

SAVING

LAND

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SUMMER 2023


THE CARBON PATHWAY

KEEPING LAND TRUSTS
ON SOLID GROUND

FARM BILL 2023

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 Land Trust Alliance
Together, conserving the places you love



“Being a small part of this broader legacy is really special, and we carry that responsibility for future generations.”

— Adele Wunsch, a young farmer and new owner of Coulter Farm South

An agricultural conservation easement helped Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy protect Coulter Farm—which features rich soils and spectacular views of Lake Michigan—from development and pass it on as two parcels to new owners who will keep the property as working lands. Read the story on p. 20.



CONTENTS

↑ Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust partners with families to protect ranch lands across the state.

DEPARTMENTS

5 From the President
On being bold.

6 Conservation News
An interfaith partnership to reduce stormwater runoff, youth help revive a creek and more.

10 Capitol Connections
Carrying the spirit of Advocacy Days forward.

12 Voiced
Biodiversity warrior.

24 Land We Love
Return to summer camp.

31 Safeguarding Conservation
Who let the dogs out?

32 Fundraising Wisdom
Where does the money go in environmental grantmaking?

34 Resources & Tools
Share your story of disability and nature.

36 People & Places
Natural burial is a conservation strategy.

38 Accreditation Corner
The new seven-year accreditation term.

FEATURES

14 The Carbon Pathway

A Land Trust Alliance pilot program opens the door to carbon financing for two land trusts in Maine.

By **MADELINE BODIN**

20 Farm Bill 2023

Another reauthorization cycle of the Farm Bill is ramping up, putting a spotlight on the largest source of federal funding for private land conservation.

By **MARINA SCHAUFFLER**

26 Tribute to Terrafirma

Celebrating the 10-year anniversary of Terrafirma, a one-of-a-kind insurance program that helps land trusts defend their conserved lands.

By **TOM SPRINGER**

ON THE COVER:

A popular spot for rock climbing, Tumbledown Dick Mountain is part of a working forest landscape that could be enrolled in Mahoosuc Land Trust's carbon offset project.

JERRY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY

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Land trusts preserve farms and ranches that provide local food. They conserve habitats so plants and animals have a chance to flourish. And they protect natural spaces for people to recreate and relax. Without you, these critically important lands are in danger of being lost forever.



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ON BEING BOLD

IT HAS BEEN A BUSY SPRING here at the Land Trust Alliance, with a successful Advocacy Days “fly-in” event in Washington, D.C., regional land trust conferences and an Alliance board meeting in Utah focused on strategic planning. All these events left me energized for the future and reminded me of psychologist Abraham Maslow’s popular words: “In any given moment, we have two options: To step forward into growth or to step back into safety.” The Alliance has always chosen to step forward with thoughtful, careful consideration. The stories in this issue of the magazine highlight how the Alliance is continuously innovating and taking bold steps to meet the needs of land trusts across the country.

The feature story on our carbon offset pilot (see p. 14) reflects our commitment to finding new ways to finance conservation. The story celebrating Terrafirma’s 10-year anniversary (see p. 26) tells how the Alliance boldly dove in to provide land trusts with the safety net they need in the event of legal challenges. And, although advocating for conservation funding in the Farm Bill (see p. 20) is a constant at the Alliance, we are always looking for creative ways to bring more resources to power private land conservation. One such example is the Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) Act of 2023, legislation the Alliance has championed and that was introduced by a bipartisan congressional coalition in late May. If passed and signed



DJ GLISSON, I/FIREFLY IMAGEWORKS

into law, FCEP will help keep private forestland intact and sustainably managed for timber.

As we head into the summer months, I urge you to also find opportunities to be bold—whether in your work or personal life—and to make time to get outdoors.

ANDREW BOWMAN

Friendly Fencing Helps Wildlife in the Northern Bighorns



SHERIDAN COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

↑ This spring, Sheridan Community Land Trust (SCLT) assisted with the retrieval of collars that had been deployed to study the movements of mule deer in the northern Bighorns of Wyoming. SCLT's Meghan Kent (left) assists Rocio Gosende-Washburn (right) as she uses a special antenna to search for a signal emitted by each collar once it drops from a deer.

In the high foothills beyond Big Goose Canyon in the northern Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming, staff from the accredited Sheridan Community Land Trust (SCLT) searched for an unusual prize this spring: three GPS collars that dropped from mule deer.

Equipped with coordinates of the drop points and an antenna to pick up radio signals from the collars, SCLT Conservation Program Manager Meghan Kent and SCLT Operations Manager Rocio Gosende-Washburn strapped on snowshoes to trek through snowfields that lingered longer than usual this spring.

Once the collars were located, data could be downloaded about when and where the deer travelled. The does were first collared in 2021 as part of a pioneering study by SCLT and conservation partners. As that study winds down, conservation efforts will expand as the Wyoming Game and Fish Department begins a complementary five-year study.

Knowing where mule deer feed, breed and raise their young helps wildlife biologists and conservationists determine where to focus efforts on protecting their habitat. SCLT plans to use the information to help landowners remove, replace or modify fences to make it easier for mule deer to move across their land.

SCLT has several “friendly fence” projects underway in Sheridan and Johnson counties and compiled a free brief guide to help landowners deploy wildlife friendly fencing methods. “Even something as simple as leaving a gate open for wildlife to pass through without crossing a fence makes a difference,” says Kent.

The guide is available at SheridanCLT.org/Land/Friendly-Fencing. The land trust also has a drought planner and monthly water supply reports to help farmers and ranchers navigate challenges during droughts. For more information, visit SheridanCLT.org/Water. ☺

GARDENERS AND PARISHIONERS UNITE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

If we want clearer, cleaner creeks—we need to manage our stormwater better,” is the motto of Gunpowder Valley Conservancy’s Clear Creeks Project. The initiative works to restore water quality in the Gunpowder Watershed of Pennsylvania and Maryland, which drains into the Chesapeake Bay.

The Clear Creeks Project has worked with several faith-based institutions. Recently, Gunpowder Valley Conservancy (MD) launched a year-long partnership with Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake to support a Bay-Wise Project at Divinity Lutheran Church, primarily funded by a Chesapeake Bay Trust Outreach and Restoration Grant.

This summer, the project will install

a micro-bioretenention practice to treat runoff from the parking lot, a native Bayscape to enhance wildlife habitat and two rain barrels to capture runoff from the church roof. Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake will provide resources to help the congregation form “green teams” and spiritual workshops that complement environmental stewardship.

Two garden clubs that use the church as a meeting space will be involved with the Bayscape garden installation and maintenance. And master gardeners from University of Maryland Extension will help the property qualify for Bay-Wise Certification.

“Divinity Lutheran Church is a small congregation with a call in our



GUNPOWDER VALLEY CONSERVANCY

↑ A partnership between Maryland’s Gunpowder Valley Conservancy and faith-based institutions like Divinity Lutheran Church is improving stormwater management to restore Chesapeake Bay water quality.

faith tradition to love our neighbors and care for all creation,” says pastor Chris Schaefer. “We are excited to partner with Gunpowder Valley Conservancy to improve the environmental stewardship of our property and host free workshops for the surrounding community to become more active partners in caring for creation.” ☺



OPEN LAND TRUST, MILES SANDER

↑ Working farmland on St. Helena Island under conservation easement increases resilience of sea islands surrounding Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island as part of the new sentinel landscape in South Carolina.

SOUTH CAROLINA’S LOWCOUNTRY GAINS “SENTINEL LANDSCAPE” DESIGNATION

A newly established “sentinel landscape” in South Carolina’s Lowcountry will help protect more than 2.2 million acres of longleaf pine forest, ranchlands, sprawling salt marshes, forested wetlands and unbroken wildlife corridors in the southeastern corner of South Carolina.

The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, brings together the U.S. Departments of Defense, Agriculture and Interior to conserve land around military bases. The program continues to grow in funding and stature, delivering nearly a billion dollars of conservation funding over the last decade.

According to the Sentinel Landscapes 2022 Accomplishments Report, sentinel landscapes have permanently protected nearly 610,000 acres of land and enrolled over 3.1 million acres of land in voluntary conservation programs since 2013.

The South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape will support training activities for Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island and Naval Support Facility Beaufort.

Key partners—including Ducks Unlimited (accredited), Lowcountry Land Trust (accredited), Open Land Trust, Open Space Institute and The Nature Conservancy (accredited)—in the South Carolina Lowcountry Sentinel Landscape will work on protecting ecologically significant areas, drinking water supplies and working farmland, with the goal of maintaining long-term military readiness and climate resilience across the landscape.

The program experiences strong competition from local interests who want their places to be selected as sentinel landscapes. The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership holds designation cycles for new sentinel landscapes on a biennial basis. ☺

To learn more about the 2024 round of sentinel landscape nominations, visit sentinellandscapes.org/get-involved.

Florida’s Little Tiger Island Is Finally Protected

Little Tiger Island in Florida’s Nassau County provides important habitat for a number of federally listed and candidate species, including the gopher tortoise, West Indian manatee, wood stork, Atlantic sturgeon and piping plover.

In 2021, the accredited North Florida Land Trust secured a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program to protect the island. Earlier this year, Florida officials approved the property for acquisition. In February, the state officially closed on the property using an additional \$965,000 in funds from the Florida Forever program.

“We have been working to protect this property for years and are thrilled it will now be natural forever, because it is now or never. Little Tiger Island is an important ecosystem for many plant and animal species and provides environmental benefits to the area,” says North Florida Land Trust President Allison DeFoor.

The 565 acres of salt marsh and maritime forest connect a network of protected lands and waters along the Florida-Georgia border from St. Andrew Sound in Georgia to the St. Johns River, which includes Fort Clinch State Park, Cumberland Island National Seashore and the Fort Clinch Aquatic Preserve.

The island’s preservation will help protect the area against flooding, erosion and storm surge while safeguarding wildlife habitat. Little Tiger Island will become part of Fort Clinch State Park and will be managed by Florida’s Division of Recreation and Parks. ☺



NORTH FLORIDA LAND TRUST

↑ This spring, the state of Florida acquired Nassau County’s Little Tiger Island after its protection by North Florida Land Trust.

YOUTH RESTORE CREEK AND SECURE WATER FOR NATIVE PLANTS

Nearly 800 Northern California schoolchildren descended the banks of Stemple Creek earlier this year to plant more than 3,000 native plant species. They joined the accredited Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) and a coalition working to enhance the critically important waterway that flows through thousands of acres of agricultural land, including Lazy R Ranch.

To help the young plants survive, MALT secured one of the project's most important ingredients: water. Although parts of California currently face the prospect of intense flooding, at the time, the severity of California's drought left little in Lazy R Ranch's main pond to irrigate the project's plants.

In 2021, MALT launched a Drought Resilience and Water Security Initiative (DRAWS) to help Marin County farmers and ranchers develop water sources, add water storage and increase water distribution. With DRAWS funding, Lazy R Ranch installed a rainwater harvesting system, a 5,000-gallon tank and a pumping system to feed the property's main pond.

After the new water storage system was installed, the main pond at the Lazy R Ranch was full for the first time in years, with enough water resources for the livestock operation and to ensure the project's plantings could firmly take root. "It's amazing to see this all come to fruition," says the Lazy R Ranch's Linda Righetti Judah. "It's truly a dream come true."

Marin Resource Conservation District and Point Blue Conservation Science's Students and Teachers Restoring A Watershed



↑ Northern California schoolchildren hard at work installing native plants for a Marin Agricultural Land Trust creek restoration project.

(STRAW) program secured more than \$800,000 for the project. Marin Resource Conservation District is now looking to other properties within the Stemple Creek watershed, many of which are MALT-protected, to conduct similar initiatives to enhance water quality. ☺

1,000-Plus Acres of Biodiverse Texas Hill Country Protected



↑ An endangered species, the golden-cheeked warbler breeds only within the Edwards Plateau Region of Central Texas.

More than 1,000 acres of uniquely biodiverse land in the Texas Hill Country has been permanently protected from future development in Hays County, one of the fastest growing areas of Central Texas.

This easement was proposed and sponsored by Hill Country Conservancy to be funded through the 2020 Hays County Parks and Open Space Bond. The 2020 Parks and Open Space Bond called for the issuance of \$75 million to establish parks, open spaces, conservation lands and other recreational opportunities in Hays County.

The Hays County Commissioners Court approved approximately \$9.6 million last fall for the Purgatory Creek Nature Preserve, which includes golden-cheeked warbler habitat, natural springs, canyons,

caves and other karst features that carry water directly into the Edwards Aquifer.

Purgatory Creek Nature Preserve is located next to the Purgatory Creek Natural Area, the La Cima Parkland and the La Cima Regional Habitat Conservation Plan Preserve. Together, the combined areas contain more than 3,200 acres of protected land in the Texas Hill Country, creating one of the state's largest unbroken blocks of urban wilderness, open space and water quality protection lands.

Kathy Miller, CEO of the accredited Hill Country Conservancy, noted in a press release that the preserve is "a great example of a private and public partnership that can balance the need to plan for future growth while preserving the surrounding ecosystem and the community's access to nature." ☺

International Wildlife Corridor Boosted by Land Trusts' Work

The Algonquin to Adirondacks corridor (dubbed A2A) is one of the most intact forest and wetland linkages left in eastern North America, stretching between New York and Canada. In 1998, the journey of a collared moose named Alice helped bring attention to the A2A wildlife corridor. Since then, many groups and land trusts have joined forces in the A2A Collaborative, an effort that brings together First Nations, conservation organizations, landowners and policymakers to conserve this natural landscape to benefit wildlife and people.

The accredited Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT) is a land trust exclusively focused on forever-wild conservation in New England and New York to support wildlife habitat and connectivity. Those goals led them to the A2A in 2022.

In the fall of last year, NEWT purchased 1,433 acres of former timberland in St. Lawrence County just beyond the

Adirondack Park to create the Grasse River Wilderness Preserve. A few months later, in January 2023, the organization announced it had purchased roughly 1,050 acres, now called the Bear Pond Forest, in a remote part of the park, within the Five Ponds Wilderness.

Late in 2022, and then in the first half of 2023, NEWT worked with two additional accredited land trusts in the A2A—Indian River Lakes Conservancy and Thousand Islands Land Trust—to add forever-wild conservation easements to properties they protect. Both organizations collaborated with NEWT through its Wildlands Partnership, an initiative that aims to increase forever-wild land protection across the Northeast in partnership with accredited land trusts.

“One of our primary purposes is to protect wild, resilient and linked land for wildlife. The A2A corridor is all about connectivity and making space



BRENDAN WILTSE

↑ Northeast Wilderness Trust's Grasse River Wilderness Preserve at sunset.

for wildlife to move about, finding safe spaces to raise their families. We are really pleased to deepen our connection to the region while supporting the shared goals of the A2A Collaborative,” says Jon Leibowitz, executive director of NEWT. ☺

GREAT LAKES LAND TRUSTS AWARDED GRANTS FOR WATER QUALITY



WALLOON LAKE ASSOCIATION AND CONSERVANCY

↑ Michigan's Walloon Lake Association and Conservancy received a Land Trust Alliance grant to improve aquatic invasive species awareness and boat launch signage at Walloon Lake.

The Great Lakes encompass the largest surface of fresh water in the world, but they face multiple threats, including invasive species, pollutants, loss of natural lands, algal blooms, climate change and more.

To help land trusts protect and restore freshwater resources in the Great Lakes basin, earlier this year the Land Trust Alliance awarded in total more than \$100,000 in grants to 15 land trusts in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin.

The grants will help Great Lakes land trusts develop strategic protection plans and effectively steward one of the world's greatest freshwater resources. For instance, Michigan's Upper Peninsula Land Conservancy (accredited) received funding to collaborate with local Indigenous communities on strategic conservation planning, and Indiana's Little River Wetlands Project was awarded money to restore wetlands in Eagle Marsh, one of the country's largest urban wetland restoration projects.

In 2019 and 2020, the Alliance assessed how Midwest member land trusts are already protecting Great Lakes water quality and what could help them increase their impact, and in 2022 the Alliance used the findings to launch the Great Lakes Land and Water Initiative, funded by The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and The Volgenau Foundation.

“There is an intimate connection between what happens on our land and the health of the water that flows from it, making land trusts perfectly positioned to lead water quality initiatives that are critically important to their communities,” says Andrew Bowman, the Alliance's president and CEO. ☺



DJ GLEESON, IIFIRELY IMAGEWORKS

↑ Brenda Mallory, chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, speaking at Advocacy Days 2023.

CARRYING THE SPIRIT OF ADVOCACY DAYS FORWARD

By **LAUREL BRODSKY,**
CLARE DRISCOLL
and **ANNA HICKS**

Just a few months after the start of the 118th session of Congress, the Land Trust Alliance brought together 108 land trust leaders to Washington, D.C., for its 12th Annual Advocacy Days event on April 17-20. The event featured high-profile speakers and 175 meetings with congressional offices to discuss key issues and to share strategies to advance conservation goals. With more than 80 new members of Congress, Advocacy Days offered an important opportunity to educate newer decision-makers on the critical role of voluntary private land conservation and to reconnect with returning members of Congress and staff to advance our policy platform on behalf of the land trust community.

Once again, this year's Advocacy Days took place largely in-person with a virtual issue briefing and first-timers training held two weeks before the Washington fly-in. During the training, members of the Alliance's government relations team and guest speakers provided an overview of

our policy priorities, background information on bills and advice for meeting with members. Additional land trust leaders who were unable to join us in Washington logged on to participate in the virtual trainings, bringing the total number of attendees at Advocacy Days events to 126 people.

The in-person event kicked off with a welcome reception at a local beer garden on the evening of April 17. The event continued the next morning with a distinguished speaker series featuring Brenda Mallory, chair of the Council on Environmental Quality; Troy Heithecker, U.S. Forest Service associate deputy chief; Rep. Andrea Salinas; and Karen Woodrich, deputy chief for programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Each speaker underscored the importance of advocating for private land conservation and educating members and agencies on how our community serves landowners through conservation programs.

ON THE HILL

The Hill was lively, with beautiful spring weather, as attendees navigated the Capitol complex to participate in 175 meetings with congressional offices. In these meetings, land trust leaders advocated for our policy priorities with a focus on the 2023 Farm Bill. In addition, they asked for support for upcoming and recently introduced legislation such as the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act and the North American Grasslands Conservation Act. Participants also voiced support for regional measures, including the New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act. The successes of our advocacy were seen in no time at all as the New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act was introduced in the House just a week after the conclusion of Advocacy Days.

During these meetings, attendees prioritized making connections with new members and educating them and their staff on what a land trust is and how they serve their communities. As Karsyn Kendrick, conservation program manager for the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT), put it, “With so many new members of Congress and new staffers, it was a great opportunity to do some face-to-face education about land trusts and their needs in Oregon. I was also able to share some amazing stories from each district, along with offers to get staff out on the land to see some of our projects.”

Advocates’ voices were not just heard in meetings. Molly Fales and Brendan Boepple of Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust partnered with the Alliance and the American Farmland Trust to draft and submit a letter in support of NRCS conservation easement programs in advance of a Senate Subcommittee on Conservation, Climate, Forestry, and Natural Resources hearing.

Between meetings with congressional offices, attendees met with staff from both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees to hear about the status of the 2023 Farm Bill negotiations and to advocate for our 2023 Farm Bill priorities. Our highest priorities include seeking increased funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to meet outsized demand and establishing a comprehensive forest conserva-

“I felt so energized and pumped up for land trust work after the meetings, and super excited to get legislators and their staffers out to see some of our projects in the fall.”

—Karsyn Kendrick, conservation program manager for the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT)

tion easement program. More than 20 Alliance and land trust leaders attended each committee meeting and provided tangible examples of issues they face in accessing and utilizing federal funding.

A CELEBRATION OF PARTNERSHIP

Advocacy Days attendees, members of Congress and their staff and partners came together for an evening reception to celebrate NRCS conservation easement programs. Multiple esteemed officials and members of Congress addressed the crowd, including Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Rep. Abigail Spanberger, NRCS Associate Chief Louis Aspey, Sen. Mike Braun, Sen. Roger “Doc” Marshall and Rep. Earl Blumenauer. These distinguished speakers highlighted the bipartisan support of land conservation, the successes of the land trust community in conserving over 61 million acres of land to date, and the importance of the Farm Bill easement programs. Stabenow also took a moment to recognize the passing of the Charitable Conservation Easement Program Integrity Act, which was an important victory following last year’s Advocacy Days event.

The week ended with Agency Day with attendees meeting with officials from

the USDA, the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service. In each meeting, members highlighted success stories illustrating how agency funding can leverage the land trust community’s expertise by strengthening the access and effectiveness of conservation programs. Alliance members advocated for changes that can help get funding off the ground, such as reducing administrative barriers and streamlining review processes. Larry Levin from Ozark Land Trust emphasized how these meetings are an important forum to share appreciation for each agency’s partnership and provide updates on what is working and what can be improved. “With Fish and Wildlife, I was able to offer thanks for the support our Meramec River work has received from the fishers and farmers partnership,” said Levin.

Although this year’s Advocacy Days event has come to a close, the hard work continues. Legislators are still drafting the 2023 Farm Bill, and many other important bills for land conservation are moving through the House and Senate or are set to be introduced soon.

We hope all attendees carry this spirit of Advocacy Days into the year ahead! ☺

LAUREL BRODSKY, CLARE DRISCOLL and ANNA HICKS are interns with the Alliance’s government relations team.



↑ Alliance government relations team members (left to right): Lori Faeth, Clare Driscoll, Laurel Brodsky, Anna Hicks, Nikki Nesbary and Chelsea Welch.

DI GLISSON, iFIREFLY IMAGEWORKS



↑ Doug Tallamy.

BIODIVERSITY WARRIOR

Doug Tallamy is on a mission to convert individual home and property owners into biodiversity warriors. A best-selling author, Tallamy founded Homegrown National Park (HNP) with Michelle Alfandari in 2020. Tallamy argues that conservation needs to happen outside parks and preserves, and everyone can step up to help, whether with a flowerpot, lawn, garden, woodlot, ranch or farm.

“Conservation is a discipline with a deadline.”

— E. O. Wilson

In my view, the only way to achieve E. O. Wilson’s dream of protecting the natural world on at least half of the planet, as described in his 2016 book “Half Earth,” is to coexist with nature, in the same place, at the same time. We must bury forever the notion that humans are here and nature is someplace else, for there are no longer enough “someplace else’s” to meet the need. We have persisted for the last century in the misguided belief that humans can only thrive when segregated from the natural world, and, as a result, the U.S. has formally protected only 12% of its land.

We can achieve Wilson’s lofty goals without excluding the human enterprise, but the key to doing this is to practice conservation not only in protected wildlands, but also outside of parks and preserves: where we live, work, farm and play. And by “we,” I don’t mean just a few ecologists and conservation biologists. I mean every one of us. Conservation is the responsibility of everyone on Earth because every one of us depends entirely on healthy ecosystems.

We’re off to a good start. Property owners throughout the country—and particularly the more than 29,000 individuals registered on HNP’s interactive map to indicate the native plants they have added to their landscape—are shrinking lawns, planting trees, expanding native plant populations, protecting woodlots and removing invasives all over the U.S. One HNP campaign, “No Yard, No Problem,” introduced container gardening with keystone plants by ecoregion and inspired city dwellers to be part of the movement—our TikTok post received over 4 million views.

I am grateful to everyone who has heard the urgency in Wilson’s voice. But we need more people to hear it, and we need them to hear it soon. Let’s convince 10 times more people to build their own part of Homegrown National Park—it’s fun, it’s rewarding, it’s vital and above all else, it works!

Humanity has entered a race, perhaps the most important race humans have ever been challenged to: a race against time, a race to curb our own destructive habits, a race to change our culture from one that exiles Mother Nature to the most uninhabitable places on Earth to one that welcomes Her into all human-dominated spaces. As E. O. Wilson famously said, “Conservation is a discipline with a deadline.” The deadline is approaching, so please help spread his important message! ☺

Land trusts can register on the HNP map to help get an accurate record of conservation on private property and encourage their communities to get involved. Visit map.homegrownnationalpark.org.



“Support from the Land Trust Alliance provided a lasting impact during 2022, as it always has. Along with elevating the land trust community as a whole, the Alliance has been instrumental in the growth and new direction of the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust.”

—TYLER SANDERSON, executive director, Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (accredited), Texas

CREDIT: GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER TRUST

OUR MEMBERS ARE AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO.

The Land Trust Alliance is here to support you through crises and join you in celebrating your victories. Most of all, we share your passion for conservation. We are inspired by all you do to conserve lands and waters and to foster healthy, vibrant communities now and for future generations.

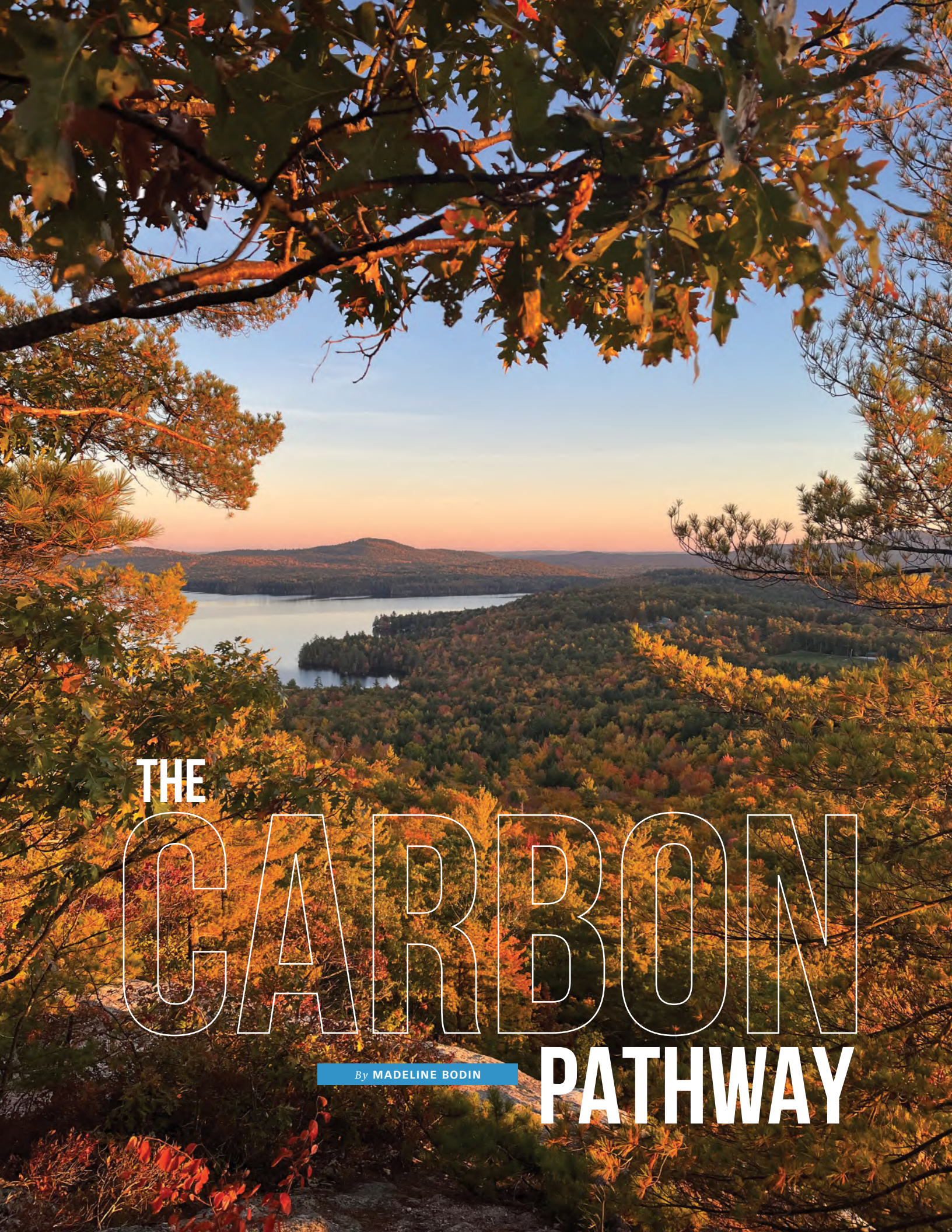


“We’re rocking it right now, and that’s because the Land Trust Alliance came in at the right time to help us just take off.”

—KAY OGDEN, executive director, Eastern Sierra Land Trust (accredited), California

The Land Trust Alliance is here for you:

- **We invest in our members** so you can take your career and organization to the next level.
- **We advocate for our members** for policies so you can conserve more land.
- **We offer conservation defense tools to help our members** ensure that protected land stays protected—so you can sleep at night.
- **We connect our members to each other**, to experts and to potential partners so you never feel alone.
- **We provide our members with standards**, training and expertise so you have what you need to run and grow your organization.
- **We are champions of our members’** reputation so you have the support of your community and the public.
- **We keep our members abreast of the latest developments**, trends and opportunities so you can feel confident, informed and inspired.
- **Our events and platforms help you** share your success stories and lessons learned with the land trust community.



THE
CARBON
PATHWAY

By MADELINE BODIN

←
A view from Loon Echo Land Trust's Bald Pate Mountain Preserve out toward Tiger Hill Community Forest. Both properties are enrolled in the Alliance's pilot carbon project.

↓
Loon Echo staff monitor a conservation holding in Maine's Lake Region.

For over three decades, Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT) has conserved forests and wetlands in the northern Sebago Lake region of southwestern Maine. Like many medium-sized land trusts, success has come at a cost, or rather, with costs, significant ones. In addition to the stewardship costs typical of most land trusts, LELT has seen usage of its trail system, encompassing over 30 miles, blossom in the past 10 years, especially during the pandemic. The increased demand has meant the need to hire more summer stewardship staff and provide new amenities such as bathrooms and parking areas.

"I think land trusts, broadly speaking, have spent the last 30 to 40 years in a frantic rush to protect as much land as possible," says Matt Markot, LELT's executive director. "That has resulted in a lot of good conservation, but it has left land trusts financially vulnerable to long-term stewardship costs."

LELT earns some revenue through sustainable timber harvests, which also honors the timber industry's legacy in the region and is an important outreach tool. Still, increasing use and costs have raced ahead of what responsible timber harvests bring in.

AN ALLIANCE PROGRAM HELPS LAND TRUSTS NAVIGATE CARBON FINANCING

A few years ago, looking for a new way to ease its increased financial burdens, LELT saw another way to have its forested lands yield meaningful financial benefits: the voluntary carbon market.

Carbon markets create financial incentives for activities that reduce or avoid greenhouse gas emissions, matching corporate buyers seeking offset credits to help meet their decarbonization goals with sellers who generate these credits through nature-based climate solutions.

"Plants are currently the only surefire way to pull carbon out of our air," wrote reporter Erik Vance of The New York Times in a 2021 piece on climate change. "That means putting aside land and managing it well. Land trusts try to do just that and often need help with projects or funds to buy more land."

For a medium-sized land trust like LELT, with 8,500 acres conserved and three full-time staff, navigating the carbon market was difficult. "We had learned enough to understand that our forestland holdings were likely good candidates for producing high quality carbon offsets," Markot says. "What we also understood was that we had to find a partner with which to develop a project."

"The reality is most local and regional land trusts do not have enough eligible acreage to access the voluntary market alone," Markot says. "It's expensive to develop a carbon project. There are thresholds for ROI [return on investment] that come down to eligible acres." That means most land trusts need to figure out how to work with a partner—ideally another land trust—to increase the amount of eligible acreage to access the carbon market. But how could LELT do that?

Kirk Siegel, executive director of Mahoosuc Land Trust (MLT), similarly thought that participating in the carbon market might be a good fit for MLT, which has conserved 22,000 acres of forests, mountaintops, agricultural lands and waterfalls where the White Mountains straddle the Maine-New Hampshire border. However, with 20 years' experience as a land conservation attorney, he knew carbon projects were complex, so he explored the possibility cautiously.





COURTESY OF MAHOOSUC LAND TRUST



COURTESY OF MAHOOSUC LAND TRUST

↑
Top: Two volunteer Stewardship Committee members conduct annual monitoring of an easement for Mahoosuc Land Trust.

Bottom: An easement monitoring group for Mahoosuc Land Trust meets at Flint Mountain Farm.

Siegel was interested in a carbon project, specifically, because he had concerns that MLT could become too reliant on harvesting timber on fee-owned lands for its funding portfolio. A carbon project revenue stream would allow any timber harvesting decisions to be made based on habitat and biological diversity.

But, with rapidly growing conservation easement and fee land stewardship demands, and only two year-round staffers at the time, Siegel was concerned that MLT might not have the resources necessary to participate in a carbon offset project.

CREATING A CARBON MARKET PROGRAM

“The Land Trust Alliance is here to help land trusts protect and steward more land and do it well. We see a strong alignment with using carbon finance as a mechanism to protect and manage land,” says Kelly Watkinson, the Alliance’s land and climate program manager. “There isn’t enough federal or philanthropic funding to do all the land conservation work needed, and carbon financing can help fill that gap.”

The demand for nature-based carbon offset credits is there, says Erin Heskett, the Alliance’s vice president of conservation initiatives. The value of the voluntary carbon market was \$2 billion in 2021, the last year data is available, according to Ecosystem Marketplace, a nonprofit environmental finance information provider. That’s nearly four times its value in 2020, it reported in a brief. The 500 million carbon credits traded in 2021 represent 500 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent either stored or not emitted.

The Alliance aims to help its members overcome the barriers to participating in the carbon market, including the expertise required and the complexities of aggregating land parcels between organizations. “Most land trusts don’t have enough acreage on their own to support a carbon project,” Heskett says, “so they will need to aggregate their acreage with other land trusts and landowners.”

To help land trusts access the carbon market more readily, in 2020 the Alliance launched a two-pronged Carbon Offset Pilot Program, focusing on both improved forest management (IFM) and avoided grassland conversion projects. It turned to Pennsylvania-based Finite Carbon, North America’s leading developer of forest carbon offsets, to develop IFM voluntary carbon projects and to The Climate Trust to develop voluntary grasslands carbon projects.

The Alliance couldn’t have picked a better time to begin such a project, says Dylan Jenkins, vice president of portfolio development at Finite Carbon. Once, the revenues available from a carbon project were too low to allow any but the largest landowners to see revenue after the upfront costs, Jenkins says. Today, they are high enough to make smaller projects viable.

One aspect of the Alliance’s assistance is a pool of re-grant funding that participating land trusts can apply for to cover the cost of exploring the feasibility of the carbon project. Those include costs that might otherwise be difficult to recoup, says Heskett, including legal fees, staff time and the cost of a forest inventory. The Alliance also developed template legal agreements and other documents with Finite Carbon and The Climate Trust to help streamline the project development process and established a well-defined pathway for land trusts to navigate the complexities of carbon project development more easily.



Tumbledown Dick Mountain, Maine, which Mahoosuc Land Trust is under contract to acquire, is the type of property that can be enrolled in a carbon project under an improved forest management protocol.



Trail runners atop Mahoosuc Land Trust's Rumford Whitecap Mountain Preserve.

“We are going to do a lot of good work with this funding.”

Matt Markot, executive director of Loon Echo Land Trust



JERRY MONKMAN, ECOPHOTOGRAPHY

↑ Loon Echo's Maggie Lynn, director of partnerships, and Matt Markot, executive director, explore the land trust's trail network in winter.

The program also addresses the all-important factor known as “additionality.” Additionality is the concept that entering the land in the carbon market creates an increase in the amount of carbon stored on the land, Jenkins says. For forest projects, increased storage comes in the form of trees, growth that would have otherwise been harvested, or is enhanced by improved management practices. If timber harvesting is already strictly prohibited, the land would not qualify because it couldn't add carbon storage.

Finite Carbon works with credible buyers to ensure that their carbon offset targets are met, and value is delivered to forest landowners. Credits are the landowners' to utilize as they wish—in this case, the land trusts. Finite Carbon helps guide decision making with the land trusts' best interests and values in mind.

The LETL and MLT projects were developed under the IFM protocol established and managed by American

Carbon Registry (ACR), an organization charged with developing rigorous, science-based carbon offset standards and methodologies as well as providing project registration, verification oversight and offset issuance.

“ACR sets out rigorous rules and requirements to ensure carbon projects deliver real and lasting climate impact,” says Kurt Krapfl, ACR's director of forestry. “Innovative approaches such as those developed by the Land Trust Alliance help to make carbon projects accessible to land trusts and small landowners, ultimately incentivizing the climate benefits of sustainable forest management.”

As originally designed, the pilot project targeted land trusts with fee-owned lands to develop carbon projects. It has since expanded eligibility to include a partnership between a land trust with fee-owned lands and a private landowner with eligible lands under a conservation easement.

“This is a dynamic space,” Watkinson says. “Prices change and opportunities change, and what wasn't a fit 10 years ago or even two years ago could be a fit now.”

“Private land conservation and land trusts play an essential role in advancing natural climate solutions,” says Andrew Bowman, president and CEO of the Land Trust Alliance. “By helping our members benefit from revenue from the voluntary carbon market, the Alliance is both supporting climate change mitigation by enhancing activities that remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and accelerating land protection and stewardship.”



COURTESY OF KIRK SIEGEL

↑ Kirk Siegel, executive director of the Mahoosuc Land Trust, navigated the land trust's carbon project.

PUTTING THE PROGRAM TO WORK

When LETL and MLT found the Land Trust Alliance carbon program, things began to fall into place for the two land trusts.

“The Alliance spent a lot of time developing a model for an aggregated project, and that was immediately attractive to us,” Markot says. “It was clear that a lot of thought, care and attention went into the model.”

“We are grateful that ultimately we partnered with another land trust that we already had a great relationship with and felt very comfortable working with,” Markot says. “It ended up working really well.” Together, LETL and MLT enrolled about 8,000 acres of fee-owned land in the carbon project.

Siegel warns that the process is time consuming and can take months or years to develop from start to finish. Not only were there spreadsheets and legal documents to understand, but there was also working with Finite Carbon to take the project through all of the necessary verifications to becoming registered. Still, working through the Alliance pilot was easier than going it alone, he says.

“Once competent legal and technical advisors start reviewing the proposed project with you, you realize it’s not magic,” Siegel says. “Because the advisors have already reviewed many projects, they can help you see behind the numbers and the implications of these very large legal documents to work out what is best for the organization.”

“There are no two ways about it—we would not have been able to capitalize on the carbon market without the support of the Alliance program,” he says. But the Alliance’s support went beyond technical matters to the mission-centered conservation value of participating in such a project, Siegel says. “The Alliance’s cost-benefit analysis showed that this was the right thing for land conservation.”

Siegel says that the first year’s revenues from the carbon offset program will be set aside to fund the many years of verifications and inventories required to participate in the project. “After the first year, however,” he says, “we should see revenues that we can put back into our forest conservation programs.”

For MLT, now with four year-round staff and still growing, the carbon project solves the problem of those difficult decisions about timber harvests. Siegel says, “Any harvests we would do would be based on ecological and biological diversity mandates, rather than financial imperatives by virtue of the carbon project.”

But it will also do more. It will allow the land trust to conserve more forest land. “It is crystal clear that the revenues will make significant conservation of forest land possible,” Siegel says.

Markot anticipates that it will be 18 months before the revenues from the carbon offset project start going towards LETL’s stewardship projects such as capital improvements, including bathrooms for visitors to the land trust’s preserves.

But LETL is already benefiting. Its involvement helped the land trust access grant funding from the Open Space Institute to have researchers look at its stewardship management plans and forest management plans through the lens of offsetting carbon emissions, and offer management recommendations that go beyond growing trees for the timber markets. “We see it as an opportunity for leadership,” Markot says, “to help create new best management practices for our area.”

Markot is aware that there has been some controversy about carbon markets and whether they are an effective conservation tool, but sees the scales tipping heavily toward conservation benefits. He is confident of the rigorous protocols upheld by the American Carbon Registry and that the revenues LETL will see from the carbon market will power its mission.

“We are going to conserve more land, to restore and enhance habitats, to increase equitable access to conservation lands for everything from recreation to subsistence hunting and food gathering. We are going to support our communities as they chart pathways forward for everything from land use planning to open space planning and housing,” he says. “We are going to do a lot of good work with this funding.” ☺

MADELINE BODIN is a freelance environmental and science journalist.

CARBON MARKET RESOURCES

The Land Trust Alliance offers a suite of resources on carbon finance and the carbon market for its members, including a four-document Practical Pointer series. The series includes an introduction that explains how nature-based carbon credits work and how working with credible carbon registries can assure the integrity of land trusts’ carbon projects. The Practical Pointer on ownership and additionality in the carbon market explains some legal issues unique to land trusts, such as who retains the carbon rights for a property under a conservation easement and how “forever wild” restrictions (or no-till or low-till restrictions on agricultural lands) typically exclude that property from the carbon market.

A third Practical Pointer defines terms and concepts common in most carbon projects and provides a list of information to gather and analyze to minimize your risk while preparing to develop a carbon project. The fourth Practical Pointer on federal tax treatments of carbon credits gathers precedent from similar credits, such as acid rain credits, and private letter rulings (IRS decisions on single cases) to offer advice in a realm not included in the Internal Revenue Code and Treasury Regulations.

As with all of the Alliance’s Practical Pointers, these documents offer savvy advice, but should not replace your legal, accounting or other professional counsel. In addition, the Alliance offers two digital downloads on the carbon market. Scan the QR code to find these resources and more. ☺



Land trusts interested in learning more should contact Kelly Watkinson at kwatkinson@lta.org.



Raul Gomez plants new cherry trees at Coulter Farm North. Gomez is the son of migrant farm workers and grew up working for nearby Wunsch Farms. He is now a managing partner for Third Coast Fruit Co., a division of Wunsch Farms specializing in apples and cherries. This is the first farm under his ownership.

RICK KAN

THE FARM BILL

A LIMITED-TIME OFFER TO PROTECT VALUABLE WORKING LANDS

By MARINA SCHAUFFLER



Left to right: Lew and Ginny Coulter, the original owners of Coulter Farm, with the new owners, Adele Wunsch (purchaser of Coulter Farm South) and Emma Smith and Raul Gomez (purchasers of Coulter Farm North).

RICK KAN



ld Mission Peninsula, a narrow finger of land rising from a Lake Michigan embayment, supports a historic farming district dotted by vineyards and orchards. Perched high on a ridgeline among protected properties is a fruit farm with high-quality soils and a view of Grand Traverse Bay.

Following three generations of family stewardship, the property's aging owners, Ginny and Lew Coulter, needed equity from the land for their retirement, as many farmers do—40% of U.S. agricultural land is held by people over age 65 and will likely change hands in the next 15 years.

“Coulter Farm lies in a prime viewshed that has seen rapid development, and a portion is zoned for residential housing,” says Laura Rigan, farmland program manager at the accredited Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC). Growth has pushed agricultural land values up to \$40,000 per acre, making it hard for new farmers to compete against developers. The cherry orchards at Coulter Farm were at risk of getting splintered into housing lots.

But thanks to a creative partnership and with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), GTRLC was able to purchase an agricultural conservation easement on the Coulter Farm before the landowners sold it—in two parcels—to young farmers.

Federal support for agricultural conservation easements is increasingly vital as development nationwide over recent decades has been displacing farms and ranch lands at a rate of roughly 2,000 acres every day. If that trend continues unabated, by 2040 the country could lose an area of productive lands nearly the size of South Carolina, according to research published last year by American Farmland Trust.

“Working lands are really critical to the future of this country,” says Lori Faeth, senior director of government relations at the Land Trust Alliance, noting their contributions to food security, fiber production, carbon storage, economic well-being and community vitality. “Once these properties are converted to other uses, they're lost.”

Saving more working lands depends in large measure on what happens with the Farm Bill reauthorization, a five-year commitment that covers far more than nutritional assistance benefits, subsidies for commodity growers and crop insurance. The Farm Bill—the current version of which expires this September—is the single largest source of federal funding for voluntary private land conservation. Improvements this year could strengthen the Farm Bill's capacity to protect irreplaceable farmlands, ranchlands and forested lands across the country.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALLER-SCALE FARMERS

Farm Bill funds for agricultural land protection flow primarily through two easement programs administered by NRCS: the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), in which projects compete for funds allocated to each state, and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), a more flexible funding source that can be accessed for smaller projects. The 2018 Farm Bill allocated a total of \$2.25 billion for ACEP and \$1.5 billion to RCPP over five years. The Inflation Reduction Act, signed into law

in 2022, will add significant additional funding to both programs.

These federal funding programs are especially valuable in helping older farmers with succession planning, Rigan explains. In the case of Coulter Farm, GTRLC shaped a project that met the financial needs of the long-time owners through a purchased agricultural conservation easement supported by RCPP

funds. RCPP can support atypical projects that might not score well on the standardized, statewide criteria used for ACEP.

“For us,” Rigan says, “RCPP has been a huge benefit because our farms are very diverse and have multiple conservation values in addition to preserving agriculture.”

The easement on Coulter Farm lowered the land value sufficiently to make it affordable for young farmers with limited resources to each acquire half of the original farm. One of the new farmers, Raul Gomez, is the son of migrant laborers who worked on a nearby fruit farm owned by the parents of Adele Wunsch, the other young farmer who will now own and farm the adjoining parcel.

“I think if you farm long enough, and manage farmland long enough, your end goal is to farm your own land and own your own farm,” Gomez tells GTRLC. “So it's definitely exciting to be able to do that, and to be able to say that we have a farm.”

His partner, Emma Smith, adds: “It would absolutely not have been affordable for us without the easement. Neither one of us has inherited wealth, so it would have been impossible for us at this stage in our lives.”

The Land Trust Alliance is working to ensure that the new Farm Bill provides dedicated resources and programs that support historically underserved populations in accessing their own farmland, in part by including a set-aside for beginning, limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers.

STREAMLINING THE PROCESS AND EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES

In some cases of farm succession, time to complete an easement purchase may be limited, as farm owners weigh that option against offers from land developers. Rigan hopes that the new Farm Bill will streamline the process by which land trusts can become “certified entities”—trusted partners of the NRCS with less paperwork required for each new project.

The 2008 Farm Bill recognized that such a mechanism could lead to more efficient agricultural land protection, but in the intervening 15 years, only nine entities nationwide have been certified and only for the ACEP Program. “It would be extremely helpful if certified entity status was available through the RCPP,” Rigan says. “It would speed up the process and it would benefit all parties.”

One of the few land trusts that has attained certified entity status, the accredited Athens Land Trust (ALT) in Georgia, has found “it makes life so much easier,” says Justin Merrifield, ALT's conservation director. Even as a certified entity, he notes, navigating the federal bureaucracy is a commitment. “There are 85 documents [to complete], and that's the all-green-lights version,” he says.

COLORADO OPEN LANDS



TL Bar Ranch is surrounded by grasslands and aspen forests that provide forage for cattle and wildlife habitat, including elk during calving season. The ranch abuts Uncompahgre National Forest in Colorado.

ATHENS LAND TRUST



The 171-acre Wiley Farm in Walton County, Georgia, is protected with an agricultural conservation easement by Athens Land Trust. Knowing the easement ensures the land will stay protected long after he is gone, owner Dale Wiley has planned to be buried in the spot where this photo was taken so he can forever have this view of the land he loves.

Being a certified entity has helped ALT complete five to seven ACEP easement projects annually in recent years, but its staff still can't keep up with demand from farmers wanting to conserve their land. Like many others in the land conservation community, Merrifield hopes that the new Farm Bill will include an expanded Forest Conservation Easement Program, enabling land trusts to help working forest owners keep their lands intact. "Timber is our state's number-one industry," Merrifield says, so an easement program targeted to working forests "would go so very, very far in Georgia."

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS WITH NRCS

Land trusts already engaged with ACEP and RCPP easements often develop strong partnerships with state-level NRCS staff. "They can be great allies and can help you navigate the process," says Rigan.

When staff of the accredited Colorado Open Lands (COL) sought to help the owners of the 9,111-acre TL Bar Ranch place an agricultural easement on their land, the NRCS state conservationist recognized the unique opportunity this project afforded and became a strong advocate within the agency in helping secure funds, notes Sarah Parmar, COL's director of conservation.

That expansive ranch, which adjoins federal properties and lands protected through conservation easements, provides exceptional wildlife habitat and offers migratory corridors for many species. Bald eagles, peregrine falcons, elk, black bears and mountain lions all thrive on the ranchlands, and its conservation through ACEP increased by 30% the critical habitat needed by Gunnison sage-grouse, a rare bird with a population now confined to southwest Colorado and parts of Utah.

Remote ranchlands might seem at low risk from development pressure, but a study identified the TL Bar Ranch in the top two tiers of risk for both primary- and second-home residential development. And with skyrocketing values for water rights in drought-ridden western states, Parmar says, there's growing pressure to "buy and dry farmland," tapping water rights for distant urban use. To protect productive irrigated lands in the face of this trend, "we really do need a substantial level of federal funds" for agricultural easements, she adds.

Expanding funding for ACEP will protect not just the future of agricultural production but a ranching heritage going back more than two centuries. The TL Bar Ranch is part of a livestock operation that has been maintained since 1894. Marie Scott, a skilled and far-sighted rancher, began accumulating lands in southwestern Colorado in the 1920s, eventually owning and managing 100,000 acres. Before her death in 1979, she transferred much of her vast acreage to those who would keep the working lands productive, including her ranching staff. The TL Bar Ranch—now conserved through ACEP—is owned and managed by the daughter and son-in-law of Scott's ranch manager.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Across the country, land trusts that recognize the powerful impact of NRCS easement programs have been participating in the Alliance's large and diverse Farm Bill Working Group—shaping priorities for the new legislation to become a stronger force for working lands protection (see sidebar). There's an urgent need now for land trusts to amplify those collective Farm Bill recommendations by inviting congressional members and staff to tour lands conserved through ACEP and RCPP.

"Getting [elected officials] out on the land and hearing straight from landowners has a huge and lasting impact," reflects Rigan of GTRLC. "It's a great way to showcase NRCS' investment, share appreciation and describe the continued challenges and need for increased support."

Parmar has found similar benefits in Colorado, where congressional representatives and U.S. Department of Agriculture administrators have joined land trust staff for field sessions. She notes, "It's never too soon to start building those relationships to ensure that elected officials can connect with work on the ground!" ☺

MARINA SCHAUFFLER is an independent environmental journalist in Maine and a frequent contributor to *Saving Land*.

FARM BILL PRIORITIES FOR AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION

The Alliance has developed recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill, available on its website, based on input from a Farm Bill Working Group comprising more than 130 land trust representatives from around the country. These individuals will remain active throughout the summer as the Farm Bill is refined and will be instrumental as new programs take shape following the bill's reauthorization.

The highest priority the group identified is to increase funding for ACEP, so that NRCS will have resources to meet the high demand from farmers and ranchers wanting to keep their working lands in production. Another urgent need is to streamline how federal agencies implement both ACEP and RCPP.

The Alliance also seeks to level the playing field for smaller-scale farmers, ensur-

ing that those who have been historically underserved or those with limited resources have full access to Farm Bill conservation programs. Increasing the federal cost share, allowing ACEP funds to cover landowner transaction costs, and a funding set-aside for beginning and disadvantaged farmers would help realize this goal.

The Farm Bill Working Group is also advocating for a more streamlined path for land trusts to become certified entities, and for that status to apply across all NRCS easement programs. There is strong support as well, given that nearly 60% of all the nation's forests are in private hands, to have an expanded, stand-alone Forest Conservation Easement Program providing more resources to help keep productive forest lands intact. ☺

For more information, visit landtrustalliance.org/farm-bill.



Members of the Alliance's Farm Bill Working Group gathered in June 2022.

LAND TRUST ALLIANCE



'A Forever Summer Camp'

Last July, campers and staff at Camp Creighton in Massachusetts received some exciting news: Their summer camp, owned and operated by the Boys & Girls Club of Lynn since the 1960s, would be protected forever by a conservation restriction held by Greenbelt, Essex County's Land Trust, and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Camp Creighton welcomes hundreds of youth ages 6-14 from the city of Lynn and town of Middleton each summer to come "make everlasting memories" at the camp's pond, woods and hiking trails. The 121-acre camp property was originally donated by the Creighton family, who also generously contributed to the conservation restriction that will permanently protect the land and provide financial support to the club to fund operations and improvements at the camp over time. ©

"The club will be able to preserve the beautiful conservation land and pond that surrounds the summer camp," says Brian Theirrien, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of Lynn. "This partnership will protect and support the [Creighton family's] wishes to provide a forever summer camp site for youth from surrounding towns and from the [club]."

TOP IMAGE BY LUIS SOSA/LOVEWORK MEDIA.
MAIN IMAGE BY NEIL UNGERLEIDER/GREENBELT.







TERRAFIRMA

HELPING LAND TRUSTS STAY ON SOLID GROUND

↑
The accredited Save Mount Diablo land trust—a Terrafirma member since 2017—and its partners have protected more than 120,000 acres in over 50 parks and preserves on and around Mount Diablo.

By TOM SPRINGER

Terrafirma has no flightless bird for a mascot and no spokes-lizard or NFL quarterback to pitch its insurance. But Terrafirma Risk Retention Group LLC offers something that no national insurance company can: affordable coverage that land trusts can use to defend conserved lands.



STEPHEN JOSEPH/WWW.STEPIENJOSEPHOTO.GALLERY

Such insurance is essential because of two harsh realities that land trusts face. One, that they will eventually have to take action against someone who violates a conservation easement or trespasses on a preserve. And two, that land trusts will strain or even break their budgets if they try to cover the hefty costs of dispute resolution (negotiation, mediation and ultimately litigation) without an insurance safety net.

“A land trust with a decent endowment might be able to defend a few conservation easement violations in court,” says attorney Jim Phillippi, board member at The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County and a member of Terrafirma’s all-volunteer Claims Committee. “But with numerous easements to defend, you’d be in trouble. I’ve seen cases where land trusts spent \$500,000 or \$1 million in litigation costs. Without insurance, you don’t fight many cases of that size and keep your land trust.”

Terrafirma has been helping land trusts uphold lasting conservation since 2013. Now, as Terrafirma marks its 10-year anniversary, it sees increased disputes of all types and sizes, with the original grantors of easements and with neighbors to preserves and conserved lands. As more protected lands change hands and as land trust acquisitions increase possibly through state and federal

programs, the conservation defense safety net provided by Terrafirma is more valuable than ever. Beyond insurance, Terrafirma offers members numerous resources to head off conflicts before they reach crisis stage. And, once a claim is accepted, Terrafirma provides much more than just legal defense funds.

“Having had two conservation easements violated before the existence of Terrafirma, our small volunteer-led land trust finds Terrafirma’s insurance and drafting updates for easements highly comforting,” writes Owl Creek Conservancy, members of Terrafirma since its founding. “Insurance means not only that we can meet our obligations to donors and to protected properties without the worry of exhausting our reserves, but also that legal assistance with national experience and perspective can be available to us.”

Still, since Terrafirma is not your usual insurance company, it’s essential that members understand how it operates. Especially when it comes to filing claims and taking necessary steps to avoid claim rejections.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR TERRAFIRMA

Land trusts had worried about the inherent legal risks of conservation easements long before Terrafirma was formed. As the number of easements grew, there were bound to be occasional deals that went south. Or west, as it turned out.

“It wasn’t any particular problem we ran into,” recalls Dan Pike, with Colorado Open Lands. “We just started asking what we would do if we ever had to go to court on our easements. And honestly, we didn’t have a good answer.”

In the late 1990s, a group of western land trusts worked with attorneys Jessica Jay and Andy Dana to explore options for enforcing easements. Their findings suggested that a pooled insurance model could work, provided that enough land trusts came together on a national scale. It was exactly the kind of partnership that the Land Trust Alliance was well-suited to establish. Nonetheless, the road from tangible to achievable was hardly a straight line.

“Before we decided on an insurance structure, we tried Lloyds and Chubb (world leaders in the insurance market). But creating insurance for land trusts wasn’t on their to-do list,” says Leslie Ratley-Beach, conservation defense director at the Land Trust Alliance and vice president of Alliance Risk Management Services LLC (ARMS), the wholly owned subsidiary of the Alliance contracted to provide day-to-day management for Terrafirma.

Ratley-Beach joined the Alliance in 2007 to lead the creation of Terrafirma along with starting the Alliance’s first ever conservation defense national initiative. The Alliance did its actuarial homework to decide how many insured parcels a fledgling insurance company would require in order to generate sufficient reserves to pay claims and operations costs. “Commitments from 423 land trusts came in, which was the critical mass needed to convince insurance regulators and the IRS that Terrafirma wouldn’t fall on its face,” says Ratley-Beach.

Since then, Terrafirma has lived up to the Latin rendering of its name: “on solid ground.” It now has 554 land trust members in 48 states, with over 11.1 million acres insured. What began with 14,000 protected parcels has nearly tripled to over 37,000 in 2023, a growth rate of 5%-12% per year. Along the way, Terrafirma has paid out \$5.8 million in member claims and offered \$3.1 million in premium discounts.

COSTS, COVERAGE AND CLAIMS

As a nonprofit captive insurance company, Terrafirma doesn't exist to benefit shareholders or earn any profits. Rather, it's a form of self-insurance that's 100% owned by its members. And to be clear—since it's often a point of confusion—Terrafirma provides liability insurance, not property insurance. This means it will pay for the legal cost of a preserve or easement challenge, but not if a big oak falls on your office roof.

To join Terrafirma, members pay a registration fee ranging from \$375-\$4,000, depending on the size of their conservation portfolio. A land trust may insure its entire conservation easement/deed restriction portfolio or its entire fee-owned land portfolio or both, but may not select individual properties or easements for coverage. In addition, members pay a premium of \$67 per insured property. Each policy carries a \$5,000 deductible with a maximum of \$500,000 per claim. There are discounts for land trust members that adopt practices to limit risks, such as becoming accredited and completing Terrafirma risk management training.



About 85%-90% of placeholder claims get resolved without legal action. In some cases, a promptly filed placeholder claim can give land trusts quick leverage to defuse an unfolding situation.

Another Terrafirma difference that members find surprising—in a good way—is the claims process (see sidebar on p. 30). For anyone with car or home insurance, the idea that one should file claims for anything but a major loss sounds dubious—that's how you get stuck with higher premiums and a higher deductible. Not so with Terrafirma.

"People say, 'We don't want to inundate you with claims,'" explains Tom Kester, ARMS operations manager and secretary. "I say, 'Please, inundate us!' You can go online and file a placeholder claim in mere minutes. A Terrafirma claim won't affect the cost of your premiums or ability to renew your policy."

The placeholder claim simply notifies Terrafirma of a situation that may escalate later. Here, it's best to err on the side of caution. Additionally, there is no obligation to proceed further with a placeholder claim. Terrafirma recognizes that filing claims is an indicator that land trusts are out doing their jobs to uphold lasting conservation.

"We need members to file a placeholder claim as soon as they see a problem. Even if it is a trivial or uncertain matter," Kester says. "Otherwise, it may snowball and cost much more in legal expenses than if it were reported early. Plus, once you've filed a placeholder claim, you can still seek an amicable resolution."

Members can later ask for the claim to be reviewed by the Claims Committee, whose members have deep experience in real estate, insurance and land trust law. To analyze whether the claim is covered under the Terrafirma insurance policy, they'll use monitoring reports, communications with landowners, photos and other data. Since 2013, Terrafirma has denied only 4% of its claims (82 out of 1,971). When claims are denied, it's nearly always for these reasons:

- The violation pre-dates the member's Terrafirma policy—i.e., an event that occurred before the insurance took effect.
- The claim is for one of the 37 excluded items that Terrafirma does not cover. Visit terrafirma.org/exclusions for a complete list.
- The claim was filed past the policy term or extended reporting period. The policy year runs from March 1 to March 1, and the deadline to file claims is April 30.

TERRAFIRMA'S WINNING TRADITION

Once a claim has been approved for coverage by the Claims Committee, Terrafirma covers the member's legal costs for conservation defense up to the claim limit and based on standard attorney rates, not full commercial rates. This includes fees for attorneys and experts for attempts at a voluntary resolution, but also mediation and, if that fails, litigation. Other unusual aspects of Terrafirma are that it covers land trusts initiating dispute resolution, covers all aspects of voluntary settlement and defends if the land trust is named in a lawsuit provided that the claim has been determined by the Claims Committee to be covered. And should members go to court, they have good reason to feel optimistic—Terrafirma's record speaks for itself.

"The perception in court is that we're the good guys here," says Phillippi. "The public good argument for our conservation work comes across very well. I think it's stunning that in Terrafirma's 10-year history we've only had three losses. The majority of cases were settled without further litigation."

Terrafirma recommends using local attorneys who know the lay of the land, says Grant Weaver, a Terrafirma Claims Committee member from Sonoma County, California. "We retain experienced litigators who know the community, the jurors and the courts. They know legal idiosyncrasies that others won't. For instance, California was once part of Spain. Our attorneys need to understand an arcane system that includes Spanish civil law and English common law."

Speaking of local, many land trusts have attorneys who serve on their boards. Might they represent their organization in court? Weaver advises against it. For one thing, they may not be litigators. For another, he says, "It's more helpful to have someone who's not so close and can be dispassionate about the case."

For the most part Terrafirma cases rarely go to trial. While the opposing party may bluster, they will negotiate if they know they're wrong and stand to lose big in court. Although in cases where the opposing party refuses to relent, litigation remains the only option.

For the accredited San Juan Preservation Trust in Washington state, litigation was the only way to obtain a \$100,000 settlement.



BEAR YUBA LAND TRUST



A Terrafirma member since 2013, San Juan Preservation Trust dealt with illegal clear-cutting on its Geary Preserve (pictured) on Fidalgo Island, Washington, for which it won a \$100,000 settlement. The preserve's steep bluffs rise from the beach and eelgrass in the nearshore waters provide habitat for juvenile salmon and forage fish for migrating salmon.



In 2014, California's Bear Yuba Land Trust discovered several large Douglas fir and incense cedar trees cut down and lying in a ravine on its Woodpecker Wildlife Preserve. The fallen trees were clogging the natural stream runoff route and jeopardizing stability of the steep hillsides. Through Terrafirma support, the land trust attempted mediation but eventually turned to litigation, winning a settlement from the landowner after three years.



BEAR YUBA LAND TRUST



BEAR YUBA LAND TRUST



We're always ready as a sounding board and resource. It's our job to help land trusts keep their promises.

The landowner owned a bed-and-breakfast uphill from the 38-acre John H. Geary Shoreline Preserve, which occupies 1.25 miles of shoreline along Burrows Bay on Fidalgo Island. In 2013, the landowner illegally cut a wide swath of trees on the preserve to create a waterfront view. The damage was doubly hurtful as the 22 parcels that comprised the preserve were protected in 1992 by a neighborhood coalition formed to stop development there. Adding insult to injury, the offending landowner then advertised the expanded view of Puget Sound in ads for the B&B. Fees from the settlement reimbursed TerraFirma's litigation costs, with the remainder used by the land trust to restore vegetation on the denuded hillside.

PREVENTION: STILL THE BEST MEDICINE

TerraFirma's insurance and risk management resources include assisting insured land trusts to obtain voluntary resolution of disputes. Especially early on when the problem is smaller and the parties less entrenched, TerraFirma can help find an out-of-court resolution that upholds lasting conservation.

About 85%-90% of placeholder claims get resolved without legal action. In some cases, a promptly filed placeholder claim can give land trusts quick leverage to defuse an unfolding situation.

Consider the case of a successor owner who threatened to install a prohibited apartment above their permitted garage. The land trust didn't wait; it filed a claim immediately. Next, the land trust talked with TerraFirma about the landowner's plans. The land trust decided it should tell the owner it had insurance to cover enforcement of these types of disputes. And, that the land trust hoped the landowner "would respect the conservation easement and not build the apartment." Soon after this message was diplomatically conveyed, the land trust reported to TerraFirma that the successor owner withdrew the demand. Nothing has been heard from them since.

"We want to see both sides talk and hopefully work things out," says Kester. "When land trusts can resolve matters this way, it's a testament to the value of good relationships."

Finally, as that rare bird in the insurance industry, TerraFirma wants to hear from its members. The ARMS staff and the TerraFirma volunteer committee members believe in service to the insured owner members of TerraFirma. And members will never hear an insurance jingle as hold music.

"Feel free to call us anytime, you'll get a live person," says Ratley-Beach. "We're always ready as a sounding board and resource. It's our job to help land trusts keep their promises." ☺

TOM SPRINGER has served in several roles for the accredited Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, including board member, volunteer and writer.

ABOUT TERRAFIRMA



CLAIMS

When, Why and How to Submit Them

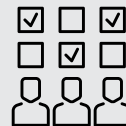
Every year TerraFirma is forced to deny claims because the land trust missed the deadline (April 30 each year). TerraFirma is a nonprofit organization just like your land trust. It needs to be able to continue to pay covered land trust claims. You must file your placeholder claim at the first instance of a possible problem so that TerraFirma knows what claims to plan for that policy year—even if the first indication of a possible problem is trivial or uncertain or if something is just barely amiss. Filing a placeholder claim is quick, has no adverse consequences for your land trust and there is no obligation to proceed further.

How do you know what warrants a placeholder claim? Listen to your instincts, says Ratley-Beach. If your gut check indicates concern, file a placeholder claim. TerraFirma's website offers a guidance document that can help you evaluate common situations.

Learn more at terrafirma.org/info/claims.

TerraFirma is always available to help—please call or email to talk about the first indication of a potential problem:

- Leslie Ratley-Beach, lrbeach@lta.org/802-262-6051
- Tom Kester, tkester@lta.org/802-249-7147
- Gabe Martinez, gmartinez@lta.org/202-924-9007
- Scott Yaw, syaw@lta.org/202-800-2248



TERRAFIRMA STRUCTURE

TerraFirma Risk Retention Group LLC is owned only by its land trust members and managed by Alliance Risk Management

Services LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Land Trust Alliance. TerraFirma governance is by a Members Committee made up of volunteers elected by region on a rotating basis. TerraFirma is solely responsible for meeting its obligations to its insured land trust owner members and other vendors, consultants and creditors. The Alliance, ARMS or any land trust member are not liable for the claims, debts or other liabilities of TerraFirma. ARMS reports to the Alliance board's finance and conservation defense committees regarding its role as manager for TerraFirma.

More information is available at terrafirma.org/how_it_works.

THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

By **AILLA WASSTROM-EVANS**

As we bask in the glory of summer's goodness, land trusts face the perennial question of whether, when and under what circumstances to allow dogs on preserves. Dog use can conflict with conservation purposes and raise safety and liability concerns; it can also increase community access, appreciation and support of land trust objectives. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but history has revealed certain factors land trusts should consider in balancing conservation permanence and community benefit. (Note that this article does not address regulations governing service dog access.)

Dog rules generally involve three components, each informed by the other—to allow dogs or not, what rules apply if dogs are allowed and enforcement. Deciding to allow dogs or not involves prioritizing potentially conflicting uses and starts with mission compatibility. Whether the land trust's mission includes resource conservation and public recreation, and to what extent, can be gleaned from the land trust's articles of incorporation, bylaws and federal tax exemption related filings. Land managers also evaluate whether uses are compatible with any funding requirements and the conservation purposes and values of the specific preserve.

Common conservation concerns associated with dog use include interference with ground-nesting birds, destruction of sensitive and unique plant life and impacts to water quality from dog waste. Preserves that are particularly sensitive to such impacts might be best served by a total prohibition on dogs, while others might not. Public safety, liability and risk of predator alarm are significant concerns. In addition, intensity of use on trails might trigger varying leash and pet waste rules.

As land trusts evaluate ways to better serve their communities, they are finding positive outcomes from opening their land to public access. When considering dog use in relation to public access benefits, inclusivity might call for different options. Allowing dogs on preserves might increase community use. On the other hand, dog-averse users might avoid a preserve based on its dog policy and history.

These decisions must be informed by enforcement capacity, as any rule is only as good as the capacity to enforce. Policing leash and dog waste rules on trails is a headache for land stew-



↑ Liz Pederson of Idaho's Wood River Land Trust hams it up with her dog, Dexter, on the Carbonate Trail, which offers a birds-eye view of Wood River's Greenway Trail and surrounding wetlands below.

ards. Enforcement in most instances is limited to reporting a nuisance or trespass claim to law enforcement. Many land stewards turn to other tools to mitigate non-compliance such as signage, public education, providing waste stations and direct outreach to trail users through in-person discussions or surveys. Creative sign language seems to be particularly effective, ranging from gentle—"To ensure continued access by your canine companions, please keep them on leash ..."—to bold and humorous, such as this one seen in Jefferson County, Colorado—"There is no poop fairy. Please clean up after your dog."

There are rarely easy answers, but when land trusts engage in thoughtful, informed and well-documented decision making, they are better prepared to respond to objections with defensible decisions, in turn protecting conservation permanence. ☺

AILLA WASSTROM-EVANS is conservation defense fund & education manager at the Alliance.

Author's note: The content for this article comes in large part from the field experience of our members. In drafting this, we searched dozens of discussion threads from the Alliance's online Stewardship and Ask an Expert forums and drew upon these when writing. These cross-country conversations of shared experience are the spark that makes our community so special. Thank you for your participation.



ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/INDYSYSTEM

WHERE DOES **THE MONEY** GO IN ENVIRONMENTAL GRANTMAKING?

A new study by the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Sustainability Initiative (JEDSI) at the Yale School of the Environment examined nearly \$5 billion in grants awarded by 220 foundations in 35 states and found that several of the largest mainstream environmental organizations received more funding individually than did all the environmental justice organizations combined.

The study's authors, Yale Professor of Environmental Justice and JEDSI Director Dorceta Taylor and JEDSI Program Manager Molly Blondell, say that over the past decade, there has been some research on disparities in grantmaking, including on how organizations led by people of color were less likely to be funded than other kinds of organizations. However, they wanted to determine if such disparities existed in environmental grantmaking specifically and, if so, what factors contributed to the outcomes.

Taylor and Blondell surveyed more than 30,000 environmental and public health grants, with a mean grant size of \$160,650, over a three-year period from 2015-2017. They found that organizations' revenues matter in their ability to attract funding, with more than half of the grant dollars going to organizations with revenues of \$20 million or more. Organizations with revenues under \$1 million received less than 4% of the grant dollars.

Although environmental organizations working on "core" environmental topics,

such as conservation and energy, were funded more frequently, foundations also funded organizations working on issues such as social inequality, justice, empowerment, Indigenous rights, environmental justice, disaster preparedness and relief, housing and homelessness, food assistance and food insecurity, faith and religion, movement building, voter mobilization, workplace and workforce issues, and institutional diversity.

Several of the largest mainstream environmental organizations, however,

obtained more funding than all the environmental justice organizations combined, according to the study's findings. The Sierra Club, for example, received more than \$200 million in grants, almost five times what all the environmental justice organizations combined received, while the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute received about \$140 million in grants, over three times what all the environmental justice organizations combined received.

Such disparities can, in part, be explained by advantages in size and staffing. Mainstream environmental organizations often have robust funder networks and in-house grant-writing teams that apply for numerous grants. In contrast, smaller organizations may have fragile funding networks with few funders.

However, Taylor notes that commonly cited arguments that environmental justice organizations tend to be relatively newer and smaller don't account for all the disparities in funding. "If we take the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), for instance, this organization is older than The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), and the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC)," she says. "Like EDF and NRDC, the NAACP relies heavily on legal strategies to achieve its environmental goals. However, the funding the NAACP receives is much less than it is to the other organizations named."

Disparities also are related to whether an organization is run by people of color, whether they focus on people of color and whether they are female-run, Taylor says, noting that "most environmental justice organizations are female-led, have a person of color as the chief executive, and focus on people of color."

Among the most striking findings, she adds, is that although more than half of the foundations surveyed (56%) funded organizations primarily focusing on people of color, less than 10% of the grants and grant dollars were awarded to these organizations.

"Foundations are hesitant to fund organizations that focus their work on people of color," Taylor says. "When foundations fund grantees to work on issues focused

on people of color, they tend to make small grants. This bias has been found in other studies. It is an entrenched pattern that activists try to highlight and change."



Other key findings include:

General support grants, highly coveted by grantees, were awarded frequently. However, over 80% of the general support grants went to white-led organizations. Additionally, less than 10% of the general support grants went to organizations focused on people of color.

Male-led organizations obtained about 54% of the grants and more than two-thirds of the grant dollars. White-led organizations obtained more than 80% of the grants and grant dollars. Hence,

white-male-led organizations received the most grants and grant dollars. White-male-led organizations obtained about 48% of the grants and roughly 61% of the grant dollars awarded.

Approximately 46% of the foundations supported environmental justice organizations. Environmental justice organizations led by people of color obtained 71% of the grants and about 77% of the grant dollars.

The study's authors say that foundations must identify inequities, including conscious and sub-conscious biases, in their grantmaking processes and provide more general support grants to organizations focused on people of color, environmental justice and diversity activities.

In the future, they hope to do a more comprehensive assessment of environmental grantmaking that spans a longer timeline.

"Some of the communities that are most in need of funding are the ones getting the least funds to do environmental work," Taylor says. "We hope that foundations recognize this fact and use our findings to evaluate their grantmaking processes and develop more equitable grantmaking strategies. Greater equity and transparency in grantmaking will further the overarching goal of improving the environment." ☺

PAIGE STEIN is the executive director of strategic communication at the Yale School of the Environment. This article is reprinted courtesy of the Yale School of the Environment and originally appeared at environment.yale.edu/news/article/where-does-money-go-environmental-grantmaking.

MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

One of the main findings of the study is that foundational grantmaking gives more to organizations working on traditional conservation than environmental justice, but there are indications that this trend is changing rapidly. Taylor and Blondell note that "change is not a one-way street" and suggest activists and grantees can influence foundations through efforts such as the Donors of Color Network's new Climate Funders Justice Pledge, a movement to get top climate funders to increase their funding to Black, Indigenous and people of color-led environmental justice groups. Actions like this and other "grantee and activist challenges will open foundations to new funding possibilities and reduce funding disparities identified by this and similar reports," say the authors. In a chapter at the end they offer concrete tips for both foundations and grantseekers. ☺

DARCI PALMQUIST, *Saving Land* editor



ORENDA RANDUCH/SEMPERVIRENS FUND

↑ A diverse group of hikers joined Syren Nagakyrie (center in green t-shirt) at a recent group hike in Dr. Aurelia Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park, Oakland, California.

SHARE YOUR STORY ABOUT DISABILITY AND NATURE

By **SYREN NAGAKYRIE**

Stories about disability and nature have been left out of the public sphere for far too long. When they are told, it is typically through an ableist lens for the non-disabled gaze. We are most familiar with inspirational stories about someone “overcoming” their disability to accomplish remarkable feats, or tales of saviorism focused on able-bodied people helping someone with a disability. But these stories simultaneously cast disabled people as victims and inspiration, removing all agency from our stories.

There are other stories to tell. Disabled people deserve to have full, embodied representation of our experiences—nothing about us should be shared without us. Through the Disabled Hikers storytelling project, we are expanding the conversation about disability and the outdoors and providing a platform for the stories that have gone untold. For example, we uplift stories of Indigenous perspectives about the intersections of chronic

illness, colonialism and misogyny; Black queer experiences of thru-hiking with a disability; and what it means to be fat, Black and disabled in a culture focused on wellness. Disabled and chronically ill people hold so much wisdom about the world and how we move through it, and that wisdom should be shared.

Disabled Hikers is an entirely disabled-led organization that celebrates disabled people’s experiences in the outdoors,

builds community to help facilitate those experiences and advocates for justice, access and inclusion. There is limited representation in the outdoors for the disabled and chronically ill community, and Disabled Hikers is committed to helping disabled people share their own stories via its blog and social media. Have a story to share or know of someone in your community who might want to share their story? Visit disabledhikers.com/share-your-story to submit your story about your connections with nature or experiences outdoors as a disabled or chronically ill person. ☺

SYREN NAGAKYRIE is the founder and director of Disabled Hikers.

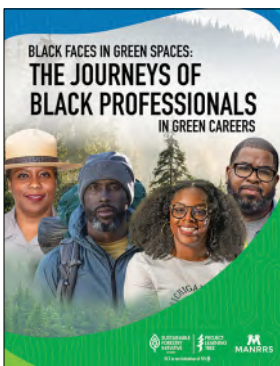
Editor’s note: Disabled Hikers has numerous resources available at its website, including a hikers’ hub with digital trail guides, stories on its blog and opportunities to connect with others. The organization’s work includes writing trail guides, leading group hikes, consulting with parks and organizations, presenting at workshops and advocating for social change.

Land Trust Merger in Connecticut

Three land trusts—East Granby Land Trust, West Hartford Land Trust and Wintonbury Land Trust—recently merged to form one regional land trust, Traprock Ridge Land Conservancy. Leaders from the land trusts began exploring opportunities to work together in 2021 during workshops with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council. Through these sessions they discovered that they shared common visions and missions, had limited capacities and sought to reach more people. They concluded that the best way to accomplish their goals would be to join forces and form a regional land trust. With grant funding from The Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation, the three land trusts explored the feasibility of merging and developed a plan for how to structure a new organization. The merger was announced in April. Their story can be useful for other land trusts considering similar endeavors. Read it at trlandconservancy.org.

Also check out the Land Trust Alliance's "An Introduction to Mergers for Land Trusts," a digital download available to members for free on the Resource Center.

Helping Young Black Americans Explore Green Careers



A new guide for young adults shares the stories of 22 Black professionals in the forest and conservation sectors. "Black Faces in Green Spaces: The Journeys of Black Professionals in Green Careers" offers personal stories and advice to the next generation about exploring their own careers in the forest and conservation sectors. Jobs represented include forester, biologist, hydrologist, GIS specialist, DEI

specialist, environmental educator, urban forester and more. Alliance board member Sam Cook and Scholar for Conservation Leadership Fellow Lillian Dinkins are among the professionals highlighted. Published by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Project Learning Tree and Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences, the guide is available to download for free at plt.org/news/journeys-guide and print copies can be ordered for a fee.

Affordable Housing Working Paper

The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy's working paper—"Building Collaboration among Community Land Trusts Providing Affordable Housing and Conservation Land Trusts Protecting Land for Ecological Value"—is the result of a 2022 gathering of

representatives from conservation and community land trusts and other stakeholders. The authors assert that collaboration across these groups is imperative today given the intersecting challenges of climate change, affordable housing shortages, loss of biodiversity and racial injustice. The paper explores reasons why these groups could and should collaborate; values that center equity in collaborative efforts; hurdles to collaboration; examples of joint efforts; and most importantly, pathways to advancing collaborative efforts. Download the working paper at lincolninst.edu/publications/working-papers/building-collaboration-among-community-land-trusts-providing-affordable.

Toolkit: Land Trusts and Wildlife Crossings

Land trusts play a critical role in increasing wildlife crossings for highways, and many land trusts are already working on transportation-related projects, says the Center for Large Landscape Conservation. The organization recently published a toolkit that compiles lessons learned and best practices of land trusts engaged in wildlife crossing projects. The toolkit is useful for land trusts already engaged in this work, as well as for those less familiar with connectivity efforts. Users will find many diverse examples of these projects. In addition to examples and insights, the toolkit shares funding resources and public-private partnership opportunities. Explore the toolkit at largelandscapes.org/land-trusts-toolkit.

Pride Month Reading



The Parks Stewardship Forum journal recently published a special issue titled "LGBTQIA+ Experiences and Expertise in the Outdoors and in Conservation." Guest editor Forrest King-Cortes, the Alliance's director of community-centered conservation, worked on the issue with a team of writers, editors and other contributors to highlight LGBTQIA+ perspectives through photography, artwork, videos,

first-hand essays and more. One case study follows the career of a transmasculine individual navigating the challenges of working in outdoor recreation jobs, which often involve a variety of unique living situations, arrangements and contexts—such as moving to rural or remote communities or living in shared housing—that can pose "distinctive challenges to individuals who have non-dominant identities," write the authors. Read the issue at escholarship.org/uc/psf. ☺



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Exchanging Gifts

Natural Burial Is a Conservation Strategy



KALLYN BOEMER

↑ A plain pine box and hemp ropes are all that's needed to ensure a natural return to the earth at Bluestem Conservation Cemetery.



KALLYN BOEMER

↑ A burial in progress with family and friends at Bluestem Conservation Cemetery.

Within the course of a year, veteran conservationists Heidi Hannapel and Jeff Masten's parents received terminal diagnoses. They each took leaves of absence from their careers to support their parents' dying at home. Emerging from these life changing events, they recognized they could apply their conservation experience to building a local, community project that could change the way people approach life, death and burial.

"Land trust projects are already deeply personal places for people," Masten says. "When I attended the Land Trust Alliance's Rally in 2006, I was inspired by a presentation by Billy Campbell that reinforced the conservation strategy between community, land protection and green burial. Conservation burial piqued my curiosity and became a reality when we founded Bluestem."

After 40 visits to conservation and natural burial grounds and five years of walking parcels, studying maps and community networking, Masten and Hannapel found the right land for Bluestem, a conservation cemetery, on 87 acres in the Triangle region of North Carolina. The property is rich in cultural and agricultural history, set among the rolling hills and open fields. Protection of its rural character, wildlife and stream corridors, and the restoration of former agricultural fields into prairie grasslands, is ongoing. Land protection occurs in tandem with natural burial. Bluestem welcomed its first burials in the summer of 2022.

Conservation burial was pioneered by Kimberley and Billy Campbell, who opened Ramsey Creek Preserve, the first green cemetery in the U.S., on land protected

with a conservation easement by Upstate Forever in South Carolina in 1997. Since then, numerous land trusts have partnered on natural burial initiatives to preserve and restore lands and celebrate life in a meaningful and lasting way.

“People and communities have long held genuine and tangible attachments to land. With loved ones buried on the land, connections to the land are instantly and deeply meaningful,” says Hannapel.

Land Trusts as Partners

Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC) and Eno River Association are two independent land trusts that have signed on as co-holders of Bluestem’s conservation easement. Jessica Sheffield, executive director at Eno River Association, says that they pursued this collaboration expressly for its dedication to “connecting with one another, to our deceased and to the land.”

These two land trusts share the responsibility for monitoring Bluestem’s conservation easement. They will also share a stewardship endowment, creating opportunities to lessen the burden of monitoring obligations. Both land trusts bring their resources and membership clout to the project. Common values attract these members and donors to both land trusts and to Bluestem. In addition, Bluestem sells plots and charges for events on the property, with a portion of that income donated to the land trusts to support their conservation missions.

John Christian Phifer, executive director of Larkspur Conservation at Taylor Hollow, a conservation burial ground in Tennessee, suggests that natural burial as a conservation strategy transcends size and meets missions simply by focusing on relationships. “Larkspur’s land trust partner, The Nature Conservancy, understands that connecting people to the land is the key. Burial does this in a way that is lasting and deeply personal. That translates effortlessly to the heart of every land trust’s mission.”

Some land trusts have feared mission creep, wondering how this model can fit the mission for large and small land trusts alike. “Conservation cemeteries can be constructed in different models,” says Masten. “A land trust can be an easement

holder, an operator or a partner. The land trust decides its role and how it wants to contribute or be connected. Either way, it contributes to a significant and profound community conservation project that has local environmental impacts and can change the way the community thinks about burial.”

“The mission of any land trust is both conservation and stewardship,” says Ron Strom, former TLC board president and longtime community network supporter. “Not only does green burial offer a more environmentally friendly alternative to conventional burial or cremations, the conversion of conventional farmland into native prairie, the planting of carbon-capture, deep-rooted grasses and the creation of a trail network all further the public benefits mission of a land trust.”

A Community of Volunteers

Like most conservation projects, volunteers are key. In one year, Bluestem built a volunteer corps of 100 people. One of those is Steve Gartrell, a career urban planner with roots in biology who took on the role of hiking trip docent with TLC after his (second) retirement. On a recent spring day, he led two tours through the trails at Bluestem, introducing TLC members to the property and to volunteers and friends of the burial ground.

Visitors to Bluestem come to explore a more permanent presence on the property for themselves when their time comes; others show up because a loved one is already interred there. Family members of those buried return to walk the property and participate in workdays, blazing trails, installing birdhouses and leading educational events or hikes like Gartrell, who “truly enjoys leading others to nature.”

Whatever their motive, volunteers of various land trusts and community groups gather at burial grounds with shared purposes of stewarding land and supporting families in their grieving, resulting in lasting relationships that benefit all.

“For me, Bluestem is the place that I have been looking for,” Gartrell says. “A place that combines my love of nature and the natural world—in the present, with enjoying its beauty and serenity, while



HEIDI HANNAPEL

↑ The pond at Bluestem Conservation Cemetery in Cedar Grove, North Carolina.

also helping others to lay their loved ones to their final rest—and in the future with finding my own final place of rest.”

“I think this is what Billy Campbell was talking about when he began this conversation 25 years ago,” says Masten. “Our bodies as gifts to the land, the land as a gift to us. Conservation burial is a means for us to act in a tangible way, contributing to climate resiliency while creating whole families and communities of spiritually and financially invested land stewards.”

For more information about what land trusts need to know when considering partnering with a natural burial initiative, visit the Conservation Burial Alliance’s website at [conservationburialalliance.org](https://www.conservationburialalliance.org). ☺

LEE WEBSTER is a funeral reform advocate, educator, writer, former president of the Green Burial Council and co-founder of the Conservation Burial Alliance. She writes from the foothills of the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE SEVEN-YEAR ACCREDITATION TERM



DI GLISSON / LIFEFREELY IMAGEWORKS

↑ Melissa Kalvestrand.

In 2019, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission announced that the accreditation term will be extended from five to seven years for land trusts successfully completing their third renewal. This new term recognizes the hard work and commitment of land trusts that have achieved accreditation for 15 consecutive years or longer while maintaining the high standards of the accreditation process.

In early 2024 the first land trusts will be applying for their third renewal and qualifying for the extended term. Here's what land trusts need to know.

Finding the Right Balance

The decision to create an extended term was years in the making. It was the result of collecting feedback from land trusts as well as analyzing data from applications to determine how and when a longer term would appropriately balance sustainability and integrity. The Commission heard from land trusts about how

much time they spend putting together an application; a longer term would help reduce that time. But, if a land trust were to start having gaps in core areas of its work during its accredited term, it would be difficult for it to successfully achieve renewal at its next application. At the same time, that land trust would be publicly using the accreditation seal, which could put the reputation of other accredited land trusts and the accreditation program at risk.

Ultimately, it was determined that a seven-year term, including a check-in with a brief progress report, would be the right approach to ensure the high standards expected of accredited land trusts while respecting the time land trusts commit to the renewal process. At its third renewal a land trust can expect an application and review process similar to its previous renewals, with the focus being on its work over the five-year term. The fourth renewal application will focus on activities over the seven-year term.

Growing Together

When the Commission first explored the idea of a longer accreditation term, we saw that, even though collectively land trusts were working hard to implement *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and meet the requirements, many still needed to take considerable corrective action to achieve renewal of accreditation. Based on the data and conversations with land trusts, the accredited land trust community was not ready for an extended term before now. It was also clear that the Commission needed to work with the Land Trust Alliance to ensure that there were abundant resources and learning opportunities to help accredited land trusts meet and implement

the requirements. The Commission also needed a streamlined, digital application process and robust accreditation management system. We have grown together, as a community, to be ready to take on the added risk of an extended term while balancing the time land trusts invest in the renewal process.

The New Progress Report Component

Many land trusts have staff and board turnover and program changes, even over a five-year term. In addition, the accreditation requirements are periodically adjusted to respond to feedback and reflect other changes in land trust practice, such as remote methods for monitoring and inspecting properties. The new extended term includes a brief progress report conducted about halfway through the seven years. Having the land trust connect with the Commission in this way will allow us to evaluate information and give feedback on any areas of concern. The progress report also benefits the land trust as the information will be automatically input into the next application, giving the land trust a head start on its next renewal application. Accredited land trusts are committed to practicing at the highest conservation standards, and the progress report is a step to ensure that this remains true over the longer term, even during times of change.

Staying Connected During the Extended Term

It's easy for land trusts to stay connected! You can read the Commission's monthly e-news, visit our website for updates to the Requirements Manual, take webinars offered by the Alliance and engage with the Alliance's Resource Center. The Commission is always there to help, and we encourage land trusts to reach out with questions about the accreditation requirements or related documentation before a concern turns into a major issue. Commission staff fields hundreds of questions a year from accredited land trusts. Pick up the phone, send us an email, reach out for guidance on accreditation—we're here for you. ☺

MELISSA KALVESTRAND is executive director of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.



MELISSA KALVESTRAND

French Pond in Adirondack Park, New York.

ACCREDITATION BY THE NUMBERS

(as of March 2023)

101

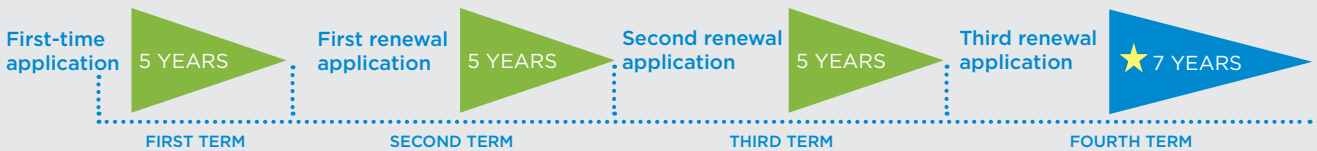
land trusts accredited for the first time.

239

land trusts have achieved their first renewal.

125

land trusts have achieved their second renewal, 27 of which will be eligible for the extended term in 2024.



FAQ

Is the seven-year term optional?

The seven-year term is not optional. This avoids confusion and avoids having a two-tier system where some land trusts after third renewal have a five-year term and others have a seven-year term.

How will I know when my land trust will be eligible?

Any land trust that is applying for its third renewal qualifies for a seven-year extended term. One way to think of it is, has your land trust been accredited for at least 15 consecutive years? If so, your land trust qualifies!

What will the extended term application look like?

The third renewal application and process will be similar to those for first and second renewal. As with your land trust's previous two renewal applications, the focus will be on your land trust's activities over the past five years as an accredited land trust. ☺

Explore more information about the extended accreditation term at landtrustaccreditation.org/renewal/extended-term.



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