

TWO DECADES OF EXCELLENCE, TRUST AND PERMANENCE

By **LEANNA ROBINSON**

Twenty years ago, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission was incorporated in Washington, D.C., as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. Its founding marked the beginning of a bold step forward in accountability, excellence and public trust for the land conservation community.

When the Commission was formed in 2006, its purpose was clear: strengthen land trusts, uphold the public trust and help ensure that conserved lands remain protected forever.

“It came at a time when the community was under legislative and regulatory threat,” says Executive Director Melissa Kalvestrand. “The community stood up and said, ‘We can self-regulate.’”

From the beginning, accreditation was designed to be rigorous. The process is an independent, in-depth review of governance, finances, transaction and stewardship practices, and organizational operations. It asks land trusts to take a hard look at their systems and demonstrate that they are operating according to quality standards.

In 2008, the Commission accredited the first 39 land trusts. In 2012, it published the first Requirements Manual, creating a more formalized framework for applicants and reviewers alike.

As the land trust community continued to grow and adapt, so did accreditation. The Commission launched an online renewal system in 2013, significantly

updated its Requirements Manual and application materials in 2018 to reflect the 2017 Land Trust Standards and Practices, and transitioned to a completely paperless first-time application process in 2020.

Most recently, in 2024, the Commission introduced extended accreditation terms for land trusts successfully completing their third renewal cycle, recognizing 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.

Over the past two decades, the Commission’s work has helped strengthen organizations of every size, from all-volunteer land trusts to large regional and national organizations. Through accreditation, land trusts have improved policies and procedures, strengthened stewardship practices, increased transparency and reinforced the permanence of conserved lands.

“Thanks to accreditation’s focus on governance, finance, transactions and stewardship, land trusts are able to chart a path to permanence and receive public recognition of their achievement. Accred-

itation provides land trusts with a road map for professionalism and success,” says Tammara Van Ryn, founder and former executive director of the Commission.

These impacts extend beyond individual organizations. Accreditation increases public confidence in private land conservation at a time when trust and accountability matter more than ever. This success is driven by accredited land trusts, and also by the extraordinary commitment of volunteer commissioners and staff. Since its founding, 50 volunteer commissioners have served the Commission, contributing thousands of hours annually in service to the conservation community.

“Each team member, day in and day out, personifies the accreditation seal: excellence, trust and permanence,” says Kalvestrand.

As conservation faces increasingly complex pressures, accreditation continues to provide a strong foundation for the future. What began as a response to uncertainty has become one of the conservation community’s greatest collective successes.

Twenty years later, the mission remains the same: ensuring that land trusts are strong, accountable and prepared to protect the places people need and love forever. ☺

LEANNA ROBINSON is the communications specialist for the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

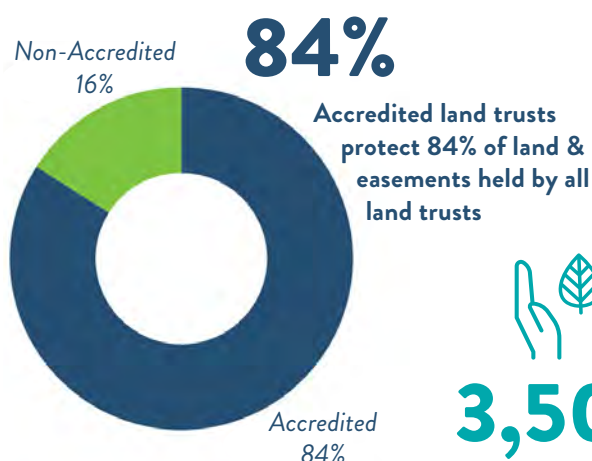
NEW LOOK

The Commission is thrilled to announce the launch of its redesigned website! The new site features a fresh look, better organization, the ability to link to Alliance resources and more. Check it out at landtrustaccreditation.org.



LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

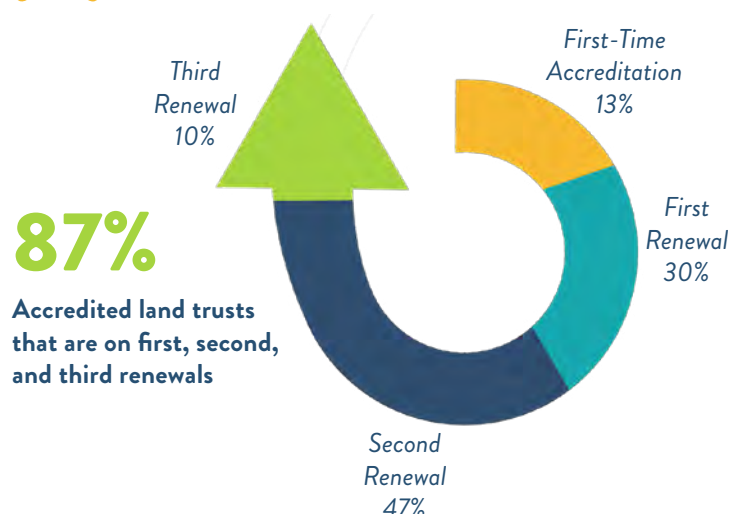


3,500+

Hours commissioners contribute to service each year



480
Accredited Land Trusts



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landtrustaccreditation.org

ACCREDITATION ANNOUNCEMENTS

Congratulations to Spartanburg Area Conservancy in South Carolina for achieving first-time accreditation! And congratulations to the 31 land trusts that earned accreditation renewal for the first, second or third time.

Accreditation renewals:

- Ashby Land Trust (MA) ♦
- Athens Land Trust (GA) ★
- Bangor Land Trust (ME) ♦
- Catawba Lands Conservancy (NC) ★
- Coastal Mountains Land Trust (ME) ★
- Colchester Land Trust (CT) ♦
- Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CO) ★
- Colorado West Land Trust (CO) ★
- Forest Society of Maine (ME) ★
- Freshwater Land Trust (AL) ★
- Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (MI) ★
- Hawai'i Land Trust (HI) ★
- Jefferson Land Trust (WA) ★
- Lake Champlain Land Trust (VT) ★
- Lake Forest Open Lands Association and its affiliate, Lake Forest Land Foundation (IL) ★
- Land Trust for Santa Barbara County (CA) ★
- Land Trust for Tennessee (TN) ★
- Legacy Land Conservancy (MI) ★
- Lyme Land Conservation Trust (CT) ♦
- Minnesota Land Trust (MN) ★
- Peninsula Open Space Trust (CA) ★
- Presumpscot Regional Land Trust (ME) ●
- Salem Land Trust (CT) ★
- Saratoga PLAN (NY) ♦
- Skagit Land Trust (WA) ★
- Tall Pines Conservancy (WI) ♦
- Thousand Islands Land Trust (NY) ★
- Three Rivers Land Trust (NC) ♦
- Utah Open Lands (UT) ♦
- Westchester Land Trust (NY) ★
- Wilderness Land Trust (MT) ★

List as of March 2026

- Denotes land trusts that have achieved first renewal
- ♦ Denotes land trusts that have achieved second renewal
- ★ Denotes land trusts that have achieved third renewal