

BY Caity Pinkard

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION
COMMISSION 

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

Vision and Hope

FOR SOME LAND TRUSTS, MERGING IS THE NEXT STEP IN THEIR EVOLUTION



From left to right: Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy board members Kirsten Peckerman, Margery Feldberg and Christine Flynn hold kestrel chicks. Executive Director Catherine Rawson says mergers allowed NCLC to uphold the promise of perpetual land conservation.

When Colorado Open Lands merged with the Colorado Conservation Trust in 2013, the process was not without its challenges. “Each merging land trust has its own culture, history of accomplishments and means of engaging with its board, landowners and stakeholders,” says Community Conservation Program Manager Ben Lenth. For COL, the key was approaching these challenges as partners, while also recognizing the dedication and investment of each land trust. “A merger is an extreme option of how two organizations may work together,” Lenth says. But when done correctly, it can create a more sustainable and productive partnership.

Catherine Rawson, the executive director of the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy, shares how a merger can benefit the land trusts involved. After NCLC merged with Brookfield Open Space Legacy in 2019 and with the Naromi Land Trust in 2020, Rawson noticed an increased capacity to provide member programs and benefits, as well as a more effective allocation of financial resources. “Land trusts have unique missions to protect land in perpetuity,” Rawson says. “In both cases, the mergers allowed us to deliver services and benefits to

our communities and members more efficiently, and better positioned us to uphold the promise of perpetual land conservation.”

Still, Rawson notes that the process of integration continues long after the merger occurs. “Even a straightforward merger requires a commitment of time over a 12-month period,” she says. For NCLC, accreditation played a big role in managing the ongoing organizational restructuring. “Accredited organizations share fundamental practices and policies that make our operations similar,” Rawson explains.

“We undoubtedly saved on staff time and legal costs as a result of merging with an accredited organization.”

Lenth also noted that accreditation can help with the process of merging, but one land trust not being accredited is not a barrier to considering a merger. “COL has merged with both accredited and unaccredited partners,” he says. “When a merging partner has adhered to *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, it provides an extra level of confidence that things were done right.” Due to the high standards set by accreditation for land trust operations, “it makes review and acceptance of another organization’s work easier.” Whether or not your organization is accredited though, Lenth says the key to any merger is to remember your shared goals.

“Focus on why you’re merging: on the community, as in the people, boards, landowners, donors and other community members who have given so much to this effort,” Lenth says. While mergers have many benefits from an operational standpoint, the real goal of any merger should be to better serve the community. As Lenth puts it, “If we’re successful, the merging land trust’s sense of community is preserved, and the transition is viewed not just as a natural next step in the organization’s evolution, but also a success for the community.”

When considering whether a merger is right for your land trust, Rawson has similar advice from someone who’s been through it: “Remind yourselves of the vision and hope you had when the process began, and focus on the positive outcome you are working to create.”

CAITY PINKARD IS THE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER AT CONSERVATION STRATEGY FUND.

Land Trust Accreditation



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL ACCREDITED LAND TRUSTS IN 2020

In August, the Commission announced the largest renewal class to date. In November, 17 more land trusts (bolded below) were added to the renewal list. There are currently 442 accredited land trusts. Organizations who continue to pursue conservation excellence through the accreditation program are an inspiration to the entire land trust community.

NEWLY ACCREDITED IN 2020

- 7 Lakes Alliance (ME)
- Alabama Forest Resources Center (AL)
- Golden State Land Conservancy (CA)
- Great Rivers Land Trust (IL)
- Middlebury Land Trust (CT)
- Mountains Restoration Trust (CA)

ALL RENEWALS IN 2020

- Androscoggin Land Trust (ME)
- **Aquidneck Land Trust (RI)** ♦
- Ashby Land Trust (MA)
- Athens Land Trust (GA) ♦
- Bangor Land Trust (ME)
- **Bear Yuba Land Trust (CA)** ♦
- Blue Mountain Land Trust (WA)
- Boothbay Region Land Trust (ME)
- Buzzards Bay Coalition and its affiliate, Acushnet River Reserve (MA)
- Cape Elizabeth Land Trust (ME)
- Catawba Lands Conservancy (NC) ♦
- Central Savannah River Land Trust (GA) ♦
- Coastal Mountains Land Trust (ME) ♦
- Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust (ME)
- Colchester Land Trust (CT)
- Colorado Cattleman's Agricultural Land Trust (CO) ♦
- Colorado West Land Trust (CO) ♦
- Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust (MA)
- Deschutes Land Trust (OR) ♦
- Dutchess Land Conservancy (NY) ♦
- Eagle Valley Land Trust (CO) ♦
- **Edisto Island Open Land Trust (SC)** ♦
- Feather River Land Trust (CA)
- Forest Society of Maine (ME) ♦

- Freshwater Land Trust (AL) ♦
- Georges River Land Trust (ME)
- Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (MI) ♦
- Great Peninsula Conservancy (WA)
- Greenbelt Land Trust (OR) ♦
- Greensboro Land Trust (VT) ♦
- Groton Conservation Trust (MA)
- Hawaiian Islands Land Trust (HI) ♦
- Hill Country Conservancy (TX)
- **Historic Virginia Land Conservancy (VA)**
- Hunterdon Land Trust (NJ)
- Jefferson Land Trust (WA) ♦
- **Kinnickinnic River Land Trust (WI)** ♦
- Lake Champlain Land Trust (VT) ♦
- Lake Forest Open Lands Association and its affiliate, Lake Forest Land Foundation (IL) ♦
- Lake George Land Conservancy (NY)
- Lancaster Farmland Trust (PA) ♦
- **Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain (MS)** ♦
- Land Trust for Santa Barbara County (CA) ♦
- Land Trust for Tennessee (TN) ♦
- Land Trust of Bucks County (PA) ♦
- Land Trust of Virginia (VA) ♦
- Legacy Land Conservancy (MI) ♦
- Leelanau Conservancy (MI) ♦
- Lemhi Regional Land Trust (ID)
- Lyme Land Conservation Trust (CT)
- Minnesota Land Trust (MN) ♦
- Monadnock Conservancy (NH) ♦
- Mountain Conservation Trust of Georgia (GA) ♦
- **Natural Lands and its affiliate, Montgomery County Lands Trust (PA)** ♦
- **Nevada Land Trust (NV)**

- New Mexico Land Conservancy (NM)
- Northern California Regional Land Trust (CA) ♦
- Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (VA) ♦
- Northwest Arkansas Land Trust (AR)
- **Oceanside Conservation Trust of Casco Bay (ME)**
- Open Space Institute and its affiliate, Open Space Institute Land Trust (NY) ♦
- Orange County Land Trust (NY)
- Peninsula Open Space Trust (CA) ♦
- Pines and Prairies Land Trust (TX)
- Rensselaer Land Trust (NY) ♦
- **Sacramento Valley Conservancy (CA)** ♦
- Salem Land Trust (CT) ♦
- Santa Fe Conservation Trust (NM)
- Saratoga P.L.A.N. (NY)
- Sharon Land Trust (CT)
- **Sheriff's Meadow Foundation (MA)**
- Sierra Foothill Conservancy (CA)
- Six Rivers Land Conservancy (MI)
- Skagitj Land Trust (WA) ♦
- **South Alabama Land Trust (AL)** ♦
- Southeast Alaska Land Trust (AK)
- St. Simons Land Trust (GA)
- Tall Pines Conservancy (WI)
- Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy (FL) ♦
- **Tecumseh Land Trust (OH)** ♦
- Tejon Ranch Conservancy (CA)
- **Teton Regional Land Trust (ID)** ♦
- The Conservation Fund and its affiliate, Sustainable Conservation (VA)
- Thousand Islands Land Trust (NY) ♦
- Three Rivers Land Trust (NC)
- **Tinicum Conservancy (PA)** ♦
- **Tri-Valley Conservancy (CA)** ♦
- Upstate Forever (SC) ♦
- Utah Open Lands (UT)
- Warren Land Trust (CT)
- Westchester Land Trust (NY) ♦
- Wilderness Land Trust (WA) ♦
- **Wildlife Heritage Foundation (CA)** ♦
- Willistown Conservation Trust (PA) ♦

♦ Second Renewals

For the complete list of accredited land trusts, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org/about/accredited-land-trusts

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