We spoke with the team at Lowcountry Land Trust, located in Charleston, South Carolina, to get their perspective and experience on preparing for and navigating the accreditation renewal process.

Lowcountry Land Trust, founded in 1986, partners with landowners and local stakeholders to permanently protect and nurture the land throughout coastal South Carolina. They have grown from a small community effort to an institution that protects more than 150,000 acres of coastal land and water. Lowcountry Land Trust’s mission is to protect land and water forever, nurture relationships between people and place, and connect conservation to community. They were awarded their second renewal of accreditation in 2024.

Commission Staff: Congratulations on your recent renewal of accreditation. This was the second renewal for Lowcountry Land Trust. What factors did you consider when applying for renewal?

Lowcountry Land Trust: As stewards of 17 South Carolina counties’ natural heritage, Lowcountry Land Trust remains steadfast in our commitment to upholding the prestigious accredited status, a testament to our unwavering dedication to excellence in land conservation. Furthermore, our enduring focus on fostering public trust was a guiding principle throughout the renewal process.

We recognize that maintaining the confidence of our community is essential, affirming our standing as a professional and dependable organization devoted to safeguarding our cherished landscapes. Integral to our renewal endeavor was the rigorous validation and review of our internal procedures. By subjecting our operational frameworks to comprehensive evaluation, we ensure adherence to the highest standards of practice, reinforcing the integrity and efficacy of our conservation efforts. These considerations collectively underscore our unwavering dedication to advancing land conservation.

Commission Staff: What resources did the Lowcountry team find helpful during the accreditation process?

Lowcountry Land Trust: The Commission’s online video tutorials provided comprehensive guidance, elucidating intricate details, and offering practical insights into the accreditation criteria and procedures. Additionally, the Reference Application Packet served as a structured roadmap, consolidating essential documentation and procedural guidelines, thereby facilitating our adherence to accreditation standards.

However, our engagement with Commission staff was paramount among these resources. This liaison was an indispensable conduit, offering tailored support and clarifications to address our specific inquiries and concerns. Their responsiveness and depth of expertise augmented our understanding and ensured alignment with accreditation prerequisites. Having a dedicated point person of such caliber not only streamlined our navigation through the process but also imbued us with confidence in our pursuit of accreditation excellence.

Commission Staff: Do you have any advice for a land trust preparing to go through the renewal process?
Lowcountry Land Trust: Without a doubt, Lowcountry Land Trust's foremost advice for embarking on the renewal process is to initiate preparations well in advance. Commence the process with ample time at your disposal to address all facets and potential challenges that may arise. Secondly, leverage the wealth of resources on the Commission's website. These materials offer insights, guidelines, and best practices to streamline your renewal journey. Moreover, establishing a designated point person within your organization to spearhead the effort is indispensable. This individual should adeptly delegate responsibilities, ensuring every team member is conscious of their role and contribution to the renewal process. By maintaining a focused and organized approach under the guidance of a proficient leader, your land trust can navigate the renewal process with efficiency and efficacy.

Commission Staff: Is there anything Lowcountry Land Trust does over its accredited term to help with the following renewal process?

Lowcountry Land Trust: Lowcountry Land Trust diligently maintains a proactive approach to accreditation, even during the five-year period between applications. Recognizing the importance of sustained adherence to accreditation requirements, the designated accreditation leader orchestrates an annual checklist to systematically verify ongoing compliance and fortify preparations for the upcoming renewal. This strategic initiative entails the creation of detailed spreadsheets, enabling the real-time tracking of pertinent data encompassing violations, amendments, newly acquired conservation easements and fee properties, among other critical facets.

Furthermore, the organization hosts annual meetings pivotal for engaging staff members, specific personnel, and departmental heads in an immersive review of accreditation protocols, ensuring adherence to the established checklists and procedural frameworks.

Commission Staff: How has Lowcountry Land Trust benefitted from being an accredited land trust?

Lowcountry Land Trust: One notable benefit resides in the elevated trust and confidence in landowners considering conservation options. Our accredited status is a hallmark of excellence, distinguishing us within the conservation community and beyond. As a result, discerning landowners have entrusted us with their projects, selecting our organization over others, drawn by the assurance of our esteemed reputation and commitment to rigorous standards. This distinction enhances our visibility and amplifies our capacity to safeguard precious landscapes for generations to come.

All photos provided by Lowcountry Land Trust (captions in order of appearance):

1. Volunteer Nancy Vinson, President & CEO Ashley Demosthenes, Former Trustee Dr. Ann Kulze, Major Gifts and Grants Director Catherine McCullough, and Trustee Marissa Sams
2. Lowcountry Land Trust-Protected Property in James Island, SC
3. Children embracing nature on the forever-protected Stevens Family Farm (Wadmalaw Island, SC)
4. Lowcountry Land Trust-Protected Property in Dorchester County, SC
5. Community Lands Director Sam Seawell and Rural Land Protection Director Josh Bell
6. Children playing outdoors on the forever-protected Stevens Family Farm (Wadmalaw Island, SC)
Thank you to Lowcountry Land Trust for sharing their accreditation story. Are you interested in sharing your story with the land trust community? Please contact us at info@landtrustaccreditation.org.