

APPLYING FOR ACCREDITATION NO MATTER THE MISSION

By **CAITY PINKARD**



BRITTANY HAMILTON

↑ Access Fund stewards conduct outreach to the climbing community in Utah.

For Grassroots Gardens of Western New York, protecting urban gardens is about more than cultivating food, it's about cultivating neighborhood connections and healing communities. "Everything we do is informed or led by our community gardeners," says Jeanette Koncikowski, the executive director of Grassroots Gardens. "They have been our partners throughout the process, including determining whether to apply for accreditation."



GRASSROOTS GARDENS OF WESTERN NEW YORK

↑ Wealth in Health community garden in Buffalo produces a bounty of fresh food for local residents.

A big part of the organization's work in Buffalo and Niagara Falls is protecting urban green spaces from development. Says Koncikowski, "In some neighborhoods, there is the risk of losing our leased gardens, some of which are almost 30 years old, to developers. In other neighborhoods, people experience food apartheid and lack access to green space." In response, Grassroots Gardens consulted its community partners and decided to apply for accreditation to better meet its promise of perpetuity.

"We wanted to be working at a best-practice standard

and apply those same standards to our network as a whole," recalls Koncikowski. By seeking accreditation, Grassroots Gardens not only strengthened its organizational policies, but the board worked to strengthen its financial, governance and land stewardship practices. "For us, the primary value of accreditation is to demonstrate to our community partners that we are a sound organization," says Koncikowski. "Accreditation signals that we have what it takes to advocate for the permanent protection of the community gardens in our region."

As the Vice President of Programs & Acquisitions for Access Fund in Colorado, Zachary Lesch-Huie can relate to Konci-

kowski's experience. An organization dedicated to conserving climbing environments, Access Fund's unique mission also requires working with a diverse network of community partners. "We work with and support more than 130 affiliated local climbing nonprofits," says Lesch-Huie. As a result, Lesch-Huie understood the importance of accreditation in bolstering the organization's reputation. "Sometimes funders and partners are surprised that a rock-climbing organization is accredited," he says. "We're the first and only climbing-specific land trust in the U.S. to be accredited, and it's a source of pride for staff."

For Access Fund, the seal of accreditation signals that they are committed to operating at the highest possible standards. "It was clear that Land Trust Alliance membership and accreditation were essential for the long-term success and integrity of our work," says Lesch-Huie. "It's a seal of excellence and legitimacy." Since becoming accredited, Access Fund has only benefited from the experience. "Accreditation is an important way to exemplify excellence and best practices for our local affiliates," Lesch-Huie says. "But it's also improved internal operations, ensuring day-to-day best practices."

As for advice to other land trusts considering accreditation, Koncikowski and Lesch-Huie are both in agreement: The accreditation process is worth the effort for any organization. "We really did grow up during the process!" Koncikowski affirms. Lesch-Huie agrees and advises land trusts to reach out to the Commission for support. "They were always ready to provide solutions when we had gaps to fill," he says. For those land trusts considering applying, he adds only one additional piece of advice: "Just like a long climb, take it move by move. It's worth it!" ☺

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

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

landtrustaccreditation.org

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEWEST CLASS OF ACCREDITED LAND TRUSTS

Starting 2022 off right, 26 land trusts achieved renewal or first-time accreditation in January of this year. These land trusts join a growing community of 464 accredited land trusts that have been verified to have demonstrated fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions and lasting stewardship of the lands they conserve.

NEWLY ACCREDITED

- Captina Conservancy (OH)
- Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (CA)
- Greenbelt Land Trust of Mid-Missouri (MO)
- Island Heritage Trust (ME)
- Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy (MI)
- Okanogan Land Trust (WA)
- Open Land Conservancy of Chester County (PA)
- Philander Chase Conservancy (OH)
- Rancocas Conservancy (NJ)
- San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (CA)
- Sheridan Community Land Trust (WY)
- Sustainable Iowa Land Trust (IA)
- Walloon Lake Association and Conservancy (MI)

RENEWED

- Black Swamp Conservancy (OH)
- Eno River Association (NC) ♦
- Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (IA) ♦
- Marin Agricultural Land Trust (CA) ♦
- Mianus River Gorge (NY) ♦
- New River Conservancy (NC) ♦
- North Coast Land Conservancy (OR)
- Oblong Land Conservancy (NY)
- Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (CA)
- Sempervirens Fund (CA) ♦
- Triangle Land Conservancy (NC)
- West Virginia Land Trust (WV)
- Wood River Land Trust (ID) ♦

List as of January 2022
♦ Second Renewals



PHOTO COURTESY OF MELISSA KALVESTRAND

↑ Melissa Kalvestrand, executive director of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

A MESSAGE FROM MELISSA

On behalf of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, my sincerest congratulations to the Land Trust Alliance on its 40th anniversary. It has been a journey of passion for the land, dedication to its protection and service to the people behind those efforts that have brought us, as a community, so far. The Alliance changed the face of land conservation through its educational programs, advocacy, conservation defense and policy work as well as by establishing the Commission in 2006. Our partnership helps to build resiliency, public confidence in land conservation, and helps ensure the long-term protection of land. We are grateful for the Alliance's investment and continued support of the Commission's work.

BY THE NUMBERS

81%

Of land and easements held by all land trusts are protected by accredited land trusts

16 million acres

Conservation easements held by accredited land trusts

6.9 million acres

Owned by accredited land trusts

*All stats are based on the 2020 National Land Trust Census