

BY Caity Pinkard

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION  
COMMISSION 

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

# GIVING BACK TO THE *Land Trust Community*

**F**ive days after her first Land Trust Accreditation Commission meeting, volunteer commissioner Karen Ferrell-Ingram’s property was destroyed by a wildfire. As harrowing as this experience was, it gave her a new perspective, she says, “on the restoration of conservation values and on rebuilding a home on an easement property.”

While she credits her parents with instilling in her a love of nature, Ferrell-Ingram was re-inspired almost 20 years ago when she and her husband realized they had built a home within an important deer migration corridor. “How could we permanently preserve our land, as well as create an opportunity for other residents to maintain their open spaces?” she wondered. “We looked around and discovered the land trust model, and with Land Trust Alliance assistance, we co-founded Eastern Sierra Land Trust.”

Ferrell-Ingram began her term as a commissioner in January 2015. “The accreditation process made a big difference for my land trust back in 2011 and I wanted to pay it forward.” She estimates she volunteers about 400 hours per year. “As anyone who has experienced accreditation knows, we are very detail-oriented, so our meetings and calls are not brief, although they are very well organized!”

“We have such a wealth of knowledge on the Commission and the level of competence and commitment of the staff is incredible,” Ferrell-Ingram says. Although it isn’t just the staff that she enjoys working with. She also values “getting to know accredited land trusts and the amazing projects they pursue.”

As a commissioner and application reviewer, Ferrell-Ingram hopes the land trust community will accept accreditation as “a regular part of doing business.” She says

that the recent impact evaluation found that accreditation has definitively helped position land trusts to preserve more land and to do it permanently. “I’m hoping that through our focus on continuous improvement we can build on our role as a valued partner to land trusts.”

First-year commissioner Andrew Kota admits he was surprised when the Commission first asked him to join as a volunteer, but it didn’t take much to convince him. “I thought it was an opportunity to contribute to a cause greater than that of the land trust I work for, and a way to learn more about the best practices land trusts around the country are implementing in their work.”

He says, “Staff and commissioners alike are intelligent, hardworking and thoughtful people who care about the integrity of land conservation around the country and who truly want land trusts to succeed with their mission. I’m impressed by the incredible level of expertise in various fields that each commissioner and staff member brings to the Commission.”

Growing up in West Virginia, Kota always knew it was important to protect open spaces for people to experience nature, and he’s been involved in land conservation ever since. Starting as a land trust intern, he has since built a land trust stewardship program, spent years doing conservation transactions, worked in fundraising and development, and most recently, had the

## **Karen and Andrew: *By the Numbers***

Collective years volunteering with the Commission:

**5-½**

Collective years working at land trusts:

**28**


Total hours volunteering with the Commission per year:

**700+**

Total pages read before each meeting:

**680+**

good fortune to lead his land trust, the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, as executive director. “I’ve had my hand in most aspects of this work,” he says, and his background helps him evaluate land trusts in the accreditation process.

Kota hopes that the Commission will continue to add value to the land trusts engaged in the accreditation process and that it attracts greater participation. For him, the best part of working with the Commission has been seeing how his land trust is “part of something that is much larger than each of our organizations individually.” 

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