

# Power in Numbers

The Land Trust Accreditation Program  
2010 Annual Report



**Excellence · Trust · Permanence**

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## Land Trust Accreditation Commission

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

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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**Laura DiBetta**  
Program Manager

**Jennifer Jennings**  
Program Associate

**Melissa Kalvestrand**  
Review Specialist

*Special thanks to former commissioner  
David MacDonald.*

# More than 100 Strong

## A Message from the Chair and Executive Director

There is power in numbers. In 2010, the number of accredited land trusts topped 100. Collectively these groups have protected more than 3 million acres of land in more than 30 states. Over 8,000 properties are protected with conservation easements, and accredited land trusts hold nearly 1,500 fee properties. From small beloved neighborhood parks to vast acreages of working ranch and forestland, accredited land trusts are making a big difference in the communities they serve.



The collective numbers are impressive, but also amazing is the fact that no two accredited land trusts are alike. The diversity of this distinct group reflects the breadth of the conservation community.

- *From an urban land trust in Georgia to the rangeland trusts of the West*
- *From wetlands owned by a land trust on the Gulf Coast to islands protected with easements in Maine*
- *From local all-volunteer groups to land trusts with more than 100 staff*



No matter what the mission or configuration, the common ground shared by all accredited land trusts is a commitment to land conservation excellence, trust, and permanence.

“The accreditation process has been an excellent and disciplined way to examine in detail our operational and stewardship practices and to assure that they are as sustainable and robust as possible,” says David Brunner, president and executive director of the Center for Natural Lands Management in California. “Having an expert external panel review these practices and their underlying assumptions has been not only revealing and motivating, but ultimately affirming.”

In addition to topping the 100 mark, in 2010 the Commission published completely revised application materials. Later in the year, we turned our focus toward renewals. A renewal design committee will work through 2011 to develop the systems for renewals, which will start in 2013. With a busy year ahead, we look forward to the number of accredited land trusts and their accomplishments growing.

Lawrence R. Kueter  
Chair

Tammara Van Ryn  
Executive Director

## SHOWCASE ON DIVERSITY

### Montezuma Land Conservancy

#### ORGANIZATION SNAPSHOT

- Founded: 1998
- Board: 9 directors
- Staff: 2 full-time, 2 ¾-time, 1 part-time
- Scope: Agricultural, natural and scenic open space resources in Montezuma and Dolores Counties, Colorado
- Land protection: 65 conservation easements protecting over 30,000 acres

*“As a mid-sized land trust, the accreditation process really brought our work to the next level. Applying for accreditation, including the self-assessment process and resulting improvements in our policies and procedures, has strengthened our organization, improved the quality of our current conservation work and helped us to ensure to an even greater extent than before, the permanence of all the conservation easements we hold.” – Executive Director Juniper Katz*



### Maine Coast Heritage Trust

#### ORGANIZATION SNAPSHOT

- Founded: 1970
- Board: 31 directors
- Staff: 37 full-time, 5 part-time
- Scope: Maine’s coastal lands and islands
- Land protection: 187 conservation easements and 111 fee properties protecting 130,000 acres, including more than 275 entire coastal islands

*“Receiving accredited status during our 40th year seems a fitting testament to MCHT’s commitment to permanent land conservation – including ongoing care for the properties we protect. Our land trust is a stronger organization today having gone through the rigorous accreditation program, and this will help us build on our years of experience in conserving some of Maine’s most critical lands.” – Board Chair and President Tom Ireland*



# Accredited Land Trusts

- Alachua Conservation Trust (FL)  
Allegheny Land Trust (PA)  
Aquidneck Land Trust (RI)  
Aspen Valley Land Trust (CO)  
Athens Land Trust (GA)  
Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust (NH)  
Bedminster Regional Land Conservancy (PA)  
Black Canyon Land Trust (CO)  
Boxford Trails Association/Boxford Open Land Trust (MA)  
Brandywine Conservancy (PA)  
California Rangeland Trust (CA)  
Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy (NC)  
Cascade Land Conservancy (WA)  
Catawba Lands Conservancy (NC)  
Center for Natural Lands Management (CA)  
Central Savannah River Land Trust (GA)  
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)  
Columbia Land Conservancy (NY)  
Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast (FL)  
Conservation Trust for North Carolina (NC)  
Countryside Conservancy (PA)  
Deschutes Land Trust (OR)  
Desert Foothills Land Trust (AZ)  
Ducks Unlimited and its affiliate, Wetlands America Trust (TN)  
Dutchess Land Conservancy (NY)  
Eagle Valley Land Trust (CO)  
Eastern Sierra Land Trust (CA)  
Edisto Island Open Land Trust (SC)  
Eno River Association (NC)  
Estes Valley Land Trust (CO)  
Five Valleys Land Trust (MT)  
Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina (NC)  
Forest Society of Maine (ME)  
Freshwater Land Trust (AL)  
Gallatin Valley Land Trust (MT)  
Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (MI)  
Greenbelt Land Trust (OR)  
Greensboro Land Trust (VT)  
Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (TX)  
Hawaiian Islands Land Trust (HI)  
Heritage Conservancy (PA)  
Hudson Highlands Land Trust (NY)  
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (IA)  
Jackson Hole Land Trust (WY)  
Jefferson Land Trust (WA)  
Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust (CT)  
Kent Land Trust (CT)  
Kinnickinnic River Land Trust (WI)  
La Plata Open Space Conservancy (CO)  
Lake Champlain Land Trust (VT)  
Lake Forest Open Lands Association (IL)  
Lancaster County Conservancy (PA)  
Lancaster Farmland Trust (PA)  
Land Trust for the Little Tennessee (NC)  
Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain (MS)  
Land Trust for Santa Barbara County (CA)  
Land Trust for Tennessee (TN)  
Land Trust of Virginia (VA)  
Leelanau Conservancy (MI)  
Legacy Land Conservancy (MI)  
Little Forks Conservancy (MI)  
Maine Coast Heritage Trust (ME)  
Marin Agricultural Land Trust (CA)  
McKenzie River Trust (OR)  
Mesa Land Trust (CO)  
Mianus River Gorge Preserve (NY)  
Minnesota Land Trust (MN)  
Monadnock Conservancy (NH)  
Montana Land Reliance (MT)  
Montezuma Land Conservancy (CO)  
Montgomery County Lands Trust (PA)  
Mountain Conservation Trust of Georgia (GA)  
Natural Lands Trust (PA)  
Nevada County Land Trust (CA)  
North Branch Land Trust (PA)  
Northeast Wilderness Trust (MA)  
Northern California Regional Land Trust (CA)  
National Committee for the New River (NC)  
Northern Prairies Land Trust (NE)  
Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (VA)  
Oconee River Land Trust (GA)  
Open Space Conservancy (Land Acquisition Affiliate of Open Space Institute) (NY)  
Pacific Forest Trust (CA)  
Palmer Land Trust (CO)  
Peninsula Open Space Trust (CA)  
Piedmont Environmental Council and its affiliate, Piedmont Foundation (VA)  
Piedmont Land Conservancy (NC)  
Placer Land Trust (CA)  
Potomac Conservancy (MD)  
Redding Land Trust (CT)  
Rensselaer Land Trust (NY)  
Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (CO)  
Sacramento Valley Conservancy (CA)  
Sakonnet Preservation Association (RI)  
Salem Land Trust (CT)  
San Isabel Land Protection Trust (CO)  
Scenic Hudson, Inc. (NY)  
Scenic Hudson Land Trust (NY)  
Sempervirens Fund (CA)  
Shasta Land Trust (CA)  
Sippican Lands Trust (MA)  
Skagit Land Trust (WA)  
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (NC)  
Stowe Land Trust (VT)  
Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy (FL)  
Tecumseh Land Trust (OH)  
Tennessee Parks & Greenways Foundation (TN)  
Teton Regional Land Trust (ID)  
Texas Land Conservancy (TX)  
The Land Conservancy of New Jersey (NJ)  
The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County (PA)  
The Trustees of Reservations and its affiliate, the Massachusetts Land Conservation Trust (MA)  
Thousand Islands Land Trust (NY)  
Tinicum Conservancy (PA)  
Tri-Valley Conservancy (CA)  
Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (NY)  
Upstate Forever (SC)  
Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust (VA)  
Weeks Bay Foundation (AL)  
Westchester Land Trust (NY)  
Western Virginia Land Trust (VA)  
Wilderness Land Trust (CO)  
Wildlife Heritage Foundation (CA)  
Willistown Conservation Trust (PA)  
Wood River Land Trust (ID)  
Wyoming Land Trust (WY)



Land Trust Alliance President Rand Wentworth and Commission Chair Larry Kueter present an accreditation award to Nora Beck, Land Conservation Coordinator at Tennessee Parks & Greenways Foundation, at the Accreditation Awards Ceremony during Rally 2010: The National Land Conservation Conference in Hartford, CT.

# BY THE NUMBERS

## ACCREDITATION APPLICATIONS

Application Year	Pre-Application Submitted	Application Submitted	Application Withdrawn	Accredited
2007 (Pilots)	NA*	38	5	32
2008	62	61	9	52
2009	32	28	3	25
2010	34	31**	2	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>130</b>

\*The pre-application was developed after the pilot program. There were 38 land trusts in the pilot.

\*\*Review of eight applications is in process.

Additional note: There has been one denial of accreditation.

## ACCREDITED LAND TRUSTS: POWER IN NUMBERS

	2008 Accredited Land Trusts (39)	2009 Accredited Land Trusts (43)	2010 Accredited Land Trusts (31)	Total*
Conservation easements	2,782	2,846	2,514	8,142
Fee properties	542	497	442	1,481
Total acres protected	517,447	1,152,675	1,437,358	3,107,480
States represented	18	29	18	34

\*Information includes the 113 land trusts accredited through 2010.

### JANUARY

- Changes to the program announced, including reduction in indicator practices
- Revised application materials and *Applicant Handbook* released

### FEBRUARY

- Full Commission meets in Denver, CO
- Registration for 2010 round 3 opens
- New *Guidance Document* released on Practice 6D. Financial Review or Audit

### MARCH

- 11 land trusts accredited
- Updates to suite of *Guidance Documents* released
- 9 applications for 2010 round 1 received

### APRIL

- Workshops presented at various conferences
- Fact sheet on corporate combinations published
- Information on 2011 fees released

### MAY

- Registration for 2011 applications opens
- Additional *Guidance Document* updates released

### JUNE

# 2010 Year in Review

## Program Improvements

The year began with the January 20 announcement of the publication of the revised application based on changes to the indicator practices and of the revised *Applicant Handbook*. These were important steps in fully implementing the program improvement recommendations made the prior year by our consultant and accreditation expert. In response to these recommendations, we also revised many of our policies. In the revised application, the number of questions and attachments was reduced by 40 percent.

## New and Updated Application Information

Throughout the year, we published new and revised information on applying for accreditation.

- In early Spring, we released updates to the entire suite of *Guidance Documents*. The changes made reflect lessons learned from recent applicants and answered some of the most common questions we hear in our webinars and workshops. The revisions also reflected the changes to the list of indicator practices
- A new *Guidance Document* on practice 6D. Financial Review and Audit was published.
- We released a suite of application addenda and a new fact sheet for applications involving multiple corporations.
- We published a fact sheet on how accreditation will look at applicants and accredited land trusts that have accepted assets from other land trusts or have gone through a corporate combination.

## Applications

A total of 31 applications were submitted in 2010. Among those were land trusts from 15 different states, all-volunteer organizations, one of the oldest land trusts in the country, and The Nature Conservancy.

## Renewal Design

While it seems like only yesterday we celebrated the inaugural accreditation awards in 2008, we knew it was time to begin designing the renewal process. The newly formed renewal design committee met three times in late 2010 and is expected to work through 2011.

## Communications

Improving communications about the program and the process was a key focus for the accreditation program in 2010.

- We released sample materials to better prepare land trusts for what to expect during the process, including a sample call agenda, follow-up information request letter, and award letter with expectations for improvement.
- We published a fact sheet to provide additional information on withdrawal.
- We published a PowerPoint and script for land trust staff and boards to use at their own meetings.
- We hosted 11 webinars and several workshops throughout the year and at Rally, including 5 daylong "clinics."
- We launched a new quarterly eNewsletter just for accredited land trusts. The inaugural issue of *The Seal* was released in September.
- We published four case studies of accredited land trusts as part of our *Profiles in Excellence* series.

## More than 100 Strong

Each year, the accreditation program reaches new milestones. With the summer announcement of newly accredited land trusts, the total number of accredited land trusts topped the 100 mark.

### JULY

- Full Commission meets in Saratoga Springs, NY
- 1 new commissioner appointed
- 13 applications for 2010 round 2 received

### AUGUST

- 12 land trusts accredited; accredited land trust numbers top 100

### SEPTEMBER

- 1 land trust accredited
- *The Seal* launches
- Fact sheet on withdrawals published
- New application materials and fact sheet released for applications from land trusts with multiple corporations
- Renewal design committee holds first meeting

### OCTOBER

- Rally in Hartford, CT: awards ceremony recognizes 24 of the 31 land trusts accredited in 2010; 2 workshops and 1 daylong seminar presented; full Commission meeting held
- Sample call agenda, follow-up letter and award letter with expectations for improvement released

### NOVEMBER

- 9 applications for 2010 round 3 received

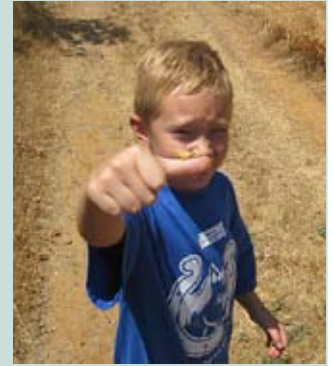
### DECEMBER

- 7 land trusts accredited
- New PowerPoint and script for land trusts made available

# SPECIAL REPORT: MITIGATION LAND TRUSTS

## Background

During the past 40 years, federal, state, and local governments have increasingly required that developers mitigate the environmental impacts of their developments. In the US, mitigation efforts have largely focused on wetlands and other aquatic resources. But in recent years, regulatory agencies have also required mitigation for degraded or destroyed natural resources such as wildlife habitat, forests, and agricultural lands. Many conventional land trusts have begun incorporating mitigation projects into well-established land protection programs. There are also non-profit land trusts that were established as “mitigation land trusts” and whose conservation mission is primarily served through mitigation projects.



Mitigation projects are generally required to be protected in perpetuity and often involve permanent restriction of development and other adverse uses through conservation easements, which must be monitored and enforced in perpetuity. The role of a land trust in a mitigation project depends on the terms of its agreements with the developer and the regulatory agency. A mitigation project plan requires not only that the terms of the easement be enforced in perpetuity, but also that the created or restored ecosystem function as it was intended to and achieve the desired ecological impacts for some period of years.

## Key Differences Between Conventional and Mitigation Projects

Projects often look different from more conventional easement and fee projects. Below are some of the distinct issues related to the accreditation indicator practices that the Commission evaluates when the applicant is extensively engaged in mitigation work.

- There may be ongoing relationships with for-profit companies and these are examined in detail under practice 4A. Dealing with Conflicts of Interest.
- The land trust’s projects may be entirely reactive, still the Commission evaluates whether the land trust applies selection criteria to what it agrees to take on under practice 8B. Project Selection and Criteria.
- The terms of the easement are frequently dictated by the regulatory agency, but the easement must be reviewed by the land trust to ensure that it meet’s the land trust’s terms under practice 9E. Easement Drafting.
- Regulatory agencies often require the developer to provide an endowment or dedicated fund for the perpetual stewardship of the project. These are often much larger than the funds set aside for a conventional project. The accreditation applicant must demonstrate how it determines the amount that is required, and if the moneys are restricted to a specific parcel, how funds are classified and tracked under practices 11A. Funding Easement Stewardship, 12A. Funding Land Stewardship, and 5A. Legal and Ethical Practices (fundraising).
- Because mitigation projects are not tax-deductible, mitigation land trusts do not notify landowners of federal tax code and appraisals requirements under practice 10B. Appraisals. This is only required for accreditation if the applicant works with donated easements as well.
- In the case of a restored or constructed wetland conserved with a conservation easement, the final baseline documentation report may not be completed until the site work is finished and the project has begun to function as intended. An initial baseline under practice 11B. Baseline Documentation Report is still required by closing, even though the final baseline may be completed later.



Mitigation land trusts, as partners to a regulatory relationship between a permitting agency and a developer have different obligations, resources and expectations than land trusts with an open-space focus. The Commission recognizes these differences while ensuring that the indicator practices are met. Doing so ensures the fairness and credibility of the accreditation program and the permanent conservation of important natural resources.

*Special thanks to Henrietta Jordan for research and writing that contributed to this report.*

# Continuous Improvement

Thirty-one organizations earned the accreditation seal in 2010. The seal is awarded when a land trust demonstrates compliance with *Land Trust Standards and Practices* by meeting each of the 26 indicator practices. In order to foster learning and quality improvement, the Commission offers expectations for improvement when it determines an applicant meets the basic elements of each indicator practice but needs to do additional work to fully comply with all elements. When an accredited land trust applies for renewal, it will need to document how it met the expectations. The Commission also offers commendations to newly accredited land trusts, recognizing excellent policies or practices for meeting specific indicator practices.

## Commendations

Many 2010 applicants demonstrated excellence in policy or practice, in particular related to 3C. Board Governance, 11C. Easement Monitoring, and 12C. Land Management. Samples of accredited land trusts' work relative to these practices may be found on the Land Trust Alliance's Learning Center.

## Expectations for Improvement

The indicator practices listed below had the highest number of expectations for improvement in 2010. Common themes covered by the expectations are provided in bullets. Prospective applicants may wish to pay special attention to these areas.

### 4A. Dealing with Conflicts of Interest (65% of 2010 applicants received an expectation for this practice)

- Amending conflict of interest policies to clarify that a conflicted party may not be present during the discussion (unless asked to provide information) and will be absent from the vote on an issue where he/she is conflicted.
- Documenting how conflicts of interest are disclosed and managed, including having a record that the conflicted party was not present when the matter was discussed (unless asked to provide information) and voted upon.

### 5A. Legal and Ethical Practices (58%)

- Providing donors of each gift of cash, land and/or interests in land greater than \$250 a contemporaneous written acknowledgement that is compliant with the Treasury Regulations, including a description of the

- property, the date of the transaction, and identification of any payments provided as part of a bargain sale.
- Complying with state charitable solicitation registration requirements in all states where funds are solicited.
- Clearly communicating to donors when soliciting and acknowledging gifts for "endowments" how the land trust intends to use the principal of and income derived from the gift. In addition, ensuring that funds received as a result of a solicitation for an "endowment" are classified with appropriate restrictions (temporary or permanent).

### 10B. Appraisals (71%)

- Providing prospective land and easement donors with written notification of the tax code and appraisal requirements, including that the land trust will require a copy of the appraisal and will not knowingly participate in projects when it has significant concerns about the tax deduction.
- Making sure that federal Forms 8283 state the amount received by the landowner in a bargain sale and that the forms are otherwise accurate and complete before signing them (such as by ensuring that the signature of the appraiser is present, completing the date of the gift, etc.).

### 11B. Baseline Documentation Report (71%)

- Enhancing baseline documentation reports by adding information on the qualifications/experience of the preparer and all minimum and desired contents outlined in the *Guidance Document* for this practice.
- Updating the quality of baseline information for older projects by securing current conditions reports signed by the current owner or similar documentation and continuing efforts to obtain landowner signatures on the baseline documentation reports that lack them.

## Conclusion

Accredited land trusts are more prepared to defend conservation land, have better systems for making and documenting decisions, and have proven they meet national quality standards. Through the accreditation process, land trusts are improving their due diligence before accepting land transactions, dedicating more money to the defense and stewardship of conservation lands, and are more focused on their promise to the public to steward and protect land in perpetuity.

## PROGRAM SUPPORTERS

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, the Alliance assists land trusts preparing for accreditation through its trainings, technical assistance, and grant programs.

In addition, we would like to thank the following Land Trust Alliance funders for their generous support of the accreditation program in 2010.

### 2010 Supporters

S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation  
Kresge Foundation  
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

### Accreditation Endowment Supporters (all years)

Anonymous  
Levin Campbell  
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation  
Kresge Foundation  
Tiffany Foundation  
Peter Carmen and Lucia Buck Foundation  
West Hill Foundation for Nature



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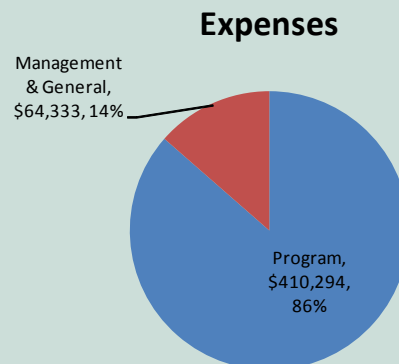
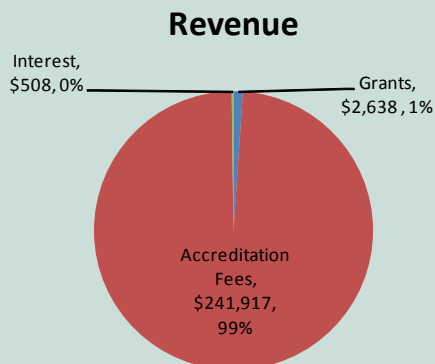
“With Congress’ approval of an extension of our enhanced tax incentives, we expect an additional 250,000 acres of forests, mountains, farms and natural areas will be protected in 2011. All of this could not have happened without the land trust accreditation program, which was essential for restoring the confidence of Congress in land trusts.”

President Rand Wentworth,  
Land Trust Alliance

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## 2010 FINANCIALS

For a copy of our complete financials, please contact [info@landtrustaccreditation.org](mailto:info@landtrustaccreditation.org).



Note: The Commission drew on grant funding received in prior years to cover expenses in 2010.

# Looking Ahead

The accreditation program was launched in 2006 to build and recognize strong land trusts, to foster public confidence in land conservation, and to ensure the permanent protection of land; 130 land trusts have now earned the accreditation seal, a mark of distinction in land conservation. Accreditation lasts for a term of five years and renewal of accreditation is an important way for the Commission to continue to meet the program's goals and to foster continuous improvement in the land trust community.

A renewal design committee was formed by the Commission in the fall of 2010 and has contracted with an internationally recognized accreditation expert to outline options for consideration. The committee includes current and former commissioners (including representatives of accredited land trusts), Land Trust Alliance board members whose land trusts are also accredited, and Alliance and Commission staff members. The goal of the planning process is to create a renewal system that continues to represent the best in land trust practices and in accreditation practices. The committee's charge is to design a process that is efficient and effective at confirming that land trusts are diligent in fulfilling their obligations and merit the full confidence of the public.

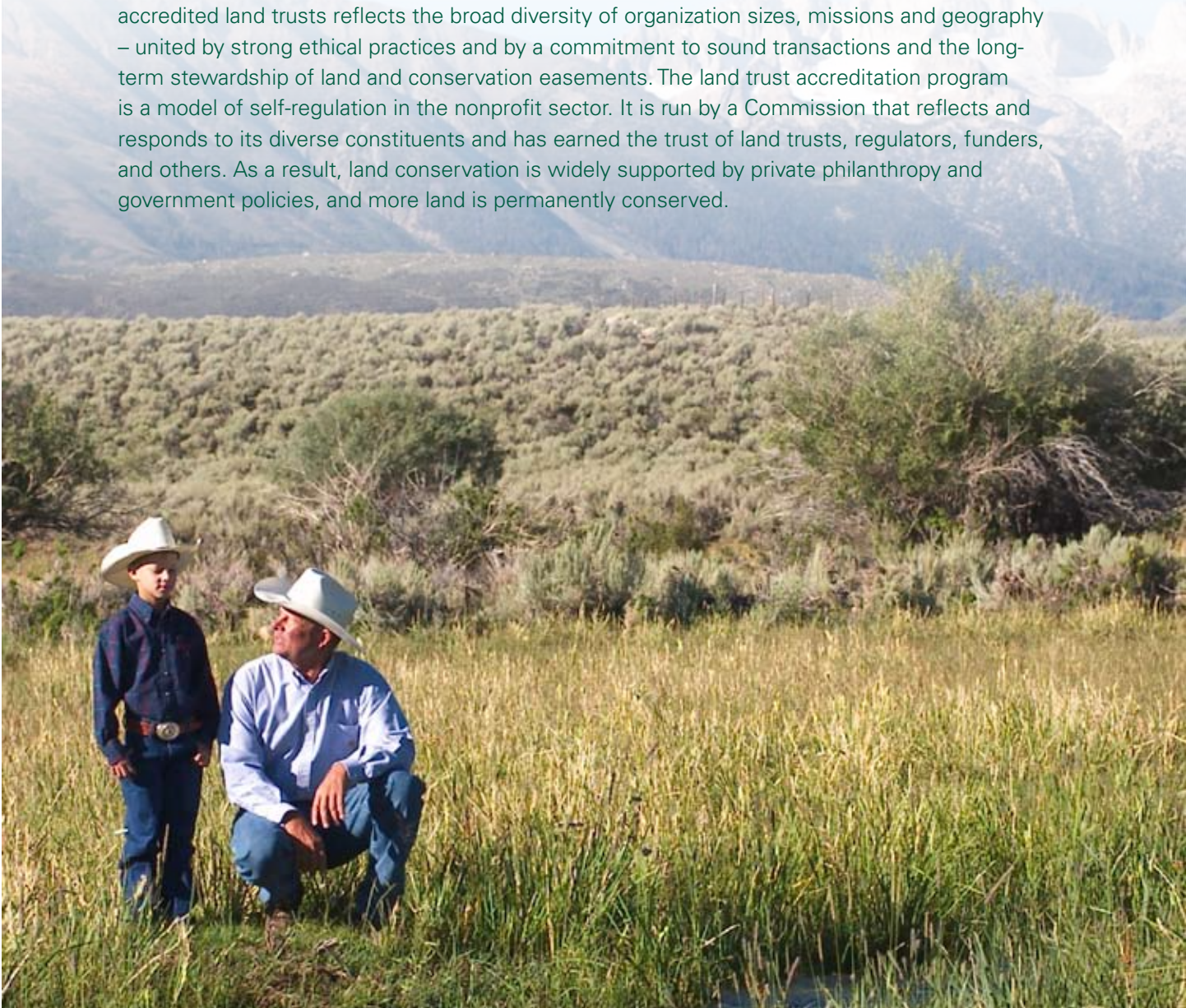
The Commission has agreed to some general framework concepts to guide the design, including assessing continued compliance with the indicator practices and accreditation standards with a focus on changes made within the accredited organization since accreditation was granted; not duplicating the original application and review process in unnecessary ways; and incorporating the use of technology to aid in the efficiency of the application process. It is anticipated that the design of the process will be complete by the end of 2011, the renewal application materials will be released by early Summer 2012, and we will be ready to accept the initial renewal applications in Spring 2013.

Land conservation is a dynamic, changing field. As the field evolves, renewal of accreditation ensures that land trusts continue their efforts to meet national standards for nonprofit governance and the long-term protection of land. Renewal ensures continued compliance with *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and accreditation requirements as organizations grow and change and helps maintain the integrity of the accreditation seal.



## VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The Land Trust Accreditation 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.



### PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina (NC)

Inside Cover: Stowe Land Trust (VT)

Page 2: (top to bottom) Montezuma Land Conservancy (CO); © Bridget Besaw

Page 3: Kimberly Seese

Page 6: (top and bottom) Wildlife Heritage Foundation (CA)

Page 9: Conservation Trust for North Carolina (NC)

Back Cover: California Rangeland Trust (CA)

Edited and designed by Laura DiBetta

Land Trust   
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