

# Understanding Basic Sliders by Looking Under the Hood

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Presented to the Silver Spring Camera Club in the Photo Forum.

## Introduction

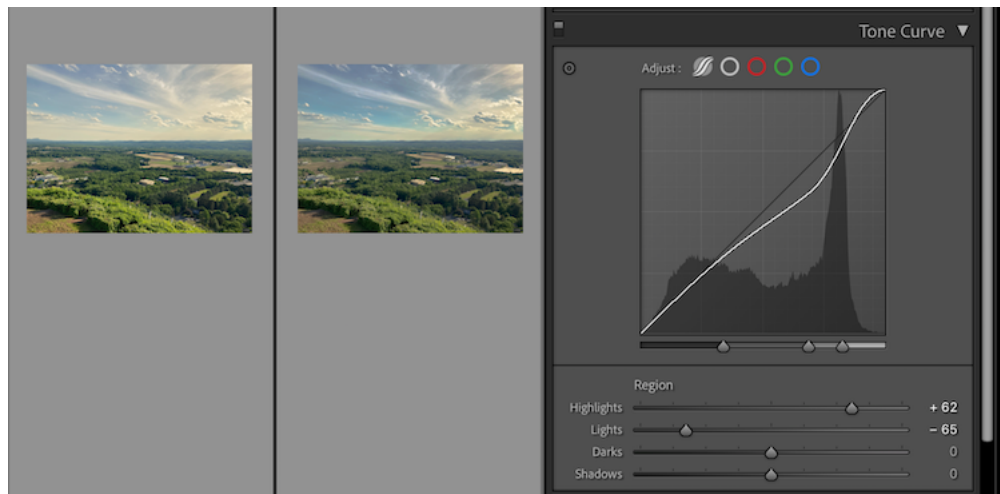
Sliders are Lightroom magic. Before there were sliders, tones and colors were adjusted with tone curves. The big benefit I see with the Tone Curve module is that it helps to explain what the contrast/highlights/lights/darks/shadows sliders are doing under the hood. Therefore, it is worth playing with even if you will use sliders 99% of the time. With curves, you can work with finer control than sliders provide.

For this set of examples, I used a landscape picture with a partially cloudy sky with trees and fields in the middle ground.

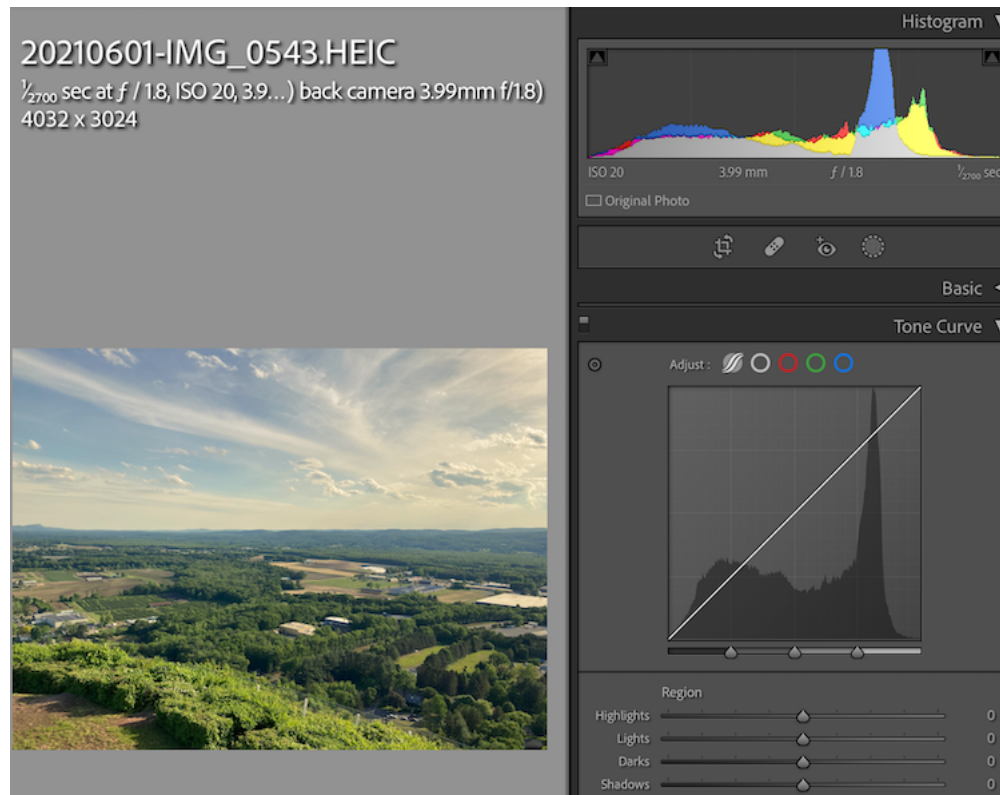


*Figure 1 Mt Tom, Connecticut River Valley. Exported to 20210601-IMG\_0543.HEIC to jpg*

# Before and After



# Original Photo



Note: Clear each previous example by right-clicking on the graph and selecting “Reset All Channels”.

Note: Press “\” to see before and after.

Curves should be used with a light hand. I am exaggerating their use so you can see the curvature in the graph. For most examples, I am concentrating on the sky region.

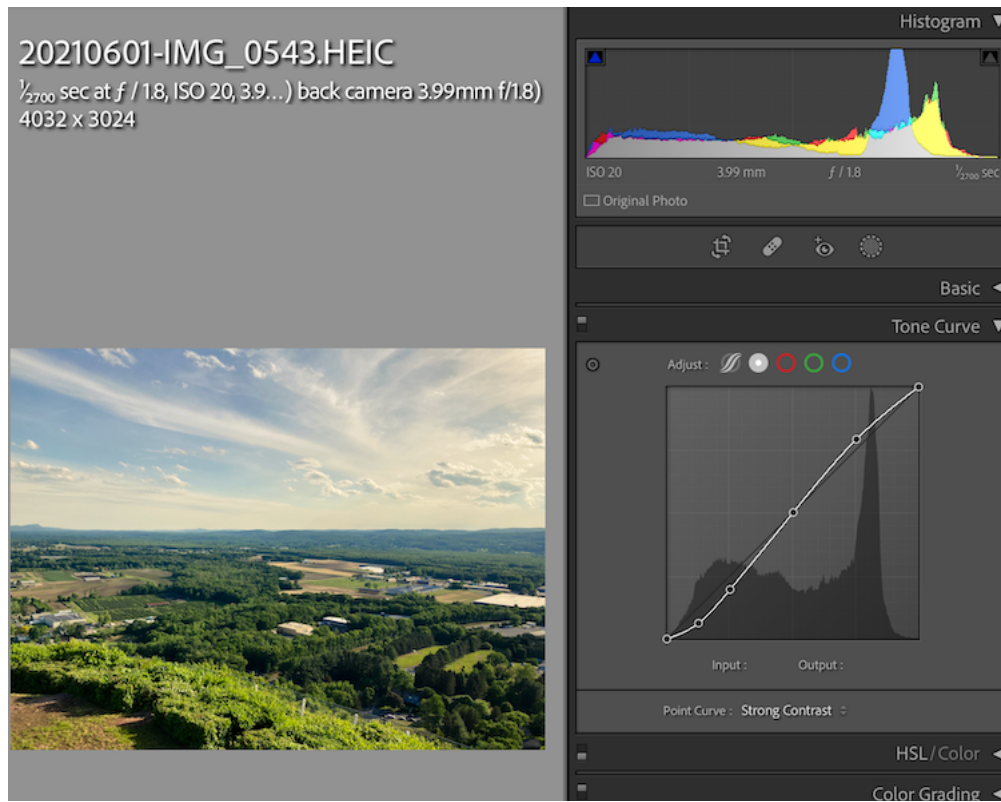


## Point Curve Adjustment option

Select **More Contrast**

You get a classic S shape in place of the straight line along the diagonal.

**More Contrast** has the same effect as the contrast slider.

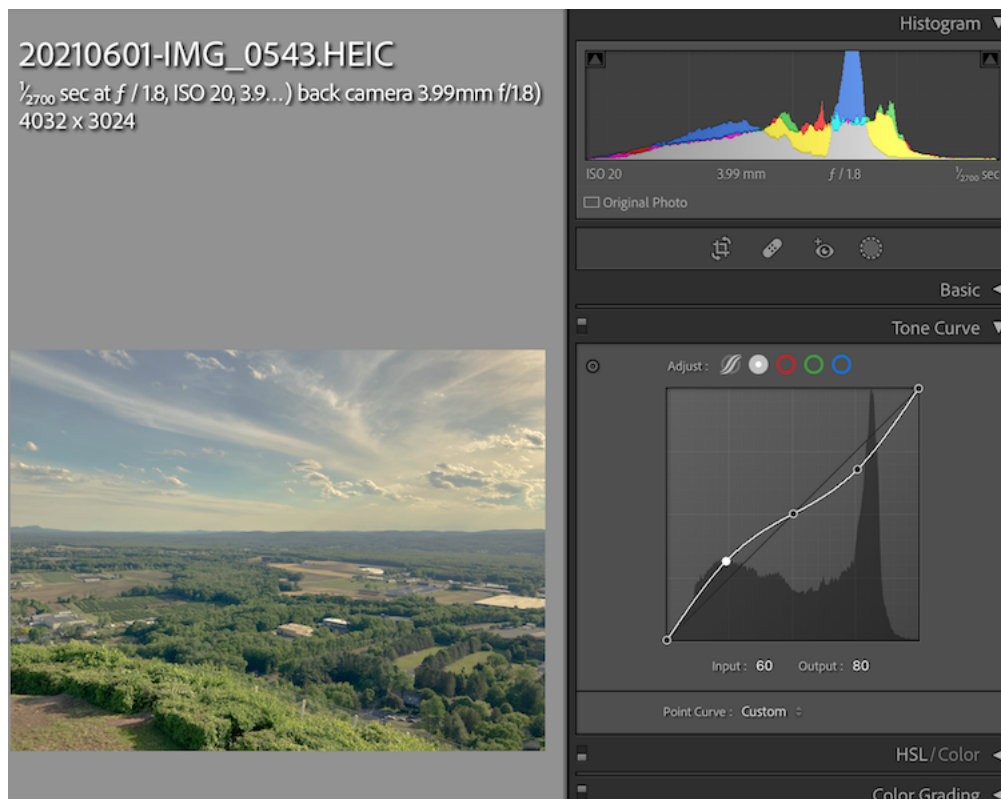




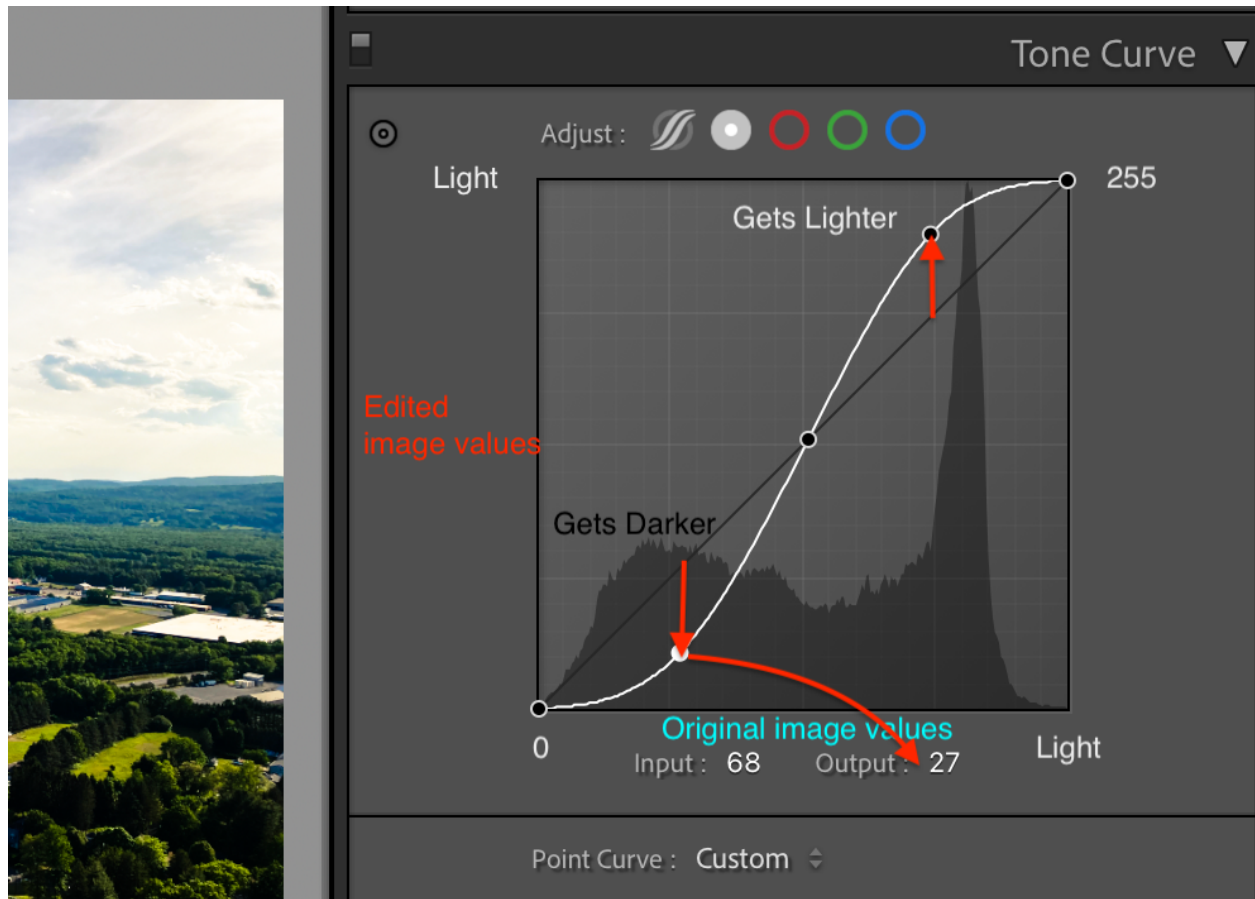
## Point Curve Adjustment option

Instead of selecting the contrast at the bottom, you can adjust the curve to just about anything as long as it makes a smooth wiggly curve. Click to make points. Adjust the points.

Note: Less contrast: Flipped S shape



**What's going on:**



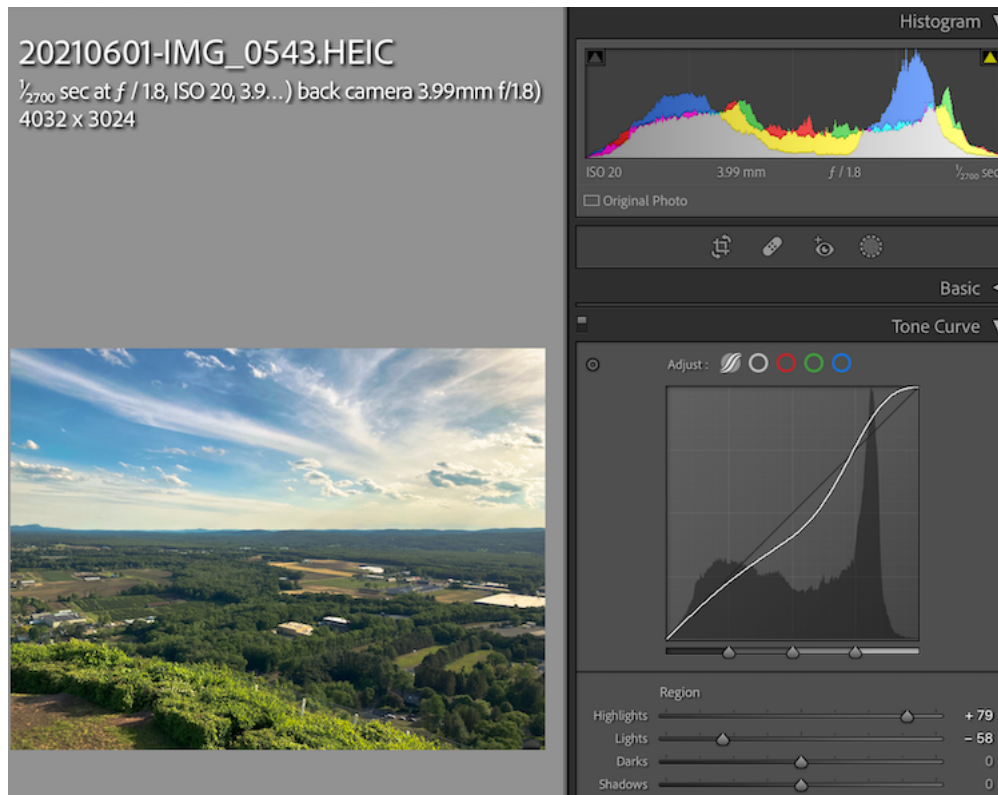


## Parametric Curve Adjustment option

This is the gateway to four more sliders.

Example: Increase the sky contrast by the use of sliders.

Note: S shape has moved towards the upper right-hand corner.

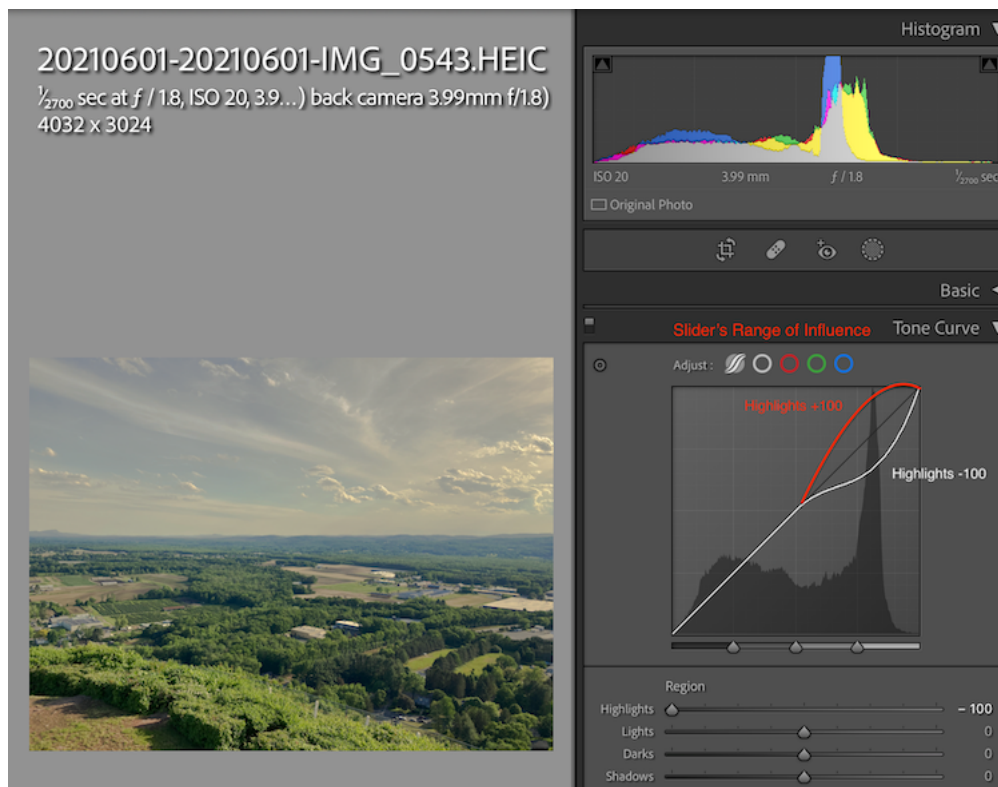






## Parametric Curve Adjustment option

What's going on: Each slider has a tapered area in the graph over which it can operate.



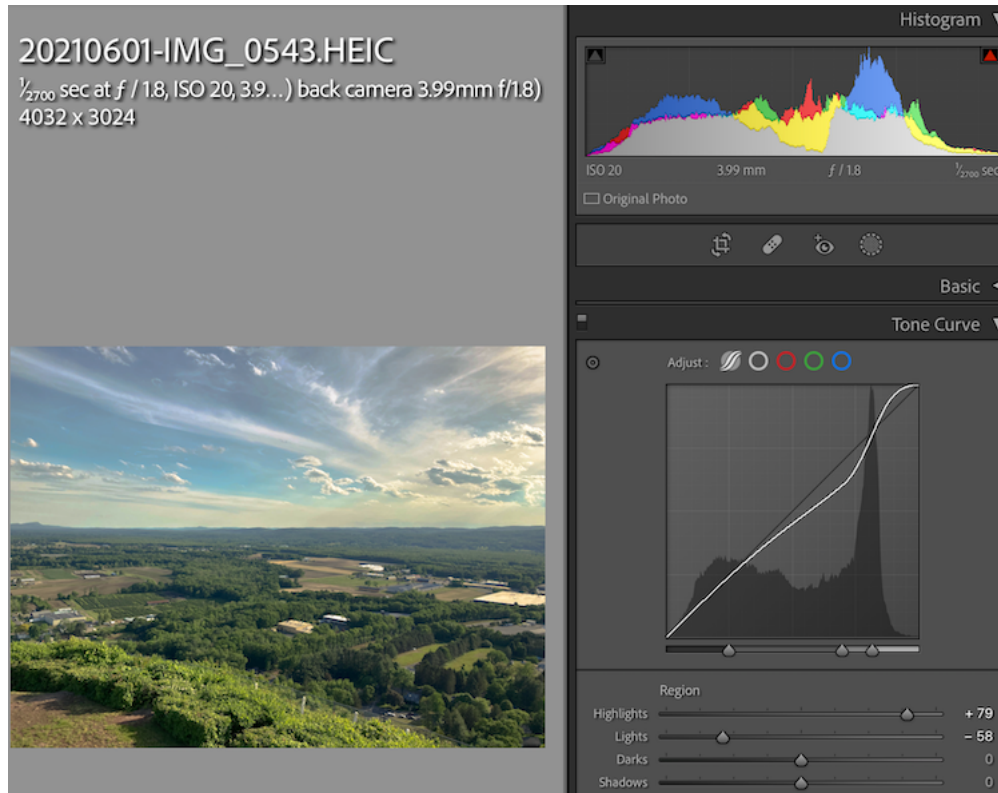




## Parametric Curve Adjustment option

**Example:** Increase the cloud contrast by the use of sliders and adjusting splits for more control.

Note: S shape has moved further towards the upper right-hand corner.  
Wow! Look at that sky!



With the color RGB curves, some things you do correspond to the Color Grading Module, but you can always push it to a narrower range. Once again, the curve module helps you see how things work under the hood. However, mixing an arbitrary color in RGB curves is much more difficult than selecting a color with the continuous color wheel in the Color Grading module.

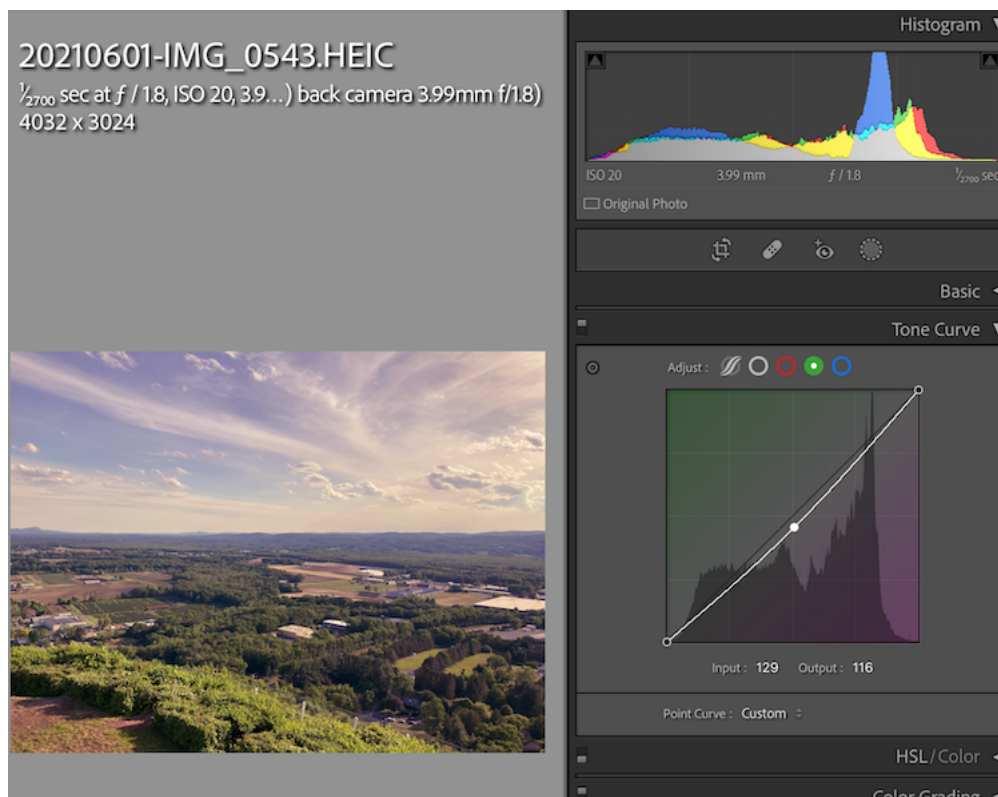


### Green Channel Adjustment option (Green/Magenta)

Here, I make the fallow fields look browner.

Note: C shape in the middle.

You can do the same thing in the Color Grading module – pull mid-tones towards magenta.



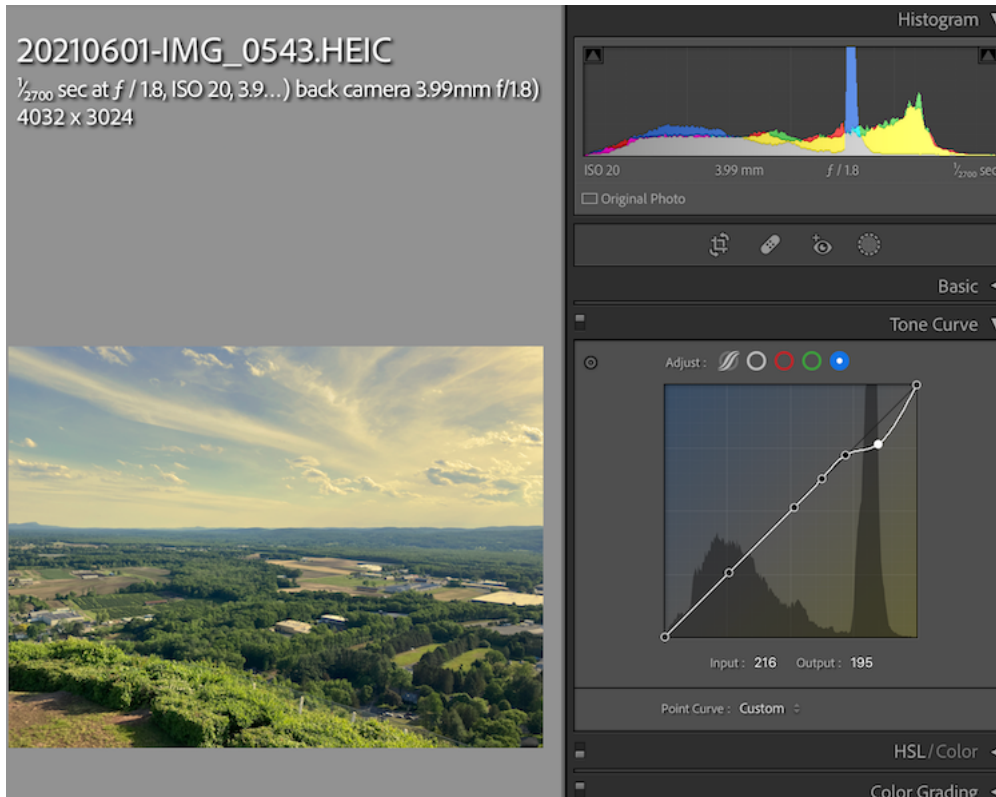


## Blue Channel Adjustment option (Blue/Yellow)

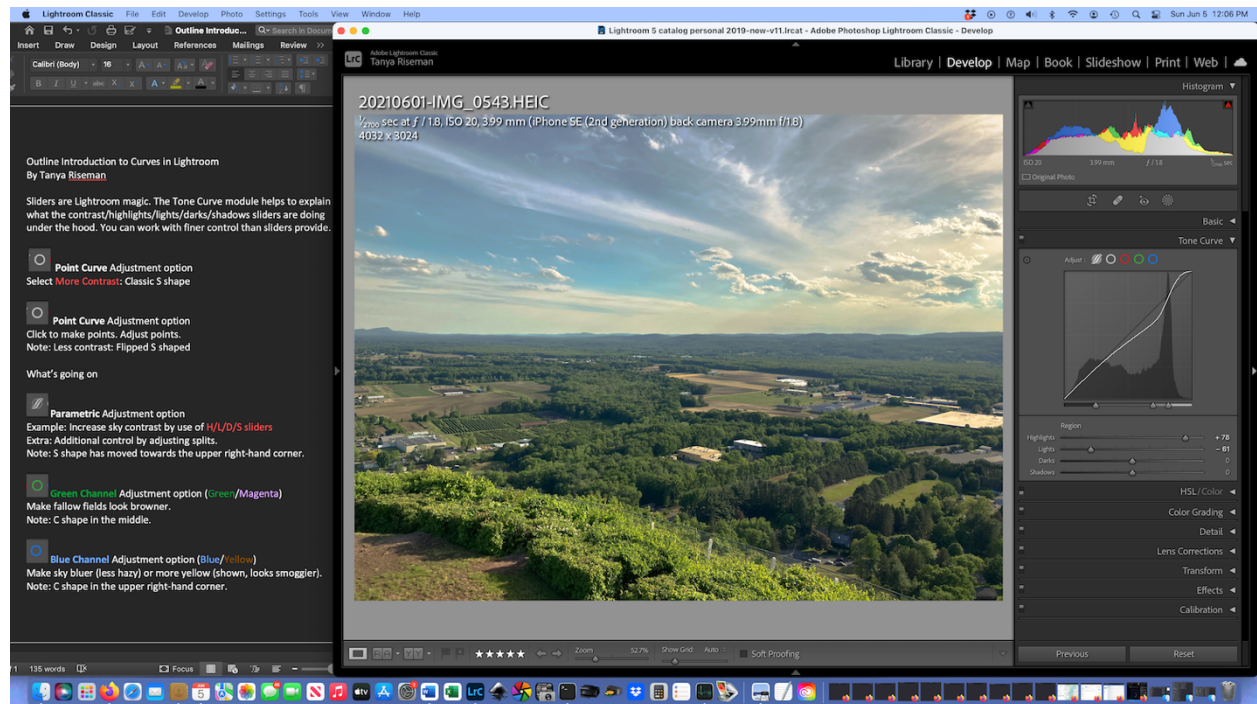
Make clouds bluer (less hazy) or more yellow (shown, looks smoggier).

Note: C shape in the upper right-hand corner.

Can't do with HSL module. Much *narrower* range than can do with Color Grading using the highlights.



# Conclusion

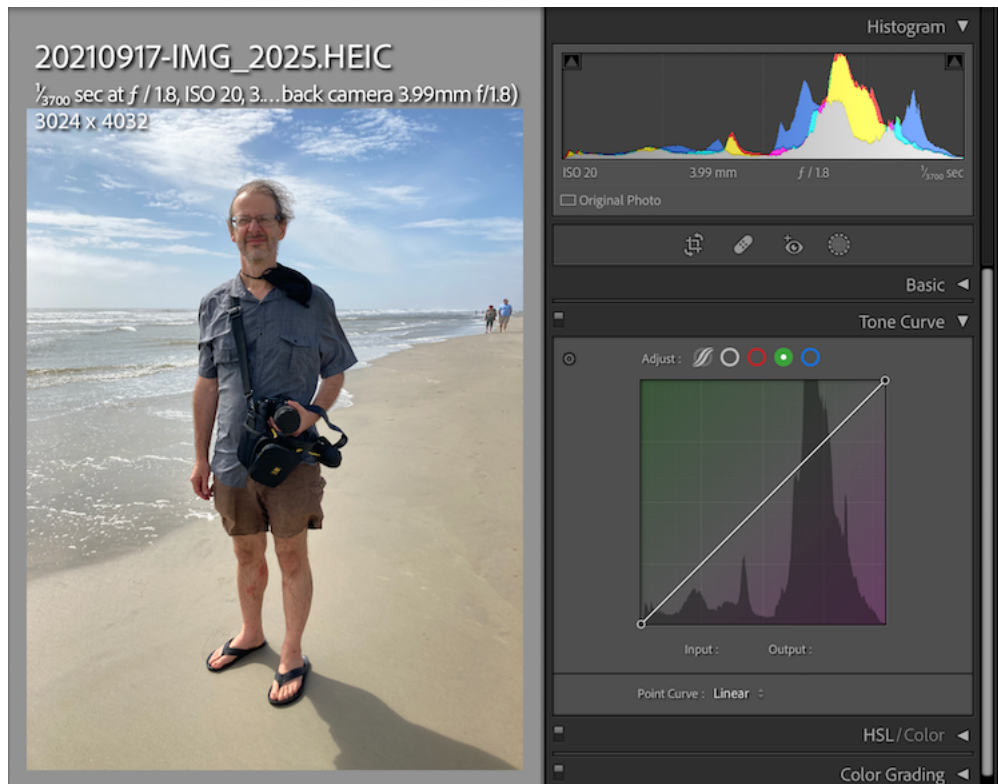


Tone curves are available in most advanced photo editing programs. They pre-date the use of basic sliders. Hopefully, this talk has made some basic Lightroom sliders less mysterious by showing the analogous use of the Tone Curve module. Curves can provide finer control than sliders. Mixing colors with RGB curves is very difficult unfortunately. In addition, masking is not available for tone curves in Lightroom.

# Postscript

Inspired by Maryland Photo Alliance speaker Lisa Carney on June 7, 2022, I pushed the RGB curves module hard to see what kind of fun I could have with it.

The Original:





Now by modifying all three color channel curves at the same time I got a “sherbet” effect. I experimented with putting in horizontal portions in the color channel curves to get a distinctive separation of colors. It is kind of a posterized effect.

