

BY Caity Pinkard

Agency Partners Value Accreditation

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION
COMMISSION 
An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

Does accreditation increase public confidence in land trusts? “Yes” finds a new report evaluating the impact of the first 10 years of the accreditation program (see article on page 24 and link below).

From increased stakeholder confidence to higher levels of organizational efficiency and governance, the report states that accreditation helps support land trusts in their mission to conserve land in perpetuity.

Important land trust partners—foundations, federal, state and county agencies, and landowners—were interviewed and surveyed as part of the evaluation. Over 80% said accreditation increases their confidence in land trusts, and they factor accreditation into their decision-making.

Some great examples of this confidence can be found at the state level. “Accreditation is an important consideration in the land trust certification process,” says Aaron Welch, a conservation easement examiner with the

Colorado Division of Conservation at the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies.

When landowners apply for state tax credits in Colorado, there is an expedited or automatic certification process for landowners working with accredited land trusts. As Welch says, this statute is a “tacit recognition of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission’s comprehensive accreditation requirements.”

“A benefit of working with an accredited land trust is the ready availability of its written policies and procedures,” Welch says. “When it comes time to demonstrate that an organization has the policies and procedures required for certification in Colorado, it is a straightforward process for it to gather and submit existing documentation. This supports the


rationale for the expedited certification process for nationally accredited organizations.”

Martha Sullivan Sapp, director of the New Jersey Green Acres Program, knows that land transactions are complex, and using public acquisition grants adds another layer of administration to a project. Sapp notes that “for land trusts that have gone through the rigorous accreditation process, we have no doubt that the transaction will be professionally managed, the public funding will be properly spent and the property will be appropriately stewarded long-term. It is not a coincidence that the most successful nonprofits we work with also have attained accreditation. This level of confidence allows us to provide larger grants to these land trusts.”

Green Acres staff also has to provide less oversight when working with staff of accredited land trusts. “This allows us to move projects forward more quickly,” says Sapp.

These comments are consistent with the findings of the impact evaluation. Government funders and private landowners often cited their trust in the third-party review of key activities, while foundations noted how accredited land trusts have stronger systems, practices and governance. “The same philosophy that got them to go for accreditation governs how they do their job,” said one state agency staff member.

Accredited land trusts are using the positive impact of accreditation to their benefit. Seventy-nine percent of accredited land trust survey respondents said accreditation helped increase stakeholder confidence, which in turn helped them to more successfully compete for funding from federal agencies.

“I looked at the list of accredited land trusts in New Jersey and we work with—and provide funding to—all of them,” says Sapp. 



KYLE BARBER

Multiple partners worked with the accredited Bitter Root Land Trust to protect the Lazy J Cross Ranch in Montana.

FIND THE NEW REPORT, “AN IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION PROGRAM’S FIRST TEN YEARS” AT WWW.LANDTRUSTACCREDITATION.ORG/ABOUT/IMPACT-EVALUATION.