

Should Your Land Trust Apply for Accreditation?

Early lessons from the pilot program

Dear Colleagues,

Do you want to build a more effective organization? Has your land trust talked about accreditation? Do you want to apply next year? Perhaps the information in this booklet, including feedback from land trusts in the pilot program, can answer your questions.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission announced the lottery for 2008 applications in May. If your organization wishes to be part of the accreditation program next year you must submit an intent to apply no later than August 31, 2007. See page 3 to determine if your organization is ready to apply.

The land trust accreditation program is designed to help build and recognize strong land trusts, foster public confidence in land conservation and ensure the long-term protection of land. The Commission was established as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance in 2006, is testing the new accreditation program this year and will accept applications via the lottery for 2008.

Details on the accreditation program can be found at www.landtrustaccreditation.org. Resources on how to prepare for accreditation by implementing Land Trust Standards and Practices are available from the Alliance at www.lta.org/tlc/.

Sincerely,

Land Trust Accreditation Commission

What's Inside

- Why Apply for Accreditation?
- Is Your Land Trust Ready?
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**Accreditation Application Lottery
Deadline is
August 31, 2007**

Why Apply for Accreditation?

What land trusts in the pilot program are saying

Effective. Efficient. Stronger.

These are just a few of the words land trusts in the 2007 pilot program are using to describe how applying for accreditation has benefited their organizations. Read more below.

"We would want other organizations to know that this process – time consuming though it is – is absolutely worth the time and effort it requires to complete! We identified the ways in which we've improved our work; we've identified areas that still need attention; and we've had a

measurable means to show our Board how we operate, aside from the usual metrics of 'bucks and acres.'" *Lara Ryan, Green River Valley Land Trust (WY)*



Photo: Green River Valley Land Trust

"Everybody knows the accreditation process involves a lot of work, and that may cause some hesitation about applying. Virtually every hour we put into our application is also helping us make Westchester Land Trust a better and hopefully more successful organization. We learned a lot about our land trust, 'tweaked' our program in a few places, and the dividends are already starting to become apparent. If we had it all over to do again, we would definitely do so." *Paul Gallay, Westchester Land Trust (NY)*

"Applying for accreditation led to many significant improvements in our policies and helped to streamline our processes." *Erin Knight, Upstate Forever (SC)*

"We started out with the idea that this was a continuous improvement process, and one that would force us to take

a fresh look at not just what we did, but how we did it. Although successful accreditation will be the 'cherry on the sundae,' the true benefit has been the process. By the end, our board members were believers, and now treat

our policy manual as a bible. We are now working on ways to permanently instill that ethic with new members." *Susan Lackey, Washtenaw Land Trust (MI)*



Photo: Washtenaw Land Trust/
Barry Lonik

Benefits of Accreditation

The public is increasingly demanding accountability from government and nonprofit organizations, including land trusts. Independent accreditation provides the assurance of quality and permanence of land conservation the public is looking for and publicly recognizes a land trust's ability to protect important natural places and working lands forever.

Preparing for accreditation and the application process also affords land trusts the opportunity to review and implement policies that will help streamline their operations and lead to more effective land conservation.

Top 3 Pieces of Advice from Land Trusts in the Pilots

1. Take the self-assessment seriously.
2. Do not apply until you are fully compliant and have set up and implemented your policies, practices and files accordingly.
3. Make sure you have the time, money and right people to tackle the application.

Is Your Land Trust Ready?

Five things to consider before applying for accreditation

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awards the accreditation seal to community institutions that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. Applicants for accreditation must demonstrate compliance with all of the accreditation indicator practices. Here are some lessons learned from the pilot program about evaluating your organization's readiness to apply for accreditation. More information and advice from the pilots is available at www.landtrustaccreditation.org.

1. Have you done an assessment?

Applicants for accreditation must complete an assessment against the full *Land Trust Standards and Practices* within three years prior to applying. Pilot program applicants say the assessment gives the organization a good sense of its readiness for accreditation and helps identify areas that need improvement. More information on assessments is available from the Land Trust Alliance.

“The best place to start is to read the *Applicant Handbook* and the application for accreditation thoroughly.”

Ann Taylor Schaving, commissioner

2. Do you have the necessary documentation?

Accreditation applications must provide evidence that the land trust is carrying out each of the indicator practices. Pilot groups stress the need for organizations to have documented policies and procedures and well-organized records. If your organization recently adopted new policies, your application must include evidence that the policies are being implemented. The Commission will also look at the paper trail for land projects to see if transactions are screened against criteria and are carefully planned and to determine if stewardship obligations are met.

3. How does your organization approve land transactions?

Do you have evidence of how land transactions are approved in your organization? Can you provide the information your board receives before it makes a decision to acquire land or conservation easements? If a committee of the board or another entity makes the decision, can you show what authority was delegated, the information provided to the decision-makers and the information provided to full board?

4. If you hold easements, do you have baselines for all and do you monitor them annually?

Applicants must have baseline documentation reports for every conservation easement they hold. They must demonstrate a pattern of monitoring each easement annually. If this is a new practice, the Commission will look for a minimum of two consecutive years of annual monitoring records to show compliance.

5. If you own land in fee, do you have management plans or written guidance for each property and do you inspect your properties regularly?

Applicants must have written management plans or written guidance for each property they hold in fee. They must be able to show that these properties are inspected regularly – on a schedule that is appropriate for the use of the property and resources protected.

**See inside for
important
information
on the
land trust
accreditation
program.**

Don't Miss the August 31, 2007 Deadline!

2007 Lottery for First Year Applications!

Land trusts around the country are eager to participate in the new accreditation program. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission will conduct a lottery in 2007 to select applicants for the first year of the program. Visit the web address below for details.

Why Have a Lottery?

The lottery will provide the Commission with important information about land trust interest in accreditation. It also provides advance notice to the land trusts selected to participate next year so that they can start preparing their applications now.

Data from the pilot program, now underway, will be evaluated before the lottery to help determine the number of names that will be drawn for each application round in the first year and how many rounds there will be.

Who Should Submit an Intent to Apply?

Organizations interested in accreditation should review the 2007 pilot application, *Applicant Handbook* and information inside this booklet to determine whether they are eligible and are prepared to apply.

Getting Your Land Trust in the Lottery – Submit an Intent to Apply

Land trusts eligible for accreditation that wish to be part of the lottery drawing must submit an electronic "intent to apply" by **August 31, 2007**. This is your organization's "lottery ticket." Visit the web address below by August 31 for more information and to enter the lottery.

Names of applicants will be drawn at Rally 2007: The National Land Conservation Conference in Denver, CO in early October.