

Mission Statement

The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance works with the community to promote and facilitate the conservation of the Rensselaer Plateau's undeveloped and unfragmented forests and other ecologically important areas. These possess many significant natural features and provide many benefits including natural habitats for plants and animals; forest products, recreation and most important, water and air quality.

Alliance Members

Rensselaer Land Trust Friends of the Dyken Pond Center Friends of the Grafton Lake State Park **Grafton Trail Riders** Mohawk-Hudson Cycling Club The Nature Conservancy **The Conservation Fund Babcock Lake Estates** The Trust for Public Land The Village of East Nassau **Berlin Mountain Fish & Game Club New York Forest Owners Association (CDC) Audubon New York Spring Lake Association Trout Unlimited (Home-Waters Chapter) Northeastern Cave Conservancy New York Flora Association Taconic Hiking Club Friends of Cherry Plain State Park Capital Region Nordic Alliance Saratoga Mountain Bike Association SKYHIGH Adventures Sidney Albert Albany JCC Regional Plan Association Albany Area Amateur Astronomers Wyomanock Center Dynamic Sports Adventure Hoosic River Watershed Association Agricultural Stewardship Association Corkscrew Rail Trail Association Greater Stockport Creek Watershed Alliance Appalachian Mountain Club (Mohawk Hudson Chapter)**

2015 - What a remarkable year! We've drawn strength through our alliances. We've accomplished more that we imagined. We've set the bar high for next year and the years after. Our strategic goals, developed in 2014, created a springboard for a pivotal year in 2015 that clearly impacted the growth and trajectory of the RPA for the future.

We are closer to our goal of seeing 18,000 acres of Plateau land conserved by 2018. Through the Forest Legacy program, 12,348 acres of Plateau forest owned by 15 private landowners will go into conservation easements over the next several years. Ken James generously donated 34-acres of unique forestland that had been managed for decades in an effort to bring back the American Chestnut. Our first operational year for our 350-acre Poestenkill Community Forest was met with a flurry of activity from trail building to the development of a forest management plan to educational programs. It's been such as success that we are moving forward to acquire and establish a second 253-acre Community Forest in the Town of Nassau.

This year, we added a new monthly lecture series focused on regional, cultural, historical and environmental topics. Our municipal representatives meetings lead to an exciting joint venture by the Towns of Sand Lake, Poestenskill and Nassau to apply for and receive a grant to develop a branding campaign and logo for the Plateau. And we developed a plan for a comprehensive multi-use trail network on the Plateau - a key 1st step forward in establishing the Plateau as a major recreational destination on par with other regional destinations like the Berkshires, Catskills or Tug Hill Plateau!

We accomplished so much this year, with 2015 marking our first year with an Executive Director, Jim Bonesteel, and a part-time Communications and Development Coordinator, Barbara Healy. The Board offers our sincere gratitude to Jim for his untiring dedication to the conservation of the Rensselaer Plateau and his skilled leadership for the RPA. This

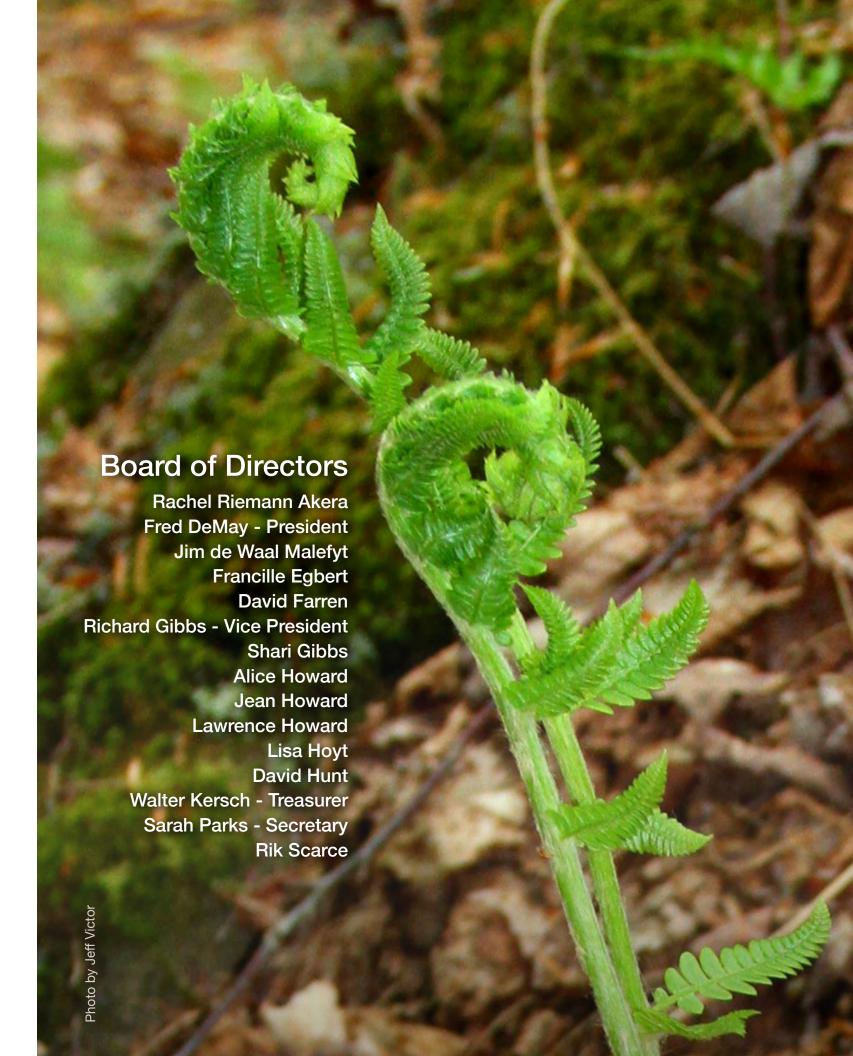
increased capacity means RPA will be able to consider projects that we couldn't even dream about just a few years ago.

We recognize and honor our Board, our members, our volunteers, our sponsors and donors and our elected officials. Most importantly...we are all doing "Conservation Through Community"!



Fred DeMay President





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Vision Statement

he Rensselaer Plateau Alliance envisions all human activities on the Plateau guided by consideration for the Plateau as a whole. The Alliance, a coalition of organizations and individuals, recognizes that the Plateau is greater than the sum of its parts. Our members will foster communication about the value of natural resources and other common values held by the communities of the region and, in concert, help to advance those values on a regional scale. Our vision will be realized when each of the wide range of human activities that occurs on the Plateau leaves the Plateau in better harmony with the ecological whole.

Working cooperatively with groups & individuals, RPA listens, inspires, leads & gets results.

Our Vision for the Plateau... 100 years from today

he Rensselaer Plateau remains a large unfragmented forest with abundant lakes, wetlands and streams that run with high quality water which helps provide the entire County with drinking water. The land consists of a patchwork of private and public properties that has been voluntarily protected by landowners and municipalities that are fully aware of the benefits of forested land and open space. The local economy thrives with recreation based businesses, tourism and locally grown forest products. People can hike, ski, bike, horseback ride and snowmobile on a trail system that connects the far corners of the Plateau. Wildlife abounds. There are healthy populations of large mammals such as moose, black bear, bobcat, forest interior bird species and an abundance of native fish such as brook trout. Native plant and animal species that existed on the Plateau in 2010 still thrive.

People visit the Plateau not only for its recreation and scenic beauty but to enjoy the hunting and fishing which have seen resurgence in popularity. A large percentage of the Plateau remains working forest providing valuable timber resources. There are core areas that have been left as wildlands and are now old growth forests supporting species such as Northern Goshawks. Visitors marvel at the large trees and undisturbed surroundings.

Well-planned development on the Plateau has resulted in a high quality of life and higher property values. It has minimized the cost of municipal services resulting in lower residential property taxes. Children have natural areas where they can play and explore freely, feeling as comfortable in the woods as anywhere. The residents that live on or near the Plateau share a special community and are proud of their forests, lakes and streams. Residents have excellent sources of information about tools that help them keep their land in forest and understand the ways they can live that minimize their impact on the ecological resources of the Plateau. The communities on the Plateau support land owners and are fully aware of the benefits of forested land and open space.

The surrounding cities and towns are proud to have the Rensselaer Plateau nearby and continue to find more ways to make green connections, wildlife and recreation corridors between the Plateau and other existing protected areas. The Plateau is an intact, functioning, unstressed ecosystem with the dynamic buffering capacity to sustain itself in the face of large scale natural disturbances.

Accomplishments in 2015

This year has been another successful year for the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance. From introducing the new Poestenkill Plateau Community Forest (350-acre parcel in Poestenkill) to the Forest Legacy grant application to conserve over 12,000 acres being awarded and funded to gathering input from stakeholders for a Trail Vision Plan to countless educational programs, we have accomplished a great deal!



Community Forests

2015 was the first operational year for the new 350 acre Community Forest located in the Town of Poestenskill. Also in 2015 the RPA Board of Directors gave the green light to an initiative to acquire and establish a second 253 acre Community Forest in the Town of Nassau... See Page 9



Trail Vision

RPA envisions several trail corridors, linking east to west trails and north to south trails, both on an off the Plateau... See Page 13



Forest Legacy

RPA's project was awarded the Forest Legacy Grant, ranking 5th nationally. This will provide federal funds for the purchase of development rights on over 12,000 acres ... See Page 10



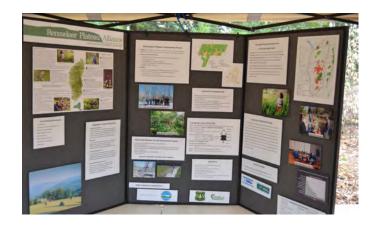
Educational & Recreational Programs

The RPA ran numerous educational and recreational programs this year, providing opportunities for community members with varied interests.... See Page 11



Organizational Capacity

RPA hires its first permanent staff positions.... See Page 14



Town Engagement

RPA continues engagement with Plateau towns through town official meetings, presentations and informational training workshops...See Page 14

Community Forests

Poestenkill Community Forest

A Community Forest Advisory Committee comprised of community members and several RPA Board members was formed in September 2013. The Committee considered over a dozen parcels of land before deciding to pursue the Poestenskill parcel. A grant submitted to the US Forest Service that ranked #1 nationally provided \$150,000 toward acquisition. With the assistance of a loan from The Conservation Fund, we closed on the purchase in November 2014 and immediately launched a two-year capital campaign to help pay off the loan. RPA has worked closely with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and other critical partners on this project.

The Poestenskill Community Forest provides recreational trails for Plateau residents and visitors, serves as a demonstration area of best management practices for forest stewardship, and is a venue for a variety of other educational programs for adults and children. Additionally, the area is vitally important for watershed protection and wildlife habitat.

The RPA and the Community Forest Advisory Committee were active partners in a very busy initial year of operation for the Poestenskill Community Forest. A detailed and comprehensive Community Forest Plan was finalized early in the year and submitted to the US Forest Service. The plan outlines objectives for the program (Experiential Education, Recreation, Economic Development, and Protection of Natural Resources), community benefits and involvement in the development of the plan, implementation strategies for achieving the objectives, proposed needs for further improvement, public access, and long-term management of the property. RPA also applied for and was awarded a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) EQIP program grant that allowed us to hire Forester Mary Spring. Mary developed a comprehensive Forest Management Plan that will be the basis for establishing a



demonstration forest for best practices. Mary also has experience working at the Siuslaw Model Forest and is getting input from Audubon New York and several local ecologists. Meanwhile, several volunteer surveyors have been working on finding and marking the property boundaries while other volunteers have been cleaning out old logging trails and marking new trails. A grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony was held on Earth Day April 22 attended by numerous state, local and regional dignitaries and officials in unanimous support of the program. The ceremony was video-taped (https://vimeo.com/140245304) and is available on our website.

Numerous educational and recreational programs were held at the Community Forest throughout the year starting with a snowshoe hike in January, *Reading the Forested Landscape* workshop with noted author Tom Wessels in June, Birding with Mary Batcheller also in June, and an August Mushroom Walk with Sun Van Hook. Also, the Saratoga Mountain Bike Association (SMBA), an Alliance member, received a grant to conduct a series of Trail Building Workshops and Beginner Mountain Bike Classes. The overall design, intent and implementation of the program prompted the US Department of Agriculture, in August, to feature the Poestenskill Community Forest as an example of a success story (https://www.na.fs.fed.us/ss/15/5392_FLP_RensselaerSSFinal_20150825.pdf).

In September, the RPA Board approved the submission of a NYS Conservation Partnership Program Catalyst grant for the Community Forest. Such funding would be for essential infrastructure including construction of a parking lot, restrooms, signage, a kiosk, trail maps, and equipment. It is anticipated that most of the work associated with the catalyst grant will be completed in 2016.



East Nassau Community Forest

The initial discussions between Executive Director Jim Bonesteel and the Albert family occurred during June and July when the Alberts expressed their wish to protect their 268 acre forested parcel from future development. Jim outlined several options for consideration including possibly selling a conservation easement to the state, working with a land trust such as The Rensselaer Land Trust, or developing the property into a community forest similar to the Poestenskill model with RPA as a partner. Following discussions with family members, the Alberts indicated they wanted the property used as a community forest. In September the RPA Board of Directors discussed the project in detail including options to cover costs, the establishment of a second Community Forest Committee with local representation, and the need to schedule a site visit. In October, the RPA Board of Directors authorized the Executive Director to enter into a contract with the Alberts contingent on the RPA being able to raise ½ the purchase price (\$150,000) by the end of 2016. A very supportive local committee was established. A US Forest Service Community Forest grant application was prepared for submission in January 2016 based on the model established with the Poestenskill Community Forest and with input from the new Community Forest committee. The RPA is optimistic that this opportunity to conserve a significant forested tract and establish a second Community Forest in the southern area of the plateau will occur in the near future.



Educational and Recreational Programs

The RPA ran numerous educational and recreational programs this year, providing opportunities for community members with varied interests. In addition to the programs detailed here, RPA also conducted Planning Board Training, Trail Building Workshops, a Learning Bird Calls event, a Mushroom walk and a Reading the Forested Landscape event (more details on these events can be found in other sections of this Annual Report).

Game of Logging

The RPA co-sponsored two days of "Game of Logging" (GOL) chain saw safety training courses. These full-day intensive sessions under a professional trainer are co-sponsored by RPA and the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA). These are funded through a grant administered by the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH). GOL covers safety gear, saw safety features and operation, saw sharpening, proper procedures for operating a saw, and then moves into directional tree felling in complicated woodlot situations. GOL is a great program for land owners on the Plateau.

Rensselaer Plateau Traverse Hike

The 5th Annual Plateau Traverse Hike went south to north this year. The new route on day one was characterized by hitting all the high points, Turner Mountain, Fire Tower Hill and the Gipfel, and finishing up with a walk through the Poestenkill Community Forest. Day two followed routes through Pineridge, the Dyken Pond Center and Grafton Lakes State Park to end up in the Pittstown State Forest. Thanks to the many landowners who gave permission to hike on their land.

Forest Investigation for Families

On a short hike, participants used all of their senses to discover what lives in the forest. They looked for clues and signs of larger mammals along with looking for the smallest creatures including insects, amphibians, birds and reptiles.

Holiday Wreath Making Workshop

About 20 participants spent a Saturday morning learning to make a holiday wreath with the great smell of balsam permeating the Pineridge Ski Lodge in Poestenkill. Walter Kersch taught us the basics of wreath making, one of his many talents. The workshop which was cosponsored by the Rensselaer Land Trust (RLT). Supplies were provided with balsam greens from the Rensselaer Plateau. Some, so delighted with their efforts made a 2nd wreath. A chili lunch was shared with lots of laughter in sharing the ups and downs of learning a new skill and everyone went home with a great start to the holiday season.

Making the Most of Your Land Workshop

Making the Most of Your Land, a workshop for woodland owners, was organized in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the NYS DEC Hudson River Estuary Program. Twenty-six people attended the program on October 17, which included presentations about the ecology of the Rensselaer Plateau, forest management, and conservation options, as well as a field trip to a managed forest. All participants intended to use the information they learned, and 92% plan to learn more about forest, wildlife or water resources on their land or community.

Forest Legacy

A notable recent development is the funding by the US Forest Service Forest Legacy Program of the grant we submitted. The President's FY16 Budget included our project and Congress funded it with the Omnibus Spending Bill of December 2015. The project ranked fifth nationally and brings together 15 different landowners to conserve 12,348 acres of mostly contiguous forest from the southern escarpment of the Plateau in Stephentown north to the Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center in Grafton, a 12-mile corridor. This project brings \$5.5 million of federal funding to the area, matched by \$2.4 million from New York State's Environmental Protection Fund for purchasing development rights. Negotiations currently underway between the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and landowners include the potential for public recreation rights and trails. Our partners in the Forest Legacy project are the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the NYS DEC Hudson River Estuary Program, the Agricultural Stewardship Association, and the Rensselaer Land Trust, demonstrating a broad range of support from both government agencies and not-for-profit organizations.

Municipal Engagement

When the town and village officials were asked if they would like us to continue our municipal official meetings, the answer was a resounding 'yes.' These meetings are a combination of structured and unstructured discussion and allow the officials to stay involved and offer ideas and suggestions to RPA.

We held two municipal official meetings, one in March and the other in November. Both met at Pineridge where we provided dinner followed by a topic discussion or presentation with time for Q/A, general discussion, sharing of ideas and concerns.

Forest Legacy was the main topic in March, wherein we briefed municipal officials on the project where we were in the grant application process, and next steps. We surveyed the group to determine the relevance of our municipal official meetings and the frequency with which they wanted meetings to continue. They preferred continuing on a semi-annual basis.

Andrew Meyer of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation gave an extremely informative presentation on "Culverts and Dams" for our November meeting. Several present were taking the information back to their respective road/highway crews for consideration in their municipality.

Lastly, in partnership with HREP and Hudsonia, we held land use planning workshops for Planning Boards in Brunswick and Sand Lake. Participants received continuing education credit and their comments were quite positive, encouraging us to consider partnering for more workshops.





Trail Vision

The counties of Albany and Rensselaer have a combined population of more than 450,000 and nearly 55,000 people, roughly 12 percent, have stated an interest in some form of outdoor recreation. The 118,000-acre Rensselaer Plateau, the fifth largest forested area in the state, is in their backyard and an ideal setting for a large connected trail system. Currently, many of these outdoor recreationists travel long distances to the Adirondacks and Catskills. Our trail vision will benefit this large community by providing larger-scale recreation opportunities closer to home, connecting the trails of the Plateau to the urban centers in Troy, Rensselaer, and Albany (each from 8 to 15 miles from the Plateau).

Moreover, RPA envisions trail corridors connecting to the Taconic Ridge in the east and, via the Taconic Crest Trail, to the states of Vermont and Massachusetts, each only about 5 miles from the Plateau. We also envision an eventual connection to the Harlem Valley Rail Trail (HVRT), currently being extended north into Columbia County towards Chatham. In the



near future, HVRT users will be able to take the trail from Chatham to the Metro North railroad in Wassaic, serving New York City, and RPA envisions that residents from as far away as New England will be able to do the same. To the north, we plan to link the Plateau to the Saratoga National Historic Park and Bennington Battlefield State Historic Site.

The Rensselaer Plateau, then, will become the hub of a trail network linking cities with parks and other recreational opportunities, states with other states, and historical sites across a region that is home to more than 1 million people. The RPA conducted public workshops and sought participation from all user groups, such as hikers, mountain bikers, snowmobilers and horseback riders. For the trail network project, we are partnering with 5 active participants: NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Hudson River Valley Greenway, Rensselaer Land Trust, Taconic Hiking Club and Saratoga Mountain Bike Association.

Organizational Capacity

In June of 2015 RPA hired its first staff. Jim Bonesteel was hired as Executive Director and Barbara Healey as Communications and Development Associate. Both are half-time positions.

The Executive Director and Development and Communications Associate positions were supported with funding from the New York State Conservation Partnership Program (NYSCPP) and New York's Environmental Protection Fund. The NYSCPP is administered by the Land Trust Alliance in coordination with the state Department of Environmental Conservation. This Professional Development grant pays 75% of the payroll costs for two years. Thereafter these positions will be funded solely by RPA.

Having dedicated staff has made a significant impact on RPA's capacity to provide programming and to pursue new land conservation projects and fulfills a goal of our 5-year Strategic Plan.



Donor Acknowledgement

Thank you to everyone who made contributions in 2015. Reflected below are contributions received between January 1st, 2015 and December 31st, 2015. We have made every effort to ensure the accurate listing of our supporters. Please email info@rensselaerplateau.org to note any corrections.

Grants & Donations from Organizations

Callanan Industries, Inc.

Dynamic Sport Adventures
Fields Pond Foundation
Saratoga Mountain Bike Assoc.
Split Rock Foundation
Spring Lake Association
Tactic Hiking Club
William Gundry Broughton

Donations from Individuals & Families

Foundation

Plateau Visionary (Greater than \$1,000)

Kevin & Mary Albert
Tom Blandy
Jim & Jill Bonesteel
Fred & Mona DeMay
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Ken James

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Plateau Patron (\$500 - \$999)

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Trail Blazer (\$50 - \$99)

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Erwin Passmann Mark & Joan Pettrone Lorraine Plauth

Susan & Neil Roberts

Ida Sands Claes Sjogreen Phillip Walton

Carl & Laura Weidemann

Donor Acknowledgement Continued...

In-Kind Donations (Event Spaces)

Old Daley Inn on Crooked Lake Pineridge XC Ski Shulman, Howard & McPherson LLP Town of Sand Lake

In-Kind Donors (Silent Auction)

Absolute T-Shirts

Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK)

Albany Marriott

American Meditation Institute

Nadine Baumgarten

Dede Bennett

Blue Skies Travel

Jim Bonesteel

Barb Boughton

Warren Broderick

Gerry Butkus

Broadway Bikes

Burden Lake Country Club

Cats Eye Pest Control

Center for Northern Woodlands Education

Crossroads Restaurant

Fred & Mona DeMay

Friends of Dyken Pond

Nancy Gardner

Habana Premium Cigar Shoppe

Hannaford, West Sand Lake

Robert Harris & Diane DeBlois

Lizz Hoenzsch

Alice & Hal Howard

Jiminy Peak

Walter Kersch

Mountain Road School

Ramblewild

R&G Cheese

Sand Lake Center for the Arts

Rik Scarce

Judy Schreiber

Larry & Kathy Skinner

Tom & Mona Slavin

Ross Sterantino

Tomhannock Bikes

Tri-City Valley Cats

Wayne Trimm & Melodee James

Kristina Younger

Victory View Vineyards

Zema's Nursery

In-Kind Donors (Other)

Ken James (Donation of Land)

Rensselaer County (Vans for Plateau

Traverse Hike)

Mary Spring (Work)

Shulman, Howard & McPherson LLP











2015 Financials

Financial results for RPA in the fiscal year ending December 31, 2015, show a continued steady increase in the amount of financial support received. While government grants that generally are for specific projects may fluctuate from year to year, income from individual and business contributions, programs and special events has been steadily rising. In 2015 RPA hit the income threshold that requires us to get Financial Reviewed Statements from an independent certified public accountant. These were done by the accounting firm DeChants, Fuglein & Johnson, LLP. We are still below the threshold that would require us to get a very expensive annual audit.

This year was a transition year for RPA as we moved from an all-volunteer organization using contract services for specific projects to a staffed organization. The first staff was hired in June of 2015. Payroll expenses therefore represent about half of annual expenses going forward. Another item of note when comparing 2014 to 2015 is the stark decrease in Current Liabilities and increase in Net Assets as RPA has paid off the majority of the loan to purchase the Poestenkill Community Forest.

Statement of Financial Position

ASSETS	2015	2014
Currents Assets	\$50,119	38,264
Fixed Assets (including property)	346,570	210,263
Other Assets	46,260	889
TOTAL ASSETS	442,949	249,416
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities	26,274	216,000
Net Assets	416,675	33,416
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	442,949	249,416

Statement of Activities

INCOME	2015	2014
Foundation and Trust Grants	\$16,654	500
Corporate Contributions	100,000	500
Individual & Business Donations	52,219	18,650
Donated Land	35,000	0
Government Grants	235,712	50,510
Program Income	1,520	548
Special Events Income	9,536	7,133
Miscellaneous Revenue	172	1605
TOTAL INCOME	450,812	88,769
EXPENSE		
Administrative Expenses	705	574
Development Expenses	3,539	3607
Contracting Services	25,477	58,533
Operations	4,304	2,957
Payroll (includes program, admin & development)	23,457	0
Programs	9,774	12,886
TOTAL EXPENSES	67,256	78,557
NET INCOME	383,556	10,212
NET INCOME & EXPENSES	450,812	88,769

2015 Income and Expenses

