



One Alliance, One Community

by Christina Soto



The view near a section of the Appalachian Trail in New Hampshire. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy, one of 1,000 Land Trust Alliance members, describes itself as the “guardian of the trail.”

LAURIE POTTEIGER

The Land Trust Alliance works with the land trust community in countless ways, demonstrating how we are all stronger together.

A land trust on the brink of shutting down, another facing bad press and the entire land trust community depending on passage of the enhanced federal tax deduction for conservation easement donations to help landowners save their land. To whom did they all turn? The Land Trust Alliance.

Since 1982, the Alliance has been the go-to organization for its land trust members. A voice for the land trust community, the Alliance is the national leader in conservation policy, standards and education. It works diligently to advance land trusts so they can conserve and steward more land now and for future generations.

With a solid new strategic plan in place, the Alliance is well into its 36th year working with land trusts. One supporter once said, “If there wasn’t an Alliance, we would have to create one.” Here’s an overview of the many benefits the Alliance offers its members, some you may not even have known about.

How It Works

To help land trusts be the best they can be, the Alliance focuses its energies and resources on four distinct but interrelated areas of activity, providing tools, resources and programs to support land trusts in every aspect of protecting land:

Advocacy

The Alliance advocates for land trusts at multiple levels by promoting conservation-friendly public policies and programs (such as the federal tax incentive), defending against challenges (in courts and in the court of public opinion) and promoting the value of land conservation and land trusts to critical audiences nationwide.

Capacity Building

The Alliance builds the capacity of land trusts through standards and practices, educational offerings, training curricula,

regrants and financial assistance to land trusts, preparation services related to TerraFirma and other programs. The Alliance also provides ongoing education and training through regional staff, webinars and publications to strengthen organizations and train land trust leaders.

Convening

The Alliance serves as the convener for the land trust community, not only through our annual Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference, but also through land trust networks (online and regionally) and strategically in response to moments of crisis and opportunity.

Collaborative Leadership

The Alliance provides collaborative leadership to the land conservation sector by working with the community to identify emerging threats, find practical solutions and set the agenda for private land conservation nationally, such as creating conservation defense insurance to help land trusts address violations.

It’s a lot for one organization to do, and, in fact, a recent member survey revealed that Alliance members do not know the extent of what the Alliance does: Members shared that they were surprised by some of the tools and resources offered, and sometimes asked for services that the Alliance already provides.

Going Above and Beyond Basic Services

The secret to the success of the Land Trust Alliance is, not surprisingly, its people. “We have excellent staff members, located in D.C. and strategically around the country,” says Chase Warden, Alliance chief operations and financial officer, who formerly worked for The Nature Conservancy (accredited). But, he adds, “We are one Alliance. Staff members draw on the power and resources of the whole organization.”

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Jorge Astorga Jr. on the Allegheny Trail.

Jorge Astorga Jr.

Always on hand to help Alliance members, Jorge Astorga says, “I respond to at least 10 questions from land trusts or affiliates per day on a variety of topics. One common thing I’ve discovered is that there is often only one contact at the land trust taking advantage of the benefits. Membership extends to everyone in the entire organization. That information gets lost sometimes, so I remind them.”

For the past year, Astorga, who is the membership services coordinator, has been handling membership renewals conditional on the adoption of the revised *Land Trust Standards and Practices* (the Standards). The experience has taught him that “we have to be patient and appreciate the workload that our members have. We need to look at things from their point of view. Boards change all the time, people get sick—time is at a premium.”

After checking in with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy about its renewal and adoption of the Standards, Astorga learned there had been some changes at the conservancy. “Jorge was very helpful and attentive while providing assistance to ATC,” says Director of Landscape Conservation Dennis Shaffer. “He listened to our issues and worked with us during a time of leadership

transitions to create a process that was workable for the Alliance and ATC. His support was always professional and pleasant. Jorge made our communications with the Alliance go smoothly.”

An accomplished ultramarathon and trail runner, Astorga especially likes it when land trusts share information about their events or trails. “I’m one of the people to whom you want to market your land trust, as in, what trails can I run or what hiking apps do you have? I’ve run on or hiked at least a dozen land trust member trails. I like to hear about them.”

Joshua Lynsen

“When a land trust has some big news, it’s important to share it,” says Joshua Lynsen, media relations manager at the Alliance. “The land trust may have its own channels to do that online, but in those instances it’s often preaching to the choir. We like to help push those successes forward, whether it’s through our social channels, our blog or other means. When the Alliance shares a land trust’s good works, the story can reach an entirely new and broader audience at a national level.” Lynsen has helped several land trusts do just that.

Lynsen points out another potential benefit to this type of outreach: “Think about grant writing. It might help that you’ve been recognized by the national organization to which you belong.”

In addition to social media and the blog, Lynsen works with land trusts to customize media lists.

This past March, Jay Kosa, communications manager at the accredited Columbia Land Trust, learned that the Alliance can create media lists on demand for land trusts (limited to two per land trust per year). He jumped at the chance.

“I asked Josh for media lists for both Oregon and Washington,” says Kosa. “I was looking to save time in updating a stale media list because I needed to distribute a volley of press releases around some major program achievements, and also to identify prospects for building new media relationships at desired outlets.”

Lynsen developed lists using such key words as “conservation,” “environment” and “outdoors/nature.” He came up with 128 names of target newspapers, TV and radio stations. Exporting the data in a comma-delineated format, he sent the list to Kosa to, as Lynsen says, “slice it and dice it as he wanted.”

Kosa was over the moon. “Josh offered to work through the list with me if desired. I appreciated both the large list and his responsiveness.”

The accredited Bluegrass Land Conservancy needed something a little different. “They gave me a starting point—Lexington, Kentucky—then asked for a 90-mile radius out from that, to cover what they consider their service area,” says Lynsen.

We’re on the Ground with You

The Alliance’s regional staff are strategically placed in areas around the country. These are the people who work hand in hand with land trust staff, board members and volunteers in their regions, often meeting up face-to-face in trainings, conferences or board meetings.

Catherine Waterston

Raised in Texas, Catherine Waterston knows a thing or two about the 14 states she supports as the Alliance’s Western program associate. “I get a broad view of the amazing work our land trusts are doing, from Texas to Alaska!” says Waterston.

She first took an interest in conservation when she went to work for the accredited Peninsula Open Space Trust in California. Before that, she loved hiking and going to swimming holes in central Texas, but she didn’t give much thought to how those places came to be protected. She says of her introduction to the land trust community, “I quickly learned how important it is, and how much work it takes, to protect those special places.”

Located in Oregon, Waterston works with land trusts in the western region and staffs the Western Help Desk (www.lta.org/western-help-desk), where she helps members find solutions to a wide range of organizational questions and challenges. “Catherine is great at understanding how best to provide land

Resource Roundup

In a short article it's difficult to cover even a partial list of benefits the Alliance provides its members. Use this list as a starting point. Go to www.lta.org and search on any of these terms.

Relevance

- Public website
- Community Conservation Program
- *Saving Land*
- eNews
- "The Dirt" blog
- Field Guide for board members
- Other publications
- Find a Land Trust website

Resilience

- Preparation support for land trust accreditation
- Terrafirma
- Land and Climate Program
- Chesapeake Bay Land and Water Initiative
- Conservation Defense
- Legal Symposium
- Merger support

Rigor

- *Land Trust Standards and Practices*
- Land Trust Accreditation
- The Learning Center (includes Ask an Expert, forums, Law Library, sample documents, on-demand training and much more)
- Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference
- Regional conferences
- Circuit Riders
- Leadership Program
- Webinars
- Salaries and Benefits Survey
- Conserv-a-Nation insurance
- Regrants

Rate

- Federal policy advocacy
- Ambassadors Program
- Issues and action
- National Land Trust Census

A few years ago, O'Donnell worked with a land trust on the brink of failure after falling victim to fraud and embezzlement. "Her dedication to helping this land trust by working with its board members and staff—all of whom cared very deeply about the outcome—really made a huge difference," says Midwest Director Carolyn Waldron. "That land trust not only recovered, it went on to earn accreditation in 2016 and is now thriving."

Broad and Deep Outreach

People in the land trust community have different conceptions about what "community conservation" means. The Alliance believes that when land trusts engage all people in their communities, especially those who have not traditionally been served by, engaged in or moved by land conservation, they make land conservation inclusive and relevant—and that's the essence of community conservation.

When land trusts take part in this work, they build broad and deep support for land conservation. They also address inequities regarding access to land, open space and a healthy environment; increase financial and political resources for land conservation (and, therefore, the rate of land conservation); make land trusts more reliant on and enriched by the communities they serve; and, ultimately, ensure the permanence of land conservation.

The Alliance will continue to produce robust programming and services to help land trusts engage in community conservation in ways that are tailored to their circumstances and unique realities. But it can do much more as a national organization that represents 1,000 land trusts from across the country. "The Alliance can complement and amplify the local efforts of land trusts with a national, coalition-based call-to-action campaign around land conservation," says Alliance President Andrew Bowman. "We're going to need the help of the entire land trust community as we design and launch this bold initiative." 🌿

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THANKS TO SARINA KATZ FOR THE PROFILE OF CATHERINE WATERSTON.



Catherine Waterston in the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

trusts with the advice and resources they need to succeed," says Wendy Ninteman, the Alliance's Western director.

MaryKay O'Donnell

Everyone who meets her likes MaryKay O'Donnell, the Land Trust Alliance's

Midwest senior program manager. And with 11 years at the Alliance, a lot of people know and rely upon her.

"MaryKay is one of the most intelligent, caring, insightful and competent land trust professionals I've ever had the pleasure to work with," says Dave Clutter, executive director of the accredited Driftless Area Land Conservancy in Wisconsin. "Whenever I'm stumped by or concerned with an issue, I know I can always count on her to provide excellent and thoughtful guidance and counsel. She's one in a million."

O'Donnell came to the Alliance with 20 years of experience in land acquisition, having worked for regional and national conservation organizations. Her interest in conservation developed early on during camping trips all over the United States in a Starcraft pop-up with her parents and six siblings. Her favorite part of her job is finding innovative ways to connect people to one another and to expand their knowledge and skills.