Annual Evaluation

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission helps build strong land trusts, foster public trust in private land conservation, and ensure the long-term protection of conservation lands. The Commission conducts an annual evaluation to mark progress in achieving its goals and to ensure it is responsive to applicants and accredited land trusts. The evaluation includes analysis of applicant surveys, public comments received throughout the year and applicant data collected by the Commission. Highlights of the 2016/2017 evaluation are reported below. The Commission also has a new statistics page on its website with graphics showing the diversity of accredited land trusts and application success rates.

Accreditation Impact

Strong Land Trusts

- Nearly 100% of accredited land trusts continue to cite “strengthened our land trust and made it more efficient” as the number one benefit of accreditation.

Public Trust

- Accreditation has helped increase public trust. The passage of the permanent conservation tax incentive in December 2015 would not have been possible a decade ago when the accreditation program was started because there was a lack of congressional trust in private land conservation.

Permanence

- More than 19.3 million acres are now conserved by an accredited land trust, which is a major win for permanence. Land Trust Alliance data released in 2016 indicate accredited land trusts are high-impact organizations and, over the last five years, show the following achievements as compared to eligible land trusts that are not yet accredited:
  - Have protected 5 times more land
  - Are 5 times more likely to monitor 100% of their easements every year
  - Are 5 times more likely to have a baseline documentation report for every easement
  - Have significantly more money to defend and steward their holdings

Applicant Satisfaction

- 100% of first-time applicants reported accreditation made them stronger
- 100% of renewal applicants reported accreditation renewal made them more effective
- 100% of accredited land trusts have chosen to apply for renewal since 2014

continued→
Applicant Satisfaction Continued

Land trusts continue to comment that the application is redundant and that the Commission is too focused on the specific wording of the indicator practices (The format of the revised 2017 Land Trust Standards and Practices “Standards” gives the Commission more flexibility to address these concerns)

Land trusts continue to find it hard to quantify the return on investment and want the Alliance to provide additional benefits for and promotion of accredited land trusts (The Commission is working with the Alliance to help increase promotion of the accreditation program)

Applicant Time

The amount of time land trusts spend in the accreditation process is dropping
- The extensive 2014/2015 program improvements are making a difference
- First-time applicant time decreased from 669 hours in 2014 to 577 in 2016
- Renewal applicants report renewal takes only 60% of the time needed for first-time accreditation

Applicant Compliance

Expectations for improvement (EFI)
EFIs are issued for minor noncompliances to help accredited land trusts and foster continuous learning and quality improvement; almost every land trust received an EFI to report on at their first renewal. **While 93% of renewal applicants in 2016 did not address one or more EFIs before applying for renewal, through the renewal process accredited land trusts showed they met all of their EFIs.**

Compliance with the Standards
Land trusts may not always consistently follow each accreditation requirement, particularly during transitions of staff and board members. **Renewal is an important opportunity to identify compliance gaps and ensure they are addressed during the renewal process to continue to ensure the integrity of the accreditation seal.**
- 90% of renewal applications did not show land trusts are notifying landowners of tax code requirements and/or the land trust is not adequately reviewing the Form 8283 and appraisal – this is consistent with 2015 and these issues were addressed in the renewal process
- 66% of renewal applications did not show adequate review of title before closing on a project – this is down from 66% in 2014 and these issues were addressed in the renewal process
- 15% of all renewal applicants have been awarded conditional renewal because additional actions are needed to fully comply with the Standards; to date all conditional renewals have had conditions removed after demonstrated satisfactory performance

September 2017