

Meet Melissa

THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION IS NO NEWBIE

“I love a good story, and I’m always fascinated with how people got involved with land trusts. My story starts with a thank you to my sixth grade science teacher, Mr. Gill, for his lesson on rain forests and the impact humans have had on them,” says Melissa Kalvestrand, the new executive director of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. “I’ve been an ecologist at heart and by training ever since, thanks to him.”

Growing up in a suburb of Philadelphia, Kalvestrand also credits her family for how she feels about nature. “I love being outside—biking, canoeing, hiking, camping, gardening or reading in a hammock all recharge me mentally and physically.”

Kalvestrand first joined the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in fall 2009 as a review specialist focused on reviewing accreditation applications. Over the past 10 years she consistently took on more responsibilities at the Commission—first as review manager and then as associate director of reviews.

In 2018, Kalvestrand was promoted to deputy director, overseeing the accreditation review process and facilitating the accreditation decisions for over 100 applications each year. She partnered in developing, interpreting, reviewing and revising the accreditation program requirements and maintaining the

Requirements Manual. She also co-facilitated the public participation process resulting in the 2017 revisions to *Land Trust Standards and Practices*.

When the Commission’s founding executive director Tammara Van Ryn left, Kalvestrand saw an opportunity to grow and develop her experiences and passion for the Commission’s work. She applied for the executive director job and was selected in January 2020.

“The Commissioners are thrilled to welcome Melissa in this new role,” says Commission Chair Bruce Runnels. “The executive director search was an extensive and thorough process, welcoming applicants from across the country. Melissa’s passion for our work and vision for the future combined with her depth of experience made her an outstanding candidate. As the newly elected Commission chair I am looking forward to working closely with Melissa as we work with the Land Trust Alliance to ensure the vital work of land conservation.”

Kalvestrand’s passion for the great outdoors has fueled a life filled with exploring and traveling. “My husband is a biology teacher, and we love to see the spark in our 9-year-old’s eyes when she is the first to spot a bird or a lizard or to find that one perfect rock to skip in the stream.” Kalvestrand hopes to cross nine more states off her list in the future to reach her goal of seeing all 50 states. She makes sure to stop at every National Park she comes across. So far



she’s visited 16, including ones in Hawaii, Alaska, Montana and Arizona.

Kalvestrand looks forward to building on the accreditation program’s successes and leading the Commission in its now second decade. “The Commission will engage with accredited land trusts in new ways to improve their return on investment in the program. Over my tenure, I have seen firsthand how the accreditation process and related investments from land trusts and the Alliance have strengthened the entire land trust movement. That strength is what will help the land trust community be more resilient to the stress of the current times.”

She looks forward to connecting with land trusts and hearing the stories about the people and the special places they work to protect. 🌿