

HBF Committee Reports Highlands Biological Foundation Annual Membership Meeting 2025

FINANCE

Members: Tom Holmes (Chair/Treasurer), John Mitchener, Frances Oakley, Robert Strickland, Vernon Skiles, Jim Landon, Jamie Creola

See 2023 Audit Report - <https://highlandsbiological.org/foundation/>

HBF is in good shape for 2025 and did very well in 2024 - Soiree \$178K raised - NET \$121K and Half Shell ~\$35K raised with minimal expenditures due to Helene and the event's cancellation. Individual contributions came in well above our \$220K projection.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Members: Jennie Stowers (Chair), Karen Patterson, Jonnie Swann, Leslie Manning, Carol Stewart, Cathy Jones, Jason Love, Julie Thomson, Jamie Creola

Gift Shop: Melanie Mauldin, Lori Heys

Summer Programming

Summer Programming is in full swing. Camps began on June 3rd. We are offering 22 Nature camps over 9 weeks for ages 5-7 and 8-11. <https://highlandsbiological.org/2025-nature-camps/>. Additionally, the funding from Cullasaja Women's Outreach enabled 20 children to register (and attend this summer) our 2025 Nature Camps without financial barriers.

In addition, we have numerous daily programs, Nature at Night programming and Zahner Lecture Series. <https://highlandsbiological.org/nature-center/summer-programs/>

The 2025 Zahner Lectures series as well the bi-annual Carpenter lecture have been finalized and we're very excited. See below and links:

- Carpenter Lecture:
 - o [Zoe Schlanger](https://authorsunbound.com/zoe-schlanger/) - Sept 10th <https://authorsunbound.com/zoe-schlanger/>
- Zahner Series:
 - o June 12th
Healthy Land, Healthy People: Centering Indigenous Voices in Conservation
Bonnie Claxton (Chickasaw) Deputy Director, The Center for Native Health

- o June 19th
Are You Bearwise? - Expert recommendations on coexisting with black bears
Tanya Poole, Conservation Initiatives Engagement Coordinator
- o June 26th
Bats in Your Backyard
Rada Petric, Assistant Research Professor and Director of the UNC IE Highlands Field Site, UNC Institute for the Environment
- o July 10th
Cohabitate; Living with Nature
Sonya Carpenter, Co-founder and President of Co-habitate Inc.
- o July 17th
Lesser-Known Medicinal Mushrooms of the Southern Appalachians
Christopher Parker, Mycologist and Co-Owner The Forest Farmacy
- o July 24th
Understanding Helene as a Geologic Event in Southern Appalachia...and What is a "Geologic Event" Anyway?
Philip S. Prince, Ph.D., Project Geologist, Appalachian Landslide Consultants, PLLC, Virginia Tech Department of Geosciences
- o July 31st
The Good, the Bad & the BUGly
Dr. Kelly Oten, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, NC State University
- o August 7th
Finding the Fabulous Ordinary - A guidebook to seasonal joys of ecosystems in the Southeast
Georgann Eubanks, author, University of North Carolina Press
- o August 14th
Southern Appalachian Forest Resilience in a Post Hurricane World
Megan Sutton, The Nature Conservancy, Southern Blue Ridge Program Director

Year-Round Programming

During the 2024/25 School Year, Julie has been busy doing outreach programs and hosting small group tours/engagements at the Nature Center. The Nature Center closed for the season right before Thanksgiving, but we piloted having the NC open once-a-month for programming and self-discovery during February and March with much success and positive feedback from the community.

This program year (Fall 2024 - Spring 2025), HBF will provided free environmental education programs for several local organizations including the Boys and Girls Club of Cashiers, Boys and Girls Club of Highlands, Gordon Center afterschool, Gordon Center preschool, the Learning Literacy Center, Highlands

Community Child Development Center, the libraries of Highlands and Cashiers, Chestnut Hill, Highlands School, as well as several community events in Cashiers and Sylva.

From September 2024 through May 2025, we offered over 56 outreach programs and served over 1000 individuals. Funding from Cullasaja Women's Outreach and Church of the Good Shepherd helped support these programs.

Staffing Update:

We have been busy hiring staff over the past few months. Marissa Nieddu joined us in January as the new Marketing and Communications Specialist. We have hired four Summer Naturalists - one returning from last year and three are students from the IE program. We have also hired a second Education Specialist, Maddie Wikstrom, who will be starting in late April. She and Julie will jointly run the Nature Center, take care of our Animal Ambassadors, run programs throughout the year and provide Outreach opportunities during the school year. The rehiring of this position will also allow us to focus on adult and youth volunteering and programming.

Many, many thanks to Melanie Mauldin and Lori Heys for the work they have been putting into the shop so far this year. The merchandise and set up of the gift shop area has undergone some wonderful changes including toys, books, t-shirts and hats, jewelry, hostess gifts, water bottles, and much more.

A big "thank you" to several of our Foundation trustees and friends who volunteer at the Nature Center welcome desk. We couldn't do it without you!!!

HBF 2024 Funding to HBS and Other Community Organizations:

Along with running the Nature Center and the variety of summer programming just mentioned, the Foundation also supported the research and education efforts of the Highlands Biological Station and community.

Macon County School's STEM Program: HBF granted \$10,000 to Macon County School's STEM program, providing crucial support for educational initiatives, field trips, hikes, special presentations, and essential science equipment in county schools.

HBS Operations and Maintenance: HBF provided \$25,000 annual operating and maintenance grant.

Grants-in-Aid of Scientific Research: HBF awarded \$11,200 funding to 6 researchers conducting local research while in residence at the Station.

MAPS Bird Banding: 2024 marked the 5th year of HBF's funding of the MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity & Survivorship) bird banding program at HBS in partnership with Blue Ridge Bird Observatory.

Research Assistants: HBF provided \$25,600 in funding for two Research Assistants at the Highlands Biological Station to assist with microplastics, small mammal, and bat research.

Bat Research and Education: HBF awarded \$10,000 for the BatPack Citizen Science Project monitoring bat activity along the Appalachian Trail and \$9,500 to support the “Highlands Bat Blitz” in September, allowing 20 bat research biologists to come to the plateau and conduct bat research with Dr. Rada Petric, UNC Institute of the Environment’s Highlands Field Site Director.

Wayfinding Signage Masterplan: HBF provided additional funds to the Station for completion of wayfinding signage for trail, major vehicular, and building signs to be completed by the end of the year.

In 2025, HBF will continue to provide funds for research, assistantships, Bat Pack, MAPS Bird banding, HBS Operational support, and Macon County STEM programs.

DEVELOPMENT

Members: Keller Torrey Chair), Jennie Stowers, Lindy Harrison, Lisa Daily, Jim Landon, Martha Stibbs, Ruthie Edwards, David Martin, and Jamie Creola

HBF continues to successfully raise funds to support our programs and investments in research and education. We held our most successful fundraisers ever last year (2024), the Playmore Soiree, with this year’s Twilight in the Garden Soiree, July 28th, set to surpass that mark. We already have a record breaking 48 hosts and tickets are going fast.

We raised over \$346,000 last year through contributions and grants (not including events). We continue to raise more money annually each year to support our ever-growing programs. These gifts reflect the commitment of each member to the vision of the Highlands Biological Foundation – *to inspire present and future generations to preserve and protect the unique environment of the Highlands Plateau by raising awareness through experiential learning.*

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Members: Gayle Watkins (Chair), Leslie Manning, David Martin, Bob Strickland, Bill Bush and Jamie Creola

The committee has met numerous times to discuss process and participation and begin the content development and design of several surveys that went out this spring - Board Member and Community. It has been an extensive, iterative process that will give us crucial information moving forward.

The committee also discussed hiring a consultant to steward the process and help with data collection, facilitation of focus groups and interviews, as well as data analysis and reporting. An RFP was submitted in May and the selection process is in its final stages. Work will begin in July and run through the end of 2025.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

Members: Charley Tarver (Chair), Linda Barlow (Sub-Committee Chair - New Office), Alex Smith, Frank Langford, Lisa Daily, Vernon Skiles, Lisa Armstrong, Karen Patterson, and Jamie Creola

Much work has been done by its committee members. Charley, Linda and Jamie have been busy addressing tree removal, water and plumbing, HVAC, furniture assembling, and bridge/structural aspects of the new property - meeting with contractors and technicians.

Thanks to another generous gift by Amy Patterson, HBF now owns the adjacent lot next to the new office that was gifted to the Foundation by Amy and Cookie Patterson last summer. Once Strategic Planning completes, a work on a site master plan will begin.

NOMINATING

Members: Jennie Stowers (chair), John Mitchener, David Martin, Lindy Harrison, Lisa Armstrong, Tom Holmes

Many thanks to the following trustees who have completed a term. We are so grateful for your contributions to HBF and serving as strong leaders during a time of rapid growth - Vernon Skiles, Melanie Mauldin, Frances Oakley, and Cathy Jones

Nominated for a second term: Amy Patterson, Jim Milby

Nominated for a first term (please see attached Bios): Jimmy Bewley, Catharine Seay, Kent Whitman, John Helmer

2025 Officer Slate:

- a. President: Tom Holmes
- b. VP: David Martin (1 year - transition)
- c. Treasurer: Bob Strickland
- d. Secretary: Lindy Harrison

Procedure for Nominating Trustee Candidates

The following criteria should be considered when making HBF Trustee nominations:

1. The nominee is supportive of the HBF mission.
2. The nominee is willing to share his/her volunteer time, talents, energy, and resources with HBF.
3. The nominee will demonstrate a fiduciary responsibility to HBF.
4. The nominee will help fill HBF's need for a well-rounded board with balanced experience/talents.
5. The nominee will contribute the HBF annual fund.

Nominating Procedure:

Trustee nominations should be submitted a minimum of 30 days prior to the June Board meeting. Nominations will be accepted throughout the year, up to the 30-day deadline. Nominations will not be accepted from the floor of the Annual Meeting. The Nominating Committee needs 30 days to properly vet the candidates, collect pertinent information, and allow time for the Board to review the nominees.

Members of the Foundation are encouraged to self-nominate, or to nominate other HBF or Highlands community members whom they know to meet the Trustee criteria.

The person making the nomination should send by email or hand-delivery to the Executive Director the following information: the name of the proposed candidate; a bio with all contact information; and a letter stating why he or she feels that this candidate is appropriate and would be an asset to HBF.

To encourage nominations, the Nominating Committee will send out a call for nominations to all HBF members, either as a notice with the spring email, or as an independent email notice.

Once an individual is identified and accepted by the Nominating Committee, the Board Chair with the Executive Director will approach the nominee to discuss board responsibilities and also to confirm the interest of the individual. *No member of the Nominating Committee should approach or discuss the nomination with the individual.*

The Nominating Committee will submit their nominations to the Executive Committee 20 days prior to the June Board meeting. The Executive Director will distribute the list of nominees and attached information to the Board of Trustees seven days prior to the June meeting. This will allow time for the Board to familiarize themselves with the candidates prior to the meeting. The Board members should direct questions about nominees to the members of the Nominating Committee. Board of Trustee nominees will be voted on at the June meeting.

Once the individual is confirmed at the June Meeting of the Board of Trustees, the Executive Director or Board Chair will contact the individual and a letter of congratulations will be sent to the individual with a reiteration of the board responsibilities, as well as the schedule for the Trustee Meetings. This is the appropriate time for the Chair or the Executive Director to meet with the individual to discuss their individual interests and to determine their committee options.

Upcoming Board Transitions:

Term 2 ending in 2026:

- Lisa Armstrong
- Frank Langford
- David Martin
- Alex Smith
- Carol Stewart
- Jennie Stowers