I believe that land trusts are made stronger through the accreditation process. I am so pleased to join the staff of the Commission to work with land trusts across the country that seek accreditation. It strengthens and benefits not just the individual land trust but the conservation community.

Courtney joined the Commission as a Review Specialist in May 2024. Previously, she worked for 22 years for the Galveston Bay Foundation, an accredited land trust on the Upper Texas Gulf Coast, where she worked in nonprofit operations, strategic planning, grants administration, habitat restoration, and outreach. Courtney holds a Master of Science degree, with distinction, in Interpretation: Management and Practice from the University of the Highlands and Islands in Perth, Scotland, and a Bachelor of Science degree, summa cum laude, in Environmental Science from the University of Houston â€“ Clear Lake. She enjoys reading, nature writing, hiking, and traveling.

Q: How did you get involved in land conservation?

A: I became involved in land conservation through my previous work with a conservation nonprofit organization and land trust on the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. My work with the Galveston Bay Foundation began in habitat restoration, mainly intertidal marsh and some seagrass and bird nesting habitat, but I later moved into grants administration, operations and management, and strategic planning. About midway through my career there, certain strategic decisions were made that really elevated the importance of land conservation and stewardship among the organization's programs. I helped secure some early capacity-building grants for conservation and brought on the organization's first dedicated conservation and stewardship staff.

Recently, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in heritage interpretation. Through my thesis studies, I became passionate about the place of land and landscapes at the intersection of cultural and natural heritage.

Thinking back, my own personal feelings about land are rooted in family and my upbringing in a rural area of Texas between Houston, Austin, and San Antonio. I grew up watching my dad work on our land and build our home. I have strong memories of that land and my own interactions with it â€“ learning to tie my shoes surrounded by curious chickens in the chicken coop; hot days spent fishing for perch or catfish from the pond; the smell of cedar; being lulled to sleep by the sonorous songs of bullfrogs; and many others.

Q: What inspires you to keep working in land conservation?

A: All these experiences â€“ personal, professional, academic â€“ contribute to my desire to work in land conservation. They've made me cognizant of the many and layered meanings land and landscapes hold for people, the strong memories and sense of place they can evoke, and the importance of preserving and stewarding them well.

I believe that land trusts are made stronger through the accreditation process. I am so pleased to join the staff of the Commission to work with land trusts across the country that seek accreditation. It strengthens and benefits not just the individual land trust but the conservation community.

Q: When you’re not working, what is your favorite way to spend time in nature?
A: I love a good trail, and walking and hiking are my favorite ways to spend time in and move through nature. Some of my most memorable recent experiences have involved walking through a carnivorous pitcher plant bog at the Big Thicket National Preserve in East Texas, climbing among the red sandstone formations at the Valley of Fire State Park in Nevada, and soaking in the rich sights and smells of the Perthshire woodlands in Scotland (including a truly ancient yew tree). Also, my youngest son is very into the National Park Service’s Junior Ranger program, and I love watching him learn about the places we visit, earn his Junior Ranger badges, and take the oath to protect parks.

- Image 1: Courtney on a forest walk through The Hermitage in Dunkeld, Scotland
- Image 2: Courtney at Cinnich Glen, a 100-foot gorge near Loch Lomond, Scotland
- Image 3: Courtney at John o’Groats, a coastal village in the far north of Scotland
- Image 4: Courtney hiking with her two sons at Valley of Fire State Park, Nevada