



KNOW YOUR POLICY “INSIDER” AND OUT

By **LISA MCCARTHY**

How does your land trust handle conflicts of interest? What plan does your land trust have in place to document the disclosure and management of actual and potential conflicts? These may seem like elementary questions that your land trust answered when it first drafted its conflict-of-interest policy or thought about when it first applied for accreditation, but do you know if your land trust is consistently meeting the accreditation requirements? The consequences of mismanaged conflicts of interest can include legal and reputational risks. Your land trust should regularly review its policies and procedures and the related requirements.



↑ Wood River Land Trust's Executive Director Amy Trujillo.

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

landtrustaccreditation.org

CELEBRATING FIRST-TIME ACCREDITATION

The Commission is honored to announce the 11 land trusts that achieved first-time accreditation in February 2024. Preparing for and going through the accreditation process strengthens the organization and the entire land trust community. We commend these 11 land trusts for their dedication to practicing the highest conservation standards and making a commitment to uphold their promise of forever. Welcome to the community of accredited land trusts that is made up of strong, vibrant and mission-driven organizations, with their own unique conservation stories.

- Audubon Society of Rhode Island (RI)
- Berks Nature (PA)
- Buffalo Niagara River Land Trust (NY)
- Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy (NY)
- La Plata Open Space Conservancy (CO)
- Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust (ME)
- Manada Conservancy (PA)
- New England Forestry Foundation (MA)
- North Central Conservancy Trust (WI)
- Oregon Desert Land Trust (OR)
- Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (MI)

***SPECIAL NOTE:** The Commission is excited to announce the list of renewed land trusts in the summer edition of *Saving Land*. We look forward to continuing the celebration of accredited land trusts!

51 MILLION ACRES AND GROWING
Accredited land trusts now protect 84% of land and easements held by all land trusts, which is 51,314,675 acres of land. That's 23 times the size of Yellowstone National Park.

WHO'S AN "INSIDER"?

The Standards define "insiders" as board and staff members, substantial contributors, parties related to the above, those who have an ability to influence decisions of the organization and those with access to information not available to the general public. Those with the ability to influence decisions or have access to information can include committee members, certain volunteers, contractors, consultants and advisory board members.

clearly document who left the room during a meeting (this includes digital meeting spaces and conference calls) and when they return.

When the issue was flagged for Wood River Land Trust, they recognized they needed to be more vigilant.

"Our response was to create a comprehensive conflict-of-interest checklist that staff uses to ensure that all elements of our conflict-of-interest policy are being followed and documented," says Trujillo.

Good governance and solid policies and procedures are the building blocks of a strong land trust. As organizations grow and take on new projects, it is important to regularly review policies and procedures to ensure that best practices are being implemented. Wherever your land trust is at in its accreditation journey, now is the perfect time to review your conflict-of-interest policy and to ensure your land trust has taken every measure to ensure proper documentation needed to show it is meeting the Standards and requirements.

For more guidance, please visit the Alliance's Resource Center and review the Accreditation Commission's Requirements Manual. ☺

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"We review our conflict-of-interest policy at our annual board meeting. The board members sign an acknowledgement of reviewing the policy," says Amy Trujillo, executive director of Wood River Land Trust in Idaho. "Our policy helps make things transparent and identify actual or perceived conflicts, which helps maintain our solid reputation as sound decision-makers."

Accreditation is a third-party verification process that relies on your land trust having documentation that it is meeting *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and the accreditation requirements. To meet the conflict-of-interest requirements, your organization's meeting minutes need to provide a clear historical record of transactions and show that every effort was made to remove undue influence from decision making by documenting the insider left the room during the vote.

Wood River Land Trust received a question during its renewal application process about fully documenting the requirement that the conflicted party was absent for the vote.

"We documented that an insider abstained and did not participate in deliberations, but it was not clear if she left the room for the vote. Sometimes it can be hard at the moment of a vote to remember all the details that need to go in the minutes. Our board secretary drafts the minutes and sometimes staff helps draw up the final document so a detail like who was present, unfortunately, was overlooked," Trujillo explains.

If your policies and procedures need a refresh, there are resources to help. The Alliance's Resource Center is the best place to start when looking for template policies and guidance for understanding practice elements. From there, land trusts have come up with simple but effective ways to