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SUMMER 2021



THE 30X30 VISION

FIGHTING CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

LOCAL RESILIENCE

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Land Trust Alliance
Together, conserving the places you love

"In the future I hope many more family farms will be protected by permanent conservation easements through the land trusts of our nation."

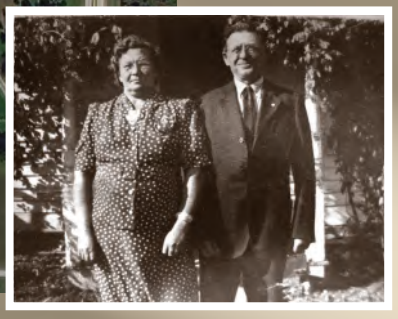
Dean Fedde, Nebraska farmer



Stella and Joe Burns







Stella and John Deloske

The Nebraska farm (bottom) cultivated by Stella and John Deloske was sold in 1966 and developed into five parcels where rooftops replaced fields of corn, oats and alfalfa. Their grandsons, Dean and Wayne Fedde, bought the adjacent farm (top) from their aunt and uncle, Joe and Stella Burns. The Fedde brothers vowed to save this farm and in 2010 protected it with a conservation easement with the accredited Nebraska Land Trust. Read Dean Fedde's story of the two farms on page 12.



BRUCE HOGLE / KANSAS LAND TRUST

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↑ **Sunset on the Kunze Prairie in Riley County, Kansas. Kansas Land Trust protected the 630-acre native tallgrass prairie with a conservation easement.**

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ON THE COVER: **The view from The Piedmont Environmental Council's Piedmont Memorial Overlook in northern Virginia. PEC and other land trusts have recently been called on to defend the integrity and purpose of conservation easements. See story on page 18.**
PHOTO BY HUGH KENNY

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The Legacy Society recognizes those who have made a commitment to permanence by including the Land Trust Alliance in their estate plans.

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MAKING THE CASE FOR CONSERVATION

I HAVE LONG TOUTED THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES of a national goal to protect 30% of the nation's land base by 2030 (see page 14). Such a goal creates opportunities for our community because land trusts are critical to it becoming a reality. Accordingly, the goal provides us with a prominent platform from which we can advocate for additional resources to increase the pace of *all* the kinds of work we do in *all* geographies. It also creates challenges, however, because it is audacious, subject to interpretation, and surrounded by misinformation—all of which fuel critics and detractors.

There are, in fact, vocal opponents of 30x30. In expressing their opposition, they often attack land conservation writ large, and the tools used by land trusts, particularly conservation easements. As the article on state legislative attacks on conservation demonstrates (see page 18), land trusts often find themselves having to defend and make the case for private land conservation.

Here at the Alliance, we know the value of land trusts' work—work that is voluntary, local, community-driven, nonpartisan, charitable and enduring. But perhaps the most powerful rationale for conservation is the land itself and all that it provides: pure drinking water, healthy food, clean air, carbon sequestration, habitat for wildlife, and places for people to reflect, recreate, hunt and fish.

There are no surprises in this articulation. In fact, you will find much of it echoed in the principles set forth in the Biden administration's recent "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful" report. But together these arguments express in a powerful way why private land conservation facilitated by land trusts should be embraced by people all along the political spectrum and not become another lightning rod in today's culture wars. Let's all work together to spread the word about how land conservation is something everyone can rally around—and to build social cohesion among a deeply splintered American populace.



DJ GLISSON, II/FIREFLY IMAGEWORKS



ANDREW BOWMAN

By **KIRSTEN FERGUSON**

DUNE HABITAT IN HISTORIC BLACK COMMUNITY CONSERVED

The accredited North Florida Land Trust (NFLT) recently paid tribute to MaVynee Betsch, an environmental advocate known as "The Beach Lady" for her efforts to protect Amelia Island's American Beach. Betsch, a member of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, was the great-great-granddaughter of Abraham Lincoln Lewis, who founded American Beach in 1935 to give African Americans beach access during the days of segregation.

Betsch dedicated the last 25 years of her life to preserving American Beach and the Little NaNa Dune system, an important habitat for gopher tortoises and migrating birds. She posted signs to protect nesting sea turtles and encouraged residents to plant wildflowers to stabilize the land and provide butterfly habitat. Betsch was instrumental in securing the property's addition to the National Park Service's Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve in 2004, one year before her death.

To honor Betsch's legacy, NFLT purchased three parcels of land in the Little NaNa Dune system on what would have been her 86th birthday in January. NFLT financed the purchase with a $1.255 million loan and launched a campaign to pay it off.

"We wanted to protect this historic community and its natural benefits for the good of the wildlife that depends on it and to protect the sense of place that rests in the memories of so many generations of families that vacationed in American Beach at a time when they were prohibited from beaches all across the country," says Jim McCarthy, NFLT president.



AMERICAN BEACH MUSEUM

MaVynee Betsch fought for the historic and ecological preservation of Florida's American Beach.



NORTH FLORIDA LAND TRUST

North Florida Land Trust preserved a portion of the Little NaNa Dune system in MaVynee Betsch's honor.

A Global Community for Land Conservation

Earlier this year, the International Land Conservation Network (ILCN) launched a new round of participants in its Large Landscape Peer Learning Initiative. The initiative, which continues through 2022, connects organizations from around the world to accelerate the protection of land and natural resources. "This initiative is an incredible opportunity to work with large landscape conservation leaders on some of the most difficult challenges we face as a global community, such as climate change and habitat fragmentation," says Joel Dunn, president and CEO of Chesapeake Conservancy, an ILCN participant.

"The need for collaboration on conservation has never been more important or urgent than it is today," Dunn adds. "Scientists from around the world have agreed that in order to prevent the global biodiversity crisis, humans must conserve 50% of the world's lands and waters for nature by 2050. An interim target of 30% lands and waters conserved by 2030 has been set, and many nations and landscapes are now adopting this important goal." (See related story on page 14.)

Chesapeake Conservancy has experience achieving landscape-scale conservation objectives. Along with the National Park Service, Chesapeake Conservancy is the co-convener of the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership, a large landscape collaborative working in partnership to conserve 2 million additional acres by 2025, with the goal of protecting 30% of the Bay watershed by 2030.

Learn more about the ILCN at www.landconservationnetwork.org.

LAND TRUSTS REINFORCE VAST EMPIRE STATE TRAIL

New York's extensive Empire State Trail is now complete, thanks in part to the role played by several land trusts. Governor Andrew Cuomo announced plans for the nation's longest multi-use trail in 2017. The 750-mile bicycle and walking trail spans north-to-south and east-to-west, connecting New York City to Canada and Buffalo to Albany. Along the way, it links 20 regional segments to create a continuous statewide route.

Near Kingston in the Hudson Valley, the trail includes the 1.9-mile Hudson River Brickyard Trail, which passes through a 520-acre waterside property—and future state park—protected by the accredited Scenic Hudson in 2019. "It's one of the few places along the Empire State Trail offering a direct connection with the river," writes Scenic Hudson. "The trail will directly connect you with the Hudson River, majestic views of nearby cliffs, and the joy of watching a soaring bald eagle, waterfowl, kayakers and sailboarders."

The accredited Rensselaer Land Trust also recently celebrated the completion of a critical segment of the 36-mile Albany-Hudson Electric Trail, which follows a former electric trolley corridor, passing through scenic farmland, historic Hudson Valley communities and multiple crossings of the picturesque Valatie Kill stream. "Our land trust partnered with the Hudson River Valley Greenway and New York state to create a trailhead," says Rensselaer Land Trust Executive Director John Winter. "Besides owning and maintaining the trailhead, we also maintain about 6.5 miles of the multi-use trail in the town of Schodack."

Visit empiretrail.ny.gov to view interactive maps, segment descriptions, access points, trail distances and attractions along the trail.



RENSSELAER LAND TRUST

↑ **Rensselaer Land Trust's John Winter (left) and Marcos Velazquez celebrate the opening of the Albany-Hudson Electric Trail, part of the 750-mile Empire State Trail.**

A Green Retreat Grows in Baltimore

BLISS Meadows is a 10-acre land reclamation project that brings educational farming and equitable access to green space in northeast Baltimore. Founder and Executive Director Atiya Wells, a pediatric nurse, leads the effort to transform the formerly neglected land into a community garden and hub for outdoor education. After discovering the untended patch of forest in her Frankford neighborhood, Wells formed a nonprofit group, Backyard Basecamp, and launched BLISS Meadows to reclaim the tract and connect urban families—especially people of color—with nature.

With help from Baltimore Green Space, a land trust that partners with communities to preserve urban open space, Wells found and contacted the lot's owner, persuading him to let her farm it and use it for the outdoor programming. "I think having community green space is really important," Wells told the Bay Journal, stating a desire to instill the gardening knowledge especially needed in the city's food deserts, where grocery shopping options are limited.

Prior to the pandemic, Backyard Basecamp crowdsourced a fundraising campaign to purchase an abandoned house on an adjoining lot for use as a year-round hub for classes. With a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, Wells hired a contractor to grade the meadow to improve stormwater drainage and make space for an outdoor amphitheater. Future plans for the site include beehives, a forest school, expanded community farm production and a trail system in the park.

Learn more at backyardbasecamp.org.



SEAN MANCHO

↑ **Backyard Basecamp founder and Executive Director Atiya Wells (left) with board member Curtisha Charles at BLISS Meadows in Baltimore.**



JEFFERSON LAND TRUST

↑ Valley View Forest, protected by Jefferson Land Trust, is a 65-acre working forest that provides long-term benefits to the surrounding community.

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF SPECIAL PLACES

Conserved farms, forests and trails are not just amenities. They are also resources that safeguard the economic health of communities, concludes a recent study by The Trust for Public Land, Jefferson Land Trust and North Olympic Land Trust (all accredited).

The report, "The economic benefits of conserved lands, trails, and parks on the North Olympic Peninsula," quantifies the value of the Washington state peninsula's protected land. The conclusion? Conserved lands are economic drivers that generate hundreds of millions of dollars in benefits each year.

For instance, farmland conservation keeps working farms active, allowing the North Olympic Peninsula to generate $29.4 million in farm products each year. "Preservation efforts of local farmland have led to the resurgence of the agricultural economies of Chimacum, Quilcene and the Dungeness and have contributed to the economic growth of the North Olympic Peninsula," says Richard Tucker, Jefferson Land Trust executive director.

In addition, the study finds that the forest economy provides 1,440 jobs and $92.1 million in wages each year, while the peninsula's protected lands reduce pollution control costs by $25.8 million each year.

Read more at https://saveland.org/discovering-the-economic-value-of-conserved-lands-on-the-north-olympic-peninsula/.

Who Are the New Outdoor Users?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Americans sought refuge in the outdoors, some for the first time ever. These new outdoor participants represent an unprecedented opportunity to grow and diversify the land trust community. But first we need to better understand them. A recent report commissioned by the Outdoor Industry Association examines the profile of the new outdoor participant, defined as someone who participated in an outdoor activity for the first time during the pandemic or after a significant lapse. The report asks and answers important questions about who the new participants are, and how we can keep them engaged.

Among the takeaways: New participants are more likely to be female, younger, living in an urban area and more ethnically diverse than existing participants. New participants primarily seek socially distanced outdoor activities to spend time with loved ones safely, exercise, stay healthy or reduce screen-time fatigue. And new participants are largely motivated by outdoor recreation opportunities with low barriers to entry that are available and accessible within 10 miles of their homes, including walking, running, biking and hiking.

Download the free report at www.outdoorindustry.org.



©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MAPODILE

↑ A recent study explores the demographics of new outdoor users, a growing constituency for land trusts.



USDA NRCS

↑ Washoe Tribe member Louinda Garity's artwork depicting a sage grouse dance is featured on a new NRCS brochure and story map to highlight sagebrush conservation.

NRCS HONORS NATIVE AMERICANS WITH NEW BROCHURE, STORY MAP

Across the West, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with Native Americans to restore sagebrush range through the Sage Grouse Initiative, part of the Working Lands for Wildlife program. NRCS highlighted these growing partnerships recently though a new brochure and story map, "The Dance of the Sage Grouse: Bridging Culture and Conservation."

The poster-sized brochure features the vivid artwork of Washoe Tribe member Louinda Garity along with stories about successful NRCS conservation partnerships to restore sagebrush habitat while making tribal lands more productive for livestock. Garity's artwork depicts the sage grouse dancing in early spring with Nevada's Stillwater Range in the background. For Nevada tribes, sage grouse provided food and feathers for decoration while the sagebrush itself is traditionally used for shelter, medicine, tea and spiritual cleansing.

"We are acutely aware of the need to protect and nurture this environment," says Garity. "Our tribes take our sacred dances from the movements of the sage grouse, deer and all animals native to this area. People that don't live here just see a vast barren desert, but nothing could be further from the truth. … Our people have been here for more than 10,000 years—and how did they survive this climate? I wanted to show the desert not as barren, but as a living ecosystem."

Download the brochure and view the story map at www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/sagebrush-community/the-people.

Garden of 11 Angels Slated to Open in Cleveland

The accredited Western Reserve Land Conservancy recently obtained the final piece of funding for a project years in the making to transform the site of 11 murders in Cleveland's Mt. Pleasant neighborhood into a community garden and memorial. Set to open in fall of 2021 with support from Ohio's Clean Ohio Fund and partners, the Garden of 11 Angels seeks to uplift the community by transforming eight vacant parcels into a memorial that restores the site to an ecologically thriving natural area.

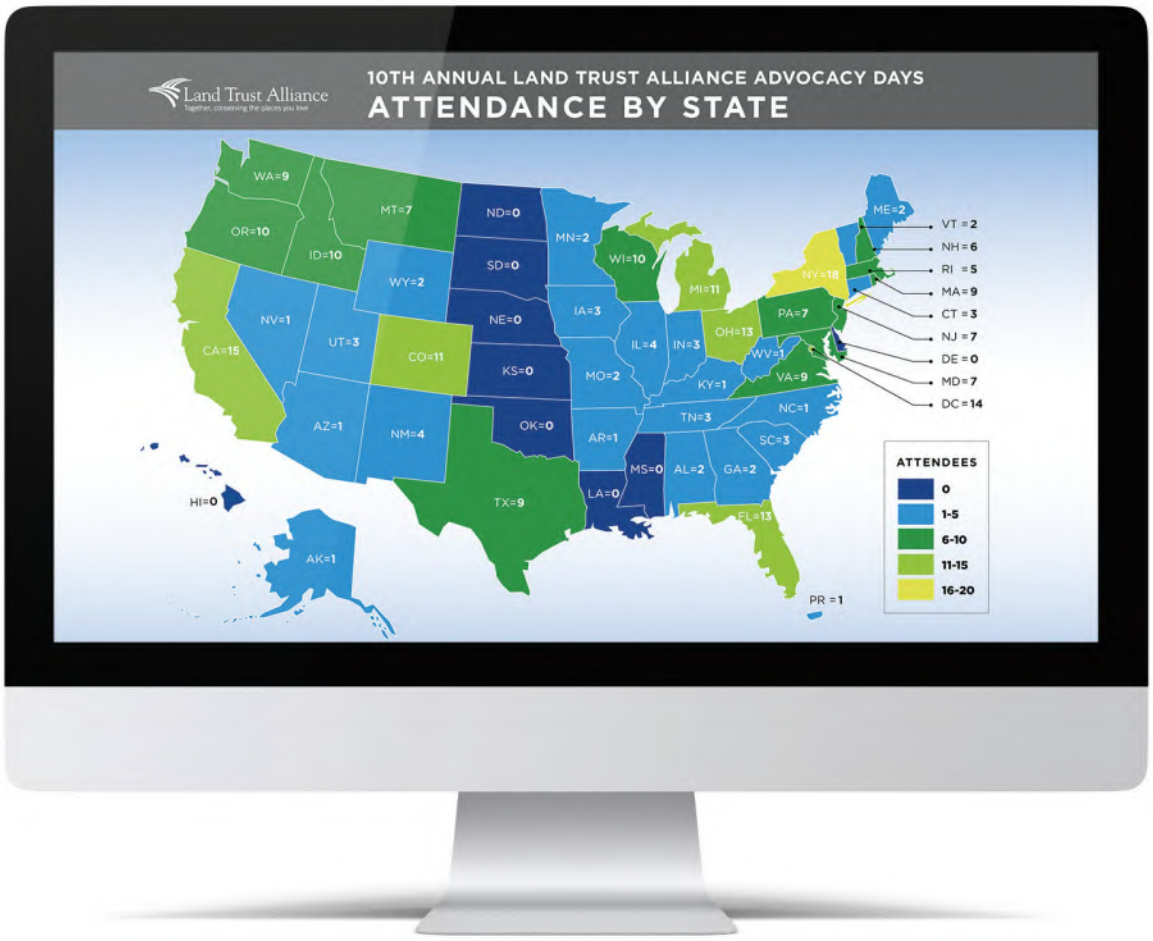
"For more than a decade, the tragedy of these 11 women who were forgotten by society and brutally murdered in a decrepit house on Imperial Avenue has been a scar on this community," says Isaac Robb, vice president of planning and urban projects at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "We hope that the Garden of 11 Angels will be part of the healing this community needs and deserves."

The home where the women's bodies were found was demolished in 2011. In 2016, at the request of project partners, including the Mount Pleasant Ministerial Alliance, Western Reserve Land Conservancy stepped in to help acquire two adjacent vacant parcels, in close partnership with the victims' families and the local community. Since 2016, five adjacent parcels have had their blighted residential structures demolished as well. In 2019, Cleveland's LAND Studio reconfigured the original design to complement the eight total parcels that now serve as the backdrop of the memorial.

↓ An artist's rendering of Garden of 11 Angels, a Cleveland community memorial and park slated to open this fall.



WESTERN RESERVE LAND CONSERVANCY



↑ **Alliance members participated in more than 170 virtual meetings with congressional offices for this year's Advocacy Days. The map shows the number of land trust and Alliance staff who participated per state.**

ADVOCATING IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

By **MORGAN ZENTER** *and* **SIERRA MOEN**

Advocating for conservation policies from the comfort of one's home can sometimes present challenges. For one, it can be hard to attend a meeting with a high-ranking official while family members—including furry companions—vie for attention. However, Land Trust Alliance members once again demonstrated record-setting engagement, perseverance and flexibility during the 10th annual Land Trust Alliance Advocacy Days, held virtually April 19-22.

Each year, the Alliance hires two government relations interns to help organize and coordinate the popular Advocacy Days event. Interns gain a firsthand look at conservation advocacy and are instrumental in coordinating meetings among land trusts and elected officials. This year, we took on this important, educational and fun role.

While this spring's event was the second in a row to be held fully virtual, the format provided advantages by removing traditional participation barriers, such as travel costs and time spent away from the office. As a result, a record 250 land conservationists, representing 43 states, participated in over 170 virtual meetings with members of Congress and their staff. More than 130 were first-time Advocacy Days participants.

"We were thrilled to have so many attendees, especially first-time participants, join us at this year's event," says Lori Faeth, the Alliance's government relations director. "By bringing together our community in such a way, we not only underscored the value of land conservation to members of Congress but also strengthened our voice on Capitol Hill."

Advocacy Days is an opportunity for the land trust community to educate decision-makers on federal policy priorities. This year, those priorities included reintroducing and passing the Charitable Conservation Easement

Program Integrity Act, underscoring the importance of Farm Bill conservation programs and supporting a modernized Civilian Conservation Corps program.

Land trusts also were prepared to address developing political opportunities, including the January executive order "Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad." Many members took the opportunity to educate policymakers on the importance of private land conservation and the pivotal role that land trusts can play in achieving the ambitious 30x30 goal. This outreach was especially important given the amount of misinformation circulating about 30x30 and private land conservation. (See our feature on the 30x30 goal on page 14.)

Over four days, attendees met with Congress members and their staff to advocate for and discuss policies directly impacting land conservation. Attendees heard remarks by Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) and Reps. Abigail Spanberger (D-Virginia) and Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-Pennsylvania). In addition, Robert Bonnie, deputy chief of staff for policy and senior climate adviser at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, delivered a timely keynote address focused on natural climate solutions. Attendees also had the opportunity to meet with key agency officials at the U.S. Forest Service, USDA's Farm Production and Conservation division and the U.S. Department of the Interior as part of a newly created Agency Day.

Here's what went into planning and executing such a major event.

STEP ONE: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Planning for Advocacy Days begins nearly a year in advance, but the first visible sign is the "save the date" notice in February. To boost attendance, Alliance staff relied on field coordinators, board members, interns and other staff to conduct outreach. This was amplified through word-of-mouth interactions across the close-knit land trust community.

Once participants registered, the most time-consuming task was scheduling meetings for land trust representatives with Congress members and their staff—an assignment that went well beyond coordinating calendars. This required a significant amount of research, including learning about individual land trust needs, interests, service territory, prior interactions and standing relationships with officials.

STEP TWO: TOOLS FOR ADVOCACY

Once the appointments were scheduled, we made sure that attendees had all the necessary information, tools and resources to ensure successful meetings with elected officials. We created an informational biography for each member of Congress and fact sheets for each policy priority as well as customized supplemental material based on our members' needs. Advocacy Days participants used an online hub to access this information and share factsheets and other materials with congressional offices.

In addition, two advocacy training sessions were held. An issues briefing for all attendees provided an overview of the policy agenda. A training for first-timers provided tips for interacting with members of Congress and their staff and offered virtual opportunities to role play Hill meetings.

STEP THREE: THE CONGRESSIONAL MEETING

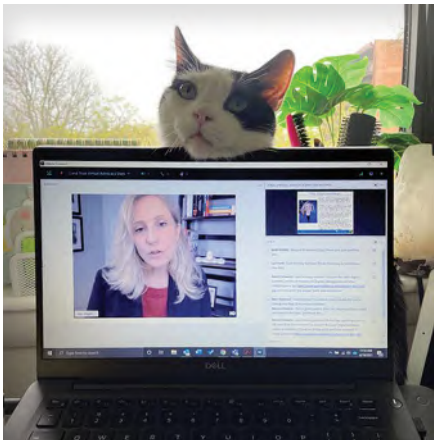
Once land trust members reviewed the materials and attended the trainings, it was time to meet with elected officials. Congressional offices welcomed the chance to talk with constituents, and through virtual visits it was easy to connect. This year, Alliance members participated in more than 170 virtual meetings with congressional offices, including over 40 meetings with elected officials.

After educating their congressional representatives about the issues important to our community, land trust participants recorded the details of their meetings in an Alliance advocacy database. We reviewed the results, and it was clear that Alliance members were effective advocates. Many reported that officials were receptive to their messages. Many Alliance members invited elected officials to visit a property or attend a land trust event—an excellent way to show Congress members how federal programs are working on the ground.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Thank you to the hundreds of participants who made this year's Advocacy Days our most impactful and well-attended event yet. After reading about our success and the importance of this work, hopefully more people will feel inspired to participate next year. In the meantime, for the latest policy news, please visit lta.org/2021-policy-agenda. Building relationships among land trusts, decision-makers and their staff is an ongoing effort. If we don't continue to advocate for policies that support our community, we won't be able to achieve our ambitious land conservation goals.

MORGAN ZENTER and **SIERRA MOEN** served as Government Relations interns with the Land Trust Alliance in the spring of 2021.



LINDSY CRUTCHFIELD

↑ **Alliance staffer Lindsy Crutchfield's cat Archie listens to Rep. Spanberger's speech during Advocacy Days.**

DO YOU KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVES?

It is remarkably easy to determine who represents you in Congress! Simply go to www.govtrack.us/congress/members and enter your ZIP code. You can do this for every ZIP code where your land trust holds a conservation easement.



← Author Dean Fedde (right) and his brother Wayne on the farm they protected with a conservation easement. The Nebraska farmers vowed to save their family farmland and worked with Nebraska Land Trust to permanently protect it in 2010.

A TALE OF TWO FARMS:

THE POWER OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

DEAN FEDDE AND HIS BROTHER WAYNE are third-generation Nebraskan farmers who placed an easement on their property in 2010. This column was adapted from a letter Dean wrote in response to published attacks on private land conservation and the 30x30 goal.

I am a lifelong Nebraskan with deeply planted roots in southwest Sarpy County. For nearly a century, my family has farmed in the Lower Platte Valley, an area rich with some of our state's most fertile soils. In Nebraska's fastest growing county, there is now an urgency to protect the historic farmsteads, rolling fields of grain and the diverse habitat needed to sustain the abundant wildlife of the region. In these rapidly changing times, agriculture is being squeezed out and farms are vanishing at an alarming rate. Unfortunately, my family has suffered that reality.

My brother Wayne and I grew up on the farms of our grandparents, John and Stella Deloske, and our uncle and aunt, Joe and Stella Buras. The two farms were located approximately 7 miles south of Gretna, separated by Nebraska Highway 31.

My grandparents were Lithuanian immigrants who moved to their 40-acre farm in 1932. Along with his six children, Grandpa Deloske farmed with horses, growing corn, oats and alfalfa to feed their cattle, hogs, goats, chickens and geese. It was presumed that this farm would always stay in the family. However, shortly after my grandfather passed away in 1966, an investor contacted a part of the family with an offer to buy the farm. Unknown to the rest of the family, the farm was sold. The house, barn and outbuildings were bulldozed and burned. The land was broken into five parcels as rooftops replaced the fields of corn, oats and alfalfa. This family farm was forever gone.

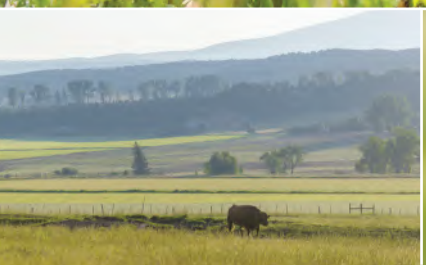
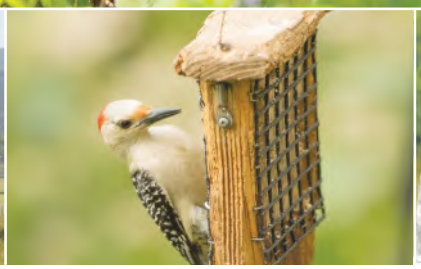
Meanwhile, on the adjacent 158-acre farm, our Uncle Joe and Aunt Stella were dedicated not only to protecting the environment but also to improving it. After the passing of Uncle Joe, Wayne and I vowed to not let this farm disappear. In 1993, we purchased the farm from our Aunt Stel, committed to following in their footsteps with a deep respect for the environment.

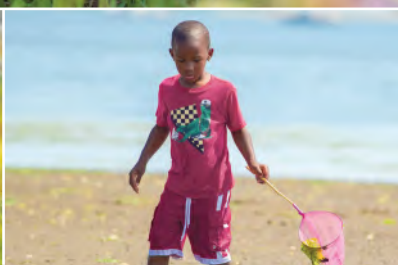
Today, we are a certified organic farm growing corn, soybeans, oats, winter wheat and alfalfa. To my brother and me, these two farms are not just parcels of real estate to be bought and sold; they are a treasured part of us. We could not save our grandparents' farm, but in 2010 we were offered the opportunity to forever protect the farm and legacy of our uncle and aunt with a permanent conservation easement with the Nebraska Land Trust.

Conservation easements are a powerful asset for the farmers and ranchers of our state. In Sarpy County, the pressures are growing stronger as every agricultural acre holds the potential for development. Lack of support for conservation easements can subject a family farm or ranch to permanent change. Once an unprotected farm has been broken by development, that land is forever altered and will never again return to agriculture. The opportunity of a permanent conservation easement can protect a family farm or ranch, allowing for future generations to continue in agriculture. For my family and the future farmers who will tend our land, we are eternally grateful for that opportunity.

HELP ACHIEVE A MOON SHOT FOR NATURE

Conserving 30% of Lands and Waters by 2030



Photos by DJ Glisson, II / Firefly Imageworks

LAND TRUSTS AND THE 30X30 GOAL

A broad scientific consensus has emerged—with governmental support—that conserving 30% of lands and waters by 2030 will protect key ecosystems and buffer against the worst impacts of climate change.

We cannot achieve this ambitious 30x30 goal without the private land conservation so effectively driven by land trusts.

But business as usual won't get us there. That's why we are challenging land trusts to double the amount of land they have conserved by the end of this decade.

Your gift will help ensure that land trusts have the vision, tools and resources to accomplish this audacious challenge—one that is only possible with the support of the Alliance and your help.

A FOOTBALL FIELD-SIZED PIECE OF LAND IS LOST EVERY

30 seconds

due to development in the United States
(Based on data from 2001–2017)

Together, we will permanently protect land for future generations, mitigate climate change and save critical habitats.

HELP CONSERVE 30X30

Make a gift today at **donate.lta.org**

30x30

PUTTING PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION ON THE MAP

By **TOM SPRINGER**



BRENDAN WILTSE

On January 27, just days into his new administration, President Joe Biden issued an executive order focused on "tackling the climate crisis at home and abroad."

Nestled among orders to rejoin the Paris Agreement, establish a Civilian Climate Corps—modeled on the Depression Era's Civilian Conservation Corps—and advance clean energy is a call to conserve at least 30% of the nation's lands and waters by 2030.

The idea of conserving 30x30, as the goal is known, is not a new one. Biologist E.O. Wilson proposed in his 2016 book *Half-Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life* that the only way to avoid an extinction crisis is to conserve half the planet. And scientists have been coalescing behind an interim target to protect 30x30 at the global level. In addition, states ranging from South Carolina to California have proposed protecting 30% or more of their lands.

While not new, the goal is urgent. In the United States, 24 million acres of undeveloped land were lost between 2011 and 2017 alone. "That's roughly a football field of natural area disappearing every 30 seconds, most of it on private lands," says Andrew Bowman, president and CEO of the Land Trust Alliance. When the land's natural qualities disappear—conservationists call asphalt "the last crop"—so do the wild creatures that call it home. In just one example, the North American bird population has dropped 29% since 1970—a loss of more than 3 billion birds.

When undeveloped land falls prey to strip malls and subdivisions, its ability to sequester carbon, recharge aquifers and reduce greenhouse gas pollution also plummets—a huge environmental loss that our planet can scarcely afford. A 2017 National Academy of Sciences study found that the world's natural and working lands deliver 37% of the greenhouse gas emission reductions needed to keep the global temperature increase below 2 degrees Celsius.

Given the scope of the challenges we face, it is not surprising that the goal is ambitious. Scientists assert that if we are to fend off the climate crisis and prevent the possible extinction of thousands of species, we need to bridge the gap between the roughly 12% of land protected, based on the U.S. Geological Survey, and the 30% goal—a gap of some 4 million acres, an area more than twice the size of Texas.



BRENDAN WILTSE

↑ **Eagle Mountain Wilderness Preserve near Essex, New York, protected in 2019 by the Northeast Wilderness Trust.**

← **Climate change threatens the North American bird population, which has dropped 29% since 1970.**

↓ **(Left) The Wolfe Farm in Wallowa, Oregon. (Right) A rock wall remnant from the late 1800s on the Butt-n-Buck preserve in Arkansas.**

NEW GROWTH FOR LAND TRUSTS

The urgency and magnitude of the 30x30 goal led Alliance officials to predict a time of growth and promise for land trusts.

"The audaciousness of the president's conservation goal is right for this moment," wrote Bowman in an Alliance statement. "And this 'moonshot' for nature is necessary for more than just environmental reasons: Land—and the public's desire to conserve it—provides a rare chance to reduce political polarization among a deeply splintered American populace."

Bowman cites a recent landmark legislative victory as proof of the common ground that exists around conservation. In August 2020, President Donald Trump signed the Great American Outdoors Act with wide bipartisan support that included two western Republican governors. The act provides $900 million annually to support the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which protects federal lands and voluntary conservation on private lands. Created in 1964, the fund has never had permanent congressional funding until now.

"Voluntary private land conservation is a bipartisan and popular priority, and we're perfectly positioned for 30x30," says Erin Heskett, the Alliance's vice president for conservation initiatives. "Biden's executive order focuses on slowing down climate change, and it's instructive to note that according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communications, in every U.S. congressional district a majority of voters believe that climate change is happening."

However, the 30x30 goal and the president's order are not without their detractors. Some fear this is an attempt to seize private property to expand public lands; others are



LEON WERDINGER



JACK BUTT

concerned that the use of existing public lands will be restricted.

"There is a lot of misinformation out there about 30x30," says Lori Faeth, the Alliance's director of government relations. "But that creates an opportunity for us to demonstrate that voluntary private land conservation will do none of those things: Conservation easements help private lands stay in private hands." Faeth went on to point out that the executive order specifically mandates that administration officials engage agricultural and forest landowners and other key stakeholders. "This is not an empty gesture of inclusiveness," Faeth noted. "It will be impossible to achieve the 30x30 goal without private land conservation—and land trusts are the key drivers of private land conservation."

In fact, a May 6 report from the administration, titled "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful," recognizes that the "President's challenge is a call to action to support locally led conservation and restoration efforts of all kinds and all over America, wherever communities wish to safeguard the lands and waters they know and love." The report, which lays out principles for building and maintaining broad support, enthusiasm and trust for 30x30, also presents six recommendations for early focus for this work. One is to incentivize and reward voluntary conservation by working landowners.

That said, Heskett describes the bold goals of 30x30 as an "immense lift." Each year, the nation's land trusts protect between 1 to 2 million acres. In the last 40 years, they've saved a total of 60 million acres. Now, the Alliance's goal for 30x30 calls on land trusts to protect 60 million additional acres by 2030.

"Land trusts are excited about building momentum around 30x30 and securing the lands that will help people, plants and animals thrive," Heskett says. "There's no dearth of land to protect. It's really about advocating for and leveraging the financial resources it will take, building the capacity of the land trust community and collaborating across the landscape with inclusivity in mind. That includes agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other federal agencies, Indigenous communities, ranchers, farmers and other private landowners."

Nonetheless, as Bowman noted, aspiring to protect one-third of the nation's land base by 2030 evokes the bold spirit of President Kennedy's 1961 challenge to put Americans on the moon by 1970. And while 30x30 won't require technical advances of the sort needed for rocket boosters and lunar rovers, it will demand we ramp up key conservation programs that usually plod along on a fixed fiscal orbit.

FROM MOONSHOT TO REALITY

From the seat of his tractor in rural Wallowa County, Oregon, Woody Wolfe knows well the importance of conservation. Wolfe lives with his wife, Megan, and two sons on a seventh-generation, 1,700-acre farm where they raise alfalfa and timothy hay for domestic and global markets. After fall harvest, Wolfe will log 200 to 400 miles hiking and hunting in the high country. "If I'm having a bad day on the farm," he says, "I just look up to the mountains."

As a media-savvy conservationist, Wolfe also practices what he preaches. In August and September, he quits pumping irrigation water from the Lostine River so that native runs of Chinook salmon have ample flow for passage and spawning. And whether or not his boys Liam and Weston become farmers, the property will remain a farm in perpetuity. Wolfe has signed two conservation easements totaling 463 acres with the accredited Wallowa Land Trust.

"Because of COVID, people are looking to get out of the city, so it's driving up land prices," he says. Yet even as tourism booms in northeast Oregon, Wolfe meets more and more farmers who are eager to protect their land with easements. For that to happen, he recommends changes to the NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Wolfe speaks from his experience as an easement applicant, president of the Wallowa County Farm Bureau and member of the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission.

In addition to a need for increased funding, he'd like to see the whole easement process streamlined and accelerated. "It took seven years to complete both of my easements," he says. "We need to figure out a way to facilitate people who want to do this now. The Oregon Ag Heritage Commission surveyed farmers and found that there's a $50 million demand for easements. But there's no funding from the state for this program at the moment."

SAVING WILDERNESS WITH 30X30

While it's essential to save more working lands from development, the biodiversity goals of 30x30 also call for conservation of lands that can be protected as wildlife habitat. These natural lands can



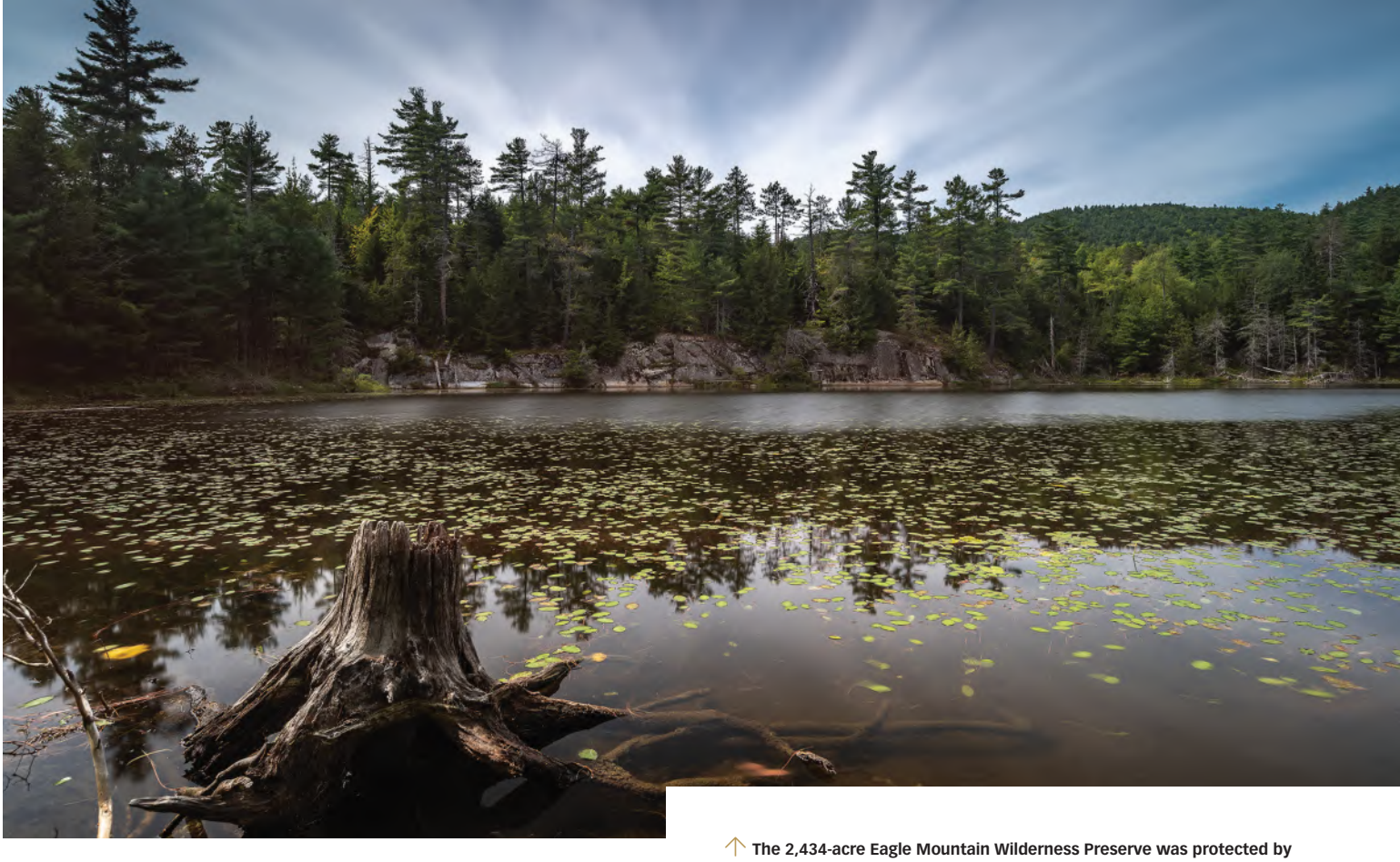
TRACY ROBILLARD/NRCS

↑ **Landowner Woody Wolfe worked with Wallowa Land Trust, the Nez Perce Tribe and other partners to protect the family's century farm in Wallowa County, Oregon.**



TRACY ROBILLARD/NRCS

↑ **As tourism booms in northeast Oregon, demand among farmers for conservation easements is high.**



BRENDAN WILTSE

↑ **The 2,434-acre Eagle Mountain Wilderness Preserve was protected by Northeast Wilderness Trust and further safeguarded with a forever-wild conservation easement held by Adirondack Land Trust.**

harbor a multitude of species and function as a bulwark of climate resilience in the warmer decades to come. This "really gets to the heart of what 30x30 is about," says Jon Leibowitz, executive director of the accredited Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT).

In 2019, NEWT put its "forever wild" principles into action when it created the Eagle Mountain Wilderness Preserve near Essex, New York. The 2,434-acre preserve, with both mature and young forests, miles of streams and numerous ponds, protects an important transition zone between the Adirondack highlands and the lowlands of Lake Champlain. To assess the preserve's ecological value, NEWT used an online resource that should prove useful for other 30x30 land deals.

"Eagle Mountain Wilderness scored very high on The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Land Mapping Tool," Leibowitz says. "It's one of the filters we use when looking at new property." Essentially, the resiliency score estimates a site's capacity to maintain species diversity and ecological functions as the climate changes. Eagle Mountain's above average rating bodes well for the bear, moose, deer and peregrine falcons that call it home. (Access the tool at maps.tnc.org/resilientland.)

As land trusts rack up more acreage in pursuit of 30x30, some have taken extra steps to ensure the durability of their preserves. Here, NEWT used the "belt and suspenders" approach, which Leibowitz explains this way: "The simple fact that a land trust owns land may not give it enough protection. If we protect other people's land with easements, can't we do the same with our own?" Like a cautious soul who uses a belt *and* suspenders to hold their trousers up, NEWT did something similar. They asked the accredited Adirondack Land Trust to hold a forever-wild easement on the Eagle Mountain Wilderness Preserve.

EASEMENTS: LOCAL BENEFITS, GLOBAL IMPACT

In Arkansas, Jack and Anne Butt forever changed their views on easements after a dynamic talk by staff of the accredited Northwest Arkansas Land Trust (NALT). The Butts and two friends purchased land for their 700-acre preserve in 1992. It features a mixed Ozark hardwood forest, limestone bluffs and more than 1 mile of Lee Creek. Now solely in the Butt family's hands, the Butt-n-Buck preserve has become a beloved rural retreat.

"We built a 20-by-40-foot rustic cabin in 1995 that still has a woodstove for heat and kerosene lamps for light," says Jack Butt, who practices business law in Fayetteville, about 25 miles north. "We do have city water, but when the grandkids visit, there's no handheld electronics. You come here to do something outside—not be tied to your screen."

The Butts love the seclusion for what Jack Butt calls "selfish reasons." They don't want to see new roads, blazing yard lights and 10-acre ranchettes carving up the scenic Ozark landscape. That alone justified their Butt-n-Buck easement. After the easement's dedication, Jack and Anne held a meeting for adjacent property owners where NALT staff gave a presentation that cast easements in a newer, global light.

"This went well beyond saving trees," Butt says. "They told us how critical our properties were for fighting global warming. How they banked carbon and created a wildlife corridor so that animals displaced by climate change can migrate from Texas to Appalachia. Frankly, that was the first time I'd heard that. They make easements so much more than a 'nichey' thing."

TOM SPRINGER has served as board member, volunteer and writer for the accredited Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.



BRUCE HOGLE / KANSAS LAND TRUST

↑ Land trusts in the Midwest, such as Kansas Land Trust, have faced and fought legislative challenges in recent years.

THE FIGHT AGAINST CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

By **MADELINE BODIN**

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, LAND TRUSTS ARE BANDING TOGETHER TO STOP STATE LEGISLATION THAT WOULD LIMIT PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION

↓ The view of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains from The Piedmont Environmental Council's Piedmont Memorial Overlook.



HUGH KENNY

IN 2011, a Nebraska state senator, upset by conservation easements that take land out of crop production (for other uses that the landowner chooses), introduced an alarming bill that would make the government the sole provider of conservation easements, allow counties to deny easement renewals for any reason and limit state funding for conservation easements.

In 2016, a Kansas state senator worried about eroding tax bases introduced a bill to grant counties the right to terminate conservation easements or limit them to the life of the grantor. And in 2020, the South Dakota legislature initiated a bill that would allow successor landowners to terminate conservation easements on their properties.

Across the country, from California to New Hampshire, the perpetuity of conservation easements is being challenged at the state level. Most of these challenges arise in the form of bills introduced in state legislatures.

The issues driving the legislative challenges are distinctive to each state, but the solutions that land trusts have found are similar. Land trusts are monitoring legislative bills, joining with partners to address legislative challenges and using individual property rights as their most effective argument in favor of perpetual conservation easements.

Land trusts in the Midwest have faced many legislative challenges in recent years. The organizations have learned to be alert. Knowing what's going on in your statehouse is crucial, but that can take many forms, says Jerry Jost, executive director of the accredited Kansas Land Trust. "We are a smaller land trust," he says. "I'm generally not involved with the legislature unless there is a challenge to the integrity and perpetuity of conservation easements."

That's where a network of like-minded organizations comes in. "There will be people in every legislature who pay attention day to day to what bills are moving," Jost says. Sometimes these are fellow land trusts, and sometimes they are organizations like the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, he says.

Travis Entenman was fairly new in his role as executive director at the Northern Prairies Land Trust, headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, when he heard about the 2020 South Dakota bill. "We thought the bill would have a tremendous impact on state conservation practices, and not just ours," Entenman says.

While the Northern Prairies Land Trust had always worked closely on conservation easements with groups such as the accredited Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, their shared concerns about the bill showed Entenman that outdoor organizations are also allies in opposing legislation against perpetual conservation easements.

The accredited Nebraska Land Trust did not work alone to address the misinformation about conservation easements that surrounded the 2011 legislation, says Dave Sands, the land trust's executive director. It joined a coalition of land trusts, landowners, hunting and fishing organizations, wildlife groups and advocacy organizations that created talking points, worked with senators, solicited media coverage and coordinated testimony on the bill.

In 2011, the coalition's strongest allies were the farmers and ranchers whose land is protected by conservation easements. More recently, the land trust has worked to create a broader range of allies with an advisory board of interested locals that guides conservation priorities in the ruggedly beautiful, politically conservative northwestern corner of the state, Sands says.



NEBRASKA LAND TRUST

↑ **This northwest Nebraska property—owned by Chief Dull Knife College in Montana on the Northern Cheyenne reservation—was protected by Nebraska Land Trust with funding from the Nebraska Environmental Trust fund, which no longer funds conservation easements due to political pressure.**

Kansas Land Trust partners with Fort Riley's Army Compatible Use Buffer Program to protect wildlife habitat and the military installation against conflicts with its neighbors, as well as to make sure wind turbines don't interfere with radar. So when there was a challenge to conservation easements, a U.S. Army representative testified to a legislative committee about the importance of permanent conservation easements to the installation's role in national defense.

"The people who care about land conservation are all throughout the political spectrum," Jost says. "Look for conservation allies and build working relationships."

Educating legislatures and the public often means turning one of the biggest objections against conservation easements into a reason to support them. "A successful argument is that land conservation is an essential part of property rights. People have the right to leave a conservation legacy with their land," Jost says.

"We were effective in convincing people that conservation easements are the flip side of the property right that allows people to develop their land," says Sands. "When you take a farm and turn it into a subdivision, it will never grow food again. It's a forever decision. A conservation easement allows people to keep their land in agriculture forever as well."

The 2011 bill did not pass, but land conservation in Nebraska did not escape unharmed. Today, a commission appointed by the governor no longer allows state grants to fund conservation easements, Sands says. The 2016 Kansas bill died in committee later that year. In South Dakota, the bill failed to pass out of committee just three weeks after it was introduced.



STEVE GEHLBACH

← In January, a proposed bill, which ultimately failed, risked undermining the perpetuity of conservation easements in New Hampshire.

↓ Much of The Piedmont Environmental Council's Roundabout Meadows property and surrounding landscape is protected thanks to conservation easements.



HUGH KENNY



MARCO SANCHEZ

↑ Mike Kane of The Piedmont Environmental Council in Virginia.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

While some parts of the country have a long history of challenging conservation easements based on a perception of property rights, new challenges are appearing in other parts of the country where challenges have not been common.

"The people of New Hampshire love the state's rural character, and they are proud of its history of private land stewardship. What land trusts do—conserving land that remains in private hands through conservation easements—is well supported," says Ryan Owens, executive director of the accredited Monadnock Conservancy in Keene, New Hampshire.

But there can be legislative challenges even in states where the idea of conservation easements is widely embraced. "In the seven years that I've worked for the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, there have been several bills which, if they had passed, would have been challenges, not just for land trusts, but for any private landowner who wants to conserve their land," says Matt Leahy, the accredited Forest Society's public policy manager.

In 2017, a proposed bill would have required all sales of land to the federal government to be approved by the governor and the executive council, an executive body that advises the governor.

"We argued that it would impact the rights of private landowners," Leahy says. "If a landowner wants to work with a public agency to protect their property, that person should be allowed to do so. I think that argument resonates with many legislators."

More recently, in January 2021, the state legislature introduced a bill following a dispute between a landowner and an easement holder. The easement holder, the state of New Hampshire, objected to agricultural land being used for parking and as an airstrip during summer classic car exhibitions at an adjacent farm-owned restaurant.

"I think the bill was born of good intentions," Owens says. However, the solution it proposed was extreme: the nearly unlimited allowance of amendments to government-held conservation easements. "I'm not saying that easements shouldn't be amended," he adds. "But there should be a high standard of what can and can't be changed. This bill was vague and arbitrary about what was allowable."

By undermining the perpetuity of conservation easements, the bill risked making future New Hampshire easements ineligible for

> "THE GOAL IS TO ENSURE THAT THIS LEGISLATION DOES NOT PUT LEGITIMATE CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AT RISK OF BEING EXTINGUISHED."
>
> **Tamara Galanter,** legal adviser to the California Council of Land Trusts

federal tax deductions. There was also concern that some farmland easements could become ineligible for Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funding. Fortunately, the bill didn't gain traction. Several groups opposed it, including the state land trust coalition, much of the farming community and municipalities, which hold many easements through their conservation commissions, Owens says.

In March, the bill was retained in committee.

CALIFORNIA

In February 2021, a bill (AB 721) introduced in the California assembly could potentially eliminate the permanence of conservation easements in the state, land trusts and other conservation advocates believe. The bill's goal is to create affordable housing, a major issue in the California legislature this season. The bill would make any restrictions on the number, location or size of residences unenforceable against the owner of an affordable housing development.

"The legislature is now considering several dozen bills to address the need for more affordable housing in California," says Tamara Galanter, a partner in the law firm of Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP, which serves as an adviser to the policy committee of the California Council of Land Trusts. "Originally, we thought this couldn't possibly mean conservation easements. So we contacted the bill's sponsor and learned they are concerned about conservation easements."

Even worse, the assembly member who introduced the bill is otherwise a strong supporter of environmental legislation. As written, the bill does not exempt conservation easements, so unless protected by other laws, land conserved for wildlife habitat, water quality or agriculture would be fair game for development.

"We are working to find a solution that removes roadblocks to affordable housing while at the same time protects the perpetuity of conservation easements," Galanter says. The policy committee of the California Council of Land Trusts is working with lobbyists and the bill's sponsors to amend the bill.

"The goal is to ensure that this legislation does not put legitimate conservation easements at risk of being extinguished. The conservation community recognizes the need for affordable housing. I am hopeful that with specific amendments to address conservation easements, we can support this legislation," Galanter says.

The other warning from the bill is that legislation threatening the perpetuity of conservation easements may not even use the term "conservation easement," she says. "This bill applies to 'restrictive covenants.' But the definition of restrictive covenants makes clear it would include conservation easements," Galanter says. "When reviewing legislation, make sure to look for this type of language."

VIRGINIA

Sometimes legislation isn't the problem but rather provides the solution to a state-level challenge to conservation easements. In 2016, the Supreme Court of Virginia ruled that a winery was within its rights to build a retail facility on land conserved by a conservation easement. The ruling stated that the conservation easement language was unclear and, as with other restrictive covenants, any uncertainty should be decided in favor of the landowner.

Defending the integrity and purpose of conservation easements, says Dan Holmes, director of state policy for The Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC), "calls for protecting the original donor's intent and reaffirming the intent of the general assembly."

The solution would take the form of legislation because, says Mike Kane, director of land conservation for the accredited PEC, "the courts had made a decision that in our opinion went against the intent of the general assembly. We wanted to give the general assembly an opportunity to reaffirm that commitment to the easement program."

PEC is part of a mature network of land trusts and conservation organizations in Virginia, including the Virginia's United Land Trusts (VaULT) and the Virginia Conservation Network (VCN), which has over 100 members ranging from garden and bicycle clubs to faith organizations and land trusts. Members of VCN work together to perfect language for legislative purposes. Each year the group agrees to a shared agenda and then develops ways to communicate their shared goals.

"It really helps when you've already developed a way to talk about an issue, what's at stake and why the legislation is needed," Holmes says. It also helps when legislators know these goals are shared broadly. Collaboration on the shared agenda gives a greater voice to organizations both big and small, Holmes says, and shows elected officials how much support there is for an idea.

It took a year to craft the right language. PEC, The Nature Conservancy and VaULT took a lead role in honing legislative language for consideration during the 2021 Virginia General Assembly session. Sen. Chap Petersen (D-34) and Delegates Michael Webert (R-18) and Wendy Gooditis (D-10) championed the legislation.

In the end, the suggested legislation included one simple sentence: "Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, an easement held pursuant to this chapter shall be construed in favor of achieving the conservation purposes for which it was created."

By putting the focus on the conservation purposes of an easement, the bill gave the courts flexibility in how the dispute is resolved while still ensuring the protection of the underlying conservation values, such as agriculture, forestry or water quality, Holmes says.

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam signed the bipartisan bill into law in March of 2021.

"I'm just happy that we can focus on positive things again," Holmes says. "We can do what we do best, which is conserving land and ensuring that it is a part of the conservation fabric for future generations."

MADELINE BODIN is a freelance environmental and science journalist.

Celebrating Insta-Nature for Earth Month

Earth Day has become a month-long event, with environmental groups around the globe logging in and signing on to inspire a love for nature. This past April, the Alliance invited four land trusts to take control of our Instagram account for a day, bringing viewers on a virtual tour of conservation lands in Montana, Kansas, Maine and the Southeast.

BRUCE HOGLE



ELIZA WILEY

"Prairies may steal the show in Kansas, but the Kansas Land Trust has also protected more than 3,200 acres of woodlands! These protected areas provide wildlife habitat, riparian buffers for creeks and streams, and peaceful recreational trails for people to enjoy."

↑

KANSAS LAND TRUST
KANSAS

"Here in west-central Montana, we appreciate the importance of working lands in the context of conservation. Our area's farmers and ranchers are our #1 conservationists, and Prickly Pear Land Trust aims to support the protection of working farm and ranch lands for future generations of people and wildlife."

←

PRICKLY PEAR LAND TRUST
HELENA, MONTANA



EMILY ANDERSON

"Nearly 70% of the Chattooga River watershed is national forest land, but the river and its tributaries are often impacted by activities on other public and private lands. Our land trust work began in 2000, and we currently conserve over 500 acres throughout the Southern Appalachian Mountain Bioregion."

←

CHATTOOGA CONSERVANCY
GEORGIA, SOUTH CAROLINA
AND NORTH CAROLINA

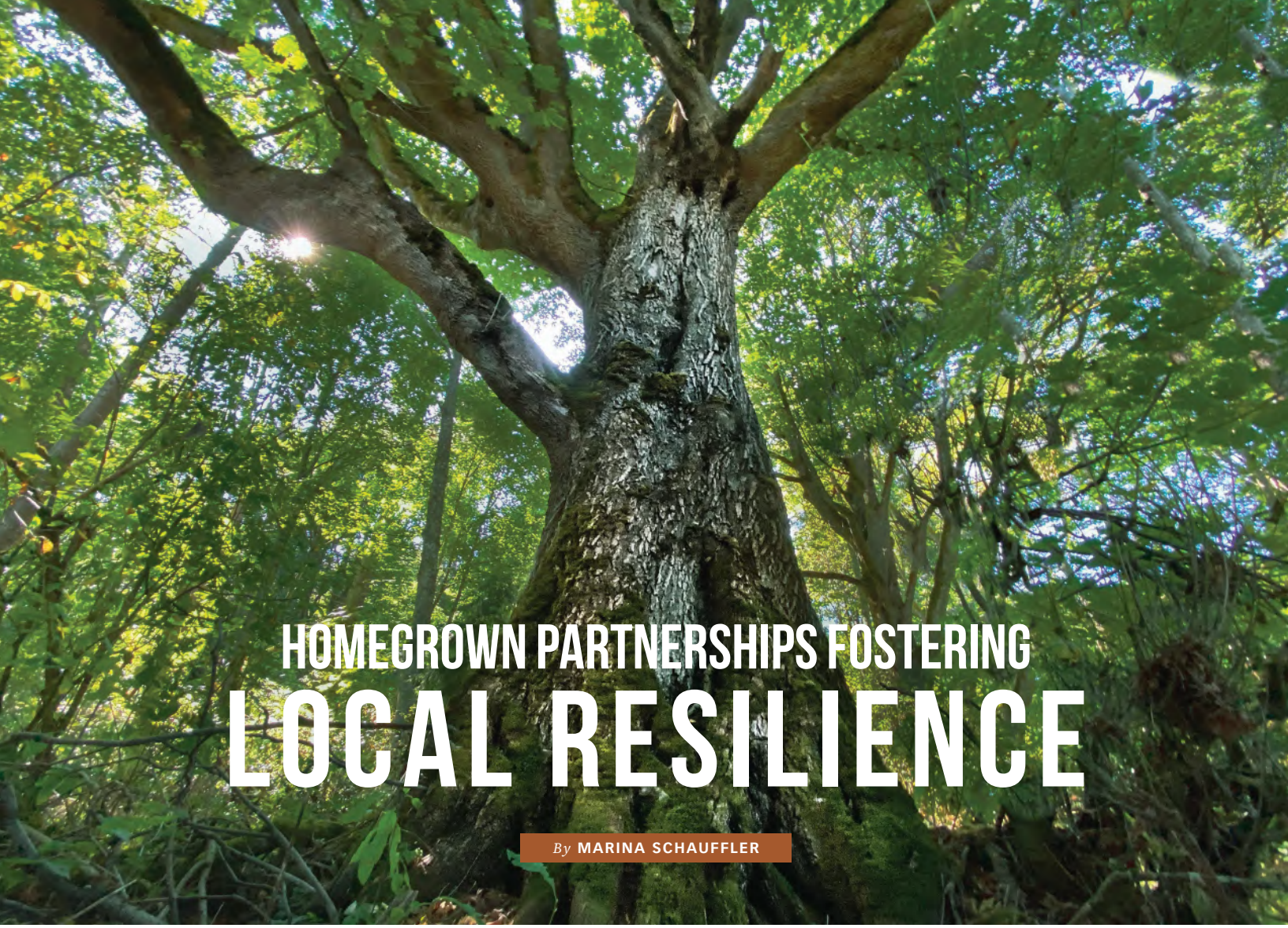
"We conserve over 8,500 acres of land in southwestern Maine. From the mountains to the rivers and lakes to the fields, forests and wetlands—we're proud to keep this special corner of Maine beautiful, resilient and open to all, now and forever."

↓

LOON ECHO LAND TRUST
MAINE



JERRY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC



HOMEGROWN PARTNERSHIPS FOSTERING LOCAL RESILIENCE

By **MARINA SCHAUFFLER**

SUSTAINABLE FORESTS

Jefferson Land Trust is working to transform Chimacum Ridge Community Forest into a community forest that demonstrates responsible forest management.

TIM LAWSON

Even before COVID-19 made communities more aware of the need to strengthen self-reliance, land trusts were working to enhance sustainable forests and locally grown food. In the process, they are helping to meet community needs, supporting regional economies and reducing carbon pollution.

Fostering community self-reliance can be a perfect role for land trusts, given the array of economic, ecological and social benefits that locally sourced products provide, says Erik Kingfisher, director of stewardship at Jefferson Land Trust (accredited) in Port Townsend, Washington. It just takes inviting communities to "look at the potential here—to take care of each other and take care of the place," he says.

BUILDING FOREST LITERACY

Jefferson Land Trust took the long view in developing its conservation plan, asking residents what they wanted the region to look like in 100 years. The Olympic Peninsula has a fraught forest management history due to "liquidation of ancient forests," Kingfisher notes, which made it hard for people to imagine "a kind of forestry that can be perpetually sustaining our community."

Soon after the land trust's conservation plan came out in 2010, an opportunity arose to protect a forested ridge at the heart of its service area. The land trust committed to acquiring the property and creating a 915-acre community forest that will "demonstrate how responsible forest management can look," Kingfisher says.

The land trust won't own all of Chimacum Ridge Community Forest until 2023, but the project is already recognized regionally. It received $3.4 million from the state legislature in 2017 toward an ecological forestry conservation easement on the property and is poised to secure another $3 million in community forest funding through a new state competitive grant program.

Using a 65-acre demonstration project that will become part of the larger forest, land trust staff are inviting input from regional wood-product users—such as custom home builders, shipwrights and boatbuilding and woodworking schools—on how the forest might meet their needs. "Everyone sees potential here," Kingfisher says. This summer, local businesses will start marking trees that



PHOEBE PARKER

LOCAL WOOD

To educate people about the benefits of local forestry, Local Wood WORKS took groups on tours of sustainable forestry sites and niche sawmills.



AMERICAN CHESTNUT LAND TRUST

FRESH FOOD

American Chestnut Land Trust acquired a former tobacco farm (above), using it to grow fruits and vegetables for a local food pantry.

ACLT volunteers (below) display their harvest before delivering to the St. John Vianney Food Pantry.



AMERICAN CHESTNUT LAND TRUST

they would like from the first harvest.

In addition to supplying sustainably harvested wood for local markets, the forest will provide an outdoor classroom and what Kingfisher calls "a center for our cultural identity." Through this effort, he adds, "We're growing the number of opportunities for people to participate."

FOSTERING A LOCAL WOOD MOVEMENT

The seeds of Local Wood WORKS, a collaborative project to strengthen regional wood markets and "keep forest as forest," grew from an idea by a land trust director with a service area of 412,000 acres and a tiny staff. "I have got to get more strategic about moving the needle on land conservation," Theresa Kerchner, executive director of the accredited Kennebec Land Trust in central Maine, recalls thinking in 2009, realizing that after two decades the land trust had protected just under 1% of its land area.

After forging partnerships with other agencies and nonprofit organizations interested in keeping forests from development, Kennebec Land Trust began to see the potential for the buy-local movement to expand from food to wood. The idea grew in part from a 2002 Harvard Forest paper, "The Illusion of Preservation," which argued that it is better in heavily forested landscapes to judiciously cut trees locally and minimize wood consumption than it is to buy wood from distant settings with questionable management practices. Local consumption, Kerchner says, helps people "come to terms with timber harvesting" and recognize the value of buying from operations where practices are clearly regenerative.

After Local Wood WORKS launched in 2013, the three land trusts involved—Kennebec Land Trust, Maine Coast Heritage Trust and The Nature Conservancy in Maine (all accredited)—began reaching out to architects, designers, builders, loggers and sawmill operators. "People who had thought of land trusts as tree-huggers started to see things differently," Kerchner says. "We have all been learning how to work together toward shared goals."

To "nudge the market a little" and "build on the Maine brand," Warren Whitney, land trust program director at Maine Coast Heritage Trust, says they organized a conference, took groups on tours of sustainable forestry sites and niche sawmills, held "lunch and learn" sessions, and created an online guide to local wood sources.

First-hand exposure has had a strong impact, says Lee Burnett, Kennebec Land Trust's project manager for Local Wood WORKS: "When people see it, they get it right away."

Late last year, Lumbery—Maine's (and possibly the nation's) first "micro-lumberyard"—opened, supplying all-local woods to builders and home remodelers. Lumbery owner Mike Friedland credits Lee Burnett, saying he was "the first one I reached out to when I thought of opening my store." Thanks to Local Wood WORKS, timberland owners involved in regenerative forestry and protecting their watersheds have new markets like his, Friedland says: "Our store is their farmer's market."

FRESH FOOD FOR THOSE IN NEED

On the shores of Chesapeake Bay in southern Maryland, working farmland defines the landscape. One of the largest holdings of the accredited American Chestnut Land Trust is a former tobacco farm with 7 acres of prime soils.

When the land trust acquired the farm, a volunteer helped run a small community-supported agriculture operation, but that evolved into "agriculture supporting community," says American Chestnut Land Trust's executive director Greg Bowen. Land trust volunteers raise and donate to the local food pantry enough fresh fruits and vegetables to feed 30 to 40 families in peak season and 10 to 20 through the winter months. "Fresh food is hardest to get your hands on when you are food insecure," Bowen says.

The farm also showcases different regenerative practices—including a food forest, the German horticulture technique hügelkultur and Native American farming practices—giving area residents inspiration and confidence to produce more of their own food.

Two Chesapeake Conservation Corps members help welcome visitors and youth groups to the farm. One current member, Alyssa Matanin, finds that farm visitors "become more mindful of their purchase practices" and inquire about local sources for farm-fresh vegetables. "Everyone's excited about local produce," she adds. "It's hard not to care about the land!"

EXPANDING A FOOD BANK'S CAPACITY

Just as the pandemic heightened food insecurity in March 2020, the Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts took an important step to "increase the stream of fresh, local and organic vegetables for people in need, and particularly kids at risk of hunger," notes Andrew Morehouse, executive director of The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. Following a six-year collaboration with the accredited Kestrel Land Trust in Amherst, the food bank acquired a 142-acre working farm where it now contracts with organic growers to supply up to 300,000 pounds of vegetables primarily for public schools in Springfield and Holyoke, cities with many food-insecure families.

"We couldn't have done it without them," Morehouse says of Kestrel Land Trust. It took a long time before the land trust was able to negotiate an agreement on land well-suited to the food bank: near a highway so it could readily transport farm produce to communities in need. Kestrel then secured financial commitments from the local municipality and the state to purchase agricultural preservation restrictions, and a loan from The Conservation Fund (accredited) that allowed Kestrel to hold the land until the food bank could acquire it.

This spring, the Food Bank Farm created an organic demonstration parcel modeling no-till practices and will host beginning farmers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, providing them with land initially, before—in cooperation with Kestrel Land Trust—helping them find affordable farmland of their own.

"Recognizing that local food does not serve everyone equally," Kestrel Land Trust has already leased some of its land to one group of immigrant farmers and is actively seeking land for another group, says Kristin DeBoer, the executive director.

PROVIDING FRESH FOODS WITHOUT GREEN SPACE

Land trusts face an added challenge supporting community resilience when pavement dominates the landscape, rather than forests or farm fields. Community parks and gardens are especially critical in densely populated urban areas, observes Tori Kjer, executive director of the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land



THE FOOD BANK OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS



THE FOOD BANK OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

FOOD BANKS

Kestrel Land Trust and The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts worked together to acquire land for a farm that grows organic produce for food-insecure families.



DANIEL MELLING



LOS ANGELES NEIGHBORHOOD LAND TRUST

COMMUNITY GARDENS

The Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust's Fremont community garden on a high school campus is a center for urban agriculture education.

Trust, which serves 400,000 residents in South Los Angeles where "there's no green space."

Through a web of partnerships, the land trust has created 29 community parks and gardens over the past two decades: places where she notes people can "get access to fresh food, but also open space, and get to know neighbors and take on leadership roles." These settings provide opportunities for "learning by osmosis" as community members work side by side.

Gardens become "a backdrop for larger conversations about access to nature" and park equity, she adds, particularly for the 15 to 20 teenagers selected each year to participate in the land trust's Gardening Apprenticeship Program. Through paid work at the land trust's 1-acre community garden on the campus of Fremont High School, and through field trips, they learn about food systems, composting, cooking, nutrition and environmental careers.

The partnership with the Los Angeles United School District, Kjer says, has allowed the "campus to become more of a community-serving space," whereas most schools in the city are gated to the public. A community clinic runs a wellness center at the school, and the land trust has planted an orchard, medicinal garden, raised beds and community garden beds. Twice each month, the campus hosts a "Free Food Fair" with donated produce from Food Forward (a gleaning organization) that brings in area residents and introduces them to gardening opportunities. The land trust provides access to tools and water for all its community gardens since "gardening can be expensive," Kjer notes.

LA Compost provides trainings and technical support for on-site composting at the Fremont High School garden, and allows area residents to sign up to bring their home compost and take back finished compost. This offers "another layer of engagement with the community," Kjer says, helping residents "see and understand the full cycle of food."

The land trust wants to keep expanding this garden network so more residents can access fresh local foods. "There's so much publicly owned land that could be used for gardens," Kjer says.

BECOMING A COMMUNITY HUB

Using the natural resources at hand—whether gardens, farms or forests—land trusts are establishing themselves as community hubs while building local resilience. This work seems like a natural evolution of land trusts' missions to help people connect with the land, reflects Jefferson Land Trust's Erik Kingfisher. Community forests, urban gardens and farming all strengthen the health and well-being of local residents, while giving the community greater resilience in the face of supply-chain disruptions and systemic shocks.

It's all part, Kingfisher says, of "the reciprocity with land that is so fundamental to what it means to be a land trust."

MARINA SCHAUFFLER is an environmental writer and columnist in Maine.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Jefferson Land Trust's Valley View Forest:
www.saveland.org/protected-properties/valley-view-forest

Local Wood WORKS:
www.localwoodworks.org

American Chestnut Land Trust:
www.acltweb.org

Kestrel Land Trust and the Food Bank Farm:
www.kestreltrust.org/new-food-bank-farm-created-2020

Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust:
www.lanlt.org



↑ Westchester Land Trust's president and board members at a board retreat in 2017 on a property protected by the land trust.

WESTCHESTER LAND TRUST

GIVE NEW BOARD MEMBERS A GOOD START

By **JIM WYERMAN**

Board members are crucial to land trusts because they hold a fiduciary duty to implement the mission, ensure the organization's survival and protect conserved land forever. Setting expectations and providing training are key to making new board members feel useful and supported.

WHY TRAINING MATTERS

Land trusts are unique because they carry obligations that extend in perpetuity. "That's very different from other types of nonprofits," says Lori Ensinger, president of the accredited Westchester Land Trust. "We want to make sure our board members understand that from the beginning. We can't just sell land if we need to raise funds. Perpetual stewardship of a conservation easement or preserve can be a surprising or scary concept, even to those with prior high-level board experience."

Often board members join a land trust because they like the mission and enjoy the outdoors. But they may not understand a budget, board roles or even what a land trust really does. Training can help fill that gap. As the foundation of their role, all board members need to understand the mission, conservation easement basics and their fiduciary duties. "A great volunteer doesn't always make a great board member," Ensinger cautions. "The roles are very different."

Besides education, a good orientation offers support. Being a solitary new board member can be a lonely experience. Both the accredited Wallkill Valley Land Trust and Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) assign mentors to provide guidance and build confidence. Some regional service centers offer joint training, which also provides a supportive peer network.

SET EXPECTATIONS

The setting of expectations needs to happen during preliminary discussions before a prospect joins the board, advises Ensinger. This means being clear and specific about the organization's mission, legal and fiscal duties, role of the board versus staff, and exactly how much time or financial contribution is expected.

MET tells candidates to expect to put in 10 to 15 hours a month and attend all or most of six board meetings a year. "We have a working board. If people don't show up, we don't get a quorum and can't do work," says Toby Lloyd, MET board member. In contrast, MET doesn't set a dollar donation expectation. "We want all to contribute, but we leave it to them to decide."

All boards should be strategy boards, and new members need to know that, says Sharon Danosky, president of Danosky and Associates. Boards should be thinking about where they need to be in 10 years and how to get there. "As a board member, your role is for policy, oversight, strategy and fundraising," she says. Operational details are better left to staff.

NO PERFECT WAY

"There are many good ways to bring in a new board member, as long as they understand and are committed to the mission," says Connie Manes, circuit rider for the Land Trust Alliance in New York. Most boards offer some version of a "Land Trust 101" training or briefing book that covers the vision, mission, bylaws, structure, staff, conservation easements, programs, budget, development and conserved properties.

There is no better introduction than getting new board members out on the land to tour conserved properties, says Danosky, who offers assessments and consulting to nonprofit boards. Only by experiencing the land can they become passionate about saving it.

MET takes a flexible approach, letting a new person get their feet wet before deciding how they can best contribute. New members are encouraged to sit in on all committee meetings before deciding which one to two committees will be the best fit. This introduces them to all parts of the organization and actually integrates them faster. "It used to take six months to get a new board member up to speed. Now it takes one to two months," Lloyd says.

Westchester Land Trust does an annual new board training that involves anyone who joined in the past year. A half-day seminar covers fiduciary obligations, how land transactions work and stewardship obligations. The board also participates in regional trainings. Ensinger says board candidates cannot be parochial, with narrow interests: "We serve rural and urban communities, and they need to have an understanding and appreciation of both parts of our mission."

Land trusts in Connecticut and New York have joined together in "Board Member Boot Camps," organized by Manes, who brings a unique perspective as both a consultant and executive director of the accredited Kent Land Trust. "It makes sense for neighboring groups, especially small ones like a land trust that represents one town or a small area, to coordinate their trainings." In-person gatherings also create camaraderie and opportunities for networking.

Held this year over Zoom, the boot camp consisted of one-hour sessions that paralleled the *Land Trust Standards and Practices* categories of governance, financial management, land transactions and stewardship. This gave participants a common language and framework that has been hugely helpful, says Manes.

Learning is not just for new board members. Many land trusts offer ongoing training at board meetings and retreats. The annual Land Trust Alliance Rally is another way to introduce board members, new and old, to a wide range of issues. With Rally being held online this year at a lower cost than in person, it's more accessible for more board members.

Another resource is the Alliance's Learning Center, which offers many free trainings and webinars for board members, along with learning modules for *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. These are complex topics, and people need to hear them more than once to really understand, notes Manes. BoardSource also offers a free library and tools on board governance issues.

Board work needs to be shared by all board members, not just a few. Some nonprofits need to pay more attention to cultivating leadership across the full board, Danosky says. "When the focus of board meetings shifts to vision and strategy, that's when the full board gets passionate and really engaged. They can't wait to come to the next meeting!"

RECRUITING

A discussion of orientation would not be complete without mentioning the importance of smart recruitment. Aligning a board with a land trust's mission starts with recruitment that is strategic, diverse and inclusive. All board members should be thinking about who the next board members will be.

Many land trusts recruit for a specific expertise, be it legal, real estate, fundraising, communications or something else. Both Ensinger and Christie DeBoer, executive director for Wallkill Valley Land Trust, say they are often looking for a specific skill set and that new board members usually come aboard with an understanding of what the land trust needs from them.

Danosky cautions that the matrix model of recruiting to fill a gap does not work very well when a board is seeking to be more inclusive. "A good question to ask is, 'Who is being left out and why?'" You may be missing important voices or community stakeholders. "It all comes back to the mission and the vision," she says. "What do you want the world to look like in 10 to 15 years, and what is the role of the board in making that happen?"

In recruiting new board members, MET has found that land conservation experience is not essential, as long as a candidate is passionate, willing to learn and committed to doing the work. "We've had fabulous board members who came in with only a general understanding of what a conservation easement is," says Lloyd.

His advice: "Cast your net far and wide in the recruiting process. Don't be shy about including youth. We need them to shepherd open space and conservation in the future."

NEVER TAKE YOUR BOARD FOR GRANTED

From the start, all board members need to feel engaged, valued and appreciated. "Nobody wants to be on a board where they don't feel useful," says Manes. "Volunteers are special people. You need to treat them with respect and help them find a productive fit." Structure your meetings to encourage diverse perspectives and new ideas, especially from new members.

Ensinger agrees: "Never forget to thank board members and do what you can to make them feel appreciated. Pick up the phone. We made calls to see how they were doing during the COVID quarantine. That was really appreciated. One said 'Gee, even my kids don't do that!'"

Every board member is a unique person with a different motivation for being on a board. "Board members are people too," says Ensinger. "You need to pay attention to what each board member is looking to get out of the experience."

Most land trusts are taking board orientation very seriously, especially given the expectations represented by *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, accreditation requirements and Terrafirma membership. They know that up-front training pays off in an informed, engaged and effective board member.

Bottom line: Invest in board training. Nurture new board members as they grow into strong board leaders who will help you protect cherished trust lands in perpetuity. As MET's Lloyd observes, "A board is only as good as its board members."

JIM WYERMAN is a conservation writer in Takoma Park, Maryland. He was formerly the director of communications and development for the Land Trust Alliance.



WESTCHESTER LAND TRUST

← **Two members of Westchester Land Trust's board led a wilderness walk at Zofnass Family Preserve in 2019.**



DJ GLISSON, II/FIREFLY IMAGEWORKS

THE OTHER IMMUNITY

By **LORRI BARRETT**

Summertime is outdoor time, meaning more public recreation on conserved lands.

It's also the perfect time to review your state's recreational use statutes. These provide immunity against negligence lawsuits for landowners who open their land to the public free of charge. Given the current popularity of trails and preserves during the pandemic, the dual purposes of limiting liability for land trusts and encouraging landowners to allow public recreation are more important than ever.

Recreational use statutes can be important tools when dealing with unexpected calamities. However, immunity doesn't prevent people from suing. Plaintiffs will still sometimes challenge these statutes after an injury, and land trusts should prepare themselves and their landowners for that possibility. The examples that follow paint a picture of what recreational use immunity looks like, and how it can help your organization. While the decisions below ultimately upheld the recreational use immunity statute, the cases were tied up in court for years.

As an example, in a Sacramento case, a runaway horse from an Old West stagecoach reenactment injured a visitor to a neighbor's property. The plaintiff's attorney argued that the recreational use statute should not apply because the visitor was not involved in the stagecoach reenactment. Both the trial court and the appeals court found that the statute protected the landowner, but the landowner still had to pay legal fees.

In a New York state case, the plaintiff injured himself while walking on a trail that offered views of a beautiful waterfall. The plaintiff's attorney argued that recreational use protections did not apply because he was walking rather than hiking. The trial court found that immunity did not require the subjective intention of hiking in order to trigger recreational use immunity. Since the plaintiff was walking on a hiking trail, he was hiking. So, landowners—including land trusts—who open their land to the public for free recreational access do not have to query visitors to make sure everyone is visiting the hiking trail with the intention of hiking.

In a Minnesota case, snowmobilers sued the nonprofit that managed trails where they lost control of their snowmobiles. The plaintiff's attorney argued that the nonprofit didn't qualify for immunity under the recreational use statute because it did not own the underlying trail. The appeals court held that the association qualified for immunity, since it occupied and controlled the trails.

Land trusts don't have to sacrifice their goals of promoting the use and appreciation of conserved land in order to reduce legal liabilities. As the cases above demonstrate, these goals may at times conflict. Still, there are ways to achieve both with the right planning and expertise. To further manage risk, land trusts may want to use waivers and secure additional insurance coverage. Land trusts can also provide specific rules of use and safety information for trails on their websites and at trail heads and parking areas. And remember during the pandemic to emphasize social distancing and other precautions consistent with whatever public orders are in place.



KRIS RASER/NORTHBAY

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP LESSONS

By **JIM WYERMAN**

Land trusts traditionally partner with businesses to sponsor events, secure grants and engage volunteers on their land, but the potential range of partners and benefits is actually much broader. Underlying most successful partnerships are three recurring themes: Listen and tailor your partnership to the businesses' needs; make sure it is a good fit for your land trust; and engage your partners on the land.

The pool of prospects is deep, says Emma George, corporate relations officer at the Land Trust Alliance. She advises thinking beyond the typical outdoor product and service companies. "The desire to be outside is pretty universal, especially during COVID-19, and many corporations are eager to tap into that. Corporate collaborations can be as diverse and robust as you make them."

The first step in developing a good partnership is to listen and identify what a business may need and assess if that is something with which the land trust can help.

The accredited Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests did just that in figuring out how its Christmas tree farm on conserved land might partner with local businesses. In speaking with local inns and hotels, the Forest Society learned what they really needed was help putting "heads in beds" during the skiing offseason. Working together, they created a unique lodging package to provide offseason guests with a cut-your-own tree and holiday wreath. As a result, the land trust sold more trees, and local businesses got more tourists.

The Forest Society also partnered with bus companies to run tours during the spring wildflower and fall foliage seasons, with a stop at the tree farm to learn about maple sugaring and visit the maple syrup museum. At its pre-COVID peak, the farm attracted 100 buses each year. The Forest Society benefits from increased visitors and free marketing by the hoteliers and bus groups. And local businesses love that there is another reason for tourists to visit.

The accredited Colorado Open Lands tailored a fellowship with Molson Coors Beverage Company to study how farm practices impact migratory sandhill cranes. The birds make a two-month stopover in Colorado each spring. They nest in a wildlife refuge but feed on fields managed by farmers growing barley for Coors. The research showed that leaving barley on the stalks longer saves grain for when the cranes most need it, an easily implemented scheduling change.



KRIS RASER/NORTHBAY

← ↑ **Natural Lands partners with PECO and outdoor education program NorthBay on its Powered by Nature program that gets kids outside to learn.**

Each company is looking for different benefits: community goodwill, employee appeal, increased sales or something unexpected. Most importantly, "You need to make sure your partnership works as a business proposition, and that it's economically a win-win," says Forest Society Farm Director Nigel Manley. He also recommends having someone on the ground in the community to manage and nurture the relationship. Listening and tailoring is the key.

Land trusts should first assess whether a prospect is a good mission fit, and the partnership offers enough benefit to make it worthwhile. They should never feel pressured to take on a partnership, says George. "They should not sacrifice critical staff bandwidth. For small land trusts, some prospects can be a time sink with nominal return. Don't be afraid to say no to a corporation's first offer. Suggest alternatives. The company may come back with a better offer."

Some partnerships are easier to manage than others. A major realtor in New Hampshire's north country provides clients with a gift membership to the Forest Society. The realtor sends prepared packets to new members, making the partnership easy for the Forest Society to administer, and he gets a discount for the memberships. The Forest Society established another straightforward partnership with the statewide television station to publicize a "Five Hikes in Five Weeks" event.

Christie DeBoer, executive director of the accredited Wallkill Valley Land Trust in New York, looks for the "low-hanging fruit," like an art installation along a rail trail. "Even small events can bring awareness and exposure. If I can get 100 $25 donors from an easy event, that's fabulous."

New partnerships take time to develop and mature. Manley says it can take three to five years to get a new project or business enterprise off the ground. At Colorado Open Lands, one partnership evolved organically by slowly winning over employees before engaging the management.

The partnership started when the land trust President and CEO Tony Caligiuri spoke at a monthly educational series hosted by Tryba Architects of Denver. His talk was a hit with employees who started coming to hikes and volunteering. They initiated and ran a silent auction to benefit the trust. The owner of Tryba joined their advisory board and the company now matches employee donations.

For four years, Colorado Open Lands has also offered a conservation leadership program that attracts junior business leaders for an annual series of outdoor experiences and seminars. The program built a loyal base of support and seeded a conservation ethic in future business and political leaders. Some graduates have gone on to engage their new employers when they change jobs. When asked what the most important benefit of such partnerships is to Colorado Open Lands, Caligiuri quickly replies, "It's the learning."

The accredited Natural Lands in Pennsylvania has developed two unique partnerships with PECO, a local power provider, and other partners. PECO approached Natural Lands looking for support in administering a grant program that funds open space projects with municipalities and nonprofits. Since 2004, the program has awarded more than $2.4 million to support 303 open space projects in a six-county area, much of them in underserved urban communities.

PECO also sponsors Powered by Nature, an initiative with outdoor education program NorthBay that offers multiple outdoor experiences to all fourth, fifth and sixth graders in the Pottstown, Pennsylvania, school district. Kids learn outside by exploring parks, streams and preserved land. Kirsten Werner, Natural Lands' senior director of communications, says, "This program helps us reach the next generation and gets them interested in environmental issues. We're in the forever business. We need to make sure we have people that care in the future."

A less common type of partnership is cause marketing, where a business gets marketing benefits in exchange for support for a nonprofit, which means a land trust's name or brand is associated with a product or service. Seeking legal counsel first is a good idea, because there are complex rules and state registration requirements. Engage for Good offers useful resources and a free eBook, *Cause Marketing 101 for Business*.

"Cause marketing can be a dangerous, slippery slope where you're giving back more than you get," says Emily Hughes, director of membership and finance, Little Traverse Conservancy in Michigan. She advises doing a gut check: "Ask yourself, 'Is there something more important I could be doing instead, like visiting a major donor?'"

Other tips: Be creative and flexible, nail down all details in writing and designate one staff person for all corporate relations. Be clear about expectations up-front, the more specific the better: Who will run joint events? What exactly will the corporate marketing team do? What minimum income or donation will the land trust require?

Land trusts should not measure their corporate partnerships solely by monetary returns. Many land trust leaders say the most important benefit is exposing a new generation of leaders to the importance of land conservation.

The best partnerships are built around a mix of tailored events, donations and engagement on the land, hopefully with the land trust not doing all the work. Each partnership is unique. It's not "Build it and they will come," but rather "What can we build together?"

JIM WYERMAN is a conservation writer in Maryland. He formerly served as director of communications and development for the Land Trust Alliance.



JERRY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

↑ Scruton Dairy Farm is a 135-acre family farm protected by a conservation easement. The Scruton family worked with the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire to enroll in the ALE program.

HELP IS JUST A CLICK AWAY

New Online Tools Guide Land Trusts Through the ACEP-ALE Application Process

Farm Bill programs, taken in total, are the largest source of federal funding for private land conservation in the United States. The Alliance team works with the land trust community, federal agencies and our partners to educate Congress on the many benefits of these programs. We also develop tools to help land trusts understand and access these vital programs—tools such as our new online ACEP-ALE Action Center.

You may have heard of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE) component of the Farm Bill through people you know in the conservation community. And it sounds like it could be a good source of funding to help conserve the farmlands, ranchlands, grasslands or wetlands in your community.

But how to successfully apply?

Whether you're new to ALE or already familiar with the program, the application process can be challenging to wade through. But the outcome is certainly worth it—with some $450 million available in funding each year, ALE is making a huge difference in helping landowners conserve farms, ranches and their ways of life.

"The ALE program is an important tool for land trusts and landowners that helps keep land in production for generations to come," says Nikki Nesbary, manager for Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs at the Alliance.

A key Farm Bill easement program, ALE is run by NRCS, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. NRCS operates dozens of voluntary programs that together have led to the protection of 5 million acres in conservation easements across the country.

It's no secret that the application process for ALE funding can be complicated. That's why NRCS reached out to the Alliance when looking to create new online tools to help land trusts through the application process.

"Our goal is to help guide land trusts and individual landowners through the application process, making it easier to get critical conservation funding out into communities," says NRCS Easement Program Division Director Carrie Lindig.

The Alliance's new online ACEP-ALE Action Center walks applicants through every step of the process. Features include:

- **ALE overview.** The nuts-and-bolts of ALE and its history.
- **Eligibility.** Start here to quickly determine your eligibility.
- **Success stories.** Wondering what ALE can do for you? Check out these stories from land trusts across the country who have received ALE funding. This is also a great place to share your own story!
- **Getting started.** Before you begin the application, read these helpful tips for getting started.
- **Entity Application guide and Parcel Sheet guide.** An ALE application requires two forms, one for Entity and one for Parcel. These guides walk you through every question on the forms, categorized by section. You can fill out the forms online, while keeping the guides up in an open tab for step-by-step assistance.
- **Document library.** Looking for resources? The document library provides links to current forms, fact sheets and other resources.
- **Acronyms and glossary.** Still confused? Look up insider terminology and confounding acronyms here.

With our online ACEP-ALE Action Center, land trusts can better support landowners who are considering conservation easements.

Erica Hernandez, a statewide land acquisition specialist for the accredited Alachua Conservation Trust, is enthusiastic about the benefits of the new online tools.

"This is a tremendous and invaluable resource! I think it was really well planned and has a ton of useful information. Thank you for pulling it together!" wrote Hernandez after reviewing the pages. Access the ACEP-ALE Action Center on the Alliance's website at lta.org/ale.

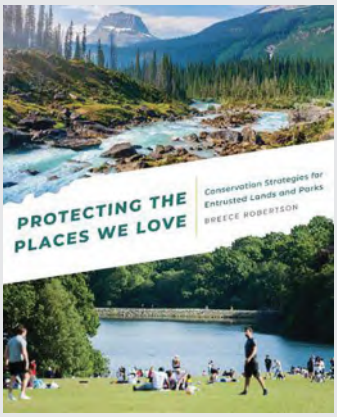
Case Study: Siting Renewable Energy with Conservation Lands in Mind

The accredited Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) received a Land Trust Alliance grant in 2020 for a project to help guide utility-scale solar development in rural Virginia. New legislation is helping the state move quickly toward a clean energy future, and PEC's project aims "to accomplish the state's clean energy goals while protecting prime farm soils, forests and other high-value conservation lands." Its grant proposal includes developing effective policies for renewable development at local and state levels and building community groups' capacity to advocate for sensible siting measures. Read more at pecva.org/utility-scale-solar.

2021 Land and Climate Grant Program

Interested in funding support for your land trust's climate resilience and mitigation work? Through a collaboration between the Land Trust Alliance and Open Space Institute, grant funding and/or technical support is available to help land trusts integrate climate science into strategic conservation or management plans. Successful applicants will receive funding amounts of $5,000-$15,000 and/or one-on-one technical support. Submissions are due by July 23; all projects must begin in 2021. Interested land trusts can find more information and submit a letter of interest at lta.org/climate. Questions should be addressed to kwatkinson@lta.org.

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BOOKMARKS

SUMMER READING

You don't have to be a GIS expert to love maps and find inspiration in their ability to help conservationists save the world, says Breece Robertson. In *Protecting the Places We Love: Conservation Strategies for Entrusted Lands and Parks*, Robertson takes readers on a tour of GIS resources, tools and field-tested examples that are helping organizations on "a modern path toward better conservation results." Formerly with The Trust for Public Land and currently director of partnerships and strategy at the Center for Geospatial Solutions at the Lincoln Institute for Land Policy, Robertson wrote this book for anyone interested in strategic conservation. Available now as an e-book through online booksellers; print version will be released in July at esripress.esri.com/.

ONE-STOP SHOP FOR RFPS

The RFP Depot is an online repository where the land trust community can post requests for proposals and be confident that the most knowledgeable land conservation professionals are reviewing them. You won't need to rely on chance, geography or personal connections to find the consultant that best meets your needs. All affiliates and land trusts can upload RFPs on this helpful new tool and Professional Affiliates at the premium-level will be able to view and respond. Find it on the Learning Center at tlc.lta.org/rfpdepot.

Working Lands, Leadership and Community

Three New Board Members Share Alliance Values

For native Texan **Blair Calvert Fitzsimons**, ranching has always been in the family. Her love of the land was fostered by time spent as a child on her grandfather's ranch and continued into adulthood when she married a rancher conservationist and they took over his family ranch. She is a strong advocate of working lands and a "ground-up" approach to land management.

Fitzsimons served as the founding CEO of the accredited Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT), created in 2006. During her tenure, TALT protected more than 235,000 acres of farms and ranches from development. She has worked at the state and federal levels on numerous policy initiatives, including the creation of a state-funded conservation easement program and a statewide outreach strategy to communicate the importance of working lands conservation.

"I hope that my background in starting and running a land trust, together with my ranching and conservation work, can help add to the collective wisdom of the board and inform its decisions," says Fitzsimons.

She previously served on the Land Trust Alliance Board from 2015-2018 and looks forward to being back with "a wonderfully diverse, dedicated group of men and women who represent the many facets of land conservation throughout the country."

Growing up in Southern California, **Cheryl Fox** didn't realize quite how much she valued nature until she moved to New York City after college. But it was in Park City, Utah—where she headed in the late 1990s to become a ski instructor—that her conservation career took hold.

"I learned that an area called the 'Enchanted Forest' was slated for 175 homes. Naturally, I joined the resistance. Together our little group of upstarts protected a bit of that forest."

It was through this work that Fox became a founding member of the accredited Summit Land Conservancy, established in 1998. She was the organization's first staff person and currently serves as its executive director. Fox helped grow the land trust into a regional organization that protects farms, ranches, recreational lands and wetlands in four counties across northern Utah.

In 2012, Fox was selected to join the Land Trust Alliance's Executive Director Leadership Cohort, and in 2014 was part of the first Advanced Leadership Training. In 2017 Fox was given the Alliance's National Ambassador of the Year award for her outreach to Utah's congressional delegation. She still lives in Park City and continues to give skiing lessons.

New board member **Gil Jenkins** is passionate about finding "more ways to engage with those traditionally not served by land conservation. Far too many Americans have not heard of land trusts, and we have to change that."

Jenkins brings diverse experience in corporate communications and brand marketing to the Alliance board, and he is no stranger to the environmental sector. He is currently vice president of communications and public affairs for Hannon Armstrong, a leading investor in climate change solutions, and previously served as vice president of communications for the American Council on Renewable Energy, a national nonprofit that unites finance, policy and technology to accelerate the transition to a renewable energy economy.



Blair Calvert Fitzsimons



Cheryl Fox



Gil Jenkins

"I'm encouraged by the new moonshot we can rally around with the 30x30 goal," says Jenkins (see story on page 14). "As someone who has spent the bulk of my career focused on climate solutions, I believe that land conservation will need to play a prominent role in our collective response to the climate crisis."

Farewell to Sylvia Bates, a Leader in Land Conservation

By **RENEE KIVIKKO,** Vice President of Education at the Alliance

Thoughtful. Outstanding. Indispensable. Committed to excellence. A trusted adviser and mentor.

These are just a few of the many commendations that colleagues expressed to Sylvia Bates to mark her retirement from the Land Trust Alliance in May 2021.

Bates started her 30-year career in land conservation in the late 1980s, joining as staff of what was then the Land Trust Exchange (the precursor to the Alliance) in 1988. She moved on to a stint at the accredited Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests followed by years as a consultant, but was persuaded to rejoin the Alliance in 2006 as director of standards and educational services.

Bates' service to land conservation deserves recognition and celebration. Early on she helped produce one of the first Alliance publications, "How to Start a Land Trust," (a top seller for many years) and was involved with the initial Land Trust Census report. Over the years she has guided critical work to revise and interpret *Land Trust Standards and Practices.*

"The land trust community stands on the body of work that Sylvia helped shape," notes Andrew Bowman, president and CEO of the Alliance.

Whether as staff or a consultant, Bates could always be counted on for her ability to convene experts, synthesize information, build agreement and clarify guidance. Her thorough approach and attention to detail served the Alliance well in tackling complicated issues and in helping to launch new programs, such as the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Bates' contributions to the field of land conservation are matched only by her gifts as a friend, colleague and mentor to many in the land conservation community. At her virtual retirement party, Alliance staff shared humorous and heartfelt limericks (an Alliance staff tradition) and tributes to send her on her way.

"Sylvia's work over the years is at the heart of the Alliance's essence and foundation. From *Land Trust Standards and Practices* to the Alliance's library of publications, to her coaching and mentoring for land trusts and staff, the Alliance would not be anywhere near the organization it is today without Sylvia Bates."

Erin Heskett, Vice President of Conservation Initiatives



Sylvia Bates and her husband, Tom Masland, at the summit of Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM MASLAND



Hello from *Saving Land*'s New Editor

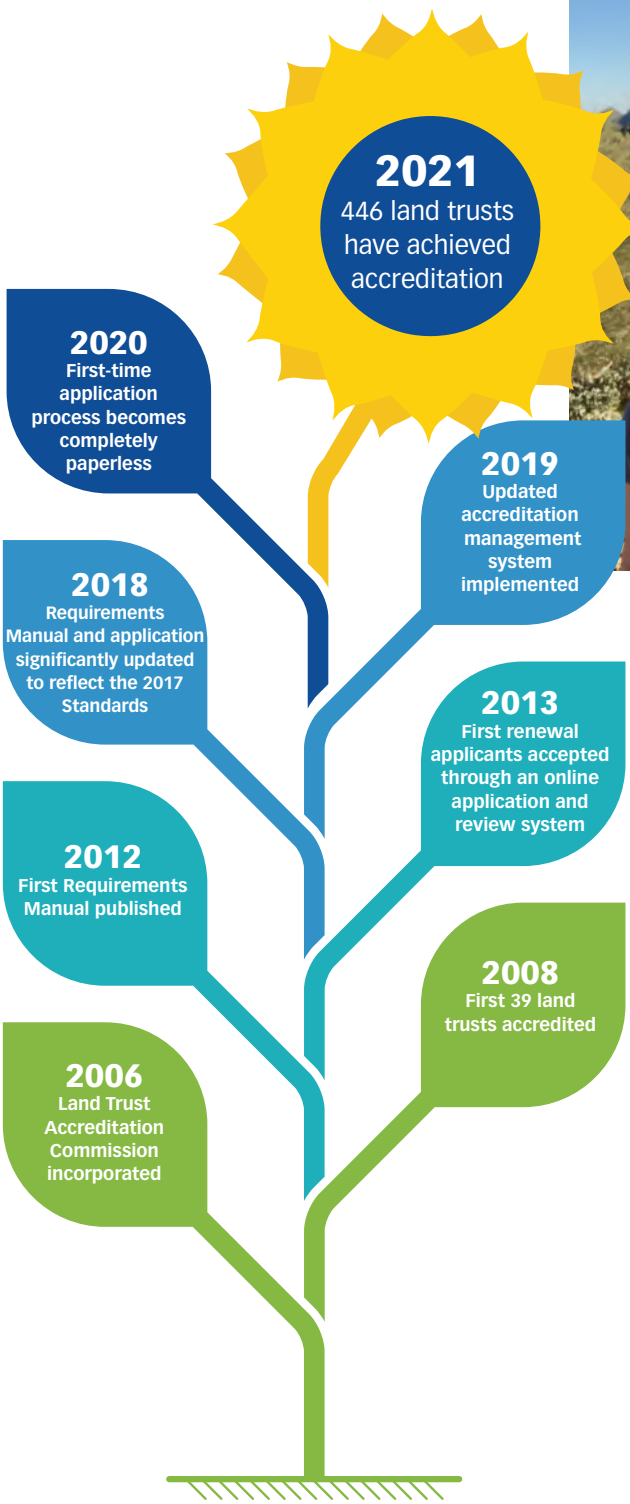
By **DARCI PALMQUIST**
Editor, *Saving Land* magazine

I am thrilled to be taking the helm of the Alliance's quarterly magazine, *Saving Land.* For 15 years I have been a wordsmith for conservation groups, writing marketing copy, science blogs and everything in between. But filling the illustrious shoes of 17-year magazine veteran Christina Soto is no small task (see her goodbye note on page 2 of the spring issue), so I implore you—be gentle. I'm honored to have this opportunity, and I look forward to hearing from readers near and far. You can reach me at editor@lta.org.



Our New Look

The spring issue of *Saving Land* magazine unveiled a new look and feel, all with the reader in mind. Virginia-based graphic designer Type E Design created a refreshed, more "open" style that conveys the qualities we love about nature and the outdoors. What hasn't changed is how the places and people of land conservation inspire every issue of *Saving Land.*





CLINT MILLER

Commissioners and Commission staff at a January 2020 meeting in Phoenix, Arizona.

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF THE LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

In 2004, the Land Trust Alliance's strategic plan articulated three goals: "Accelerate the pace of land conservation; improve the quality of land conservation; and ensure the permanence of land conservation." A key part of meeting the quality goal was to create an accreditation program that allowed for self-regulation of the land trust community, improved the quality and permanence of land conservation, and upheld the public trust in land trusts. In the past 15 years, we—the Commission, the Alliance, land trusts and the land trust community—have achieved these goals and so much more. Accreditation has strengthened the entire land trust community, and we acknowledge and celebrate all we have accomplished together.

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

landtrustaccreditation.org



DJ GLISSON, II/FIREFLY IMAGEWORKS

THE COMMISSION

50
VOLUNTEER COMMISSIONERS TO DATE

300
Hours per year on average volunteered by each commissioner

54K
Hours each year volunteered in total by the current commissioners

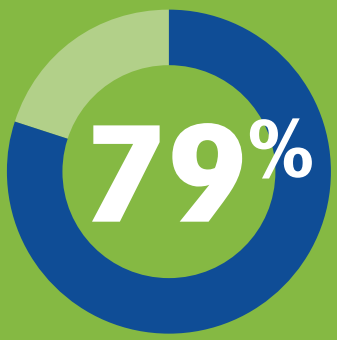
7 STAFF

5
Kingsbury Browne Conservation Leadership Award winners have been commissioners

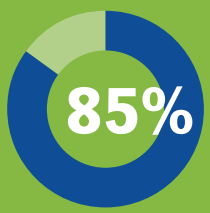
56 Years
of collective staff service



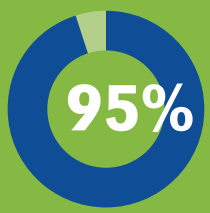
THE LAND TRUSTS



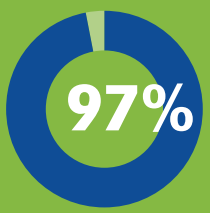
of the land conserved by land trusts is held by accredited land trusts



of pre-applicants achieved first-time accreditation



of first-time renewal applicants achieved accreditation



of accredited land trusts have chosen to renew

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YOUR ANNUAL RETREAT

Last year, 3,800 land trust staff, Board members and partners joined us for an "inspiring, honest and informative" event (Liz McLaurin, The Land Trust for Tennessee).

Learn and grow together — group pricing makes it easy to offer this valuable professional development and networking opportunity to more members of your organization.

Join us virtually for Rally 2021 — register at alliancerally.org.