



NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

LAND TRUST



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

 **1,081**
ACRES COMMITTED
TO CONSERVATION

 **3 MILES**
OF NATURAL TRAILS
BUILT ON PRESERVES

 **\$744,826**
RAISED FOR
CONSERVATION IN NWA

 **28**
SPECIES OF GREATEST
CONSERVATION NEED
DOCUMENTED ON
NWALT PRESERVES

 **200+**
TOTAL ACRES OPEN
TO PUBLIC ACCESS

 **4,935**
TOTAL ACRES
STEWARDED BY THE
NWA LAND TRUST

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Little did we know heading into 2020 that our success would be impacted by how well we withstood a global pandemic. And as I write this letter, the Covid-19 threat is still very present in our communities, continuing to shape life and work as we know it. Our hearts are with those who have lost so much.

Despite the immense challenges that 2020 presented, I'm happy to report great things were accomplished toward the mission of the land trust. Another 1,000+ acres of priority natural lands were forever protected. A strategic land protection plan was completed, providing a science-driven vision for landscape-scale protection efforts moving forward. In keeping with the plan, the land trust purchased over 300 acres connected to previously protected lands for an over 1,000-acre wildlife corridor and viewshed just north of the Bobby Hopper Tunnel in south Washington county. And our team began a deep dive to better understand race and equity issues so that we may achieve greater outcomes for all members of our community.

We also witnessed this past year the power of nature to soothe, nurture and heal us. People all over the country flocked to natural areas, seeking solace and discovering for the first time, or rediscovering the wonder and awe of our natural world. We need nature, and nature needs us. That much is clear. In that spirit, we are pleased to share the enclosed highlights of 2020 with you.

Yours in conservation,

Terri Lane
Executive Director & CEO

NEW MEMBERS JOIN BOARD

2020 welcomed two new members to the Northwest Arkansas Board of Directors! Recently retired as an EVP from Arvest Bank, Don Walker joined the board in January, followed by Mark Clippinger who has served as Park Superintendent for Hobbs State Park since 1986. Don brings with him a wealth of business and financial knowledge, and Mark is an expert in land management, stewardship, and public access.

Our board of directors are vital to pursuing our mission to preserve quality of life in Northwest Arkansas through the permanent protection of land. We are grateful to Don, Mark, and our entire board for donating their time, energy, and expertise toward guiding our mission!



Don Walker



Mark Clippinger

LAND TRUST EARNS ACCREDITATION RENEWAL

Our team works tirelessly to ensure we're saving land in a sustainable way. We're grateful to announce that we've successfully achieved accreditation renewal from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission!

The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation. It is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. As an accredited land trust, we complete a rigorous review process every 5 years that demonstrates our fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions and lasting stewardship of the lands we conserve.



CONNECTING CORRIDORS

PROTECTING WILDLIFE, WATER, AND HISTORY IN THE BOSTON MOUNTAINS

As part of our Land for Life campaign, the land trust formed a land acquisition fund that would allow us to quickly act on the purchase of compromised properties within our priority protection areas. Thanks to a large lead gift to this fund from an anonymous donor, the land trust was able to move forward with the purchase of 300 acres within the Boston Mountains Wildlife Scenic Corridor in May of 2020, establishing Blackburn Bluffs Preserve in southern Washington county.

Located adjacent to Rotten Bluff Hollow, the protected lands provide a critical link for wildlife movement between Ozark National Forest in the east to Devil's Den State Park in the west. Featuring vast bluff lines, the confluence of Blackburn and Hess creeks, and open hardwood forest, the preserve protects drinking water quality for more than 200,000 area residents in the Lee Creek watershed.



The purchase is part of an ongoing strategic effort by the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust to establish the Boston Mountain Scenic Wildlife Corridor, aiming to connect publicly protected lands at Devil's Den State Park and Ozark National Forest in the west to Ozark National Forest in the east. In the last five years, much of the land in the area has been sold for timber interests, subdivided, and rezoned in anticipation of future development. The conservation of Blackburn Bluffs Preserve alongside Rotten Bluff Hollow forms an anchor for continued conservation efforts to the east and west.

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS LAND TRUST



Blackburn Bluffs Preserve: A view of the bluff lines; open native hardwood forest; bluff formations

LANDOWNERS INSPIRED

After hearing of the land trust's efforts in the area, landowner Jack Butt was inspired to place his 700 acres of native hardwood forest just north of Devil's Den State Park into permanent protection through a conservation easement. Known as Butt-N-Buck, the property features more than a mile of Lee Creek, protecting wildlife habitat and water quality throughout the watershed. Hidden among the bluffs and creek are the remains of a once-thriving homesteading community settled by Civil War veterans in the late 1800s. Jack says he has discovered a dozen rock walls in the middle of the heavily wooded property where fields used to be farmed, and at least eight pioneer home sites marked by hand-dug wells, foundation stones, and tumbled in chimneys. He's even managed to recover and use portions of the old Lee Creek Road that once connected the cities of Van Buren and Fayetteville.

Added with the 700-acre Rotten Bluff Hollow, 1,700 acres of pristine forested habitat, water, scenic views, and history in the Boston Mountain Scenic Wildlife Corridor have been protected, forever. Thank you to Jack and all of our landowners who generously give the gift of land conservation. Your impact will benefit many generations to come!



Butt-N-Buck: Fog over Lee Creek



One of the many historic rock walls found on the property



An ephemeral waterfall

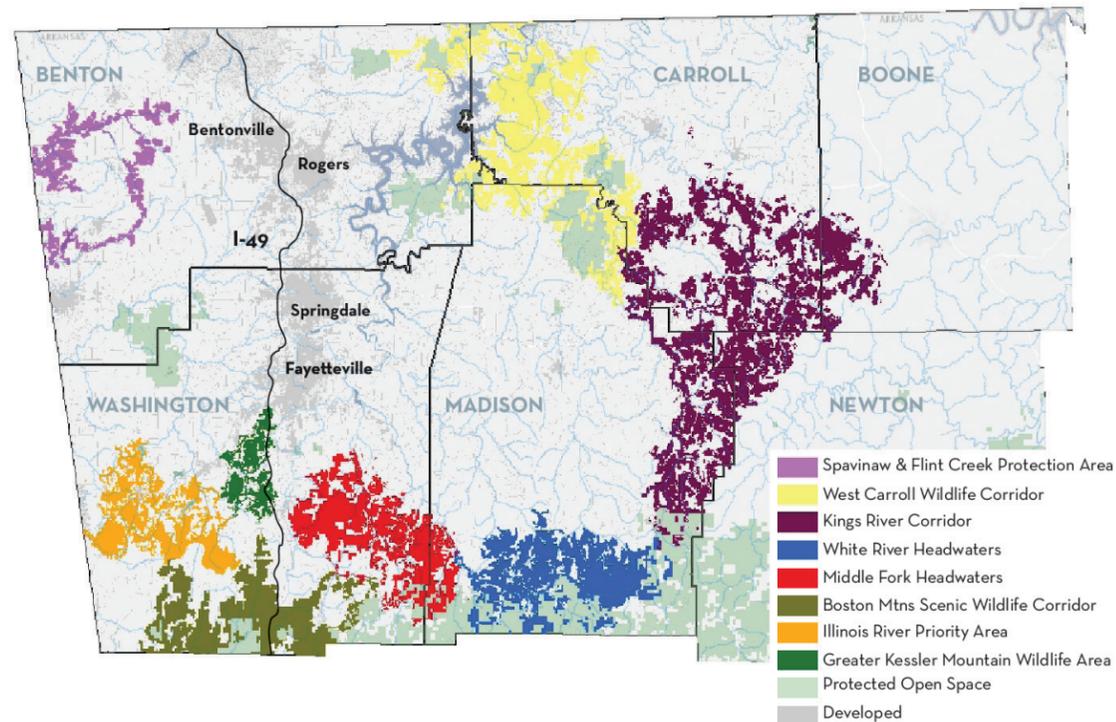
HELP PROTECT BLACKBURN BLUFFS PRESERVE:

We are still raising funds for the permanent protection and stewardship of Blackburn Bluffs Preserve. Make a gift today at www.nwalandtrust.org/blackburnbluffs

STRATEGIC LAND PROTECTION A CLIMATE FORWARD PLAN

After months of research, data analysis, and collaboration, our land protection team completed the land trust's first climate-forward conservation plan for saving the places that matter most for climate resiliency in Northwest Arkansas.

The Land Trust Alliance, Open Space Institute, and Walton Family Foundation all provided resources to help guide our latest Strategic Land Protection Plan. This Plan is designed to provide the land trust with a strategic, science-driven, landscape-scale focus for our work that complements the work and priorities of our partners.



Eight high-priority areas were identified that, if kept natural, will do the very most for preserving clean water, protecting wildlife habitat corridors, and creating a more climate-resilient future for our developing NWA region. You can read the plan in full on our website at www.nwalandtrust.org/strategiclandplan. You can also request a copy by calling 479-966-4666.

This planning would not be possible without the support and investment from our conservation partnerships. Together, we're strengthening our efforts to protect the lands that sustain our communities.

FARMLAND PROGRAM EXPANDS GROWING FARMERS AND SAVING FARMLAND



Our Farmland Preservation Program was awarded a \$920,000 grant that will support two integrated efforts to connect farmers to land and resources and conserve vital farmland needed for growing fruits and vegetables at wholesale scale. The five-year initiative aims to support existing and new family farms, promote healthy soil farming practices, and strengthen our local food system. The grant includes \$350,000 for stewardship funding to encourage farmland conservation and complement possible federal cost share programs.

“We want to keep our community’s working lands in working hands, and these new tools will increase our ability to help existing farmers to expand, grow new farmers and save farmland,” said Susan Koehler, Farmland Preservation Manager for the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust. “We get calls frequently from farmland owners who want to help new farmers and serve the community by maintaining their property for agriculture. These new resources will enable us to better support them as well.”

NWALT’s Farmland Preservation Program is part of the NWA Food Systems Initiative to support local food, increase farm viability and increase access to fruits and vegetables for residents of the region and includes the University of Arkansas, The Food Conservancy, and other agriculture focused non-profits. The initiative is funded by the Walton Family Foundation. As part of the program, the land trust launched NWAFarmlink.com last year, aimed at connecting beginning farmers searching for land to grow with owners interested in new opportunities for their property. “The cost of land is going up for aspiring farmers, and the risks are greater. Farm Link is helping to level the playing field,” Susan says. Since its launch, dozens of beginning farmers and landowners in the region have joined the site.

MATCH MADE

One Farm Link participant, Cody Murprhee, agrees: “Financially, it’s a lot harder for our generation, in terms of student loan debt and the higher cost of land in a more urban setting like Northwest Arkansas.” An aspiring and accomplished market gardener with dedicated customers, Cody was connected with Brett Marino who recently bought a historic farm in Prairie Grove. While Brett is also an experienced producer, he has other business interests, and recognized he needed to hire a farm manager. Brett joined Farm Link to help find that person and met Cody who he says has similar goals to his own. Cody believes this experience managing such a large scale operation will be rewarding, and further advance his own skills. Together, they are doing a lot of clean up on the farm and starting to do some crop and plant variety testing in green houses brought back to life after several years of being dormant. “For a person starting out, they have given me a real jumpstart. As advocates for our local food system, they know what it’s going to take to help my business grow.”



STEWARDSHIP FOR PERPETUITY

CARING FOR THE LAND WE PROTECT

With almost 5,000 acres of land now under protection of the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust, caring for the diverse needs of each property is our primary responsibility. In 2020, the land trust welcomed Renee Sniegocki as our new Land Stewardship Coordinator alongside Hannah Louise and Brittney Booth as stewardship interns. Working together, our team made great strides in restoring native plants, clearing invasives, building trails, and surveying for wildlife on the lands managed by the trust.



BLACKBURN BLUFFS PRESERVE

Built & restored 2 miles of trails in preparation for guided public access.

STEELE-STEVENSONS HERITAGE PARK



Conducted invasive species removal of English Ivy, Chinese Privet, and Bush Honeysuckle, began rehab of springhouse.



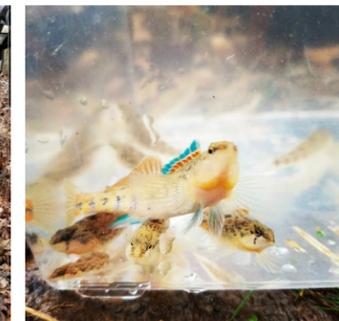
FLINT CREEK HEADWATERS

Removed 1 acre of invasive species; expanded trail additions.



WEST SIDE PRAIRIE

Conducted grassland bird nesting survey; completed management plan; began restoration.



WILSON SPRINGS PRESERVE

Conducted annual Arkansas Darter fish survey; completed cut and treat applications on 15 acres of invasive trees and 2 acres of exotic/invasive plants; installed pond leveling device to increase flow of Clabber Creek through a beaver dam, protecting vulnerable fish species.



JOIN OUR MISSION

HELP SAVE LAND IN NWA

Thanks to the support and leadership of so many, the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust has worked continuously over the last two decades to save the places that matter most to our community. With the guidance of our new Strategic Land Protection Plan we are prepared to increase the rate of land protection in our region, but we cannot do it without the support of people like you. **We invite you to join us in our critical mission to protect the places that sustain our high quality of life in Northwest Arkansas, before they are gone forever.**

DONATE TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN OUR REGION

CONSERVE YOUR LAND WITH US

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE LAND TRUST

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

ADOPT A PRESERVE

PLAN A LEGACY GIFT



CALL US

479-966-4666

EMAIL US

info@nwalandtrust.org

GO ONLINE

nwalandtrust.org

DONORS SAVE LAND

Because of the generous support of our donors, future generations will benefit from the protection of our region's most valuable resources. We would like to acknowledge and thank those in our community whose 2020 financial support of the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust provides the greatest gift - Land for Life!

CONSERVATOR'S CIRCLE

ANNUAL GIFT OF \$1,000+

\$10,000+

Susan Gately
Tina Moore & Paul Green
Don & Sheroll Walker

\$5,000+

Ed Romero & Nicole Hardiman
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\$1,000+

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ANNUAL GIFT OF \$100+

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McClendon
John Connelly

Clayton Dauphin
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Stephanie Hackmann
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Ellen Weintraut

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NWALANDTRUST.ORG

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The natural environment is one of our greatest economic assets in Northwest Arkansas. We are grateful to these foundations, corporations, and local businesses for investing in the protection of our most valuable natural lands.

WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION



Walmart  Foundation

 ENDEAVOR *foundation*




ARKANSAS
community foundation



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