



COURTESY OF WESTMORELAND CONSERVANCY

↑ Westmoreland Conservancy's Shelly Tichy (center, in yellow jacket) with volunteers and members of the Potter family at Potter's Reserve.

## ACCREDITATION AT ANY SIZE: HOW ALL-VOLUNTEER LAND TRUSTS MAKE ACCREDITATION A REALITY By CAITY PINKARD

In 2010, the Westmoreland Conservancy, an all-volunteer land trust based in Pennsylvania, was presented with an opportunity to have a consultant help guide them through the accreditation process. “Accreditation was a topic discussed at several board meetings, as the movement became increasingly visible,” recalls Shelly Tichy, the current president of Westmoreland Conservancy. “Ultimately, the board decided to pursue the opportunity.”

But even with this support, Westmoreland’s decision to go through the process was not undertaken lightly. “In general, the process is intimidating,” Tichy says. While her organization made every effort to follow best practices, challenges often arose with older acquisitions. “As an organization that had been protecting land for more than 20 years as volun-

teers, it was necessary to pull together documents and create policies to meet standards.”

While that can be an investment of time and resources for any land trust, it is particularly true of all-volunteer land trusts without full-time, dedicated staff. “The turnover of volunteers made the process challenging,” Tichy admits.

Fortunately, Westmoreland was able to turn that challenge into an opportunity to share information more freely, work together as a team and treat accreditation as a “promise to do better.” As a result, Westmoreland achieved accreditation in 2013 and renewal in 2019.

Since 2013, Westmoreland has received 318 acres in land gifts, which Tichy sees as a reflection of the rigor that accreditation represents. “We believe our donors see us as a stable, dependable and committed organization, capable of protecting the lands that they hold dear,” she says. “Accreditation illustrates to potential donors that Westmoreland Conservancy is an organization committed to excellence.”

While many all-volunteer land trusts might view accreditation as out of reach, Tichy urges them to reconsider. Commission Executive Director Melissa Kalvestrand agrees. “One of the Commission’s core values is service, which highlights our commitment to working cooperatively with land trusts of all types and sizes,” she says.

“The accreditation process is rigorous,” Kalvestrand admits. “But every land trust has found opportunities to strengthen their practices as a result. The accreditation process truly seeks to understand the unique story of an organization while ensuring conservation excellence through verified implementation of *Land Trust Standards and Practices*.”

Tichy feels that her organization is stronger for going through the accreditation process and credits her team of hard-working volunteers with making it all possible. “All-volunteer organizations are run by people who make the time to achieve their goals, and the process can be wearing on both the individuals and the organization.” By putting in the work after normal business hours, Westmoreland’s volunteers were able to exceed those goals and make accreditation possible for the organization. “I personally believe Westmoreland Conservancy to be a stronger, more focused organization than before.” ☺

**CAITY PINKARD** is a freelance writer and communications manager at Conservation Strategy Fund.

*This is the first story in a series that will explore how land trusts of any size can achieve accreditation.*

# ACCREDITED LAND TRUST LIST GROWS TO 453

Accreditation involves a rigorous evaluation that ensures applicants are operating at the highest conservation standards. Through the pandemic and environmental crises of the past year, land trusts continue to invest their time and resources in the accreditation process. We are inspired by all accredited land trusts and what they have achieved. Congratulations to the latest round of land trusts who have successfully completed the accreditation process!

## NEWLY ACCREDITED

- Agricultural-Natural Resources Trust (CA)
- California Waterfowl Association (CA)
- Grassroots Gardens of Western New York (NY)
- Guadalupe Blanco River Trust (TX)
- The Escondido Creek Conservancy (CA)
- The Goshen Land Trust (CT)
- Tewksbury Land Trust (NJ)
- Trust for Virgin Islands Lands (VI)
- Western Wildlife Corridor (OH)
- Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KY)
- Licking Land Trust (OH)
- North Salem Open Land Foundation (NY)
- Otsego Land Trust (NY)
- Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust (ME)
- Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (CO) ♦
- RiverLink (NC)
- San Diego Habitat Conservancy (CA)
- Save Mount Diablo (CA)
- South Kingstown Land Trust (RI)
- Upper Saco Valley Land Trust (NH)
- Wallkill Valley Land Trust (NY)
- Wallowa Land Trust (OR)
- Western New York Land Conservancy (NY)
- Western Rivers Conservancy (OR)

## ALL RENEWALS

- Beaufort County Open Land Trust (SC)
- Central Colorado Conservancy (CO)
- Champlain Area Trails (NY)
- Finger Lakes Land Trust (NY)
- French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust (PA)
- Kaniksu Land Trust (ID)

List as of August 2021  
♦ Second Renewals

## HAVE YOU SEEN OUR NEW HANDBOOKS?

We're excited to debut updated versions of the Applicant Handbooks. These roadmaps for the accreditation process outline each step, including what happens at the Commission after you hit submit.

Check out our new handbooks at:

[landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/applicant-handbook](https://landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/applicant-handbook).

## NEWLY FORMATTED AND UPDATED APPLICATIONS

Welcome to a better way to access all the application information you need! The applications for 2022 have been updated to reflect changes to the Requirements Manual announced in March. To help streamline the process, we have put together reference packets for first-time and renewal applicants that consist of everything you need to prepare.

Ultimately, registration, pre-application and application responses and documentation are submitted online via our Accreditation Management System.

You can find the first-time application at

[landtrustaccreditation.org/first-time-accreditation/useful-documents](https://landtrustaccreditation.org/first-time-accreditation/useful-documents)

and the renewal application at [landtrustaccreditation.org/renewal/useful-documents](https://landtrustaccreditation.org/renewal/useful-documents).

**LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION  
COMMISSION** 

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

[landtrustaccreditation.org](https://landtrustaccreditation.org)

# BY THE NUMBERS



## ALL-VOLUNTEER LAND TRUSTS

# 33

ACCREDITED

# 75K

ACRES IN  
CONSERVATION  
EASEMENTS

# 15K

ACRES IN FEE  
PROPERTIES

# \$89K

AVERAGE  
OPERATING  
BUDGET