2008 Highlights

- Streamlined process
- Revised application materials
- New Guidance Documents
- 39 land trusts accredited

The mission of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission is to recognize community institutions that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever.

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Message from the Executive Director

September 19, 2008 was a fantastic night. The ballroom at the Omni Hotel in Pittsburgh was filled to capacity; the opening dinner at Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference was about to come to a close. Excitement was in the air in anticipation of the inaugural accreditation awards ceremony.

Crossing the stage to receive their land trusts’ accreditation awards were board members, land protection directors, office managers, executive directors and volunteers. These individuals underscored the diversity of people who had worked hard to ensure the success of their organization’s application.

The awards ceremony was a time to celebrate the hard work of all of the accredited land trusts and that of the board and staff of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. It was also a milestone for the land trust community, and a reflection of the dedication of the Land Trust Alliance, the Program Design Steering Committee, the program funders and everyone who provided feedback as the program developed.

This dedication continues as the Commission works to improve the program and meet its goals of providing a meaningful and achievable accreditation program and as applicants work hard to ensure that their organizations are implementing Land Trust Standards and Practices. The land conservation community’s collective commitment to excellence, trust and permanence is ensuring that the places we love today will be loved by generations to come.

Message from the Chair

When commissioners volunteer to serve on the Commission, they know it means a serious commitment. Each commissioner has volunteered hundreds of hours reviewing applications for accreditation while juggling the responsibilities of being a governing board member and developing and evaluating the program itself. We do this because we are committed to building strong land trusts, fostering public confidence in land conservation and helping to ensure the long-term protection of land.

After a year of full operations it is clear that land trusts that have participated in the program are stronger and more efficient as a result. Accredited land trusts are also much better prepared for perpetuity, with many groups raising additional funds for stewardship or increasing their transaction due diligence in order to meet the accreditation requirements. The program is working, and others are taking notice. Here in my home state of Colorado, the Department of Regulatory Agencies has based much of its land trust certification program on lessons learned by the Commission.

So, while we may not be anxious to receive that next shipment of application binders for review, we know that our time is well spent when we hear feedback from land trusts about how important accreditation is and what a difference it is making in their operations.

“Thanks in large part to the refinement and rejuvenation of our policies and procedures brought about by the accreditation effort, our 2007 acreage total was more than double that of 2006...and we made great strides toward reaching the goal of a major capital campaign.”

Ryan Owens, Monadnock Conservancy (NH)
Accredited Land Trusts*

Aspen Valley Land Trust (CO)
Athens Land Trust (GA)
Bedminster Land Conservancy (PA)
Boxford Trails Association/Boxford Open Land Trust (MA)
Brandywine Conservancy (PA)
Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy (NC)
Cascade Land Conservancy (WA)
Catavba Lands Conservancy (NC)
Central Valley Farmland Trust (CA)
Chikaming Open Lands (MI)
Coastal Mountains Land Trust (ME)
Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CO)
Colorado Open Lands (CO)
Countryside Conservancy (PA)
Deschutes Land Trust (OR)
Dutchess Land Conservancy (NY)
Eagle Valley Land Trust (CO)
Estes Valley Land Trust (CO)
Five Valleys Land Trust (MT)
Freshwater Land Trust (AL)
Gallatin Valley Land Trust (MT)
Green River Valley Land Trust (WY)
Greenbelt Land Trust (OR)
Greensboro Land Trust (VT)
Heritage Conservancy (PA)
Hudson Highlands Land Trust (NY)
Lake Champlain Land Trust (VT)
Lake Forest Open Lands Association (IL)
Lancaster Farmland Trust (PA)
Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain (MS)
Land Trust of Virginia (VA)
Leelanau Conservancy (MI)
Legacy Land Conservancy (MI)
Maui Coastal Land Trust (HI)
Mesa Land Trust (CA)
Minnesota Land Trust (MN)
Monadnock Conservancy (NH)
Mountain Conservation Trust of Georgia (GA)
North Branch Land Trust (PA)
Northern California Regional Land Trust (CA)
Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (VA)
Open Space Conservancy (Land Acquisition Affiliate of Open Space Institute) (NY)
Peninsula Open Space Trust (CA)
Placer Land Trust (CA)
Rensselaer Land Trust (NY)
Scenic Hudson, Inc. (NY)
Scenic Hudson Land Trust (NY)
Sippican Lands Trust (MA)
Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy (FL)
Upstate Forever (SC)
Westchester Land Trust (NY)
Wilderness Land Trust (CO)
Willistown Conservation Trust (PA)

*As of February 2009. Visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org for the most current list of accredited land trusts.

Accredited Land Trusts
By the Numbers**

2,782 conservation easements
542 fee properties
517,447 total acres protected
18 states represented

**For land trusts accredited in 2008.
Lasting Results

The inaugural accreditation awards ceremony was an historic moment for the entire land trust community. But it was also an important milestone for each of the 39 land trusts walking across the stage.

All of the accredited land trusts have made significant investments in their organizations. Through the accreditation process land trusts have dramatically increased the funding dedicated to stewarding and defending conservation land in perpetuity, engaged and trained board members and new citizen conservation leaders, and improved systems for managing land and ensuring that the terms of conservation easements are being upheld.

It is clear that the program is meeting its goals of building strong land trusts, fostering public confidence and ensuring the long-term protection of land.

EXCELLENCE
Each applicant has made internal changes to processes and/or procedures in order to meet the accreditation standards, and all report that their organizations are stronger, more focused and more efficient as a result.

TRUST
A growing number of land trusts are promoting their hard-earned accredited status with the media, elected officials and their members and donors, and are building awareness of their newly recognized strength and that of the land trust community as a whole.

PERMANENCE
Accredited land trusts increased their funds for stewardship and defense, put systems in place for greater due diligence in how they review transactions, and increased the amount and quality of secure documentation to serve in the event enforcement is needed. All this helps ensure that the land will be protected permanently.

“Accreditation is a clear, unequivocal message to the public that we’re doing business in accordance with the highest professional standards of the industry. It is extremely helpful in preliminary negotiations with landowners. If they don’t bring the topic up, we do.”

Don Owen, Land Trust of Virginia (VA)
2008 marked the official launch of the accreditation program and culminated in the inaugural accreditation awards with 39 land trusts crossing the stage at Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference. The historic event was the result of years of work by many in the land trust community and, in particular, the work of the Commission during the previous 18 months developing and testing its policies and program procedures with an extensive pilot program.

The year began with changes to the indicator practices going into effect; the number of practices was reduced to 37 based on feedback from applicants and our experience with the pilot program.

In February 2008 we received pre-applications from the first round of 2008 applicants. The pre-application process, developed after the pilot program, helped screen applicants and enabled us to request specific project documentation in advance of receiving a complete application.

Sixteen pre-applicants were invited to submit complete applications using the streamlined application released in March. Review of these applications began using a more efficient internal process. By the end of 2008 an additional 45 applications had been submitted for review, and four site visits had been conducted to further test and refine our paper-based review process and procedures. We also designed and launched an online registration system for accepting 2009 applicants.

In March we released a revised Applicant Handbook that describes all of the accreditation process steps in detail and shares helpful hints from pilot applicants. The Commission also issued a series of Guidance Documents, based on what was learned from previous applicants, to provide benchmarks for land trusts on how to meet some of the most problematic indicator practices.

To assist accredited land trusts in promoting their status, we created an Accreditation Award Kit including guidelines for the use of the trademarked accreditation seal. Accredited land trusts can also use a new brochure to describe accreditation and promote their accredited status.

When we look back on 2008, we will remember that it was a year full of milestones and continued progress in meeting the program’s goals and building a solid foundation for the future of the accreditation program.

### 2008 Communications

**By the Numbers**

- 11 eNewsletters sent to thousands of stakeholders each time
- 17 conference presentations to 400 attendees
- 3 events held at Rally with over 100 participants
- 6 conference calls hosted for 2008 applicants
- 2 mailings sent to 1,000 land trust representatives each time
Year in Review

JANUARY 2008
• First suite of Guidance Documents published; revised set of 37 indicator practices goes into effect.

FEBRUARY 2008
• Full Commission meets in Houston, TX; 2009 application process established.
• Eligibility criteria expanded to include quasi-governmental organizations.

MARCH 2008
• Revised application and Applicant Handbook released.

APRIL 2008
• Full Commission meets in Saratoga Springs, NY; 2009 fee schedule established.
• Kathy Treanor appointed to Commission after the Land Trust Alliance board votes to expand the size of the Commission.

MAY 2008
• Call for volunteer commissioners announced; applications accepted through July 30.
• Commissioners and staff present at regional land trust conferences throughout the spring.
• 16 applications for 2008 round 1 arrive.

JUNE 2008
• Created and approved the license agreement to license the trademarked seal to accredited land trusts.

JULY 2008
• New Guidance Document on recordkeeping released

AUGUST 2008
• Full Commission meets in Portland, OR; first accreditation decisions made.
• 21 applications for 2008 round 2 arrive.
• Registration for 2009 opens.

SEPTEMBER 2008
• Inaugural accreditation awards ceremony held at Rally in Pittsburgh, PA.
• The Commission also hosts two workshops and an applicant luncheon at Rally.

OCTOBER 2008
• Announcement of appointment of Jean Hocker to Commission.
• New Guidance Document on independent appraisals released.
• New accreditation brochure published.

NOVEMBER 2008
• 23 applications for 2008 round 3 arrive.

DECEMBER 2008
• Revised pre-application for accreditation released.
Commissioners and Staff

COMMISSIONERS*

Elizabeth Crane
Washington, DC

David Hartwell
Minneapolis, MN

Jean Hocker
Alexandria, VA

Lucinda Hunt-Stowell
Southbury, CT

Kat Imhoff
Helena, MT

Lawrence Kueter
Denver, CO

Cary Leptuck
(Commissioner-elect)
Birchrunville, PA

Jennifer Lorenz
Houston, TX

David MacDonald
Mount Desert, ME

Heather Richards
Winchester, VA

Ann Taylor Schwing
Sacramento, CA

Peter Stein
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Henry Tepper
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Kathy Treanor
Greensboro, NC

Wesley Ward
Leominster, MA

Michael Whitfield
Driggs, ID

STAFF

Tammara Van Ryn
Executive Director

Jennifer Brady-Connor
Program Coordinator

Laura DiBetta
Program Manager

Henrietta Jordan
Review Manager

Statement of Values

In our actions and in our goals for the land trust community, the Commission aspires to the following values.

Integrity
To be clear and honest in our communications with land trusts, the public and others; to build trust in, and respect for, the accreditation program; to respect the confidentiality of data provided to us.

Accountability
To operate an accreditation program that is fair and makes consistent decisions; to learn from and respond to the land conservation community, the public and other stakeholders.

Service
To manage an accreditation program that is efficient and makes productive use of participants’ time; to work cooperatively with land trusts of all types and sizes as they go through the accreditation process.

Perspectives

In January 2009 Marc Smiley became the first commissioner to step off the Commission after the completion of his term, with Heather Richards filling his seat. They took some time to share their thoughts on the land trust accreditation program.

MARC SMILEY
Why should land trust seek accreditation?
Land Trust Standards and Practices are an incredibly useful tool to help groups assure they are able make good on a promise of perpetual land protection. Land trusts that follow these important approaches to land conservation have made the pledge that their efforts will be sustained over generations. In addition, groups that go through the accreditation process commit themselves to constantly improving how they work. That benefits every aspect of the land trust.

What advice would you give to land trusts who are trying to decide whether to apply?
My initial advice is to get ready first. It takes more than good intentions to be successful in the accreditation process. It takes preparation and recognition that the process will take time and resources. For most groups, the bigger challenge for accreditation is actually documenting all the things that the land trust says it does, but doesn’t completely do. If groups have used the assessment process effectively (and honestly) they will know where they have gaps in compliance.

What are your hopes for the accreditation program in the coming years?
My hope is that the accreditation process will be seen as a valuable investment, not a burden or cost. I’ve yet to hear from a group that has gone through accreditation that the process was not in some fundamental way helpful to them. As more groups participate and benefit, that concept is more certain to become clear. I also hope that as a community, we become more committed to building greater effectiveness among all of our groups.

HEATHER RICHARDS
What surprised you most when you joined the Commission?
How much fun I’m having! I was prepared for the work (and there’s lots of it), but the discussions are engaging and the other commissioners are so friendly. The spirited debates and discussions about issues are stimulating, and I really enjoy working with my fellow commissioners. Reviewing applications and having the privilege of reading about the great work of land trusts all across the country has been especially fun. There are so many people doing really amazing work, and striving to protect diverse landscapes and communities.

Why should other land trust professionals consider serving on the Commission?
It is a chance to help land trusts across the country become stronger, and in the meantime, meet lots of smart, interesting, dedicated people. Working with the Commission is a chance to step outside your organizational and geographic space and think more broadly about the land conservation movement in America. It’s not often that we, as local or regional professionals, get to work on a regular basis outside our own “silo.”

How do you think the accreditation program has benefited the community?
The prospect of accreditation has given many land trusts the push they needed to develop and implement practices many have only talked about for years. Although conservation work is continuing apace, the groups preparing for the accreditation process and actually applying are pausing to really implement those practices they have known they need. That impetus is making stronger organizations and increasing the permanence of easements.
Accreditation Program Funders

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission would like to thank the Land Trust Alliance for its extraordinary support of the accreditation program. The Alliance provides financial as well as administrative support to the Commission.

In addition, we would like to thank the following Land Trust Alliance funders for their generous support of the accreditation program in 2008.

Anonymous
S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation
The Bobolink Foundation
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
The Kresge Foundation
MARPAT Foundation
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
New York Community Trust
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Resources Legacy Fund Foundation
The Tiffany & Co. Foundation
Turner Foundation
US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Looking Ahead

In just three years the accreditation program has gone from the theoretical to the real. As of February 2009, 53 land trusts can now display the accreditation seal, signifying to the public that they meet national standards for excellence. Just as our applicants and accredited land trusts are on the path of continuous improvement, so is the accreditation program. Here is a preview of what’s to come in 2009.

- We released a revised Applicant Handbook early in 2009 clarifying program requirements and incorporating tips from applicants.

- We released a new Guidance Document in March 2009 on the policies required for accreditation. Additional Guidance Documents will be released as we help clarify challenging practices.

- We will continue to look for ways to refine the process so that it is more efficient for both applicants and reviewers.

- We will offer new online tools and trainings, including free webinars, to assist current and potential future applicants as they navigate the accreditation process.

- We will open registration for 2010 applications late in the summer of 2009.

- We will round out the year at Rally 2009: The National Land Conservation Conference in Portland, Oregon with a ceremony acknowledging all the land trusts that earned accreditation in 2009.

As we look to 2009 and beyond, we see the Commission’s vision for the accreditation program beginning to take hold. The number of accredited land trusts from around the country will continue to grow. They will be stronger organizations. The public will increasingly be assured that the land trust community is meeting high standards. More land will be saved – forever.

Vision for the Future

The Commission envisions a future in which land trusts have made dramatic gains in land conserved, membership, practices and overall effectiveness. The continuing increase in citizen leadership and professionalism in land trusts reflects the growth of the movement into a well-respected force serving the public interest. The growing pool of accredited land trusts reflects the broad diversity of organization sizes, missions and geography – united by strong ethical practices and by a commitment to sound transactions and the long-term stewardship of land and conservation easements. The land trust accreditation program is a model of self-regulation in the nonprofit sector. It is run by a Commission that reflects and responds to its diverse constituents and has earned the trust of land trusts, regulators, funders, and others. As a result, land conservation is widely supported by private philanthropy and government policies, and more land is permanently conserved.

“We believed that being true to our word was more important than someone else saying we were. But times have changed quickly. Today, accreditation is the best assurance you can have that our land trust remains the best possible investment of your charitable giving.”

Grant Kier, Five Valleys Land Trust (MT)