

[Open Land Conservancy of Chester County](#), an all-volunteer land trust, was awarded first-time accreditation in 2022. This dedicated community has been protecting land since 1939. We spoke to them about their decision to apply for accreditation and what it meant to achieve first-time accreditation.

Q: What was the decision making process like for deciding to apply for first-time accreditation?

A: There was never a question about whether to pursue accreditation, only *when*. We spent several years thinking about the right time to get started. We steadily updated our policies and procedures until we came to a point where we felt ready to take the plunge, knowing that much more work still lay ahead. It was important that our entire board was committed to the decision, and each member was ready to spend the time required to make accreditation a reality.

Q: What surprised you about going through the first-time process?

A: We certainly did not expect to deal with a pandemic during the application process! Fortunately, the Commission had established their fully-online application system so there was no need for our team to meet in person or make paper copies of the application materials. The Commission did a good job of setting expectations so there were no significant surprises with the application process itself.

Q: Which resources were most helpful as your Open Land Conservancy prepared for or was in the first-time process?

A: By far, the most valuable resource was the consultant we engaged to perform our assessment. As a small all-volunteer organization, we knew it was critical to obtain guidance from someone with the necessary experience to direct us through the remaining work leading up to the application. Carla Lee Lewis (now retired) did an outstanding job for us. We also relied heavily on the [Requirements Manual](#) and the many online resources on the [First-Time Accreditation](#) section of the Commission's website, including examples of policies from other land trusts.

Q: What has been the biggest success that you attribute to being accredited?

A: Knowing that we meet the same high standards as much larger land trusts, both here in southeastern Pennsylvania and nationwide, gives us a great deal of satisfaction and confidence that we can successfully tackle future opportunities and challenges. We have also received some great recognition within our local community, from elected officials, municipal staff, and other partners. Just as importantly, our focus on accreditation and the associated planning over the past few years sparked new internal initiatives in communication and community engagement. Even though we were unable to host our regular volunteer activities through much of the pandemic, those initiatives helped us to retain the support of our membership and add new friends who are now joining us for both in-person and online events.

Thank you to Open Land Conservancy of Chester County for sharing their accreditation story. **Are you interested in sharing your story with the Commission? Please contact us at info@landtrustaccreditation.org.**



Airdrie Preserve Restoration Paoli, PA, volunteers planted 80 trees and shrubs as part of a stormwater management project, commemorating the establishment of the preserve in 1940, 80 years earlier. Photo by Ray Clarke, Open Land Conservancy



Valley Creek in Cedar Hollow Preserve, Malvern, PA. Valley Creek flows through several of our preserves before passing Washington's Headquarters in Valley Forge National Historical Park. Rated "Exceptional Value by" the Pennsylvania DEP, the creek supports a thriving native trout population. Photo by Ray Clarke, Open Land Conservancy