

Grantee: Adirondack Land Trust

Program Area: Environment/Animals

Headquarters: Keene Valley, NY

Total funding: \$2,060,000 since 2014;
TNC-A/ALT

Most recent grant: \$30,000 in 2018

“combined” grants of
\$1,231,500 since 1988

As we continue this year’s exploration of the Foundation’s environmental funding with respect to conservation, preservation, and stewardship at the upcoming Board Meeting where we will hear from the Adirondack Land Trust (ALT), we felt it advantageous to provide some background on the organization, as well as some context regarding the spin-off from the organization with which it was formerly associated, the Adirondack Chapter of the Nature Conservancy (TNC-A). At our meeting on December 7th, we’ll hear from Michael Carr, Executive Director, and Nancy Van Wie, Director of Philanthropy, about ALT’s localized conservation work within the Adirondack Park, as well as the context for their upcoming strategic vision, in light of this aforementioned spin-off, and their view of the Park’s greatest challenges.

ALT was founded in 1984 with a focus on protecting the working farms, forests, scenic vistas, and wild shorelines that are critical to the Adirondack Park’s unique mix of public and private lands; by 1988, ALT had protected over 3,500 acres. The organization then joined forces with its Keene Valley neighbor, TNC-A (with which our relationship dates back to 1974), to gain process efficiencies while carrying out complementary missions to preserve prioritized parcels. Though the organizations shared staff and resources, they retained separate legal entities.

As ALT developed a number of strong relationships with local landowners and planning committees, and its mission became more focused, the time to return to its roots as an independent entity became evident. From ALT’s perspective, as more protected and connected land accumulated, the challenge of “boots on the ground” stewardship became increasingly critical and, in turn, the need to inform and properly educate the general public became more and more apparent. From TNC-A’s perspective, its aim in the Adirondacks also became much more focused on larger parcels within the context of a climate-impact lens, as ALT, which had become autonomous enough, could effectively complement TNC-A’s work by focusing efforts on smaller, vista-based conservation and prioritized “puzzle pieces” that create contiguous preserves throughout the region. The mutual “split” became official in 2016.

As you may recall, in 2015 and in the midst of this “spin-off” period, the FMKF established the Fred M. and Walker D. Kirby Land Stewardship Endowment through a \$2M grant over three years to be matched by ALT’s existing \$1M stewardship endowment balance. This FMKF grant marked the largest in ALT history. Conservation easements play a leading role in preservation efforts, but agreements between private landowners and land trusts carry significant long-term management responsibilities that are expensive and often difficult to fund through private sources. The intention of this gift was also to inspire additional support, as the total stewardship need for all of ALT’s easement holdings was \$6M. Unfortunately, the start of this hopeful leveraging period coincided with the mutual “re-separation;” it is our understanding that additional fundraising efforts were somewhat curtailed, but we have been assured that efforts to secure additional stewardship dollars will be a top priority moving forward.

Michael Carr was named full-time Executive Director of ALT in late 2016, after serving 26 years with TNC, most recently as the director of the Adirondack Chapter. He is most

commonly credited with leading efforts that resulted in TNC-A's helping to protect over half a million acres within the six-million acre Adirondack Park. Carr left TNC-A in good standing following the successful closing on the landmark "Finch Project," the largest addition of preserved land in over 100 years to the Park's constitutionally protected Forever Wild Forest Preserve. As head of ALT, he also recognizes they are in an unusual phase of the organization's "life cycle." Its staffing structure resembles that of a newer land trust (six full-time employees and an operating budget just under \$800K), while the team's obligations and relationships with landowners and communities reflect 34 years of work. As is the case with all organizations with longstanding leadership, we do wonder about succession planning and how to most respectfully have that conversation in order to ensure future, ongoing success.

It's evident that under Michael Carr's leadership and this reclaimed autonomy, ALT will soon be able to realize its potential as a collaborator and leader in North Country conservation. Notably, this organization exhibits the efficiency and impact of a larger, national land trust paired with an intimate knowledge of the communities and landowners with whom they are collaborating, a unique combination of traits necessary for the goal of expanding and managing protected land and scenic vistas, all while protecting former environmental investment throughout the Adirondack region.

Prepared by Erin Clifford
November 30, 2018