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 2015/2016 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.

- The territory of Puerto Rico and Washington State both passed conservation incentives or funding measures in 2015, citing accreditation as one reason to support the programs.

Permanence

- When the accreditation program first started in 2006, documented annual monitoring was a repeated challenge for first-time applicants. The same was true for baseline documentation reports. We can now verify that over 10 million acres of easement-protected land has the dual protection of a baseline documentation report and annual monitoring.

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
- 100% of applicants found Commission staff and Alliance support helpful

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 Land Trust Standards and Practices in 2017 will give the Commission more flexibility and an opportunity 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

Time spent by renewing organizations decreased dramatically
- The extensive 2014/2015 program improvements are making a difference
- The data set is limited; response rates are low

Time spent by first-time applicants increased
- Program improvements for first-time applicants were phased in later and may not show yet
- With more all-volunteer land trusts applying, more volunteer time and larger teams of people working on the application are being reported, increasing the average time spent

Applicant Compliance

Land trusts are not addressing expectations for improvement (EFI) issued when accreditation is awarded
- 71% of renewal applicants did not address one or more EFIs before applying for renewal – this is up from 68% the previous year
- 22% of the total number of EFIs issued at first-time accreditation were not addressed

Land trusts are not consistently following Land Trust Standards and Practices (Standards)
- Renewal is uncovering serious compliance issues in accredited land trusts
- 91% 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 up from 88% in 2014
- 77% of renewal applications did not show adequate review of title before closing on a project – this is up from 55% in 2014
- 14% of all renewal applicants have been awarded conditional renewal because additional actions are needed to comply with the Standards
- The levels of non-compliance support the continuation of the five-year term; 60% of survey respondents also support continuing a five-year term

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