The rolling hills and pastures of the central Hudson River Valley are home to the Dutchess Land Conservancy, an established land trust with eight full-time staff and over 300 easements. The conservancy’s interest in accreditation was to demonstrate that the organization holds itself to the highest possible standards of excellence. After applying for accreditation in 2008 and receiving it in 2009, they achieved this recognition and “can only see the benefits to our organization,” according to President Becky Thornton.

“In today’s economic climate, the publicity we’ve gotten about being accredited has definitely helped, especially in terms of raising money,” said Thornton. “As a charitable organization serving the public, it is crucial that the public has faith in not only our mission, but in our organization as we carry out that mission.”

The conservancy had already completed an assessment of its practices (using the Assessing Your Organization booklet in January of 2007), so they started the accreditation application process by diving into the Master Applicant Checklist. Thornton found the checklist to be a particularly good tool to stay organized. She described how their accreditation team often used it to pull the required document from the files ahead of time. Having the specific document in hand as they wrote the application answer helped provide the dates of policies and specific information about it.

They organized internally by assigning a staff team to work on the preliminary and final applications, and split it up into manageable segments. For example, some staff worked on compiling project materials, others on stewardship and other policies and still others compiled the answers to the financial questions. Thornton managed and oversaw the process, as well as completed a lot of the actual application.

The board was also very involved. The Board fully endorsed getting accredited, helped draft, review, and approve the policies that they needed to put in place, and gave support and guidance to the staff. A team of Board members reviewed the application and provided input along the way.

The most important thing the conservancy learned by going through the accreditation process is that it’s critical to put as much in writing as possible. Thornton said accreditation “has benefited us by setting the bar even higher in terms of not...”

“In today’s economic climate, the publicity we’ve gotten about being accredited has definitely helped, especially in terms of raising money.”

PRESIDENT BECKY THORNTON
only practicing sound business practices and carefully following ethical and legal procedures, but by proving that we follow them. This gives Dutchess Land Conservancy, its Board and the public the assurance from a third party that we are truly maintaining the highest standards of excellence possible."

Thornton also commented that the application process was easier than they’d expected, mostly because of the preparation they had done in advance and guidance from the Commission. The conservancy even reached a major milestone during the time it was applying for accreditation – protecting more than 30,000 acres. They also recorded their largest easement ever, at 1,650 acres, and protected more land in a single year than ever before. Achieving accreditation at the same time as realizing these accomplishments, truly demonstrates this land trust’s commitment to excellence.