

## State of Sustainability | 2025

Each year HEAT, the Hillwood Environmental Action Team, reflects on the previous year and sets a goal for the year ahead. In 2025, the working group had numerous successes, including constructing a new compost facility, installing signage across campus to aid in waste reduction and recycling, removing invasive plants and planting natives, and providing 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 2026, HEAT has decided to carry over the previous goal of reducing 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 conscious 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 2021-2025 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.”

Hillwood’s current strategic plan, for 2026-2030, includes an entire goal dedicated to environmental sustainability, as Goal 3 states: “Advance sustainable practices that inspire, educate, and contribute to the reversal of nature decline.”

HEAT was formed as a multi-departmental working group to collaborate and enact environmental changes at Hillwood. We are pleased to present the 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

#### Facilities

In 2025 alone, the recycling program prevented 104 pounds of disposable gloves, 151.4 pounds of batteries, and 158 fluorescent light bulbs from ending up in a landfill. Staff also collected coffee grounds and food scraps from around campus for composting. Lastly, the facilities team coordinated a scrap metal pick up—about 800 pounds—which were collected for recycling.

#### Horticulture

Following the great success of the past two years, 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 around the woodland trail and behind the compost facility, in addition to going back over previous areas to make sure they stay ivy free.

Relatedly, staff removed invasive plants in specific garden areas, including the Japanese-style garden, behind the Butler’s House, and along the red paths near the French parterre and Friendship Walk. To replace these with a more diverse planting, 2,111 native plants were added to the gardens. The English ivy around the sphinx statues outside of the French parterre was also removed and replaced with native barren strawberry (*Waldsteinia fragarioides*).

To continue reducing horticulture’s fossil fuel consumption, the team added more battery-operated equipment, including two push mowers. While the equipment was incorporated mid-year and therefore does not reflect full savings, some of the gas reduction numbers are as follows:

Typical Gas Use Average	2025	Reduction
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90 gallons	68.2 gallons	24%
<b>2024 Diesel Use</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>Reduction</b>
133.7 gallons	112 gallons	16%

The horticulture department held the annual Green Day of Horticulture in February, hosting a volunteer education program focused on ecological gardening. Presentation topics included native shrubs, the native orchid, erosion control, and water use at Hillwood.

In coordination with the facilities team, which collected coffee and food scraps for composting, horticulture staff composted an estimated 6,820 pounds of food waste diversion. Two thirds of this came from Merriweather Café and the remaining third came from campus break rooms. The resulting compost is fed to horticulture worms and used for compost tea, with some being combined with garden waste compost.

All of this collected compost made its way to Hillwood’s new compost facility, a major project undertaken by the horticulture department. After years of simply utilizing a compost heap, the team worked with Llugo Construction to create a formal structure, which was needed to keep the material contained and to correct drainage issues. The facility provides the ability to aerate the compost, raising its internal temperature and killing off weed seeds and disease.

Finally, staff transitioned to using peat-free potting soil, which aids in preserving peatlands vital for the environment; switched all lighting in the greenhouse to LED bulbs; and added recycling signage to all recycling bins across campus to assist staff with correct disposal of materials.

**Collections/Curatorial**

In looking for new ways to be more sustainable and reduce waste, the collections department was able to increase their recycling footprint, contributing plexiglass, paint, fabric, and other exhibition items for recycling.

The team continued to explore additional ways to ensure sustainability remains a priority when planning and fabricating exhibitions and will continue to do so in 2026. Part of this initiative is reusing cases rather than re-building new ones for displays and exhibitions. This year, the following cases were able to be repurposed:

- One case each in the staff dining room refresh and in the second mansion rotation
- Four free-standing cases and four built-in cases for *On Time: Giving Form to the Fleeting*
- In planning for 2026, the team has planned to reuse about six cases from previous exhibitions for *Interwoven: A Tradition of Textiles*. In addition, existing walls and two built-in galleries in the Adirondack building will remain the same, avoiding new construction and material waste. Many of the reused cases are designed for future use as we continue to display textiles.

Finally, Gianna Schulp, the fall 2025 project management intern, compiled a robust directory of organizations able to receive unneeded cases. In 2026, the team will donate cases that have remained in storage for over two years. Moving forward, they will continue to inventory cases that no longer serve display needs to see if they can be donated.

**HEAT**

HEAT hosted its annual Earth Day program setting up six staff-led stations, which included information on composting, birding, clean energy, and crafting with recycled materials, culminating in a native plant giveaway for those who visited each table. Passports made of seed paper were distributed and used to track the plant giveaway and station visits. 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 cups of coffee to those who brought their own reusable mug.

The group also spent time lobbying for project funding and planning for 2026, especially with the creation of a new 2026-2030 strategic plan with an entire goal dedicated to sustainability, brainstorming ways Hillwood could operate more sustainably and looking to the future.

### **People and Culture**

As part of Hillwood's commitment to sustainability, the people and culture department successfully completed the transition to fully electronic personnel files and digital onboarding processes. Key accomplishments include:

- All paper personnel files were digitized and securely stored in ADP
- New hire onboarding was streamlined through ADP's electronic platform, allowing employees to complete paperwork prior to their first day
- Benefit enrollment and guides were fully digitized, replacing paper folders with accessible online resources

These improvements support sustainability goals while enhancing the employee experience. New team members can now focus their first day on meaningful connections with colleagues and orientation to Hillwood's mission, rather than administrative paperwork. In addition, new hires now receive a digital benefits package, demonstrating how we are maintaining comprehensive information delivery while eliminating paper waste.

### **Interpretation**

This year, the interpretation team continued the ongoing practice of using digital programs for all performances at Hillwood, saving hundreds of sheets of paper, which would have been thrown away after a single use. These digital programs, accessible via QR code, will continue in 2026 and beyond, preventing future paper waste.

As part of student, Girl Scout, and festival-style programs, the department uses table covers to protect surfaces from art supplies. Previously, these have been made of plastic, and while reused as much as possible, they are not long lasting. Beginning in 2026, as the current supply runs out, the team will switch to 100% compostable table covers, aligning with sustainability goals at Hillwood while continuing to host creative activities for all ages.

### **Merriweather Café**

In 2025, Merriweather Café continued using only compostable packaging and utensils from Merriweather To Go, the express window, ensuring that while the nature of this food service necessitates disposable packaging, it is as sustainable as possible.

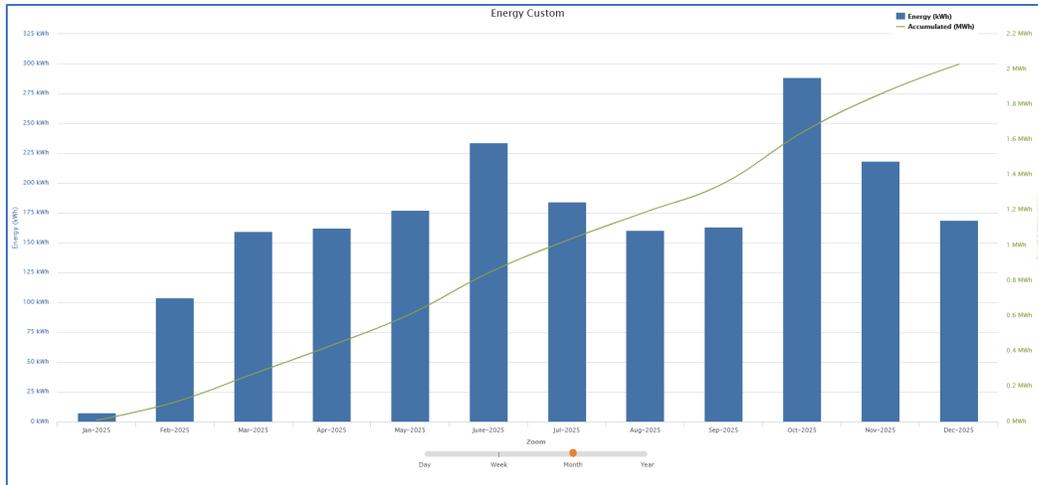
Looking ahead, the Café's goal for 2026 is to develop a better count of what is being wasted and composted. To that end, Constellation Culinary, Hillwood's catering partner, has invested in [Leanpath](#), a food waste prevention program. A scale, which will keep track of disposed food, has been installed and is ready to use for the upcoming year.

### **Finance**

The finance department made a major contribution to Hillwood's sustainability by launching a digital purchase order system this year. While staff would previously print invoices and submit them with paper forms in order to process payment, the process is now entirely digital, preventing additional paper use. Given the amount of purchases made campus-wide, this will greatly reduce the amount of paper used.

### **Other**

As part of our commitment to sustainability, Hillwood activated a ChargePoint EV charging station on the visitor center parking deck at the end of 2024. Over the course of 2025, we had over 200 charging sessions accounting for over 2.19MWh. The station had consistent usage throughout the year when Hillwood was open to the public, with spikes in June and October.



We are thrilled to offer this amenity to our staff, volunteers, and visitors, while encouraging sustainable transportation options.

Lastly, Hillwood also 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 1,039 pounds of e-waste was picked up from Hillwood for recycling in 2025.

### 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 an invasive plant removal event. In November, staff and volunteers assisted with removal on Tilden Street and along Reno Road.
- Public Programs--The horticulture and interpretation departments presented sustainability-related public workshops as part of 2025's program offerings. These included:
  - Container gardening with native plants
  - Forest bathing walks
  - Bird walks
  - Gardener's focus tours of the native garden, featuring a bio-retention pond, and the cutting garden
- Outside Programs
  - Members of the horticulture team gave four lectures to garden clubs, which included a focus on sustainable gardening practices. (Attendance: 136)
  - The horticulture team hosted the British Embassy's Energy, Climate, and Environmental Policy Team, after Hillwood was recommended as a good place to meet and share our sustainability initiatives.

### 2026 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 in the fall of 2024, HEAT decided to focus on reducing waste campus-wide. Due to some difficulties in 2025, this goal has been pushed to 2026. 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 in the fall. There are many actionable ways we plan to 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 encourage focus 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 investigate 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 6<sup>th</sup> annual Earth Day celebration on April 17<sup>th</sup> from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Continue to remove invasive plants in specific garden areas
- Continue woodland stewardship
- Host the 2026 Green Day of Horticulture
- Introduce a film recycling initiative, recycling packing material and ice melt bags from throughout campus
- Create a rain garden at the new compost facility to filter out nutrients from the stormwater to be mindful of impact to Rock Creek Park
- Replace diesel horticulture tractors with an additional electric UTV
- Incorporate new trash receptacles in visitor areas to improve waste management
- Transition to composting sticks on site, rather than sending them out for composting

—Hillwood Environmental Action Team, February 2026