

# THE OZARK HOLLER

Ozark Land Trust Newsletter

Summer 2024

## Our Promise to the Ozarks... And To You

*Forty years of conservation, but the results last forever.*

From the ideas and perseverance of our founders to present day, Ozark Land Trust has seen the Ozarks as an essential resource region around which to organize the way we live.

Rather than relying on artificial borders of political jurisdictions, our founders' adherence to "bioregionalism" meant that those other human-made boundaries should revolve around the natural landscape.

**Bioregionalism is a promise** – one from us to the habitats and species around us that we will put their health and well-being at the forefront as we go about our "people" things, be they home, work or recreation.

And our **Promise to the Future** – our celebration of OLT's 40th Anniversary – is a way for us to carry forth our commitment to the Ozark region for decades to come.

Those of you who read the *Ozark Holler* are supporters of OLT's work and mission. This year, in addition to our annual campaign ask, we are asking our friends to consider supporting our Promise campaign.

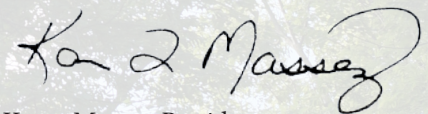
OLT's **Promise for the Future** campaign will support the growth of our operating endowment which plays a crucial role in the longevity of conservation, allowing us to:

- **Cope with the economic and other challenges** that befall nonprofits like ours, whether through a recession, a pandemic or other external circumstances beyond our control.
- **Build our staff to protect even more land.** While our funds to steward the conservation lands we already protect are sound, it is essential to add to our resources so our staff can work with more landowners who want to permanently protect their forests, working lands, watersheds and more.
- **Maintain financial independence to pursue our mission and strategies.** While support from all sources is both necessary and always appreciated, having a dedicated, substantial operating endowment offers OLT the autonomy to set its goals and priorities in a way that best advances our commitment to Ozarks conservation.

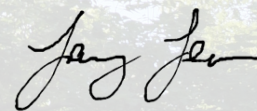
We are pleased to announce that in the very early stages of our campaign, we have already raised gifts and pledges in excess of \$75,000. And we already have another challenge gift for the next phase of our campaign as well. With this great start, we are well on our way to substantially increasing our operating endowment, providing a strong reservoir for OLT's future. *We couldn't do it without your extraordinary support and partnership!*

Please see Page 5 for more information about the Promise campaign. We hope that in addition to your annual gift, you will consider a one-time contribution to this very important initiative.

Sincerely,

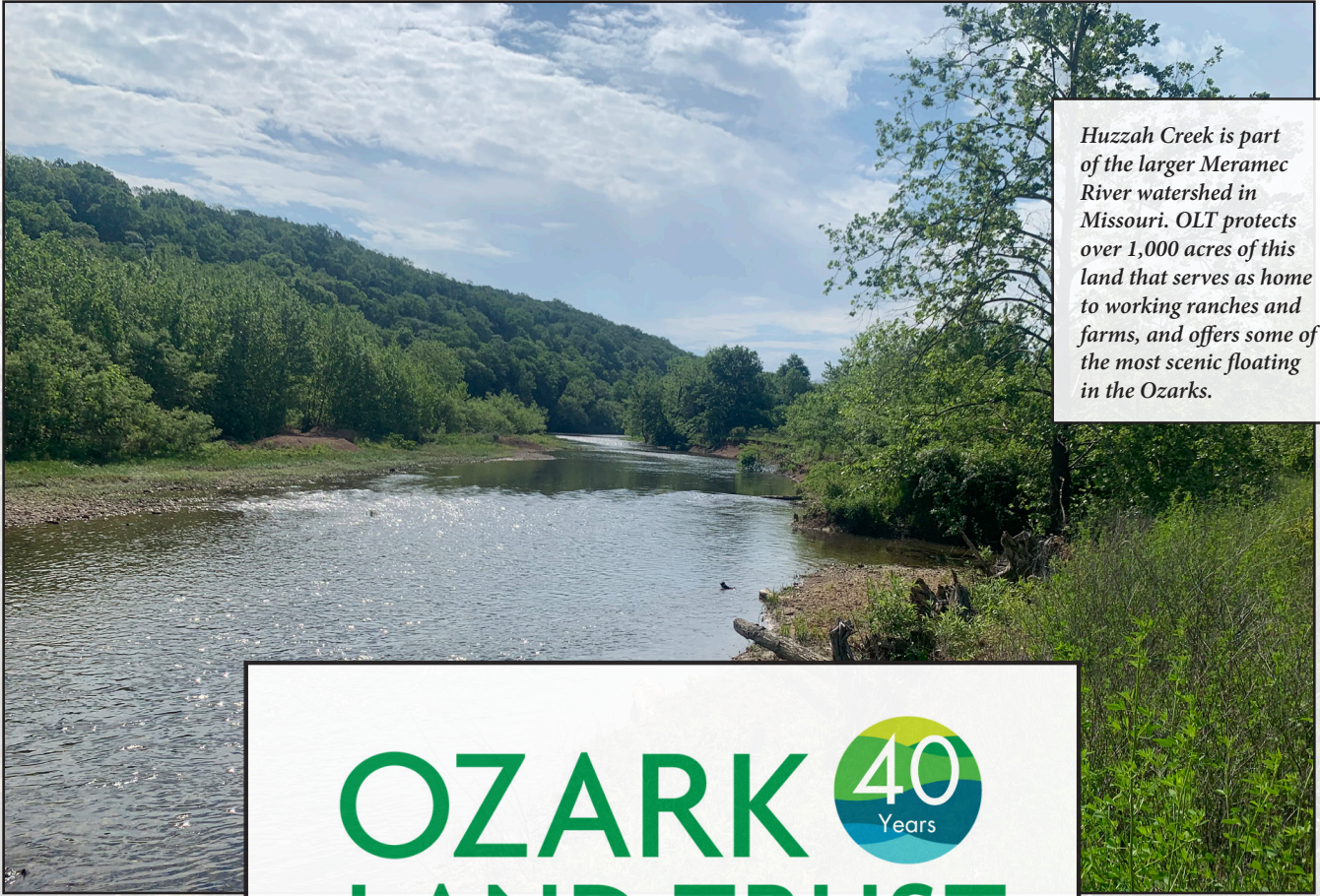


Karen Massey, President



Larry Levin, Executive Director

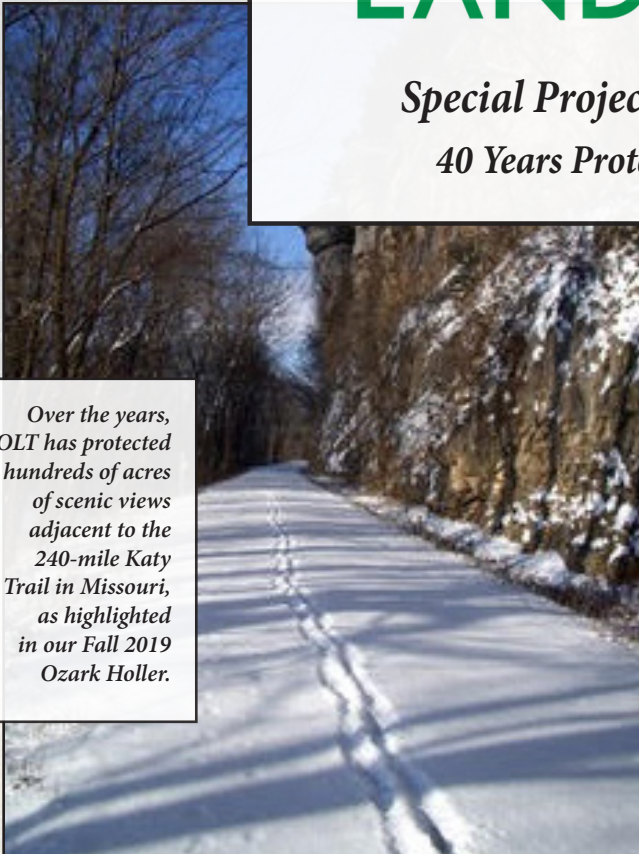




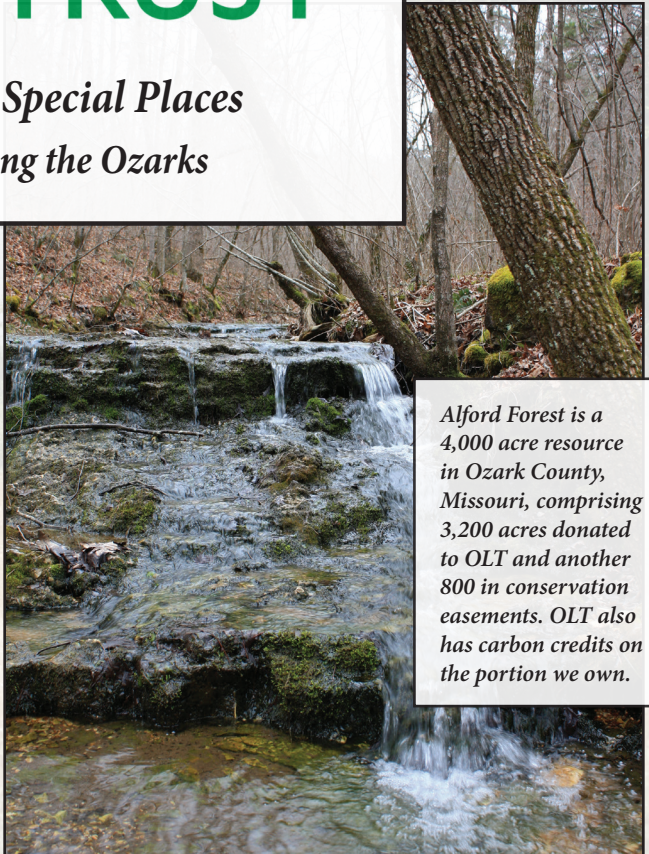
*Huzzah Creek is part of the larger Meramec River watershed in Missouri. OLT protects over 1,000 acres of this land that serves as home to working ranches and farms, and offers some of the most scenic floating in the Ozarks.*

# OZARK LAND TRUST

*Special Projects, Special Places*  
*40 Years Protecting the Ozarks*



*Over the years, OLT has protected hundreds of acres of scenic views adjacent to the 240-mile Katy Trail in Missouri, as highlighted in our Fall 2019 Ozark Holler.*



*Alford Forest is a 4,000 acre resource in Ozark County, Missouri, comprising 3,200 acres donated to OLT and another 800 in conservation easements. OLT also has carbon credits on the portion we own.*



# Working Lands

## Former OLT President values ‘practical conservation’

Growing up in the suburbs of St. Louis, David Watson always dreamed of a farm. He had an outdoorsy family, growing up with plenty of hunting, fishing and camping. His wife lived in a farming community, and though she couldn't wait to get off the farm, they've since settled in the middle—the suburbs in the St. Louis area. Somewhere in that journey, they found that Ozark Land Trust fit well with their beliefs and perspectives on working lands.

Watson joined OLT around 2010, serving about six years on the board, the last year as president. During his time on the board, Watson developed a passion for working lands and “practical conservation.” Some projects included selling carbon credits, which involved a lot of conversation within the board.

“Given the focus on climate change, being environmentally responsible, and being responsible for your carbon footprint and your energy footprint, it feels like carbon credits will continue to be a part of that conversation,” Watson said. “And most of the forest land in Missouri in the country is in private hands. So there's a need there, regardless of our political agenda, if we want to preserve timberlands and forest lands in their current state, those owners must have a revenue source. There needs



*The exquisite hills of Mark Twain National Forest in the areas so adored by David Watson. “I think the Ozarks are just inherently beautiful,” Watson said. “The beauty of the streams and hollows and all the different landscapes and habitats you encounter as you traverse the Ozarks fascinates me.”*

to be an economic return to those owners, to the current generation and to future generations of those owners.”

For Watson, conservation means wise use—not keeping people out but stewarding the land well and finding the balance between preservation and activities.

“I'm passionate about working lands,” Watson said. “Whether it's a working timberland or a row crop operation or a cattle operation, that's where conservation is going to have its biggest impact. Those producers and families need to feed their families, send their kids to school, provide for the health care of loved ones, and do everything we all do. That's got to happen. And so there are really difficult choices to be made. I don't believe it's either/or; I think there is this nexus that we can do really good conservation and still have a working property and still have a business. I firmly believe that, and anything that a sophisticated conservation organization like OLT could do in that working land space, I think would be phenomenal.”

Preservation for perpetuity has power, especially in working lands and practical spaces, and OLT is continuing to move into those spaces.

“Because of the magnitude of the task in front of them, the task that they've accepted of protecting these properties, and the conservation integrity of these properties in perpetuity, no one really knows what lies ahead of us,” Watson said. “And so that the organization is as financially strong and administratively sound, and just the infrastructure of the organization is as resilient as it can be, I think that is task number one. That has to happen. Money is important and resources are important, good people and good admin are important to that endeavor. So that would be my basic first wish.”



**David Watson**



**Scan Here for an Interview with David Watson!**



# Develop Smarter

## Collaboration is Key for Former President Jim Reeves

Deep turquoise blue springs percolate up and through the rocks and trees. A mind-boggling beauty. For Jim Reeves, that's what comes to mind when he thinks of the Ozarks. He thinks of the rivers and he thinks of the turquoise springs.

Reeves' term on the board of Ozark Land Trust recently came to an end after nine years; he served as president for more than three of those years.

Reeves brings his skills as an attorney to the organization and finds pleasure in providing that value to OLT. He recognizes OLT's uniqueness in how it collaborates, both within the organization and through partnerships with other organizations.

One moment Reeves remembers seeing different perspectives and collaboration come together was when they rebranded from Ozark Regional Land Trust to Ozark Land Trust. A motion came up to carry out this new marketing plan, and Reeves could tell it would divide the board, so he suggested tabling the decision and talking offline until the next meeting. Ultimately, when the board reconvened, they passed the motion unanimously.

"It was a difficult decision, especially for those who have been involved in the organization for its entire life," Reeves said.

But after the board had discussions about it, Reeves said that "people understood OLT was growing. It was updating. The name change was meant to bring the organization into the present and prepare for the future."

Part of looking to the future includes recognizing development and seeing how to continue using land while preserving it. Conservation easements on working farms don't interfere with their ability to earn a living and be farmers while protecting the rivers and the streams that go through their property. Those are projects Reeves says he especially loves, seeing not just conservation but "conservation plus." It's conservation plus practices, conservation plus still doing what you need to do on your land. It's conservation that doesn't interfere but enhances.

"Nobody wants to prevent anybody from making money and making a living and running their business," Reeves said. "On the other hand, the land is unique, and once it's gone, it's gone. People move to neighborhoods because there is green space and land to be enjoyed, so we don't want to take that away. The message is that we want to develop smarter and do it in a way that people will be able to enjoy our natural lands for generations."



*Jim Reeves receiving a recognition gift from current president Karen Massey for his board service at OLT's recent Annual Meeting.*

Reeves said that OLT is incredibly fortunate to have people who bring expertise in conservation and not-for-profit management. Those two skills, combined, have helped OLT grow and thrive, and OLT has always brought those two things to the table.

"I think all of our founders of this organization are heroes, and I'm not just saying that," Reeves said. "When I think back, what would have been like 40 years ago? For a group of people to put their heads together and recognize that they needed to form an organization to help landowners conserve their property, to create an organization that could mitigate development. Make development smarter. Make it so that people will still be able

to enjoy the land. The forethought of our founders amazes me. And now, looking back on it over 40 years, what they have created, to me, is just really amazing."



*When Jim thinks of the Ozarks, beautiful sights like the turquoise springs come to mind. "A mind-boggling beauty," he calls it. (Missouri Division of Tourism)*



**Scan Here for an Interview with Jim Reeves!**



# OLT at 40: A Promise for the Future

For every piece of land OLT protects, there is a story—of the natural history of the land, of families who have lived and worked there, of the incredible habitats and species we must conserve if the Ozarks are to remain the beloved place so near and dear to us all.

As we celebrate our first 40 years, OLT's mission is evident in the more than 32,000 acres we currently protect. Our founder Gregg Galbraith and his fellow tireless volunteers made a commitment to bioregionalism, focusing on the permanent protection of Ozark lands and waters as places for us to live, work and play, with natural resources and habitat front and center.

That vision has inspired the growth leading to today's professional staff and board members across the Ozark region, working with landowners and other partners to protect forests, farms, watersheds, prairies, scenic views and more. From the banks of the Missouri River in St. Louis to the majesty of the Boston Mountains in northern Arkansas, the Ozarks are a one-of-a-kind gift that need our perpetual stewardship.

We could not have accomplished any of our work without our essential partners – the landowners who want to ensure that their properties will never be developed, and supporters who provide the resources that allow us to protect more Ozark lands forever.

By the time we get to our 50th year, wouldn't it be something if our protected lands grew to 50,000 acres or more? We think so, too. And a strong Operating Endowment can make that a reality!

This is why we are asking you to consider a ONE-TIME gift in addition to your already generous annual contributions to OLT. This gift, dedicated to the Operating Endowment, will allow us to keep OLT strong and allow us to grow to protect even more lands in the future.

We ask you for your partnership in this special ask so that we can fulfill OLT's promise not only to our existing landowner partners, but to the region we love so very much — the Ozarks.

## Operating Endowment

Our goal is to substantially build our Operating Endowment this year with our Promise for the Future campaign.

While our Stewardship Endowment lets us safeguard the lands we already protect, growing our Operating Endowment will provide the resources to work with our landowner partners to protect even more lands.

It's time to secure our promise not only to be here for decades to come, but to have the ability to add more forests, working lands, natural resources and habitats to the ranks of permanently protected Ozark lands.

The Promise campaign is a major step in realizing this future both for OLT and for the region we serve.

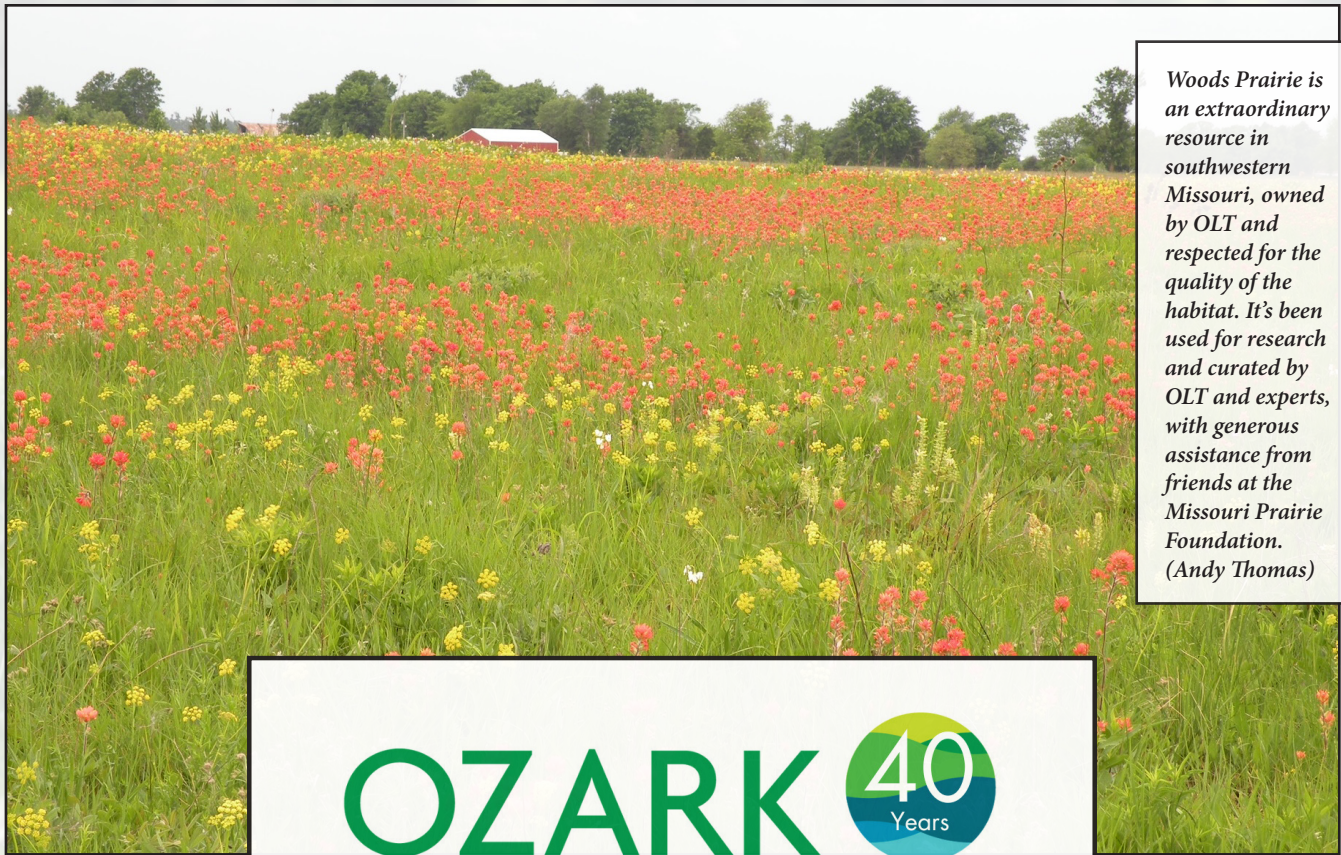
*Gifts of every amount are recognized in the Ozark Holler and our website.*

*Interested in a pledged gift to the Promise campaign over time? Contact our Executive Director Larry Levin at [larry.levin@ozarklandtrust.org](mailto:larry.levin@ozarklandtrust.org).*



***Donate Online or in the envelope provided with the Ozark Holler!***

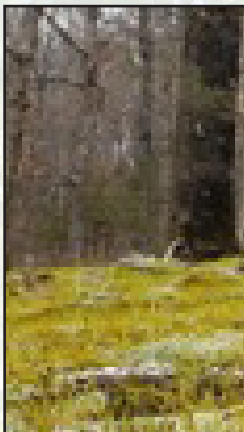




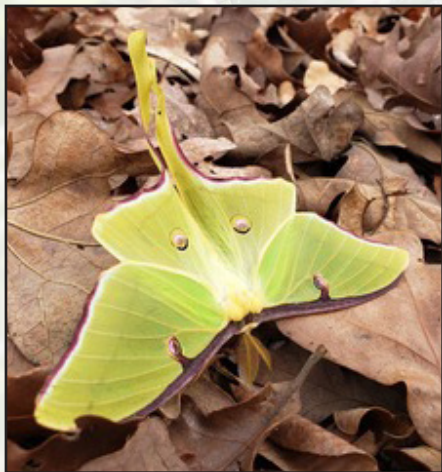
*Woods Prairie is an extraordinary resource in southwestern Missouri, owned by OLT and respected for the quality of the habitat. It's been used for research and curated by OLT and experts, with generous assistance from friends at the Missouri Prairie Foundation. (Andy Thomas)*

# OZARK LAND TRUST

*Special Projects, Special Places*  
*40 Years Protecting the Ozarks*



*OLT protects the beautiful New Pear Farm property in northwest Arkansas, which is home to both extraordinary beauty and houses a working organic chicken farm.*





## Our Director's

# Commitment to the Promise



**Larry Levin**

The '20s have been quite a decade thus far. For you, for me and for Ozark Land Trust.

For all of us, the story of this decade happened only several months in, when we became aware of a virus that ultimately led to a pandemic. Front and center for most people was the health, well-being and, sadly, loss of some of those so very near and dear to us.

March 2020 was only about 10 months into my tenure with OLT. I joined in May 2019 and was getting my feet on the ground, learning from our amazing Board, staff and my great predecessors, Peggy Horner and Ted Heisel.

So, even before a year had passed on the job, in addition to ensuring our own staff's health, I was thinking about recovery and sustainability. How do nonprofits combat such an existential threat? How do we work through it, and how do we emerge from it?

A great deal of support for the nonprofit sector was diverted to those groups combating the adverse impact of COVID: hospitals, health care agencies, job-related concerns and basic economic sustenance.

During that time, our message was this – support who you need to, and if conservation remains front and center as you have other immediate priorities, we would be so appreciative.

Thanks to very loyal and generous contributors and other help, like PPP loans, we remained stable, moved forward with our programs and avoided any layoffs or major changes in our work.

But the message resonated very strongly with the Board and me—what do we do next time? Or the time after that? After all, we are a land trust dedicated to protecting land forever, and the prospect of another such emergency had us (rightly) worried.

So, when we developed our new Strategic Plan in 2021, one of our financial goals was to grow our operating endowment. Not only did we want to ensure permanent stability, but the team recognized that as that endowment grew, it could generate income to build our team and resources to protect new lands across the Ozark region.

That's how the **Promise for the Future** came about – a way to synthesize the celebration of our 40th anniversary year with the essential need to protect and grow resources to have an even more substantial conservation impact in the Ozarks. In essence, to fund our commitment to protecting land in perpetuity.

When I look at what founder Gregg Galbraith, some of his early team members like our current Board member Andy Thomas, and others accomplished with essentially sweat and tears, it is truly incredible. They formed a basis, with only their time, ingenuity and passion, for a **forever organization** that would fulfill the collective dreams of OLT, its landowners and all who appreciate our region's habitat, wildlife,

natural resources and beauty.

Greg and a few other committed conservationists had the foresight to, from an early stage, develop a stewardship endowment so that regardless of the ups and downs of annual campaigns and the economy, OLT would have the wherewithal to be able to steward our lands, both owned and those on which we have conservation easements, as close to forever as possible.

That stewardship endowment is in great shape, and now we seek to **substantially build our unrestricted operating endowment** so that our staff, stability and growth are just as secure as our ability to steward all the lands we protect.

The Community Foundation of the Ozarks has been a magnificent partner in holding and investing both our stewardship and operating endowments, and we thank them for being such a trusted and safe investment vehicle for these funds. We believe the endowment funds you invest with us are in good hands with CFO.

So, as we ask you to consider support beyond our annual campaign this one time, we want you to know that we have proven the ability to withstand major upheaval and have grown our staff to its most substantial level to date, all thanks to you. And with the **Promise for the Future** campaign, we can not only survive but thrive with more resources to protect more resources for decades to come!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Levin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "L".

**Larry Levin,  
Executive Director**



THE OZARK HOLLER  
Published by



**MISSION**

To help people protect and conserve the natural resources and beauty of the Ozarks and to advocate for land conservation.

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*VP, Treasurer*

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Greg Pitchford  
Deanna Ray  
Andrew Thomas

**STAFF**

Larry Levin,  
*Executive Director*

Abigail Lambert, *River Stewardship Manager*

Haley Smith, *Conservation Manager*

Eric Gramlich, *Outreach and Partnership Manager*

Michelle Scherer,  
*Conservation Project Manager*

Taylor Dye, *Conservation Specialist*

Alexis Robles, *Administrative Associate*

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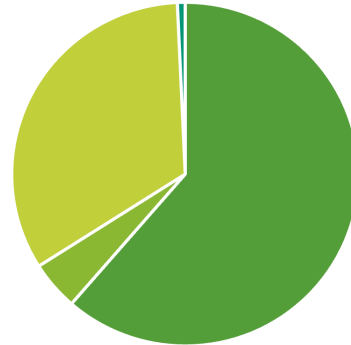
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# 2023 Finances

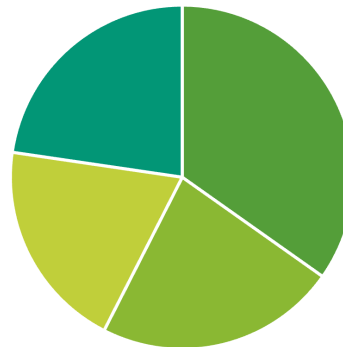
## Income & Expenses for FY23

2023 Total Income: \$650,653.03



■ Foundation Grants ■ Government Grants ■ Individuals ■ Earned

2023 Total Expenses: \$531,897.30



■ Stewardship & Management ■ New Projects ■ Outreach and Education ■ Administration

The above information is unaudited. Revenue does not include investment income or losses from OLT's stewardship and operating endowments. Expenses include costs of transactions. OLT's Federal Form 990 information returns are publicly available and also available upon request from OLT for tax years through 2021.

## Your Gifts to OLT

Whether for annual giving, our Promise campaign or legacy gifts, OLT can work with our generous donors to offer incredible ways we can meet your financial and tax-planning needs.

Contact Larry to start a conversation today.  
[Larry.Levin@OzarkLandTrust.org](mailto:Larry.Levin@OzarkLandTrust.org)

