

State of Sustainability | 2023

Sustainability and making conscientious choices in both our daily work and in the overall future and running of the institution is a focus for Hillwood. Goal 2 of the strategic plan states, “Preserve Marjorie Post’s important legacy by achieving best practices in the care of the collections, mansion, and campus, with a focus on environmental sustainability, to ensure Hillwood remains current and innovative.”

HEAT, the Hillwood Environmental Action Team, was formed as a multi-department working group to collaborate and enact environmental changes at Hillwood. We are pleased to present the first annual State of Sustainability, featuring achievements and outreach from the preceding year and outlining those for the upcoming one.

Hillwood has made great strides in our environmental stewardship, ensuring the institution remains vital, healthy, innovative, and current, building a sustainable future for our communities and the world around us. We remain committed to protecting and maintaining the health of the environment.

Sustainability Achievements

2023 Paper Usage

At the end of 2022, we set out for 2023 to reduce the paper consumption at Hillwood by 5%, totaling 10,000 sheets. Thanks to the combined efforts of all staff (typing notes, using scrap paper, thinking before printing, moving to digital alternatives, and more), we achieved this goal. We reduced paper use by 14.7%, well exceeding the 5%. It takes all of us working together to make a difference.

	Sheets Purchased
2022	180,000 (360 reams/36 cartons)
2023	145,000 (290 reams/29 cartons)
Savings	35,000

Facilities

In 2023 alone, the recycling program prevented over 200 pounds of ballasts (61.8 pounds), batteries (99.8 pounds), and disposable gloves (41.4 pounds) from ending up in a trash bin. We have also collected the coffee grounds from the break rooms around campus for composting which totals approximately 2,900 pounds of additional material from Merriweather Café and staff break rooms for the compost pile instead of the landfill. Lastly, the facilities team coordinated a scrap metal pick up—an estimated 12,000 pounds—which were collected for recycling. This included old file cabinets, old refrigerators, and all smaller scrap metal.

Horticulture

A large focus this year was woodland stewardship, continuing the clearing of invasive plants from the woodlands. Staff and woodland steward volunteers removed another full acre of English ivy in addition to over 1,000 invasive shrubs and vines. As part of this year’s winning Sustainability Shark Tank project, Hillwood developed a relationship with Earth Sangha Native Plant Nursery, working with them to select 444 local ecotype native shrubs, perennials, grasses, and sedges to plant in Hillwood’s natural lands where the invasive ivy was removed. Additionally, 1,419 native plants, or natives, were added throughout the gardens.

2023 was Hillwood’s “Big Year of Birding.” Early in the year, we formed a group of volunteer birders to document species observed on campus, engaging with and connecting volunteers to nature. As of December 11, 2023, the group has observed 86 species.

The horticulture department held the annual Green Day of Horticulture in February, hosting a three-hour volunteer education program focused on ecological gardening. Keynote speaker Matt Bright, or Earth Sangha Native Plant Nursery, presented a talk titled “A Horticultural Responsibility to Nature.”

Hillwood received recognition in the 2023 State of the Pot report produced by the Healthy Pots Healthy Planet Coalition for reducing single-use plastic consumption in our greenhouse growing facilities. Additionally, the team continued organic management practices in the cutting garden and greenhouses.

In coordination with the facilities team, which collected the coffee for composting, horticulture staff also composted 1,100 pounds from Merriweather Café and staff break rooms. All of Hillwood’s composting saved 1,320 pounds of CO₂-equivalent greenhouse gases.

Hillwood replaced the gas hedge trimmers with an electric version, allowing the department to maintain the 2022 gas savings related to horticulture equipment (90 gals in 2022, 91.5 gallons in 2023).

Lastly, we donated several hundred seedlings and divisions of native plants from the cutting garden to the University of D.C. Bertie Backus Urban Food Hub. The Hub redistributes these native plants to various schools and other organizations in D.C. that have limited resources.

Collections/Curatorial

For the past few years, the collections team has been transitioning all lighting in the mansion to LED bulbs. In 2023, the collections team completed Phase 1 of the Mansion Lighting Assessment project, replacing all exposed lighting (ceiling fixtures, recessed lighting) with LED equivalents. Work continued on Phase 2 as the team retrofitted display cases with LED equivalents and new lighting systems. Phase 2 will continue in 2024 as the team assesses other lighting systems, including painting lights and special gallery projects.

	# of Bulbs	% of Mansion Lighting
Prior to 2022	158	18%
Phase 1: Exposed Lighting (2022 and January 2023)	709	79%
Phase 2: Special Projects (2023 and January 2024)	12 (6 freestanding display cases)	
Phase 2: Special Projects	18 (3 freestanding cases remaining; other locations on the schedule include work in the second floor gallery and painting lighting)	
Total	897	

In looking for new ways to be more sustainable and reduce waste, the curatorial team recycled fabric scraps through a company called For Days. They also were able to recycle old petticoats and mannequin arm sleeves via H&M stores. Lastly, rather than fabricating all new cases for the exhibition *Glass: Art. Beauty. Design.*, the team reused existing cases and ensured any new cases could be reused for future exhibitions.

HEAT

In 2023, HEAT hosted the second Sustainability Shark Tank contest, in which colleagues were invited to submit a proposal for a sustainable change or project at Hillwood that supported environmental protection, energy savings, carbon reduction, water conservation or other unique sustainability-related topics and could win \$1,000 toward completing it. Last year’s winner was Drew Asbury with the submission of native plants to replace the invasive species removed.

HEAT welcomed Kathy Asegaf, the global sustainability leader of Deloitte, to speak about company sustainability and how organizations can look at their resources and strengths to support sustainability efforts. This sparked good conversations with HEAT about new processes and initiatives we can institute at Hillwood moving forward.

Other

Hillwood hosted a wastepaper shredding and recycling event (rather than traditional paper shredding which goes in a landfill), which saved 29 trees.

Additionally, as a means of continuing to highlight Hillwood's commitment to sustainability, this was added to the description of Hillwood's culture on the Careers and Volunteering page of the website, ensuring all potential applicants are made aware.

A large initiative completed in 2023 was the Porous Pave installation throughout the gardens, replacing the existing asphalt pathways at the Friendship Walk and those surrounding the rose garden and putting green with a permeable paving material. Made out of recycled rubber and stone, Porous Pave helps to reduce stormwater runoff.

In another sustainable-replacement project, the old floors in the horticulture building were replaced with an LEED-certified option made out of 80% recycled material.

Lastly, Hillwood continued the annual electronic recycling program, enabling Hillwood staff to bring in old electronics and tech products from home to be disposed of in a safe and sustainable way.

Sustainability Outreach

In addition to making physical changes at Hillwood, HEAT has also focused on sustainability outreach, sharing information and collaborating with likeminded organizations.

- Earth Day event
 - HEAT hosted a program to celebrate Earth Day, setting up six stations, hosting a native plant giveaway, leading tours of the CRC native garden, and getting participation from the museum shop and Merriweather Café.
- Volunteering with Rock Creek Conservancy
 - The horticulture team collaborated with Rock Creek Park Conservancy on two invasive plant removal events—one at the mini-oasis at Reservation 360 West (near the intersection of Tilden Street and Reno Road) and one at Picnic Grove #2 (near the intersection of Beech Drive and Broad Branch Road).
- Sustainability Tour for DC Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners
- Tours of Hillwood's native garden for volunteers and other groups
- Meeting with the Program Analyst for the D.C. Department of Public Works
 - Staff discussed Hillwood and D.C.'s goal to reduce landfill-bound waste by 80%
- Public workshops
 - The horticulture and interpretation departments presented sustainability-related public workshops as part of 2023's program offerings. These included container gardening with native plants and a virtual floral design workshop focused on sustainable floristry.
- Garden club lectures
 - Members of the horticulture team gave eight lectures to garden clubs, which included a focus on sustainable gardening practices.

2024 Goal and Initiatives

Looking ahead, HEAT has gathered information from across campus to develop an institutional goal and share upcoming department initiatives.

Campus-wide Plastic Usage Goal

Plastic pollution has become a worldwide concern. It is estimated that the equivalent of 2,000 garbage trucks full of plastic are dumped into the world's oceans, waters, rivers, and lakes every day, and nanoparticles are in the soil, food chain, and in our bloodstreams. This is an important topic this year for the Earth Day Organization and the United Nations. HEAT will be tackling this reduction goal in a two-part approach.

- HEAT will employ a signature campaign for Hillwood staff, volunteers, and stakeholders as a way to pledge our commitment to plastic use reduction in our daily lives, encouraging our community to sign as an indication of their dedication and willingness to participate.
- Each Hillwood department will be asked to assess and measure their own plastic usage, in order to make simpler reductions in 2024 and plan for more complex cutbacks in 2025.

HEAT and other department initiatives:

- Host the 4th annual Earth Day celebration on April 19 from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.
- Replace a diesel horticulture tractor with an electric UTV
- Restore four areas identified in the formal gardens, removing monocultural groundcovers and replanting with a more diverse plant palette
- Continue to remove invasive plants in the woodlands
- Continue the existing recycling and compost programs
- Install an erosion mat and plants to address erosion along the access road near the Adirondack building and the dacha
- Utilize the same exhibition layout as *Glass: Art. Beauty. Design.* for the upcoming *Fragile Beauty: Art of the Ocean* to minimize construction inputs and waste
- Continue to work with our consultant on a new compost facility design

—Hillwood Environmental Action Team, February 2024