

## State of Sustainability | 2024

Each year HEAT, the Hillwood Environmental Action Team, reflects on the previous year and sets a goal for the year ahead. In 2024, the working group had numerous successes, including reducing plastic use across campus, installing EV charging stations, completing a waste audit, removing invasive plants and planting natives, doing a number of outreach programs, to name a few. Hillwood has greatly improved its environmental impact, though as we continue to discover, there are still many steps we can take to ensure we are operating in the most sustainable way. Looking forward to 2025, HEAT has set a goal to reduce waste campus-wide, creating a three-pronged approach which will lead to an improved waste diversion rate. In addition to this overarching theme for the year, the group will continue existing tasks, including managing the existing recycling program, increasing composting, planning the annual Earth Day event, decreasing plastic and fossil fuel use, and more.

### The State of Sustainability

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

#### 2024 Plastic Reduction Goal

At the end of 2023, we set a campus-wide goal of reducing plastic use, a two-pronged goal encouraging people to do so both at Hillwood and in their personal lives. HEAT created a plastic reduction pledge for staff and volunteers, which 72 people signed.

Organizationally, Hillwood also instituted the following changes, aiding in plastic reduction:

- Merriweather Café shifted from plastic to compostable products for food packaging in the to-go window
- Hillwood became an institutional member of [Healthy Pots, Healthy Planet](#), whose mission is "to reduce the use of petroleum-based plastic plant containers by advocating for and promoting sustainable alternatives"
- The horticulture department committed to no new plastics for use in the production greenhouse
- Staff utilized reusable catering products (ceramic plates, bowls, mugs, glasses, and silverware) for all horticulture volunteer programs and staff events, replacing disposable, single-use plastic products.

Additionally, the focus on plastic waste spurred Hillwood to conduct an organization-wide waste audit, which provided a holistic look at our waste and recycling, enabling us to create goals and have a better sense of what we need to do moving forward. Please find more information on the waste audit below.

#### Facilities

In 2024 alone, the recycling program prevented 154.4 pounds of disposable gloves (88.2 pounds), batteries (45 pounds), corks (14.6 pounds), and stationery items (6.6 pounds) from ending up in a landfill. Staff have also collected the coffee grounds from the break rooms around campus for

composting which totals approximately 1,900 pounds of additional material from for the compost pile instead of the landfill. Lastly, the facilities team coordinated a scrap metal pick up—about 600 pounds—which were collected for recycling.

The team modified the trash enclosure, enabling the use of a larger dumpster (an 8-yard size), which minimizes the number of trash pickups needed each week. Hillwood is down to two pickups per weeks, only scheduling additional ones as needed. Additionally, the team facilitated 3,300 gallons of water savings, a mix of rainwater and free city water while work on the D.C. watermain took place. In other resource management news, Hillwood used 18,270 CCF of natural gas in 2024 than in 2023. The facilities team worked on adjusting temperature set points throughout campus where possible, encouraging heating and cooling savings and using 31,969 KWH less electricity than the previous year.

This fall, the facilities department installed electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in two spaces on the upper parking deck, available for visitors, staff, and volunteers. Initially, Hillwood has installed a single charging station with two level 2 chargers, located in the first and second spaces of the parking deck near the greenhouse. To accommodate potential future demand, lines were buried to facilitate the addition of more chargers, if needed. These chargers are Combined Charging System (CCS) chargers, which are compatible with a wide range of EVs and are compatible with Tesla EVs with an adapter.

### **Waste Audit**

As mentioned above, the plastic reduction goal spurred Hillwood to conduct a comprehensive waste stream audit with [Great Forest Complete Waste Solutions](#), analyzing the waste stream to ensure all handling and removal processes were compliant with regulations, verify that buildings are performing within the established waste management policy, and understand the waste profile and identify opportunities for improvement. The team collected trash and recycling throughout campus, measuring and analyzing the contents. This was specifically conducted at the end of October, during a high-visitation time, to provide the best look at Hillwood's overall waste.

The resulting report, which was quite thorough in its observations, will result in actionable goals, including the following:

- Create comprehensive signage and institute trainings for staff to ensure everyone understands the recycling protocol, including what materials are accepted and which are not
- Install large-scale signage for visitors near trash and recycling receptacles to improve diversion rates and better manage materials as a resource
- Provide lids for cardboard bins to keep the integrity intact and ensure they can be recycled more times as a higher-value grade of paper
- Establish a system with Constellation Culinary Group to recover and donate high-quality, edible food to reduce food waste

Great Forest provided the current diversion rate (29.7%) as well as the potential diversion rate (64.8%), should additional systems be implemented, and Hillwood has great potential to make an impact and reduce waste by correctly recycling and composting more.

### **Horticulture**

Following last year's great success, the focus on woodland stewardship continued with 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. The horticulture team installed 698 native local eco-type groundcovers, perennials, shrubs, and trees from Earth Sangha Native Plant Nursery in the woods along and below the vista lawn, continuing a partnership established in 2023. Additionally, 300 feet of erosion control netting and 1,560 native plants were installed along the service road below the Adirondack building and dacha. Lastly, in April, staff performed a full sweep of all twelve acres of woodlands to remove garlic mustard.

Relatedly, staff removed invasive groundcovers and several large invasive shrubs in five garden areas throughout the grounds. These were replaced with a more diverse planting, and 2,945 U.S. native or nativars were added to the grounds.

2024 was Hillwood's second "Big Year of Birding." As of the end of the year, 100 species of birds have been observed at Hillwood and recorded onto [eBird](#), since the birding program began in February 2023. Several Hillwood birders participated in the Annual Audubon Christmas bird count and used Hillwood as an observation site.

The horticulture department held the annual Green Day of Horticulture in February, hosting a three-hour volunteer education program focused on ecological gardening. Presentations included a recap of Hillwood's first year of birding, rethinking what is considered a weed, and designing for seasonal interest using native plants.

Following last year's recognition by the Healthy Pots Healthy Planet coalition, staff continued reducing the amount of new plastic pots used in the production greenhouse, and the greenhouse grower and volunteers increased efforts to wash and sanitize old plastic pots for reuse. A total of 10,606 pots have been washed and reused in 2024.

In coordination with the facilities team, which collected the coffee for composting, horticulture staff also composted 1,119 pounds of food scraps from Merriweather Café and staff break rooms. Additionally, staff composted 1,119 pounds of food scraps from Merriweather Café and 260 pounds of coffee and food from the horticulture break room. All of this totaled 3,329 pounds of food waste diversion, 1/3 of which was fed to the horticulture worms and used for compost tea and 2/3 of which was combined with garden waste compost.

### **Collections/Curatorial**

For the past few years, the collections team has been transitioning all lighting in the mansion to LED bulbs. Almost all lightbulbs in the mansion have now been switched to LED and all casework lighting has been replaced with LED alternatives.

In looking for new ways to be more sustainable and reduce waste, the collections department was able to increase their recycling footprint, contributing over 25 paint cans to Sherwin-Williams, over 50 lightbulbs to Lowe's, and over 50 pieces of plexiglass to Precision Plastics. Additionally, Crossline Creations, a contractor, repurposed old plexiglass from previous exhibitions for new displays and reused existing cases for a permanent display in the mansion. Three exhibition cases were also donated to other museums.

In conjunction with the sustainability message of the special exhibition *Fragile Beauty: Art of the Ocean*, collections staff made a consistent effort to lessen production and waste. They reused several existing object cases and kept the existing exhibition floor plan for the third year in a row, eliminating construction and material use. Labels for this exhibition were also 100% recyclable and biodegradable and made of 50% pre-consumer recycled material.

### **HEAT**

In 2024, HEAT hosted the third 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 winners were Jermaine Wilson and Emelsi Fuentes with the submission of adding rainwater collection barrels to buildings throughout campus to cut back on irrigation water use.

HEAT hosted its annual Earth Day program setting up six staff-led stations, which included information on recycling and recyclable materials, composting, the refrigeration cycle, and plastic-free crafts, culminating in a native plant giveaway for those who visited each table. 157 passports, used to track the plant giveaway and station visits, were distributed. Staff led tours on sustainable gardening techniques in the cutting garden and highlighted the native garden. Lastly, Merriweather Café offered two vegan specials, selling out of these, and gave out 60 cups of coffee to those who brought their own reusable mug.

The group also spent time lobbying for project funding for 2025, brainstorming ways Hillwood could operate more sustainably and looking to the future.

### **Other**

The sustainability message pervaded 2024 exhibitions and displays, notably in [Fragile Beauty: Art of the Ocean](#) and in [Holidays at Hillwood | 'Tis the Sea-son](#). *Fragile Beauty* explored the oceanic art in Hillwood's collection and in the contemporary art world while raising the need for conservation to preserve these waters. The exhibition included a panel about ocean pollution and plastic waste and a highlight of HEAT. *'Tis the Sea-son*, this year's holiday display, was inspired by the exhibition and

carried through the sustainability focus. 85% of the decorations were reused from previous years, and the visitor center tree featured stars handmade by staff from over 300 recycled aluminum cans.

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. A total of 1,297 pounds of e-waste was picked up from Hillwood for recycling in 2024.

## **Sustainability Outreach**

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

- Volunteering with Rock Creek Conservancy
  - The horticulture team collaborated with Rock Creek Park Conservancy on two invasive plant removal events. In September, staff and volunteers assisted with removal in the woodland behind Politics & Prose bookstore on Connective Ave. In October, they joined Rock Creek volunteers in Rock Creek Park, just outside of Hillwood's property line.
- Public Programs--The horticulture and interpretation departments presented sustainability-related public workshops as part of 2024's program offerings. These included:
  - Container gardening with native plants (serving 25 guests in two sessions)
  - Forest bathing walks (serving 278 participants in 24 sessions)
  - Gardener's focus tour of the native garden, featuring a bio-retention pond (serving 25 guests in four sessions).
- Garden Docent Training
  - Sustainability became a key part of the 2024 garden docent training curriculum, sharing the State of Sustainability, a pre-recorded video, and the sustainability page on Hillwood's website.
- Outside Programs
  - Members of the horticulture team gave nine lectures to garden clubs, which included a focus on sustainable gardening practices. (Attendance: 540)
  - Drew Asbury presented at [American Public Garden Association](#)'s annual conference about the Healthy Pots Healthy Planet signature campaign, of which Hillwood is a part, leading to about a dozen other gardens and individuals signing on
  - Jessica Bonilla, director of horticulture, presented to the All Hallows Guild on Hillwood's sustainability initiatives (Attendance: 100)

## **2025 Goal and Initiatives**

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

### **Campus-wide Waste Reduction Goal**

Following the waste audit this past fall, HEAT has decided to focus on reducing waste campus-wide. With a current waste diversion rate of 29.7%, we aim to increase this to at least 40%, improving by ~10%, which will be calculated during a follow-up waste audit next fall. There are many actionable ways we can reach this goal, including:

- Staff Training
  - Educating staff about Hillwood's recycling and how to improve waste habits will ensure everyone is up to date on correct protocols and better facilitate campus-wide participation. This will include how to reduce waste, how to properly recycle, and how to prevent recycling contamination.
- Back-of-House Signage
  - Refreshing signage related to waste and recycling and posting them throughout campus will assist in keeping this goal top of mind. Higher visibility of proper disposal methods will remind staff of how they can proceed and hopefully encourage additional thoughts on how to be more sustainable. This can also serve as a trial run for introducing more forward-facing

signage for visitors.

- Revisiting food waste from Merriweather Café  
Food waste management is an area in which we can improve. We plan to look into making pre-consumer food collection easier for composting, rather than direct disposal. Additionally, we will contact similar sites to see how they manage this issue.

**HEAT and other department initiatives:**

- Host the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Earth Day celebration on April 18 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Transition to peat-free potting soil
- Create a new compost facility to continue and grow Hillwood's composting program, particularly following the waste audit
- Replace a diesel horticulture tractor with an electric UTV
- Continue to remove invasive plants in the woodlands and gardens
- Continue the existing recycling program
- Increase use of clay pots with the orchid collection to further reduce the need for plastic pots
- Replace an area of poor grass with low-mow lawn

—Hillwood Environmental Action Team, February 2025