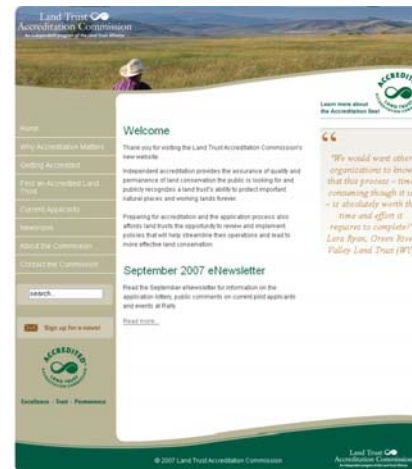


## We've Gotten a Facelift...Virtually!

Visit the Commission's new website for the most up-to-date information on accreditation, including:

- ✓ Application materials
- ✓ Fact sheets
- ✓ Current applicants
- ✓ And much more!



[www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org)

## 2007 Pilot Program

The Commission extends its sincere thanks to all of the land trusts that submitted applications for accreditation as part of the pilot program.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Bedminster Land Conservancy (PA)        | Maui Coastal Land Trust (HI)   |
| Black Canyon Land Trust (CO)            | Minnesota Land Trust (MN)  |
| Boxford Open Land Trust (MA)            | Monadnock Conservancy (NH)   |
| Brandywine Conservancy (PA)             | Monmouth Conservation Foundation (NJ)  |
| Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy (NC) | Mountain Conservation Trust of Georgia (GA)                                      |
| Cascade Land Conservancy (WA)           | North Branch Land Trust (PA)   |
| Central Valley Farmland Trust (CA)      | Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (VA)  |
| Coastal Mountains Land Trust (ME)       | Open Space Conservancy (Land Acquisition Affiliate of Open Space Institute) (NY) |
| Colorado Open Lands (CO)                | Peninsula Open Space Trust (CA)  |
| Eagle Valley Land Trust (CO)            | Rensselaer Land Trust (NY)   |
| Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (MD)     | Sippican Lands Trust (MA)  |
| Five Valleys Land Trust (MT)            | Southern Rockies Agricultural Land Trust (NM)                                    |
| Geneva Lake Conservancy (WI)            | Upstate Forever (SC)   |
| Green River Valley Land Trust (WY)      | Washtenaw Land Trust (MI)  |
| Greenbelt Land Trust (OR)               | West Wisconsin Land Trust (WI)   |
| Greensboro Land Trust (VT)              | Westchester Land Trust (NY)  |
| Heritage Conservancy (PA)               | The Wilderness Land Trust (CO)   |
| Lake Champlain Land Trust (VT)          | Willistown Conservation Trust (PA)   |
| Lake Forest Open Lands Association (IL) |  |
| Leelanau Conservancy (MI)               |  |



## The Land Trust Accreditation Program

Building and recognizing strong land trusts, fostering public confidence in land conservation and helping to ensure the long-term protection of land

### What is Land Trust Accreditation?

Accreditation is an exciting new tool that will be available to land trusts starting in 2008. Museums, aquariums, universities and many other organizations serving the public interest gain professional recognition through accreditation.

Land trusts applying for voluntary accreditation submit a detailed application that is subject to a comprehensive review to ensure that the applicant is meeting national quality standards. Accredited land trusts will be able to display the accreditation seal to provide the assurance of quality and permanence the public is looking for.



**Excellence.** Accredited land trusts demonstrate their commitment to excellence by adopting *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, the ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust, and meeting the accreditation requirements drawn from them.

**Trust.** Accredited land trusts voluntarily submit their organization to an external, independent review of their practices. As a result, accreditation provides the public with the assurance that it can trust the accredited organization meets established standards.

**Permanence.** When land trusts agree to conserve land, in most cases they do so by promising that the protection is forever. The accreditation program verifies that the land trust has the policies and systems in place to keep the promise of permanence.

### About the Land Trust Accreditation Commission

The Commission was incorporated in April 2006 as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance to operate a land trust accreditation program. The Commission's mission is to recognize community institutions that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever..

The Commission is governed by a board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country. Commissioners volunteer their expertise to verify that a land trust is carrying out specific indicator practices from *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. The Commission is testing the accreditation program in 2007, will refine the program in early 2008 and will accept its first applications in May 2008.

Photo: Green River Valley Land Trust

[www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org)

# Why Apply for Accreditation?

## What land trusts in the pilot program are saying

### Effective. Efficient. Stronger.

These are just a few of the words land trusts in the 2007 pilot program are using to describe how applying for accreditation has benefited their organizations. Read more below.

"We would want other organizations to know that this process – time consuming though it is – is absolutely worth the time and effort it requires to complete! We've identified the ways in which we've improved our work; we've identified areas that still need attention; and we've



Photo: Green River Valley Land Trust

had a measurable means to show our Board how we operate, aside from the usual metrics of 'bucks and acres.'" Lara Ryan, Green River Valley Land Trust (WY)

"Everybody knows the accreditation process involves a lot of work, and that may cause some hesitation about applying. Virtually every hour we put into our application is also helping us make Westchester Land Trust a better and hopefully more successful organization. We learned a lot about our land trust, 'tweaked' our program in a few places, and the dividends are already starting to become apparent. If we had it all over to do again, we would definitely do so." Paul Gallay, Westchester Land Trust (NY)

"Applying for accreditation led to many significant improvements in our policies and helped to streamline our processes." Erin Knight, Upstate Forever (SC)

"We started out with the idea that this was a continuous improvement process, and one that would force us to take

a fresh look at not just what we did, but how we did it. Although successful accreditation will be the 'cherry on the sundae,' the true benefit has been the process. By the end, our board members were believers and now treat our

policy manual as a bible. We are now working on ways to permanently instill that ethic with new members." Susan Lackey, Washtenaw Land Trust (MI)



Photo: Washtenaw Land Trust/  
Barry Lonik

### Benefits of Accreditation

The public is increasingly demanding accountability from government and nonprofit organizations, including land trusts. Independent accreditation provides the assurance of quality and permanence of land conservation the public is looking for and publicly recognizes a land trust's ability to protect important natural places and working lands forever.

Preparing for accreditation and the application process also affords land trusts the opportunity to review and implement policies that will help streamline their operations and lead to more effective land conservation.

### Top 3 Pieces of Advice from Land Trusts in the Pilots

1. Take the self-assessment seriously.
2. Do not apply until you are fully compliant and have set up and implemented your policies, practices and files accordingly.
3. Make sure you have the time, money and right people to tackle the application.

# Is Your Land Trust Ready?

## Five things to consider before applying for accreditation

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awards the accreditation seal to community institutions that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. Applicants for accreditation must demonstrate compliance with all of the accreditation indicator practices. Here are some lessons learned from the pilot program about evaluating your organization's readiness to apply for accreditation. More information and advice from the pilots is available at [www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org).

### 1. Have you done an assessment?

Applicants for accreditation must complete an assessment against the full *Land Trust Standards and Practices* within three years prior to applying. Pilot program applicants say the assessment gives the organization a good sense of its readiness for accreditation and helps identify areas that need improvement. More information on assessments is available from the Land Trust Alliance.

"The best place to start is to read the *Applicant Handbook* and the application for accreditation thoroughly."

*Ann Taylor Schwing, commissioner*

### 2. Do you have the necessary documentation?

Accreditation applications must provide evidence that the land trust is carrying out each of the indicator practices. Pilot groups stress the need for organizations to have documented policies and procedures and well-organized records. If your organization recently adopted new policies, your application must include evidence that the policies are being implemented. The Commission will also look at the paper trail for land projects to see if transactions are screened against criteria and are carefully planned and to determine if stewardship obligations are met.

### 3. How does your organization approve land transactions?

Do you have evidence of how land transactions are approved in your organization? Can you provide the information your board receives before it makes a decision to acquire land or conservation easements? If a committee of the board or another entity makes the decision, can you show what authority was delegated, the information provided to the decision-makers and the information provided to full board?

### 4. If you hold easements, do you have baselines for all and do you monitor them annually?

Applicants must have baseline documentation reports for every conservation easement they hold. They must demonstrate a pattern of monitoring each easement annually. If this is a new practice, the Commission will look for a minimum of two consecutive years of annual monitoring records to show compliance.

### 5. If you own land in fee, do you have management plans or written guidance for each property and do you inspect your properties regularly?

Applicants must have written management plans or written guidance for each property they hold in fee. They must be able to show that these properties are inspected regularly – on a schedule that is appropriate for the use of the property and resources protected.