



PROFILES IN EXCELLENCE

Jefferson Land Trust

Evolution of a Land Trust

BY FRANCESCA DALLEO

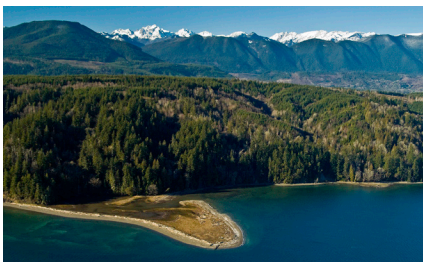
Jefferson Land Trust (WA) reached two important milestones in 2009: they marked their 20th anniversary as an organization, and earned the distinction of becoming an accredited land trust. They've come a long way in the last twenty years - having grown from an all-volunteer organization at the land trust's inception, to a staff of seven today. Though they have been operating all along according to *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust, they felt going through the accreditation process was an important evolutionary step.

Executive Director Sarah Spaeth describes their accreditation process as a collective one. The organization first learned about accreditation at Rally one year and knew it was a challenge they would welcome. The land trust already had a Standards and Practices Committee, charged with drafting and updating policies to conform to the 2004 Land Trust Standards and Practices. Spaeth underscores that as an organization, "Standards and Practices informs everything that we do and have done." This is borne out by their consistent record of organizational planning and tracking progress against the standards and practices.

Nancy Newman served as the point person throughout the accreditation process and devoted the better part of a year and a half to coordinate the effort. She explains why the organization was always so diligent in its planning and committed to Standards and Practices. "Our mission is 'Helping the community protect open space, working lands and habitat forever.' We take our mission seriously and are committed to showing our supporters and citizenry that we are a solid, compliant and trustworthy organization. Standards and Practices have always provided us the criteria we need to do so. Accreditation would finally give us recognition of our efforts."

Newman has a background in university administration and by that has first-hand knowledge of the importance of accreditation by a national organization "My assignment as staff lead in the accreditation process provided me the opportunity to use my prior experience to organize a great team and move us toward completing the accreditation application."

The land trust lost no time in beginning to prepare for accreditation. It started its self-assessment just after



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CONSERVATION ASSISTANT NANCY NEWMAN



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SARAH SPAETH

applying for the 2008 accreditation application lottery. Their initial Standards and Practices committee morphed into the Accreditation Committee, and grew in size to include many people involved in different parts of the business of the land trust – such as the Chair of Conservation Projects Committee (and board president), the Stewardship and Conservation Directors, and their legal advisor. From the beginning the committee met twice a month, and as the deadlines approached they met more often as needed.

Since their founding 20 years ago, the organization has also “really grown in terms of our community presence, partnerships and recognition,” according to Spaeth. And implementing *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and preparing for accreditation did not slow down the land trust’s other work. The land trust has formed strong partnerships to work on a very important issue in the Northwest – salmon restoration and habitat protection. In 2000 they convened what they call the “Chumsortium” with numerous agencies and other organizations.

One of their most successful collaborative projects has been with Snow and Salmon creeks, two creeks which enter into the Discovery Bay and provide rich habitat for several salmon species. Salmon Creek has the second largest summer chum run in the area, topping more than 5,000 fish returning in the summer. In 2001 they received a \$400,000 grant enabling the partnership to acquire critical riparian, floodplain, estuary and tideland habitat for their restoration efforts. Spaeth remarked, “it is important that salmon have enough habitat for survival so that they may continue to provide for us – as food, and as an economic and cultural resource.”

Jefferson Land Trust’s work protecting wildlife habitat and open space is vital to Jefferson county. And Spaeth says, “We have been happy to see that our community is impressed with the fact that our relatively small, local land trust is accredited!” The land trust has demonstrated that they’ve upheld their commitment to the community and will continue to make sure that lands can be protected in perpetuity.

JEFFERSON LAND TRUST

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ACRES OF LAND SAVED	1,355
STAFF	7
ACCREDITED	2009

For more case studies or information on land trust accreditation, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org or www.landtrustalliance.org.