

Harford Land Trust News



*Celebrating the people who
make preservation possible*



To work with landowners, private and public, to conserve land and protect its natural resources, scenic beauty, rural character, and promote a healthy quality of life in Harford County.

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Staying Grounded, Together

It's an understatement to say that these last few months have been extraordinary. Despite the challenges of this time, we've also seen many examples of citizens, businesses, and organizations pulling together as a community. Companies have retooled their manufacturing equipment to make face masks or hand sanitizer. Restaurants are selling their wholesale food supplies at cost to those in need. The list goes on and on.

At the Harford Land Trust, we've spent a lot of time considering how we can do more to protect critical needs such as the food supply chain and outdoor recreation spaces. The linkage between land – particularly protected land – and the things that we need in everyday life is often taken for granted. But land and what occurs on it play a determinative role in the availability of healthy food, clean air, clean water, outdoor recreation, community identity, and our overall quality of life.

The mission of the HLT has always been to preserve and protect land, and we have no intention of diverting from that. But if we can leverage our work and make a positive impact on our community in different ways by building partnerships with other organizations, then we are happy to do so.

Over the coming weeks, we will be unveiling two new initiatives in partnership with other local organizations. Through this August's *Harford 20/20 Challenge*, in partnership with the Ben Boniface Deer Creek Valley Fund, we will promote Harford County's publicly accessible land and water trails and encourage residents to get outside this summer.

Finally, instead of holding our annual Harvest Moon Dinner & Auction, we will be spearheading an awareness and giving campaign throughout October called *Harford Harvest*. This exciting effort will highlight the importance of local farmland in providing fresh, healthy food for local families. In addition to supporting HLT's preservation efforts, a portion of the proceeds will be shared with Harford County food pantries to support those in need this fall.

With gratitude,

Benjamin Lloyd
President



A Champion for Land

The Harford Land Trust is proud to recognize Lawrason Sayre with our 2020 Conservation Award.

Lawrason has been a champion of farmland preservation, soil conservation, and innovative farming practices in Harford County for decades.

Over the years Lawrason served on numerous local, state, and national boards related to agriculture and the environment. He has been a supporter of the Harford Land Trust since its founding in 1991, and is an important benefactor of the HLT's Hegeman Land Fund in memory of his late friend Johnston Hegeman.

After studying at Yale, serving as a Marine in the Korean War, and working as a civil engineer, Lawrason Sayre returned home to Maryland and his farming roots. He moved his young family and purchased Waffle Hill Farm in Churchville in 1960, starting with a small commercial herd and a few registered-Angus heifers. Lawrason and his family have been in the Angus business ever since, expanding the operation to include 150 registered Angus cows on 300 acres.

Lawrason and his late wife Jane, son Lawrie, daughters Nancy Ann and Sally, and late son Ned, preserved Waffle Hill Farm through the county's agricultural land preservation program in 1997.

In accepting the award, Lawrason recalled the early years of the HLT, and in particular the organization's first president, the late Johnston Hegeman. He also noted the support and commitment to land preservation made by his children and grandchildren, as preservation is as much about future generations as it is about those working the land today.



Cover photo: Lawrason with his son Lawrie and daughters Nancy Ann and Sally (photo by Farmhouse Creative Marketing). Top photo: by the Sayre family. Bottom photo: Lawrason with HLT President and friend Ben Lloyd (photo by Farmhouse Creative Marketing).

Photo by the Fitzhugh family



One Person Can ~~Only~~ Do So Much: Meet Cyndi Fitzhugh

The Harford Land Trust is proud to recognize Cyndi Fitzhugh with our 2020 Volunteer Award.

Cyndi joined HLT's fundraising committee in 2018 and quickly became a leading contributor to the Harvest Moon Dinner & Auction. Her enthusiasm, creativity, and strong Harford County network are tremendous assets to the organization. Cyndi's efforts helped HLT to recognize record event attendance and proceeds over the past two years.

Cyndi has always felt a connection to nature. She remembers fondly the many childhood trips with her family to visit relatives living in the countryside throughout Virginia and West Virginia. The granddaughter of both a farmer and an orchardist, Cyndi said, "I've always been in love with the country, nature, and family, and that's why we love HLT."

This lifelong connection to rural landscapes is something Cyndi has always carried with her. Cyndi met her husband Taylor who introduced her to the beauty

that is Harford County. After attending Towson University to study business and economics, Cyndi moved here where she and her husband Taylor started Taylorbilt Homes Inc. "We've always believed in the preservation of rural areas," said Cyndi. Now with two grown daughters Kacie and Jamie, Cyndi is proud her love for rural Harford County is shared by her daughters as well.

Cyndi believes that home construction can happen alongside land preservation and she has played an important role in helping HLT reach out to new businesses and individuals that share her vision. "I enjoy touching individuals with what's important to them. Farmers might have a different interest in preservation than a builder. I continue to encourage people to get involved with HLT." Cyndi appreciates the work HLT does to preserve land throughout the county for everyone in the community to enjoy. While not everyone may live in a rural part of the county, Cyndi emphasizes that "everyone gets to go to areas that have been protected."

Harford Land Trust, with the support of the Ben Boniface Deer Creek Valley Fund, invites you to experience Harford County's outdoor adventures this August!

Join the **HARFORD 20/20 CHALLENGE** and cover **20 MILES ON WATER** or **20 MILES ON LAND** anywhere in the county. Choose your own adventure—**kayak, canoe, paddle board, swim, hike, run, bike**—and go get those miles! Not ready to commit to 20 miles? No problem! Just select the **10-Mile Challenge option** instead.

Participants will receive an **interactive web map** with public trails and boat launch sites in Harford County and a **cooling HLT neck gaiter** to wear as you explore.

Visit www.harfordlandtrust.org to register.

\$20 Individual—**\$35** Family

To be entered for **prize drawings**, tag HLT on Facebook or Instagram (or email us) with **#Harford2020Challenge**.



Thank you to our generous sponsors—The Ben Boniface Deer Creek Valley Fund, the Office of County Executive Barry Glassman, Visit Harford, Lassen, Marine & Webster Insurance, and Harry and Eileen Webster.





“What better way to preserve this land we love?”

- SUSAN LESSER

True Love that will Last Forever

This March, Herb and Susan Lesser permanently preserved their beloved 17-acre home property with the donation of a conservation easement to the Harford Land Trust. The property has been part of Herb and Susan’s life for nearly 40 years. Their love for the land was a key motivation in their pursuit of preservation. The Lessers’ generous gift adds to more than 300 acres of nearby preserved land in Forest Hill and is part of a 50-acre forested block lined with numerous small streams.

When our staff reached out to Susan with a few questions about the property and their land preservation journey, she returned this tribute to their land titled, “Our Story.” It is a beautiful homage to the intimacy that develops in a familiar landscape between all that call the land home and so we share their story with you in its full, unedited form.

Our Story

The property was listed as a farmette, the little house a definite ‘fixer upper,’ the land meant for crops, goats and chickens. What sold us, because we were not farmers (at best, I was a mediocre gardener, Herb a city boy) was the greater part of the property which was woodlands. It awed us on that hot summer day—the coolness of it, the birds, the diverse vegetation and bigness of the mature trees towering and pushing the sky higher. The real estate agent thought we were nuts. She had showier places she wanted us to see. Herb said, “We can always fix up an old house, but where can we get our own woods?” That was 36 years ago, July 1984.

Well, we’ve fixed up the house, the vegetable garden

“Then Spring, glorious Spring! It’s what we love most. We come alive, and at no other time do we feel so a part of the land. It’s these yearly cycles that mean so much to us: predictable, dependable, life affirming.”

- SUSAN LESSER

is now a pond and the fields we have given back to nature letting the birds and creatures drop the seeds that have added more green and more trees. This is not to say there hasn’t been a lot of work. Keeping the damaging vines from climbing the trunks and the insidious weeds from choking out the desirous native plants has been a constant challenge. And the storms always leave a mess and sometimes serious damage, expensive damage, irreversible damage.

Every season has its trials, but also its beauty. What is better than to observe the new fawns in June, or the long days of summer with its green, green, green and glorious sunsets, butterflies on milkweed, birdsong at dawn? Or the fall’s slowing down with the arrival of the winter birds after the disappearance of the robins, thrushes, hummingbirds, phoebes and all the summer regulars?

Winter is sleepy for us and the trees; the wildlife that hasn’t left or gone under is busy seeking shelter and scratching for food. The deer sleep together in the woods, birds huddle in the evergreens; winter food is available naturally and at the feeders we keep stocked. Then Spring, glorious Spring! It’s what we love most. We come alive, and at no other time do we feel so a part of the land. It’s these yearly cycles that mean so much to us: predictable, dependable, life affirming.

All the creatures and all the trees need us to let them be, to acknowledge their value to the whole, their place in the continuity of a healthy earth. We feel an ethical obligation to respect and preserve the kaleidoscope of life around us for we are all a part of it and will perish without it. What better way to preserve this land we love than to let it remain in Nature’s care under the guidance of the Harford Land Trust in the form of a conservation easement. We feel very strongly that it has been the right decision.

- SUSAN LESSER





Healing through Mindfulness and Observation in Nature

HLT Conservation Preserves Used for Nature-based Therapy

Guided observations, nature walks, meditation, sensory exercises, and outdoor yoga are just a few of the nature-based therapeutic services that Nature Worx provides. Founded in 2017 by Bel Air's Phil Hosmer, Nature Worx connects people with the healing properties of nature to support their physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Recently, Nature Worx has become a full-time regular

“Nature has a wonderful way of bringing us into a state of observation.”

- PHIL HOSMER

contractor with Ashley Addiction Treatment (Ashley), providing professionally led group sessions for patients using HLT Conservation Preserves for nature-based therapy sessions.

“Nature has a wonderful way of bringing us into a state of observation,” reflected Hosmer. Nature Worx's nature-based therapy allows participants to explore and experience the world outdoors in a deliberate and focused manner. Observation and immersion in the landscape is best suited to settings with few distractions and where space is available to delve deep

into 90-minute sessions without disruptions.

Use of public parks and outdoor spaces has seen huge increases over the past few months. Outdoor activities have been a popular outlet for community members looking to exercise and safely be out in the community due to COVID-19. This increase in outdoor visitors has presented a challenge to Nature Worx in accessing the peaceful and secluded environments necessary for effective nature-based therapy sessions.

In May, HLT partnered with Nature Worx and Ashley to support their programming by offering a deeply wooded property for the partnership's pilot sessions. The permanently preserved property is ideal for deep nature immersion due to its seclusion, the trickling stream, diverse plant and animal life, and bird song. Recently Hosmer scouted additional HLT Conservation Preserve locations for future sessions throughout Harford County. Hosmer selected several HLT properties to bring patients for future nature-based therapy sessions citing their diverse landscapes, vibrant insect, animal, and plant life, and quiet spaces perfect for guided meditation and observation.

“The Harford Land trust properties are ideal locations

for conducting our experiential immersion sessions in nature,” said Hosmer. “The patients respond extremely well to the opportunity to relax, reflect, and connect with nature away from distractions, noise, and other people.” By visiting HLT property, Nature Worx patients can explore their senses to experience nature using mindfulness, meditation, and naturalist interpretation while building skills to support their recovery.

Nature-based therapy is centered around mindfulness and observation. While formal guided programs are offered by Nature Worx, Hosmer said a few moments of immersion in nature is something that can be easily incorporated into one’s daily routine with similar benefits. Be it on a back patio or HLT property, Hosmer recommends taking a moment each day to experience nature. “Find a spot in or near your home to find a place where you can sit for 10-15 minutes a

Nature-based Therapy Benefits

- ◆ Stress reduction
- ◆ Improved mood and cognitive abilities
- ◆ Decreased heart rate and lowered blood pressure
- ◆ Improved immune function

Source: Nature Worx

day in your sit spot. It’s your place to go to observe everything around you. Zoom in on your sense of hearing, touch, smell, taste,” Hosmer said. “By observing nature we are in the moment. Sit and observe, and at the end, honor yourself and that connectivity.”

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- PHIL HOSMER



Upper right photo: HLT’s Gulch Conservation Preserve.

Photo lower left: Nature Worx participants enjoy a moment in nature (photo by Nature Worx).

Research After Dark

Preserved Properties Come Alive at Night

Anyone who has ever closed the door quickly behind them at night knows just how many insects are attracted to a bright porch light, but not everyone sets out into the woods to try to attract and learn more about these nighttime insects. Dave Webb, a local self-described “Moth-er,” has been documenting Harford County’s nocturnal insects for the past six years. Webb first started tracking and observing birds 25 years ago and became acquainted with the idea of mothing when he discovered the Maryland Biodiversity Project.

Launched in 2011, the Maryland Biodiversity Project brings together community members interested in cataloging all living things of Maryland. “We already knew a lot of information about birds and butterflies, but there was very little information about nighttime animals and insects,” Webb said, “So there was an opportunity at the citizen science level,” to identify as many insects in Harford County as possible.

Looking to capture a diverse sample of insects during his nighttime sessions, Webb identifies observation locations that offer varied habitats and landscapes. Areas free of development, insecticides, and light pollution help foster successful mothing sessions, which has led Webb to schedule visits to several HLT conservation preserves.

This year alone, Webb has documented 50 new species of insects in Harford County, 15 of which were also firsts for Maryland.

Webb observes moths and insects approximately six times a month. Using an old lacrosse rebounder, Webb covers the frame with a sheet and lights it with the bright beam of a mercury vapor light. Light pollution, the brightening of the night sky by nearby lights, can be disruptive to wildlife cycles and habits and Webb’s ability to attract insects for observation. By visiting HLT properties with limited nighttime light sources, the draw of Webb’s set up becomes irresistible for insects. Attracted to the light, insects land on Webb’s sheet



Luna Moth (Actias luna) (photo by Dave Webb).

allowing him to identify and photograph the insect and record any observations.

At sunrise, Webb packs up and reports his observations to the Maryland Biodiversity Project. While the insects he inspects vary by location, Webb typically observes at least 100 different types of insects on any given night. “It’s a challenge but also a great deal of fun.”

Webb’s mothing project is just one of many plant and animal studies conducted on HLT preserved properties. Most recently, HLT’s conservation preserves have hosted studies on native turtle and snake species. Additionally, before purchasing property, HLT often commissions a biological survey to understand the unique flora and fauna of a site and to note the presence of invasive species. Habitat management is an important component of HLT’s land stewardship program.

Meet Sara Hummer, HLT's Outreach and Administration Coordinator

I am very excited to be joining HLT as the Outreach and Administration Coordinator. After a few weeks on the job, I am inspired by all that HLT has contributed to Harford County and excited by all the opportunities there are ahead of us. Growing up in Harford County, I am grateful to have experienced the joy of summer swims in Broad Creek, hikes at Eden Mill, picking out seasonal food at local farm stands, and slow family car rides along Deer Creek at Hidden Valley - windows rolled down so we could listen to the spring peepers sing and, later, breathe in the thick sent of honeysuckle. I hold my experiences in the landscapes of Harford County as essential to my personal development and I am truly honored to “come home” and help protect a place that is special to me and so many others.

Following my graduation from North Harford High School and Franklin and Marshall College, I pursued my master's



degree at The University of Edinburgh in environmental studies. My program allowed me to learn more about what I intuitively felt for most of my life - that personal experience in nature is essential to the development of an individual conservation ethic.

As HLT's Outreach and Administration Coordinator, I am excited to use the lessons I've learned about connecting people to the land, as well as a decade of experience in outreach and communications roles in the nonprofit and energy efficiency fields, to support the mission and work of HLT. I am inspired by the opportunity to share the important stories of the benefits of preservation to both land donors and the community at large, highlight the impact of HLT supporters, members, and volunteers, and create opportunities for experience and education in our valued natural spaces. I am committed to expanding our reach as an organization to a wide range of members and volunteers and look forward to supporting accessible and inclusive experience in nature to recharge, explore, and create.

Please feel free to reach out to me if I can be of any assistance to you or our organization, I am honored to serve as a resource for the community and look forward to sharing your stories, and our work, in the days ahead.

-SARA HUMMER



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“This is the organization that will give a gift back to the citizens of Harford County for future generations.

Our lands and natural resources are the gifts we have inherited, and I believe HLT has taken on the mission and has voluntarily entered in a duty to preserve both the most powerful and the seemingly insignificant, delicate, and vulnerable among all of nature.”

HARRY WEBSTER, Former HLT Board President

HLT’s work is made possible with the support and generosity of our members.

Join today at harfordlandtrust.org

Photo by Edwin Remsberg