

HBF Committee Reports

Highlands Biological Foundation Annual Membership Meeting 2026

FINANCE

Members: Bob Strickland (Chair/Treasurer), Tom Holmes, John Mitchener, John Helmer, Jim Milby, Jim Landon, Kent Wittman, Jason Souma (Investment Manager) and Jamie Creola

See 2024 Audit Report - <https://highlandsbiological.org/foundation/>

HBF is in good shape for 2026 and did very well in 2025 - Soiree \$174K raised - NET \$118K and Half Shell ~\$47K raised – NET \$36K. Individual contributions, projected at \$220K, exceeded expectations by \$16,000 following a concerted effort to reengage donors from the past decade.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Members: Karen Patterson (Chair), Jonnie Swann, Leslie Manning, Carol Stewart, Jennie Stowers, Jason Love, Rada Petric, Maddie Wikstrom, Alex Waite, and Jamie Creola

Summer Programming

Summer Programming is in full swing. Camps began on June 1st. We are offering 18 Nature camps over 9 weeks for ages 5-7 and 8-10. <https://highlandsbiological.org/2026-nature-camps/>

Thanks to our new platform – Ultra Camp, and adjustments to camp logistics – 5 days a week, 9 – 2 w/30 minute drop off and pick up windows, we are completely booked with waiting lists to boot. Additionally, the funding from Cullasaja Women’s Outreach enabled 12 children to register (and attend this summer) our 2026 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 **2026 Zahner Lectures series** has been finalized and we’re very excited. See below and links:

June 11th

Weird and Underappreciated Arthropods of North Carolina

Dr. Matt Bertone, Entomologist and Director, NC State Plant Disease and Insect Clinic (NCSU)

June 18th

Story: Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Conservation, and the Science Inside the Nest

Lauren D. Pharr, Ph.D., Postgraduate Researcher, North Carolina State University

June 25th

The Blue Wall: What we know--and don't know--about southern Appalachia's enigmatic weather-making landform

Philip S. Prince, Ph.D., Project Geologist, Appalachian Landslide Consultants, PLLC, Virginia Tech Department of Geosciences

July 9th

Southern Appalachian Freshwater Resilience and Recovery Post-Hurricane Helene

Julie DeMeester, Ph.D., Director of Freshwater and Coastal Programs, The Nature Conservancy, North Carolina Chapter

July 16th

The Venomous Snakes of Western North Carolina

Carlton Burke, local naturalist and wildlife rehabilitator, Carolina Mountain Naturalists

July 23rd

Andres Michaux in North America: Revealing the Botanical Treasures of the Carolinas

Dana Beach, Founder and former Executive Director, SC Coastal Conservation League, Board Member, Butler Parklands

July 30th

Connecting Appalachia: Wildlife Connectivity, Corridors, and Road Crossings

Liz Hillard, PhD, Senior Wildlife Biologist-Appalachian Region for Wildlands Network

August 6th

Plastic Pollution on the Plateau: An Overview of Microplastics Research in the Southern Appalachians

Jason Love, Associate Director of Highlands Biological Station, Western Carolina University,

Staffing Update

In January, Alex Waite rejoined HBF as our second Education Naturalist – replacing Julie who left at the end of November. We've also hired 4 Summer Naturalist and an additional Naturalist to help with Nature Center operations now that we are running week-long, day long camps and increased programming. These staff will be with us through mid-August.

Nature Center

The Nature Center will be closing mid-August for repair/replacement work of all the windows and doors. Below is the schedule:

NC closure

- a. Construction begins Aug. 24th
- b. Last day NC open – Aug. 15th
- c. Moving stuff, people and animals – week of Aug. 17th
- d. NC open w/minimal daily programs/Staff cleaning up – Aug. 10th
- e. Last week/day of programming – Aug. 3rd (8th last day)

Year-Round Programming

During the 2025/26 School Year, Alex (and Julie before she left in November) have been busy doing outreach programs and hosting small group tours/engagements at the Nature Center. HBF 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. **During the 2025/26 School Year, HBF offered 80 outreach programs serving ~1,400 individuals in Macon and Jackson Counties.** Funding from Cullasaja Women's Outreach, Church of the Good Shepherd, and the Community Fund of Highlands helped support these programs.

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 2025 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 \$9,850 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 \$7,700 funding to 3 researchers conducting local research while in residence at the Station.

MAPS Bird Banding: 2025 marked the 6th 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 \$43,000 in funding for three Research Assistants at the Highlands Biological Station to assist with microplastics, small mammal, and bat research.

Bat Research and Education: HBF awarded \$11,500 for the BatPack Citizen Science Project monitoring bat activity along the Appalachian Trail.

In 2026, HBF will continue to provide funds for research, assistantships, Bat Pack, MAPS Bird banding, and HBS Operational support.

DEVELOPMENT

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

HBF continues to successfully raise funds to support our programs and investments in research and education. We held another successful fundraiser, Twilight in the Garden Soiree, and are looking forward to this summer's event at Flat Mountain Farm on July 28th with 44 hosts secured and tickets on sale.

Check out our 2025 Fall Newsletter and Annual Report outlining all our events, programming and amazing donors that support the work we do in the community.

<https://highlandsbiological.org/foundation/newsletters/>

STRATEGIC PLANNING

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

Much work was done in 2025!!

Strategic planning - focus groups, interviews, and data collection from community surveys continued over the summer.

- 162 Online Community Surveys
- 42 Board Member Surveys
- 16 Individuals Interviewed
- 2 Focus Groups
- Education Partners
- Nonprofit Leaders in Highlands

This work included an extensive document outlining Vision/Mission/Values and Strategic Goals for HBF moving forward. Gayle, Allison and Jamie provided a draft Strategic Plan based on comments at December's Board meeting and subsequent versions/comments in 1st quarter of 2026. A final draft was shared with the Board and voted/passed at the Spring Board meeting.

A big thank you to Gayle for her leadership and work on the process and document. Also, to the committee and our consultant, Allison Jordan. Lastly, to the Board for their participation and thoughtful comments during the process.

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

Extensive work began at the end of 2024 and continued into 2025. 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: John Mitchener (chair), Jennie Stowers, David Martin, Lindy Harrison, Lisa Armstrong, Tom Holmes and Jamie Creola

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 – David Martin, Lisa Armstrong, Carol Stewart, Frank Langford, Alex Smith, and Jennie Stowers

Nominated for a second term: Lisa Dailey, Lindy Harrison, Jim Landon, Linda Barlow

Nominated for a first term (please see attached Bios):

- a. Pat Gleeson
- b. Matt MacDonald
- c. Gage Lequire
- d. Kathy Ward
- e. Fred Halback

2026 Officer Slate

- a. President: Tom Holmes
- b. VP: Leslie Manning
- 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 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.