

The Commission is managed by a professional staff operating from a central office in Saratoga Springs, NY, and field offices in Massachusetts, and Vermont. Land Trusts are encouraged to contact the [Help Desk](#) with questions about the program.

Melissa Kalvestrand, Executive Director



Melissa Kalvestrand served many roles at the Commission since joining in November 2009. After 10 years of consistently taking on more responsibilities, she was named executive director in January 2020.

During her tenure at the Commission, she has overseen the accreditation review process and facilitated the accreditation decisions for over 100 applicants each year. She partnered in developing, interpreting, reviewing, and revising the accreditation requirements and maintaining the Requirements Manual. She also co-facilitated the public participation process resulting in the 2017 revisions to Land Trust Standards and Practices.

As executive director, she has been leveraging the successes of the accreditation program and of accredited land trusts to advance the Commission's next phase of work. That work includes maintaining the strength of land trusts, maintaining public trust, and engaging with land trusts in new ways to improve their return on investment in the program.

Melissa has a master's degree in biodiversity, conservation, and policy from the University at Albany and a bachelor's degree in biology from Cornell University.

[Email](#) | (518) 587-3143, ext. 214

Jennifer Brady-Connor, Associate Program Director



Jennifer has worked with the Commission since March 2008 on almost every aspect of the accreditation program. As Associate Program Director, Jennifer manages the application deadline and review schedule in addition to reviewing applications. Jennifer previously worked for the Land Trust Alliance, helping develop the 2004 revised *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and the land trust accreditation program in addition to providing technical assistance to land trusts. Jennifer worked many years for a local land trust and other nonprofits to address wetland and water quality issues, she has served on a number of nonprofit boards, and she has owned and operated two small businesses. In addition to earning a bachelor's degree in biology from the University at Albany, she has a certificate in project management from Empire State College's School of Graduate Studies.

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David Diaz, Review Specialist



David Diaz joined the Commission in December 2022, bringing more than 20 years of natural resource management and land trust experience. Throughout his land trust career, David has advanced land trust accreditation wherever he's worked and believes strongly in the benefits accreditation brings to land trusts and conservation. He holds degrees in Environmental Science from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse, and Viticulture and Wine Technology from Finger Lakes Community College. An avid outdoorsperson, David enjoys birding, fishing, and hiking. He is also a wine enthusiast.

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Stacy Girmindl, Program Coordinator



Stacy joined the Commission in March 2015. As program associate she is responsible for office management, assisting in applicant tracking and correspondence along with coordinating Commission meetings. Prior to joining the Commission, she has worked in both the non-profit and corporate sectors as a marketing associate, event planner and executive coordinator. Stacy holds a bachelor's degree in communications from the College of Saint Rose.

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Lisa McCarthy, Communications Liaison



Lisa joined the Commission in January 2020. As communications liaison she is responsible for communicating messaging about the commission across a variety of platforms. Prior to joining the Commission, she has worked for the Peconic Land Trust, a historic museum farm and a NY state based advocacy organization. Lisa holds a bachelor's degree in English and Art History from Stony Brook University and is certified in graphic design and digital arts from the New School.

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Valerie Roof, Associate Director for Reviews



Valerie joined the Commission in 2012. She previously served as executive director of the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy in Michigan where she managed \$4 million dollars in grant funding to purchase conservation easements. Prior to that she served in various roles with the Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, Alliance for Bay County Schools, United Way, and VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America). Valerie also served as a consultant and facilitator with Crystal Planning Solutions, and was on the boards of several nonprofits and a private foundation. Her educational background includes a master's degree in quality management.

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Siobhan Smith, Review Specialist



Siobhan joined the Commission in 2021. She previously served as the Executive Vice President for the Vermont Land Trust where she worked for over 23 years. Prior to her land trust career, Siobhan worked as an environmental and outdoor educator. She has a bachelor's degree in American Studies and Women's Studies from Douglass College at Rutgers University.

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Jessica Whittaker, Compliance Manager



Jessica is a licensed attorney, who practiced in primarily the areas of real estate and estate planning law. Prior to entering into private practice, she was the executive director of the Sippican Lands Trust, Inc. (SLT), where she successfully guided staff through the accreditation process during the pilot program. Jessica also worked in land protection for both SLT and the Buzzards Bay Coalition, Inc. She has served on several nonprofit boards and committees, and served as Commissioner from 2009 to 2012.

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