

This year's Aileen Hughes Award recognizes the many achievements of Greg Bowen.

Greg Bowen served as Executive Director of the American Chestnut Land Trust (ACLT) from September 2015 until his passing in February 2025. A lifelong Calvert County resident, Greg was raised just miles from the land that would later become ACLT and firmly established himself as a committed, visionary advocate for land preservation. Drawing on his background in urban planning and policy management, Greg set out early in his career to make a lasting impact, ultimately serving as the Deputy Director and Director of Calvert County Planning and Zoning for 33 years. He dedicated his career to safeguarding Calvert's working lands and its ecological and cultural assets, advancing initiatives such as the Transferable Development Rights program. Through his work on this program, Greg helped to permanently preserve farmland and open space and contributed to protecting more than 23,000 acres of land – an achievement that shaped the county into what it is today.

As the Executive Director of ACLT, Greg remained deeply committed to the county that shaped him. Under his leadership, ACLT advanced its mission to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Parkers Creek and Governors Run watersheds. Greg oversaw the permanent preservation of several key properties within these watersheds, acquiring 674 acres and increasing ACLT's fee simple lands by 70% during his time as Executive Director. His legacy at ACLT endures through his contributions to land preservation, his success in strengthening countywide partnerships, and his guidance in safeguarding the ecological health of Calvert County's vital landscapes, all of which continue to shape the organization's conservation efforts.

One of Greg's most influential achievements was helping to establish the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance (SMCA) in 2021, in collaboration with the Maryland Environmental Trust. SMCA created a unified regional network of non-profit land trusts, other non-governmental environmental organizations, and governmental agencies across Anne Arundel, Prince George's, Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's counties. Through Greg's leadership and vision over the subsequent 4 years, the alliance has grown to include more than 50 partner and affiliate organizations, forming a strong regional network that continues to advance shared conservation goals.

Greg's leadership at ACLT and in SMCA was central to the successful completion of a major conservation project: the official establishment of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge in 2024. Through his work with SMCA, Greg positioned ACLT as a vital contributor to the Refuge project, ensuring community stakeholders had a meaningful voice in protecting Southern Maryland's most vulnerable lands. As of 2024, the Refuge had protected 31 acres, with an approved acquisition boundary to conserve up to 40,000 acres of forested habitat threatened by development pressures from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. ACLT holds no outstanding financial obligations related to this project.

Although the effort to establish the Refuge began in 2010, ACLT became actively involved in 2021. In 2022, Greg was asked to help lead the public engagement phase of the proposed Refuge's Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment. Drawing on his decades of experience engaging Calvert County stakeholders, Greg guided ACLT to become a key partner in the public engagement process required under the National Environmental Policy Act. Under his leadership, ACLT conducted stakeholder outreach, organized virtual meetings, and directed three public listening sessions across Prince George's, Charles, and Calvert counties, with the Calvert session drawing the largest crowd and overwhelming public support. During this phase of the project, Greg strengthened partnerships, enhanced public understanding, and reinforced ACLT's role as an integral player in regional conservation efforts.

From the beginning, Greg demonstrated exceptional leadership and innovation in building lasting partnerships. Whether he was engaging landowners, working with state and county agencies, helping to form SMCA, or uniting partners to support the Refuge, Greg brought people together around a shared commitment to the land. He lived to see the official establishment of the Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge – a monumental achievement for the region that could ultimately result in up to 40,000 acres of conserved land. This outcome was directly shaped by Greg's vision, strategic guidance, and ability to inspire public support. Through his efforts in land preservation, fostering and sustaining regional partnerships, and engaging the community, Greg ensured the Refuge's successful establishment, exemplifying the outstanding leadership in land conservation that this award seeks to recognize.