The Center for Humans and Nature family grieves the loss of one of our leading board members, Vivian Donnelley, who died on October 4, 2018. Vivian embodied many of the ideals the Center was founded to promote. Her presence on the Center’s board was grounding. She was an educator, with a lifelong dedication to learning and a gift for listening. As such, she spoke sparingly and, when she did, her expressions brought wisdom and integrity to the issues at hand. Both she and her late husband Strachan were united in a vision for our world, in which humans live with humility and curiosity, attuned to relationships that connect us with the greater community of life. We feel, keenly, the loss of her quiet elegance and strong spirit, even as we seek comfort in one of her and Strachan’s living legacies, the Center’s community of thinkers.

Vivian also served on the boards of the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, the Dalton School, The Land Institute, the American Museum of Natural History, and Green Chimneys. She was a member of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies’ Leadership Council, and she was an honorary member of the Yale class of ’64.

Vivian’s work as a thinker, teacher, and leader will continue to guide our work; we are equally inspired by her work as a mother and grandmother. As noted by Center Senior Fellow Bruce Jennings, “Vivian was the most important person in the world to one of my best friends, Strachan Donnelley, and thus she was someone whose friendship also graced my life—a gift I will always remember and cherish. One thing in particular, to me, stands out. Vivian was by far the wisest person I have known in the art of parenting. She gave me the vision of a parent and grandparent at its best. I must seek such moments elsewhere now. They shall be hard to find.” The guiding wisdom of a matriarch is ever more important at this time. While Vivian was matriarch of her family, she also brought her role as a female elder to organizations and other communities. Vivian expanded the meaning and potential of this role at a time when women leaders are needed more than ever. She will be deeply missed.

—Brooke Hecht