

Have you ever wondered who the commissioners are and what they do? **We caught up with Commission Vice-Chair Karen Ferrell-Ingram** and asked her five questions about her experience as a volunteer commissioner and about her love of the land.

Meet Commissioner Karen Ferrell-Ingram. Karen is a co-founder and former executive director of [Eastern Sierra Land Trust](#) based in Bishop, California. As a founding board member, projects coordinator, lands director and executive director, Karen worked on a variety of organizational, outreach, fundraising, and conservation projects, including accreditation in 2011. Focusing on the protection of wildlife habitats and working landscapes, Karen joined with her community, as well as state, federal and private foundation partners to preserve thousands of high-priority acres.



Karen has also worked as a native plant propagator and restoration specialist. After her conservation easement property, where she resides, burned in 2015, Karen has focused on active management of her land and recovery after fire. She and her husband live in the scenic Eastern Sierra Nevada of California where Karen was raised.

Q: What drives your passion for land conservation?

A: Wonder and awe inspire me to put my energy into preserving land, water, and wildlife forever. Nature provides us with mind-boggling biodiversity, rich soils to grow our food, and beautiful landscapes to improve our health and well-being. I don't believe humans can be healthy if our lands are degraded and developed without care for all our fellow earthly inhabitants. Working to ensure everyone gets to experience nature, not just the privileged few, is something I really appreciate about land trust efforts across the country.

Q: What inspired you to become a volunteer commissioner?

A: Accreditation meant so much to my organization when we went through the process in 2011. It was a bit scary to open ourselves up in that way but the resulting improvement of our systems was worth the challenge. When I got the invitation to apply to be a commissioner, I thought it would be a great opportunity to share the value of accreditation, which had been such a game-changer for my organization. I had just retired and was interested in learning something new while supporting the work of the land trust community.

Q: What has been the most surprising thing about serving on the commission?

A: There have been a lot of surprising and interesting things. The Commission has a tradition of continuous improvement and I've been so impressed at the unrelenting efforts to create a system that truly benefits land trusts of all sizes and helps them achieve excellence and permanent conservation. I've also been pleasantly surprised at how we have adapted to the new COVID times and that I can survive a two-and-a-half-day ZOOM meeting fairly well.

Q: Do you have any advice to someone considering becoming a volunteer commissioner?

A: Serving on the Commission has been one of the best things I've ever done. Both the commissioners and staff are a very supportive and caring group - which is probably a characteristic of the land trust community in general - but we also have fun together. If someone has a special fondness for the Standards and Practices and has some extra time to share, I would encourage them to look into volunteering with the Commission. The initial and ongoing training is super helpful, and as you might expect, the systems, meetings, and materials are exceptionally organized and well thought-out.

Q: What is your favorite way to spend time in nature?

A: I seem to have developed an addiction to looking at birds. I just find them endlessly interesting and exquisitely beautiful. I've enjoyed birds ever since I connected with the Western Meadowlarks that sang in the fields around my childhood home. But now it is a daily part of my life and a focus of my travels. The fate of birds and their tragic decline in recent years inspire me in the stewardship of my own easement property - every day I'm thinking about how I can improve my habitat for the quail, towhees, and hawks that share this land with us.



Thanks to Karen for sharing her story with us!

About the Commission

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission's main office is located in Saratoga Springs, New York. There are five full-time staff who work out of this office and three staff members who work remotely (though right now, we're all working remotely!). The staff are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Commission and are responsible for processing and reading applications as well as promoting accreditation. [Click here for more detailed information about the role of the Commission.](#)

The Commission is governed by a diverse board of 18 volunteer commissioners involved in land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country. Commissioners volunteer their expertise to verify that a land trust is implementing specific accreditation indicator elements from Land Trusts Standards and Practices. [Click here to learn more about the commissioners, including a commissioner job description.](#)

Commissioners and the Commission review staff work together to review accreditation applications. Several times a year, Commission meetings are held to make decisions on applications.