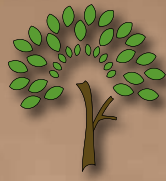


Prince William Conservation Alliance



Annual Report 2015-16



Dear Friends,

We make things happen at the Prince William Conservation Alliance. Typically, we work in partnership with others. The plantings at the Dog Park involved so many different organizations that we ran out of room to list them all on the original sign.

What a great problem to have – but that steep hillside would still be eroding sediment to the Chesapeake Bay rather than displaying flowers, if the Conservation Alliance had not taken the initiative. We identified the opportunity, assembled a team to design the revegetation, got grants to fund the purchase of plants, and recruited literally hundreds of volunteers. The logistics and time crunch can be overwhelming, but ...

That's what we do.

We do our homework. We track what's going on and talk to government officials so they know someone is watching. We read the boring reports on I-66 widening, VRE extension, and rezoning proposals, and we go to the even-more-boring meetings.

When a landowner started dumping fill dirt on agricultural land and the county said "oh no, we can't deal with agricultural operations," we contacted the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Their staff made clear that dumping construction material was not an agricultural operation. The headache of getting local officials to enforce local zoning is not over yet, but the county can no longer rely upon its old excuse. It can make for some difficult conversations at times, but ...

That's what we do.

Conservation is wise use of our resources, and we recognize there will be impacts from population growth. We also know that officials in Manassas, Manassas Park, and Prince William County have the tools to steer development to appropriate places.

When we see an issue, we don't just object – we formulate options that will enhance conservation. We propose feasible choices. Rather than add more houses in the Rural Area, we support transit-oriented development around Virginia Railway Express stations to reduce future traffic congestion. Someone besides the quick-profit developers needs to suggest alternatives, and yes ...

That's what we do.

Most Northern Virginians live in suburbia. We have lawns and what we plant in our yards makes a difference all the way to the Chesapeake Bay. So the Conservation Alliance created and maintains a Wildlife Garden at Merrimac Farm, demonstrating different species of native plants that are suitable for backyard (and front yard) habitat. Yes, it's a lot of work. It requires oversight and volunteers to weed and move mulch, but ...

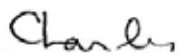
That's what we do. And we could not do it without your help, as contributors and volunteers. Because what make the difference is ...

What you do. Thank you for your support. It makes a world of difference.

Sincerely,



Kim Hosen
Executive Director



Charlie Grymes
Chair, Board of Directors

Our Mission and Vision

Prince William Conservation Alliance is an independent, non-government, non-profit environmental organization. We work to protect and enhance our local natural resources and healthy communities through stewardship, recreation, education, and advocacy.

We are committed to a positive approach that continues to build a diverse constituency and partner network. We are willing to speak up, we are constructive in our proposals, and we are capable of mobilizing people.

We take a comprehensive approach. The links between conservation and traffic, schools, zoning, and taxes are complex, but we work hard to understand how everything is connected. Working with government agencies can be challenging, but is essential to protecting the landscape.

As we enter our 15th year of operations, PWCA is the only non-governmental environmental organization in Prince William County with the capacity to plan and manage initiatives over time. We are here for the long haul, not just one issue.



Act
Local



*PWCA was founded to
protect high quality habitats
for people and wildlife.*

Stewardship: Wildlife Garden at Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area is a Model Conservation Landscape for Suburban Homes

The Merrimac Farm Conservation Landscape project provides a fantastic model for all Virginians to emulate. Incorporating native plants into our personal landscapes is the single best way each of us can help enhance and restore the habitat so critically needed by wildlife, while increasing our own enjoyment and pleasure in all things wild and beautiful. --Lou Verner, Biologist, VA Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries



We started with an old lawn and now we have a colorful, diverse garden teeming with wildlife, especially butterflies, dragonflies, birds, and frogs. This past summer nearly 80 people attended our **Annual Garden Party** for PWCA Members, which showcases this project and brings people together.

It's a great place to discover nature with your family. PWCA and others also use the Wildlife Garden for outdoor education programs. In addition to community volunteers, the Wildlife Garden benefits from the support of Marine Corps Base Quantico. Every summer we welcome their Summer Leadership Camp, when 75 participants join us at Merrimac Farm to help remove invasive species, notably Autumn Olive shrubs... hard work!



Stewardship: Buffer Restoration at Minnieville Road

In 2014 PWCA began restoration of a barren 200 x 35 foot slope on Minnieville Road, separating a County park from stormwater infrastructure. The project goal was to mitigate a serious erosion problem, help manage stormwater, create new wildlife habitat, and improve community appearance in a visible location.

We completed planting during the past year. We are now declaring success (it's gorgeous...) but we're not quitting. We are committed to ensuring high quality conditions over time... all is easily lost without maintenance!

During the past year, more than 100 people have volunteered their time to help keep the area free of invasive plants and learn more about the value of native plant communities.

The buffer looks beautiful, cheerful and inviting. It puts me in a good mood when I drive Minnieville Road.
-- Lori Bauckman-Moore



Stewardship: Citizen Science

Yes, we do birds. PWCA hosts monthly bird walks at Merrimac Farm and we sponsor, since 2008, the Nokesville Circle for the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This national event, led by the Audubon Society, is the largest citizen science project in the country.

In Nokesville, nearly 40 birding enthusiasts donate their time to count birds by species within a defined territory, a circle with a 7.5 mile radius centered at Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area.

The data collected for all CBC Circles is used by researchers for the long-term study of early winter bird populations across North America. According to the Audubon Society, more than 200 peer-reviewed articles have resulted from analysis done with Christmas Bird Count data.



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PWCA's ecological expertise greatly enhances practical application of classroom knowledge. I routinely send students to participate in their stewardship programs.

– Dr. Cindy Smith, Environmental Science Policy Professor, George Mason University

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Stewardship: Bluebird Trails

Bluebirds are a dramatic environmental success story. In the 1970's, habitat losses, pesticides, and competition from introduced species had resulted in the loss of suitable nesting sites and, in turn, Bluebird populations decreased.

A few folks who remembered the Bluebirds took direct action and provided nest boxes. The word spread. Many people began to put out nest boxes and brought Bluebirds back to our region and beyond.

To keep up the good work, PWCA established Bluebird Trails at Chinn Park, Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area, and Veteran's Park. We recruit and train volunteers, who inspect and maintain the nest boxes and collect data for each. This year we welcomed 24 new Bluebirds and 60 Chickadees, Tree Swallows, and Wrens.



Sustainable Communities: Save Our Parks

During the past year, Prince William County Schools (PWCS) proposed to build schools on three parks and formally filed a development application for one site, Chinn Park. The school system is looking at parks as “free land,” not as community assets.

Local parks are fundamental to healthy local neighborhoods. County parks are not a land bank, set aside just temporarily until someone decides it's time to pave. Parkland is an important part of the permanent green infrastructure needed for high quality development areas. There are other obvious options for new schools that do not involve development of forested parkland. To address the submitted application to develop Chinn Park, we successfully partnered with the adjacent Sycamore Ridge Homeowners Association and MidCounty Civic Association.

PWCA hosted a tour of the park site, a forested area that connects neighborhoods to each other and to the library and fitness center located in an area underserved by parks. We also published information, and spoke at public meetings. We found considerable community support for protecting forested parkland. In this particular case, nearly 75 people attended the public meeting hosted by the school system; no one was in favor of building a school on parkland. Thanks to community outcry, PWCS is currently seeking comments on their new proposal to relocate the school to an adjacent privately owned site.



Sustainable Communities: The Rural Crescent

In 1998, Supervisors realized it was not possible to build everything everywhere and keep taxes at a reasonable level. Designating a protected rural area in the portion of the County farthest from job centers created an Urban Growth Boundary. This gave Supervisors an effective tool to better manage sprawl development and focus infrastructure improvements where they are most cost-effective.

A robust rural area reduces the tax burden and benefits communities countywide. However, every year there is an effort to break the County's Urban Growth Boundary, dubbed the Rural Crescent. Greater housing density in the rural area, furthest away from the job centers, can produce windfall profits for a few speculators – but burden the general public with higher taxes to provide new public facilities.

The politics are challenging and land use changes that would blur the County's protected rural area, our urban growth boundary, are moving forward.

PWCA's newsletters and online resources provide up-to-date news on proposals that threaten or help sustain the County's smart growth policies.

Our Rural Crescent Forum last summer provided an opportunity for taxpayers to share information and ideas. PWCA Chair Charlie Grymes, former Occoquan Supervisor Mike May, and Brentsville Supervisor Jeanine Lawson talked about the countywide benefits offered by urban growth boundaries, incentives for farmers, and land use challenges. A lively community discussion representing all sides of the issue followed the short presentations.



Sustainable Communities: Protecting Opportunities to Farm

PWCA supports farmers. We promote incentives that can help bolster local agricultural operations, and we oppose efforts of land speculators to convert farmland into subdivisions. According to USDA statistics, in 2012, there were 330 farms in Prince William, with a total of 36,659 acres or about 17% of the total acres in the county. Ninety-one of these farms were for raising cattle. The most common field crop was corn. The average farm was 108 acres.

We pursue opportunities to implement tried and true tools available to preserve farmland in Prince William, including a Purchase of Development Rights program and conservation easements. We also support efforts to enforce government standards intended to protect farmland. One long-standing concern is the unregulated dumping of fill dirt, from construction sites to Rural Crescent properties. With no oversight, prime farmland soils and wetlands are often buried and also at risk of conversion into industrial mulch operations.

To address these concerns, we worked with partners to identify solutions. Last July Supervisor Caddigan initiated a Zoning Text Amendment to close loopholes in local ordinances and a final vote is expected this winter. Until then, nothing is certain. PWCA will follow progress and keep you informed. Partners supporting this effort include Supervisor Caddigan, Supervisor Lawson, Prince William Soil & Water Conservation District, and Prince William Forest Park.



Sustainable Communities: Saving the Heflin's Farm from I-66 Expansion

Last December PWCA responded to the Virginia Dept. of Transportation's (VDOT) 12th hour attempt to relocate a planned I-66 commuter parking lot and new access ramp from a site in the development area to a working farm in Prince William's protected rural area, the Rural Crescent.

VDOT's plan was a clear precursor to widening Antioch Road and Rte 55 to create a Gainesville Bypass to facilitate long-distance commutes.

PWCA demonstrated its ability to work fast and work effectively. We rallied local residents, who sent more than 200 letters to both the CTB and local officials. We got the District Supervisor and Chairman of the Board to participate in our press conference, and the Board of Supervisors sent a letter to the CTB.

As a result of our ability to mobilize citizens quickly, this commuter parking lot was removed from the plan. Of course, VDOT will be back and we'll be watching.



Community Events: Annual Bluebell Festival



Our Annual Bluebell Festival at Merrimac Farm WMA is a major event sponsored in partnership with Marine Corps Base Quantico and the VA Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries. In April 2016, nearly 1,000 people joined us to welcome spring, meet people who are working to improve our community, and view the Virginia Bluebells, which carpet the Cedar Run shoreline for nearly a mile.

Everyone can also enjoy a naturalist-led tour of the wetlands. Each has a special focus, although leaders also cover other interesting sights seen along the way. Local artist James Gallagher hand-painted a rain barrel to raffle off, local musicians donated their services, organizations contributed displays and led scheduled tours along the Bluebell Trail.

This free event builds goodwill in the community, showcases local and regional environmental groups, educates people about wildlife habitats, and highlights our successes.

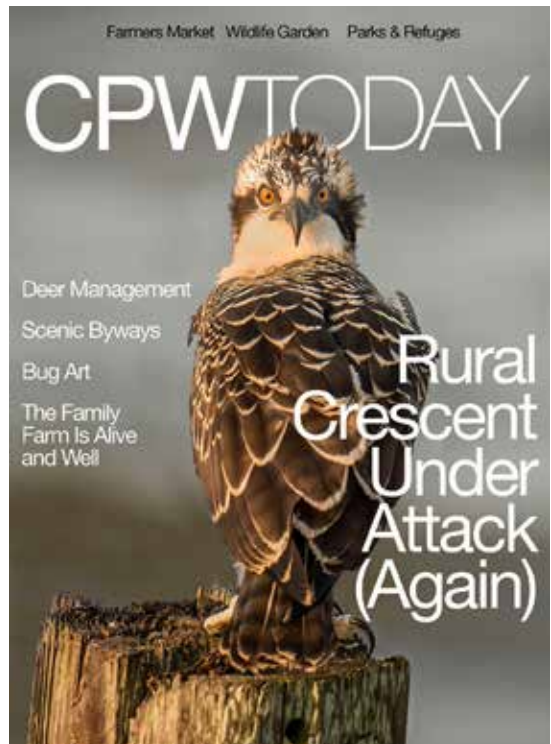


Conserve Prince William Today Ezine

CPWToday is an online magazine created to support the conservation agenda of the Alliance. The publication is produced by a company owned by one of our Board members at no cost to PWCA.

By being an online publication, it is possible to use video and other multimedia formats to tell the stories, unlike traditional paper media. Video is the fastest growing form of media, particularly with younger audiences.

The content of CPWToday is focused on the Alliance's local issues including preservation of the Rural Crescent, expansion of the VRE, increase of parkland in Prince William County and protection of clean water. Additionally, articles and videos have been produced on national and world issues such as global warming and renewable energy. The ezine can be viewed at www.cpwtoday.com.



*PWCA was honored
to receive the Ducks
Unlimited, Prince
William Chapter
2016 Conservation of
the Year Award*

and...

*The Plant Nova Natives
Campaign 2016
Champion Award*

Looking Forward

As the saying goes, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the second best time is today. PWCA takes this advice to heart. We plan to keep planting trees, in buffers, gardens, and neighborhoods. We recently received funding for a Yard Tree Giveaway next year to help re-green development area communities.

Our current restoration successes at Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area and along Minnieville Road will need tending – pruning and invasive plant removal – until they are fully established. We'll continue hosting work days to ensure high quality native plant communities that provide high quality ecosystem services.

Our annual community programs will return in 2017. In April, join us at the Merrimac Farm WMA Annual Bluebell Festival! Enjoy beautiful late-blooming flowers, good food, and friends at our Garden Party for Members as summer begins to draw to a close.

We will continue to pursue opportunities to promote conservation friendly public policies, protect the Rural Crescent, and re-green the development area. Look for public programs on the Rural Crescent and news on Scenic Byways for Prince William. Join us to plant a tree, speak at public meetings, or help with outreach efforts.

Your donation is more important than ever before. Let's take advantage of opportunities for on-the-ground projects and effective advocacy for smart growth principles that result in a sustainable, more attractive, and diverse landscape today and in the future.

In 2015 PWCA added part-time support staff and acquired professional expertise for the organization's Development Committee. During the coming year, we plan to increase community donations by 50%, in order to expand unrestricted funds, hire an additional staff person, and gain many new members.



PWCA Board of Directors

Charlie Grymes, Chair
Bill Olson, Vice-Chair
Pete Madsen
Mike May
Elena Schlossberg-Kunkel
Ernie Sears
Charles Smith
Nancy Vehrs

PWCA Staff

Kim Hosen, Executive Director
Jen Wease, Volunteer Coordinator



Photo Credits

Julia Flanagan: American Robin, Bald Eagle, Fritillaries on Milkweed, Wild Blueberries

Ernie Sears: Heflin Farm, Jeannie and Carl Heflin, Antioch Road, Virginia Bluebells

Kim Hosen: Merrimac Farm Wildlife Garden, Minnieville Road Buffer, Volunteers,
Eastern Bluebirds, Girls in the Woods, Nokesville Farm, Merrimac Farm pond in winter

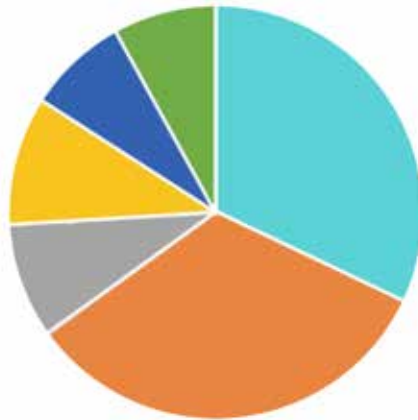
2015-16 Financial Report

Sources of Organizational Support

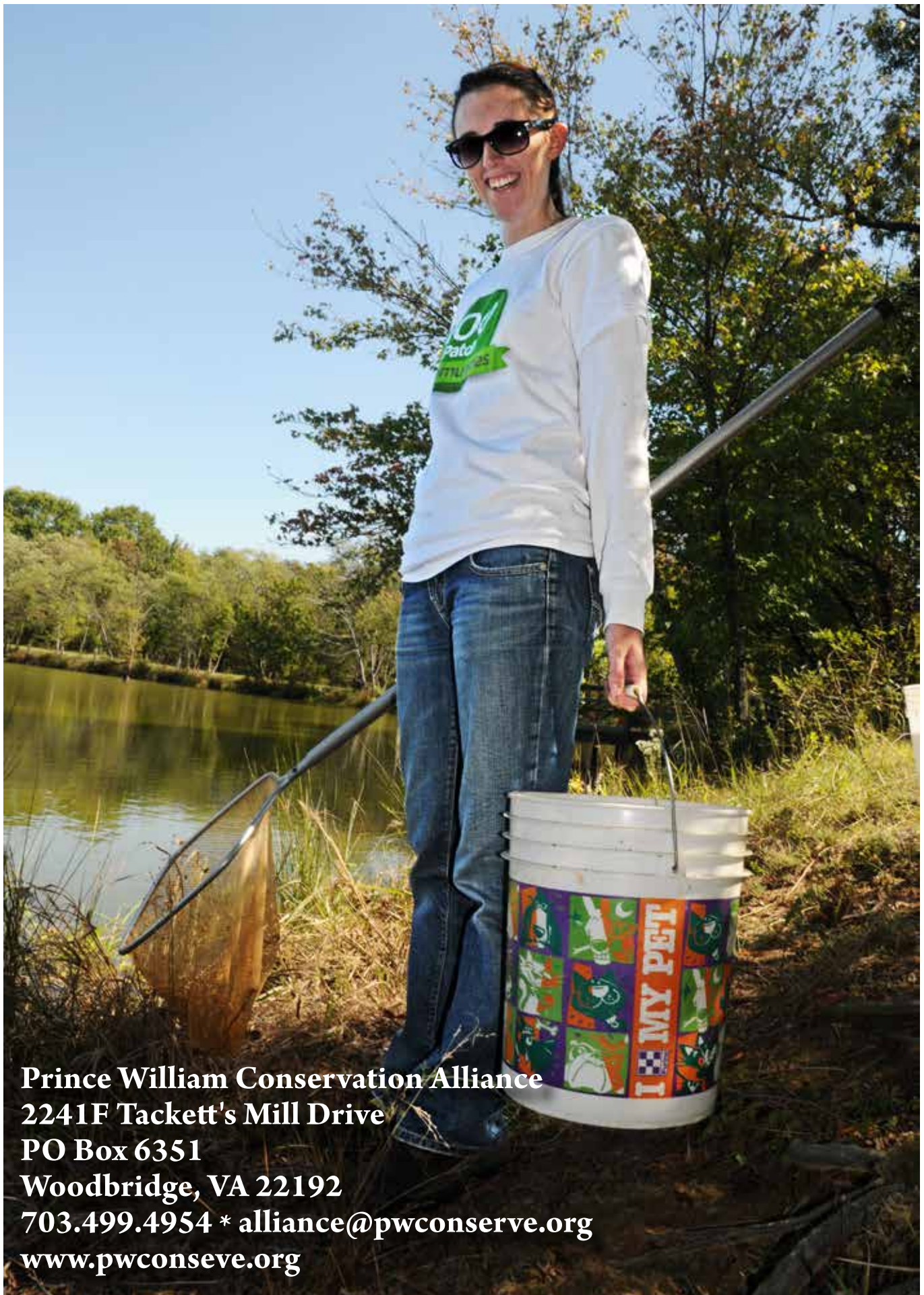


Grants	\$ 65,000	59%
Donations	\$ 45,700	41%
Total	\$110,700	100%

Program and Operating Expenditures



Stewardship	32%
Sustainable Communities/Planning	33%
Outreach	10%
Transportation	9%
Development	8%
Administration	8%
Total	100%



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