

Catch-up on the latest Accreditation Corner from the Land Trust Alliance's *Saving Land* magazine.

## What you need to know about the seven-year accreditation term

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In 2019, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission announced that the accreditation term will be extended from five to seven years for land trusts successfully completing their third renewal. This new term recognizes the hard work and commitment of land trusts that have achieved accreditation for 15 consecutive years or longer while maintaining the high standards of the accreditation process. In early 2024 the first land trusts will be applying for their third renewal and qualifying for the extended term. Here's what land trusts need to know.



### Finding the right balance

The decision to create an extended term was years in the making. It was the result of collecting feedback from land trusts as well as analyzing data from applications to determine how and when a longer term would appropriately balance sustainability and integrity. The Commission heard from land trusts about how much time they spend putting together an application; a longer term would help reduce that time. But, if a land trust were to start having gaps in core areas of its work during its accredited term, it would be difficult for it to successfully achieve renewal at its next application. At the same time, that land trust would be publicly using the accreditation seal, which could put the reputation of other accredited land trusts and the accreditation program at risk.

Ultimately, it was determined that a seven-year term, including a check-in with a brief progress report, would be the right approach to ensure the high standards expected of accredited land trusts while respecting the time land trusts commit to the renewal process. At its third renewal a land trust can expect an application and review process similar to its previous renewals, with the focus being on its work over the five-year term. The fourth renewal application will focus on activities over the seven-year term.

### Growing together

When the Commission first explored the idea of a longer accreditation term, we saw that, even though collectively land trusts were working hard to implement Land Trust Standards and Practices and meet the requirements, many still needed to take considerable corrective action to achieve renewal of accreditation. Based on the data and conversations with land trusts, the accredited land trust community was not ready for an extended term before now. It was also clear that the Commission needed to work with the Land Trust Alliance to ensure that there were abundant resources and learning opportunities to help accredited land trusts meet and implement the requirements. The Commission also needed a streamlined, digital application process and robust accreditation management system. We have grown together, as a community, to be ready to take on the added risk of an extended term while balancing the time land trusts invest in the renewal process.

### The new progress report component

Many land trusts have staff and board turnover and program changes, even over a five-year term. In addition, the accreditation requirements are periodically adjusted to respond to feedback and reflect other changes in land trust practice, such as remote methods for monitoring and inspecting properties. The new extended term includes a brief progress report conducted about halfway through the seven years. Having the land trust connect with the Commission in this way will allow us to evaluate information and give feedback on any areas of concern. The progress report also benefits the land trust as the information will be automatically input into the next application, giving the land trust a head start on its next renewal application. Accredited land trusts are committed to practicing at the highest conservation standards, and the progress report is a step to ensure that this remains true over the longer term, even during times of change.

## **Staying connected during the extended term**

It's easy for land trusts to stay connected! You can read the Commission's monthly e-news, visit our website for updates to the *Requirements Manual*, take webinars offered by the Alliance and engage with the Alliance's Resource Center. The Commission is always there to help, and we encourage land trusts to reach out with questions about the accreditation requirements or related documentation before a concern turns into a major issue. Commission staff fields hundreds of questions a year from accredited land trusts. Pick up the phone, send us an email, reach out for guidance on accreditation—we're here for you.

## **Additional Resources**

- To learn more about the seven-year term please visit the [Extended Term](#) page.

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