Land Trusts and Climate in 2019: An Assessment of Progress and Needs in Northern New England

Land trusts play a critical role in the response to climate change. In September 2019, the Land Trust Alliance and Open Space Institute surveyed 100 land trusts in northern New England to assess their level of engagement on climate change and needs going forward. 54 land trusts responded. Here, we present the major findings of that survey.

Progress Reported
How has land trusts’ ability to address climate issues changed in the past three years?

In 2014, 28% of land trusts in northern New England were aware of climate datasets and only 18% had integrated climate into their land protection priorities. In 2019, 85% of land trusts surveyed say they understand their role in climate resilience, and 60% report that strategic conservation planning has become more climate focused.

By the numbers:
Over the last three years...

85% report that organizational awareness and understanding of climate change has increased.

60% report that strategic conservation planning is more climate focused.

75% report increased ability to communicate with supporters and partners about conservation and climate change.

55% report an increased ability to protect resilient areas.

Land trusts are saying...

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Climate Needs Reported by Land Trusts

What resources do land trusts need to better address climate change in the future?

“All land trusts have a natural synergy with climate change adaptation, but to really mainstream adaptation within our organization’s workings would require funding.”
- Survey Respondent

Above all else, respondents identified funding as the most needed resource, and indicated a variety of ways that additional funding would advance their climate work: acquiring climate resilient lands, implementing adaptive land management practices, integrating climate into the organization’s strategic plan, and investing more in climate communications.

How has your ability to access funding sources for climate work changed?

- Remained the same - 49.09% (27)
- Increased somewhat - 25.82% (12)
- Increased substantially - 3.04% (2)
- Not applicable - 25.40% (14)

How can climate trainings and resources be improved?

- “We need more 1:1 support to use these tools effectively at our organization.”
- “New funding sources for resilient land conservation (public or private foundations).”
- “Updates on impacts to specific species we can communicate to the public about.”
- “More examples of groups that incorporated climate messaging and made new donor connections to support the broader work.”

Top 3 resources land trusts need to increase climate work:

1. Funding
2. Mapping Tools
3. Case Studies

Top 5 climate topics of interest for land trusts

In order of percentage of respondents who are interested or very interested in these topics:

1. Plant and wildlife adaptation (78% interested or very interested)
2. Stewardship for climate (76% interested or very interested)
3. Climate communications (65% interested or very interested)
4. Freshwater flooding (58% interested or very interested)
5. Carbon mitigation (57% interested or very interested)

Of the 54 organizations that responded to the Climate Progress and Needs for Land Trusts in New England survey, 50% operate in ME, 43% operate in NH, and 12% operate in VT. This survey was distributed with the help of the Maine Land Trust Network, the New Hampshire Land Trust Coalition, and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and generously supported by Jane’s Trust Foundation.