
- Terracon
- Trekk Design Group
- Vireo

Thank you to all of our individual donors for making this progress possible.
We couldn't Renew the Blue without your generous support!



Conservationists often say to "Think globally and act locally," and for me protecting the Blue River running through the heart of Kansas City is the best way to do that. I support the Heartland Conservation Alliance because it is the most focused and effective organization working to improve people's access to nature in our home communities. As an urban land trust, HCA works to both conserve lands and waters where they remain in near-natural conditions and to restore access to neighborhood parks and gardens in our developed core. People need nature! ~ Bill Blessing, HCA Donor

Want to join our list of donors in 2026?

Donate now at bit.ly/hcadenow or scan the QR code



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