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LAND

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WINTER 2022

STORIES FROM THE LAND

CENSUS 2020

RALLY RECAP

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 Land Trust Alliance
Together, conserving the places you love



SMALL BUT MIGHTY

The accredited Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT) in northern New Hampshire is one of many land trusts across the country that show the power of local land trusts to protect land and meet the needs of their communities (see our story about the 2020 Census on page 14). ACT went from 748 acres to 5,517 acres protected in the past five years while also adding outdoor education programming, a huge benefit to its community. In June the organization hosted its first event (pictured, this page) with Gale River Cooperative Preschool and White Mountain Science, Inc., at ACT's Whipple Farm & Field property. ©



SPACE TO GROW

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By **TOM SPRINGER**

22 Rally 2021: A Positive Place for Everyone

For the second year in a row, virtual Rally brought the land trust community together to connect, share and learn from one another.

By **DARCI PALMQUIST**

ON THE COVER:

With its network of walking and skiing trails, Overlook Farm in Sugar Hill, New Hampshire, is "a true community gem," says Gal Potashnick of Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust.

PHOTO BY KEVIN JONES

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landtrustalliance.org/giving

If you have a question about any of these options, please reach out to Rashida Moore at rmoore@lta.org or (202) 800-2249.

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THANK YOU FOR HELPING SAVE THE LANDS PEOPLE NEED AND LOVE ACROSS AMERICA!

LOOKING FORWARD

AS THIS ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE goes to press, there is much going on around the world and here at home of significance to the conservation community.

World leaders wrapped up the 26th United Nations Climate Change conference (COP26) with new commitments to address climate change, from reducing deforestation to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. While these pledges could have been more ambitious, they are nonetheless a step in the right direction. The next phase is figuring out how to implement these commitments and what they mean for conservation.

Here in the United States, the historic \$1.2 trillion bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was signed into law on Nov. 15 and has the potential to support the important work of land trusts. The bill includes critical funding for natural climate solutions, ecosystem restoration projects and disaster mitigation efforts. It also includes language to safeguard sensitive environmental and cultural heritage sites as the nation shifts to greater electrification and away from fossil fuels.

The Alliance continues to fight for the Charitable Conservation Easement Program Integrity Act, which will end abuse of the federal incentive for conservation easement donations. And we are focused on increasing funding for critical conservation programs under the 2023 Farm Bill—a result that depends in significant part on what happens with the reconciliation budget package that is taking shape as I write this column.



DI GLISSON, II/FIREFLY IMAGEWORKS

Of course, there is more to reflect on than just the legislative victories we hope to achieve by the end of this calendar year. I see so much to look forward to, including the Land Trust Alliance's 40th anniversary in 2022. From our incorporation on Feb. 22, 1982, to where we are today—nearly 1,000 member land trusts and 66 staff—the Alliance and our community have grown together to become a powerful force for good in the nation. Our collective impact is evident in the numbers and stories from the 2020 National Land Trust Census, which you can read about on page 14.

Here's to us making further strides and progress, together, in the coming year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Bowman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

ANDREW BOWMAN

By **KIRSTEN FERGUSON**

NEW YORK PROPERTY ADDS TO “WILDERNESS” WALK

A prominent forested property on the Shawangunk Ridge in New York’s Catskill Mountains is now permanently protected thanks to a recent purchase by the Open Space Institute (OSI). The 228-acre property in the town of Mamakating, the former site of a well-known Catskills resort known as “Shawangung Lodge,” was once planned for a casino development. OSI’s \$1.7 million acquisition is adjacent to five popular recreational trail systems and to the 3,300-acre Bashakill Wildlife Management Area.

The newly protected land, highly visible from several vantage points in western Orange County, advances an effort by OSI and partners to create a regional hiking trail spanning the entire 73-mile length of the Shawangunk Ridge from the New Jersey border north to the Rosendale Trestle, which OSI permanently protected in 2009 and restored in 2013. The acquisition presents an opportunity to re-route a portion of the proposed Shawangunk Ridge Trail to an off-road location, creating a “wilderness” walk and safer conditions for recreational users. The Shawangunk Ridge Trail is now nearly complete, with over 67 miles of the 73-mile-long trail permanently protected.

“With this latest acquisition, OSI continues to forge a lasting conservation legacy in the Southern Shawangunks by expanding recreational opportunities for visitors and protecting scenic and forested landscapes from development,” says Kim Elliman, OSI president and CEO. ☺

↓ A purchase by the Open Space Institute (OSI) of Shawangung Lodge will protect a former well-known Catskills resort once slated for a casino development.



GREG WILLER COURTESY OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE



IVAN RADIC, LICENSED UNDER CC BY 2.0

↑ A new Yale survey finds a significant increase in public concerns about climate change.

Climate Change Concerns Dramatically Increase

A year of extreme weather events—from record-setting wildfires and droughts in the West to hurricanes and floods in the East—may be changing the public narrative about climate change. A national survey, “Climate Change in the American Mind,” finds that U.S. views on climate change shifted significantly since spring of 2021. Americans’ understanding that global warming is happening increased 6 percentage points since March, and Americans who think global warming is occurring outnumber those who think it is not by more than six to one.

The survey from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication comes at a pivotal time, with Congress debating legislation to potentially make major national investments in climate action. After a year of disastrous weather around the world, 70% of Americans are now very or somewhat worried about global warming—an all-time record. The “very worried” increased 10 percentage points since March. ☺

 Visit climatecommunication.yale.edu to view the results as well as a full report on public climate beliefs and attitudes.

A Legacy of Groundbreaking Solutions

The history of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, a pioneering institution that began with a belief in the power of land policy to create a more equitable society, is captured in a new short film, “Life of an Idea: The Story of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.”

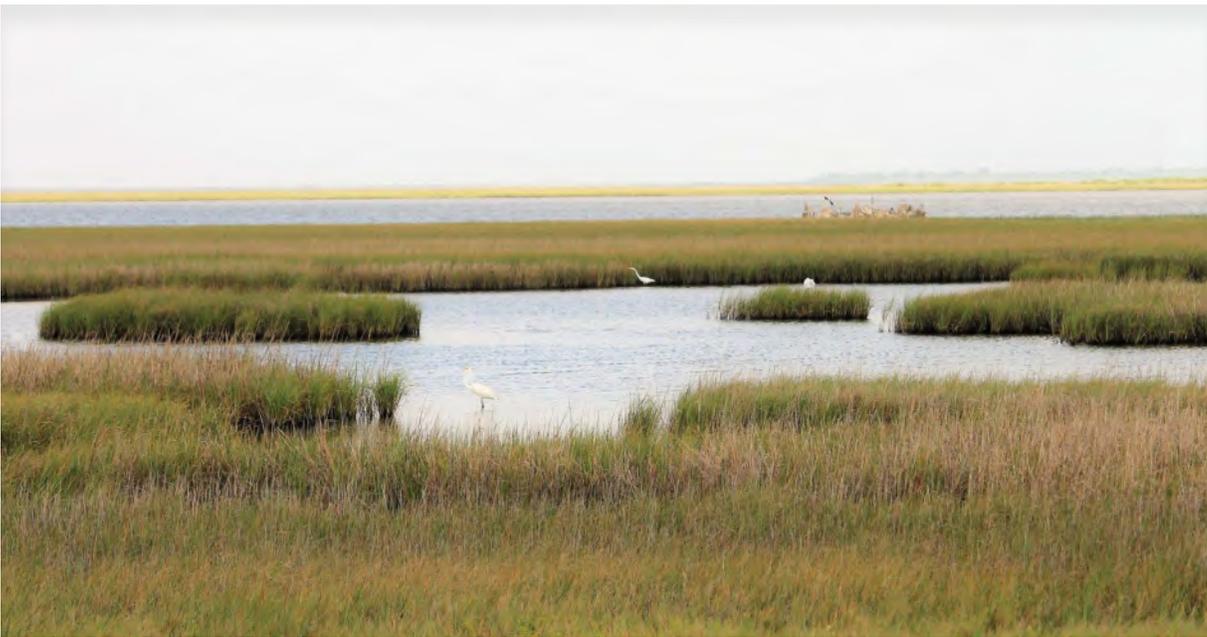
Created in honor of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy’s 75th anniversary, the film is available on the institute’s website along with record-

ings from a series of virtual events held throughout 2021 to celebrate the milestone, including programs on the role of land in tackling climate change, lessons from the Colorado River on land and drought, and the economic revitalization of America’s cities.

Pioneering Cleveland industrialist and inventor John C. Lincoln established the Lincoln Foundation in 1946 to advance the economic theories of Henry George, who thought that by freeing

communities from land speculation, governments could unlock opportunities for everyone. Lincoln’s son David later expanded the mission internationally, and his daughter Kathryn, who took the helm as chair of the board in 1996, grew the Institute’s reach to address urgent challenges like climate change.

Operating first as a small foundation and later as a school, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy now performs public policy research, education and consulting on six continents. Access the anniversary film and virtual event at lincolninst.edu/75. ☺



THE GALVESTON BAY FOUNDATION

← The newly named 5,000-acre Chocolate Bay Preserve in Texas contains critical coastal habitat for many species of birds, rare plants and marine animals.

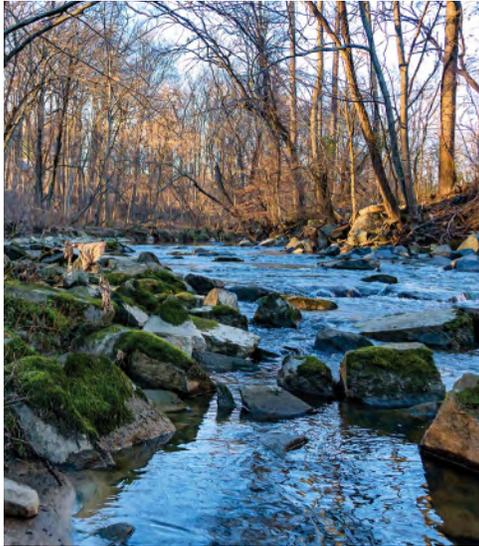
4,700 ACRES OF COASTAL HABITAT PROTECTED IN TEXAS

Over 4,700 acres of coastal habitat in Texas along Halls Bayou and West Galveston Bay were recently acquired by Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF) and will be permanently protected with a conservation easement held by the Katy Prairie Conservancy (both accredited). The newly named Chocolate Bay Preserve includes tidal marshes, freshwater and brackish wetlands and coastal tallgrass prairie.

“This preserve represents the largest conservation project

ever completed by GBF, and we are very proud to have preserved this special property. Due to the continued growth of our region, it is more important than ever to conserve large tracts of land like this now to ensure the future health of Galveston Bay,” says Bob Stokes, GBF president.

This project was prioritized for its coastal location and high-quality wildlife and fisheries habitat. The nearly 5,000-acre preserve is located only 2 miles from the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge and has 13 miles of marshy shorelines that provide nursery habitat for many species of fish, shrimp and crabs. Over 1,000 acres of brackish and freshwater wetland habitats provide refuge for waterfowl, wading birds and other species. The property also contains more than 2,000 acres of native coastal prairie with rare plant communities that have largely disappeared from the Texas Coastal Plain due to development. ☺



HENK SJIGERS/FLICKR

↑ Little Patuxent River in Maryland. A group of land trusts and conservation groups recently announced a new coalition to protect a network of landscapes and waterways in Southern Maryland.

New Coalition Supports Climate Resilience in Maryland

In September, land trusts, historical societies and multiple conservation organizations and agencies joined together on the banks of the Patuxent River to announce the formation of the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance (SMCA). The coalition’s mission is to conserve and restore Southern Maryland’s landscapes, waterways and shorelines, which are needed to maintain species diversity and wildlife corridors in a changing climate.

The Nature Conservancy’s Resilient Land Mapping Tool recently revealed that Southern Maryland has some of the state’s most resilient landscapes based on site

conditions such as soils, geology, elevation, topography and hydrology. SMCA’s goal is to identify, conserve, restore and manage the vital network of working and natural lands and waters that support biodiversity and maintain resilience in the face of future development and climate change.

“We can do this,” says Greg Bowen, executive director of the accredited American Chestnut Land Trust and co-chair of the effort. “Already, land trusts, local voluntary land preservation programs, and national, state and local parks systems have protected 22% of the lands in the five-county region. Our goal is to reach 30% by 2030.” ☺

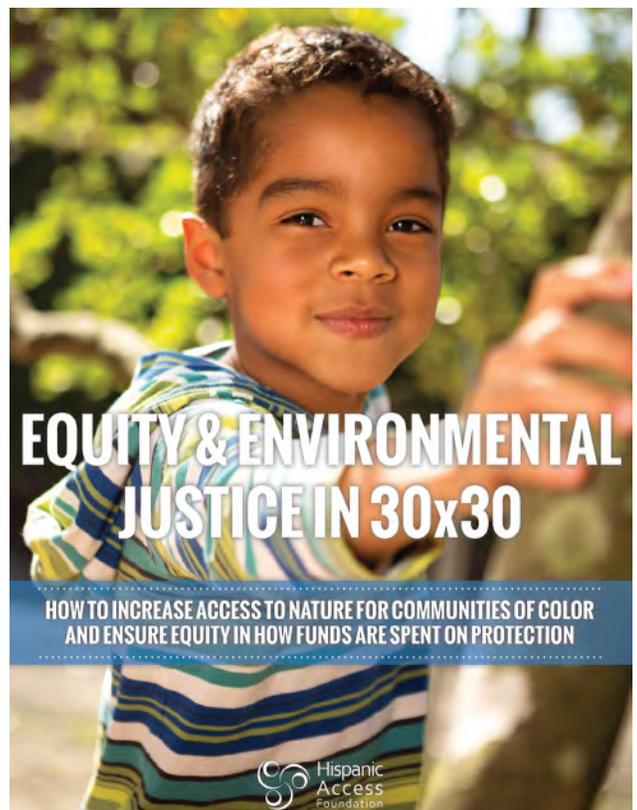
30X30: TOOLKITS FOR EQUITY AND ADVOCACY

A new toolkit from Hispanic Access Foundation, “Equity & Environmental Justice in 30x30,” explores how the Biden Administration’s America the Beautiful initiative can increase access to public spaces and nature for communities of color and low-income communities, which historically have faced a “nature gap” with less access to parks, beaches and natural areas. Download the toolkit at bit.ly/30x30Toolkit.

“Nature protection and restoration cannot be the only elements of the America the Beautiful plan,” says Shanna Edberg, director of conservation programs at Hispanic Access Foundation. “Policymakers must consider public and active transportation needs, affordable and dense housing, living wages, the border wall and immigration reform, and law enforcement reform as additional components necessary to creating meaningful equity and safety in the outdoors.”

The Land Trust Alliance is confident that land trusts can help conserve the 400 million acres needed to reach the 30x30 goal, and do so in an equitable and inclusive way. To support the advocacy work needed to get there, the Alliance has published a new toolkit that provides resources for land trusts to advocate in support of 30x30. Explore the toolkit at landtrustalliance.org/30x30toolkit.

Several states have joined the effort. New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham recently signed an executive order calling for the state to protect at least 30% of its lands by 2030 and directing the heads of several state agencies to form a task force charged with meeting the goal. The order calls for using state resources to preserve water sources, biodiversity and food security along with “traditional ways of life,” including natural resources significant to the state’s Native American communities. ☺



HISPANIC ACCESS FOUNDATION

↑ A new toolkit focuses on how to achieve equity and environmental justice in the 30x30 goal.

A HELPING HAND FOR MICHIGAN LAND TRUSTS

The pandemic forced land trusts around the country to address a range of technical and practical challenges—whether necessitating increased signage on trails related to social distancing or creating a need to better handle increased demand as more users discover land trust preserves.

In Michigan, the Land Trust Alliance recently secured funding from The Carls Foundation to address pandemic impacts for seven land trusts: Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, Keweenaw Land Trust, Legacy Land Conservancy, North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy, Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, Six Rivers Land Conservancy and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.

The funds are being used in a variety of ways. Some of the land trusts needed help to establish work-from-home options or hybrid telecommuting arrangements. One land trust is installing cameras to discourage vandalism, which has emerged as an unfortunate side effect of increased visits to protected lands. And other land trusts are applying their funds toward public outreach efforts and sustaining their education programs. By keeping their new pandemic-era supporters engaged, land trusts can reap future benefits. ☺



KYLER MORAN, COURTESY OF LEGACY LAND CONSERVANCY

↑ At the Lloyd and Mabel Johnson Preserve in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Thomas Huval and Dani Wyman install one of eight trail cameras purchased with a grant. The cameras are intended to help deter vandalism.

Florida Passes Landmark Wildlife Corridor Act



LARRY W. RICHARDSON/U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

↑ The landmark Florida Wildlife Corridor Act will protect habitat for many wildlife species, including endangered animals such as the Florida panther.

Florida passed landmark conservation legislation in recent months, taking a key step toward creating a connected wildlife corridor across the state. The Florida Wildlife Corridor Act will protect habitats for a wide range of wildlife while preventing the fragmentation of critical lands and conserving the headwaters of major watersheds such as the Everglades and St. Johns. The state budget also included significant funding for land conservation within the corridor through the Florida Forever program, which will protect critical lands for the endangered Florida panther and other species native to Florida. The Florida Wildlife Corridor encompasses nearly

17.7 million acres, including 9.6 million acres that are already protected and 8.1 million acres of remaining opportunity areas—primarily ranchlands and timberlands without conservation status.

“The Florida Wildlife Corridor Act is the culmination of decades of work. Florida’s long-term economic prosperity and quality of life depends on a healthy and sustainable green infrastructure, and the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act will help make this possible,” says Mallory Dimmit, chief executive officer of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Coalition. Established in 2010, founding partners of the coalition include The Nature Conservancy (accredited), Archbold Biological Station, Audubon Florida, Defenders of Wildlife, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and more. ☺

Learn more at floridawildlifecorridor.org



INVESTING IN COASTAL COMMUNITIES

By **CHELSEA WELCH**

For coastal communities, climate change is particularly worrisome. Sea level rise and the increasing severity and frequency of natural disasters are already being felt more acutely along coasts, with impacts predicted to worsen. And with over 50% of Americans living within 50 miles of a shoreline, investing in coastal resilience is one of the smartest ways our nation can prepare for a changing climate. Luckily for land trusts working in these communities, there are two federal programs that fund coastal conservation and restoration: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (FWS) Coastal Program and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Coastal Resilience Fund.



↑ Gather New Haven (formerly New Haven Land Trust) hosts summer camps and other nature programs for youth to learn about the ecology of their coastal community.

DI GLISSON, I/IFIREFLY IMAGEWORKS

basis to projects in 24 priority coastal geographies, including the Great Lakes region. While there are no set cost-share requirements, the program strives for a funding ratio of greater than 1:1, which can include in-kind contributions.

This program is of particular interest for the land trust community because it provides technical and financial assistance for third-party land acquisitions—unique for a federal grant program. Land trusts are frequent collaborators on funded projects. Last year the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust conserved over 13,000 acres of coastal wetlands and shoreline through the FWS Coastal Program. This project helped protect important habitat for native salmon and tribal traditions that depend on the landscape. Other past projects include the creation of a greenway with the accredited Freshwater Land Trust in Alabama and the removal of a dam in Connecticut in partnership with New Haven Land Trust.

FWS also operates the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, another program that funds coastal resilience specifically through wetlands acquisition and restoration. In 2015 the accredited Keweenaw Land Trust received \$1 million through this program to conserve more than 1,370 acres of wetlands and shoreline along Lake Superior in Michigan.

NOAA'S COASTAL RESILIENCE FUND

Less well-known among the land trust community is NOAA's funding program for coastal habitat restoration. Its new National Coastal Resilience Fund, administered in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), aims to restore and strengthen natural infrastructure to protect coastal communities and enhance wildlife habitat. The grant program funds projects in four categories based on phase of implementation, from projects that are in the early planning and design phase all the way to the monitoring of restoration outcomes. Nature-based climate solutions and planning for future climate change projections are necessary components of a successful application, as well as demon-

strated engagement with the beneficiary community. There is also a minimum 1:1 cost share requirement, which can be met using cash or in-kind contributions.

In 2020, the program awarded \$37 million to 46 grantees in coastal and Great Lakes regions, including Alliance member Whidbey Camano Land Trust (accredited) for a feasibility study for a future acquisition and restoration project in the Puget Sound. The annual grant cycle opens in March, but land trusts can reach out to the program's regional leads now to begin building relationships and to solicit feedback on project ideas.

A VITAL RESOURCE

While both of these programs regularly receive more applications than they can fund, there is potential for growth. The bipartisan infrastructure package recently signed into law by President Biden includes a substantial increase in funding for NOAA's National Coastal Resilience Fund. And, in the House, legislation to formalize and increase funding for the FWS Coastal Program was introduced this year with bipartisan support. The Alliance applauds both pieces of legislation that will bring huge funding opportunities for land trusts and increased protection for coastal communities from the worst impacts of climate change.

Coupled with a dramatic increase in funding for resilience and pre-disaster mitigation programs at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) this year, there has never been more federal focus on resilience and nature-based solutions to the climate crisis. But it will take the voice of the conservation community to ensure these programs remain authorized and funded. If you'd like to advocate for these and other federal programs that support natural climate solutions, become an Advocacy Ambassador. Learn how at landtrustalliance.org/issues-action/take-action/advocacy-ambassadors. To learn more about these grant programs, please visit nfwf.org/programs/national-coastal-resilience-fund or fws.gov/coastal/. ☺

CHELSEA WELCH is the Alliance's energy and climate policy advisor.

FWS COASTAL PROGRAM

For the past 25 years, the FWS Coastal Program has funded projects that restore and protect coastal habitat while also providing technical assistance for project design and planning. Field offices have worked with over 8,200 partners, including nonprofits like land trusts, to voluntarily restore and protect over 2.6 million acres of coastal habitat. Grants of up to \$100,000 are awarded on a rolling



← Jamey French out birding on a recent trip to Scotland.

of us if we want to move our mission forward of protecting private land conservation and achieving the 30x30 goal—we have to keep our eye on that ball and do our best to work together.

I'm also very excited about the work we're doing on ecosystem services. We're seeing more and more recognition of the connection between healthy working lands and climate change and the benefits of landscapes for carbon sequestration, for instance. And I feel like we have made progress on DEIJ with more awareness of the issues in our community, which is part of the healing, but we have a long road ahead.

What advice do you have for the Alliance and the broader conservation community?

I would tell everyone to listen to people with diverse opinions, to listen with “your shades pulled up” as we say in my family, with full focus. Try to put yourself in the shoes of people who are fearful about changes to their way of life, their traditions, their businesses.

Everyone has a perspective, and there's a lot of fear out there. A rancher might be upset about climate change advocacy because he fears what it means to his business of raising cattle, whereas someone who lives on the coast might be fearful of sea level rise flooding her home and community. I think we need to listen and put ourselves in other people's shoes before we pass judgment.

This is really where land comes in. Love of the land is something we all have in common. Our passion for the land is what unites people despite differences.

What's next for you?

I'm staying on the Alliance board for one more year but then will be taking on another chairmanship of a partner organization, American Forest Foundation, at the end of the year. And I plan to continue advocating in D.C. on our conservation agenda. ☺

In March 2022, Michael Polemis will take over as chair of the Alliance's board.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMEY FRENCH

Q&A WITH JAMEY FRENCH

Jameson “Jamey” French shares some reflections on his tenure as the Alliance's board chairman from 2018-2021.

You chaired the board during a very fraught time in history, with high political and social tensions and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. How did all of that hit home at the Alliance?

It's certainly been a challenging time. Like America, the land trust community is hugely diverse and varied. We have working lands—ranching, farming, forestry—and urban areas, we have small land trusts and big, representing all parts of the country. The biggest challenge has been how we respond to issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ). How

do we address these deep needs in our community? As board chair, I tried hard to listen and find common ground, to help hold the land trust community together.

Where do you see bright spots?

When I look back at my tenure, I think we've proven yet again how important our advocacy strength is. Maintaining our non-partisan approach is vital to our community remaining as strong as we are. The strength of the land trust community comes in part because of our political and geographic diversity. We need all



Photo by DJ Glisson, II / Firefly Imageworks

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 Land Trust Alliance

COUNTING WHAT

Stories from the 2020 National Land Trust Census

By TOM SPRINGER

You may have heard the saying, “No numbers without stories and no stories without numbers.” Since 1981, that sound piece of communications advice has been a guiding principle behind the National Land Trust Census, the nation’s longest-running survey of private land conservation. Every five years, the Land Trust Alliance queries its members for key metrics about their work, including staffing levels, acres protected, types of land protected and community engagement. Some 565 land trusts responded to the 2020 Census, providing a window into a growing conservation movement that is well-established, yet adapting in the face of profound ecological and social change.

The raw numbers are impressive—61 million acres protected (more than all national parks combined) and 16.7 million visitors to land trust properties in 2020. Dive deeper and you sense a rising tidal wave of change: Land trusts across the nation are harnessing the power of conservation to address the social challenges of their communities, from inequity to health problems to disaster preparedness.

“The 2020 Census shows that land trusts big and small are increasing their community work—through partnerships, engagement and outreach—and increasing their focus on climate change,” says Katie Chang, senior manager of educational services at the Alliance.

This shift does not come at the expense of land protection, but rather in tandem with it, and it isn’t limited to large national and regional conservation groups. In fact, local land trusts are leading the way forward—70% of the growth in land protected since 2015 was achieved by local and state land trusts.

Every land trust is as unique as the community it serves, and their stories—at least one for every acre saved—make a compelling case for private land conservation and for land trusts as enduring, committed community institutions. No matter how you look at it, the land trust community is gaining ground and is well-equipped to achieve the 30x30 goal. Protecting land and connecting people to nature has never been more necessary or more powerful.



61
million
acres protected.



SPACE TO GROW

MATTERS

Students learn in the gardens at Wadsworth STEM, a Space to Grow school in Chicago. Space to Grow is a partnership of Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands land trust to transform Chicago schoolyards into vibrant spaces to play, learn and be outside, while helping neighborhoods to reduce urban flooding.





SPACE TO GROW

↑ Children play for the first time after the ribbon cutting ceremony in the Space to Grow schoolyard at Nathan Davis Elementary School.

Bringing Conservation to the Playground

There's an expression among conservation professionals that "asphalt is always the last crop." Once an ecosystem gets plowed under and the very topsoil scraped off and trucked away, that's true enough.

Except the opposite holds true at 30 public schools in Chicago. There, playgrounds once entombed in asphalt and cement have been reclaimed as park space. This ruin-to-recovery project is co-managed by Healthy Schools and Openlands, a Chicago-based land trust. Openlands protects wild land, ensures water quality and advocates for the environment across 17 counties in Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana.

For some, rebuilding urban playgrounds may sound like more of a "parks and rec" move than something a land trust would do. But, as the 2020 Census revealed, land trusts are actively creating partnerships with community groups—80% partner with youth development and education groups. Openlands' involvement speaks to the power of these community partnerships, which can greatly amplify the resources and clout that today's conservation efforts need to succeed.

"Our main driver is to connect people with nature wherever they live," says Daniella Pereira, vice president of community conservation at Openlands. "We help people to access green space, and if that's not available then we work with a community's vision

to re-green their neighborhood."

The Space to Grow schoolyards began in 2014, under the auspices of the Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands. Capital support comes from Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Department of Water Management and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Chicago. To qualify, a school must have at least 30,000

square feet of hard surface playground that they want to demolish, places where "kids didn't even want to go outside because there was no place to sit or be alone. The research shows that there's more bullying in places like that," says Pereira. When complete, the resurrected playgrounds include trees, native plants, rain gardens and outdoor learning labs. Most also have tracks and sports fields, clad in permeable surfaces.

But what makes Space to Grow schoolyards far more complex (and expensive) than a typical playground is what lies beneath: a deep gravel substrate that's engineered to absorb thousands of gallons of rainwater and storm runoff. Essentially, the schoolyards function like an infrastructure layer cake with an icing of recreational amenities on top.

What drives the partnership is a commitment by Chicago water agencies to better manage the city's chronic rainwater runoff problem. They're relying on the sponge-like qualities of green



6.4 million
people participated in land trust programs and activities in 2020.

schoolyards to help reduce the combined sewage overflows that occur when excess stormwater mixes in the same sewer pipes with untreated waste and spills into local waters, such as Lake Michigan. The \$1.5 million price tag for each Space to Grow schoolyard comes from Chicago Public Schools and water agency capital funds. As part of its schoolyard siting criteria, Space to Grow selects low-income neighborhoods that are prone to flooding. It's a problem made worse by the heavy rains associated with climate change.

From the outset, local residents have ample say about their schoolyard's design and operation. "We don't start with a prototype," says Meg Kelly, Space to Grow director. "The community gets a chance to do scenario planning and our designers put together two concept plans. We want the end product to be what our partners want."

Nonetheless, each schoolyard must meet two conditions: First, provide play equipment and outdoor classrooms; and second, remain open after school and on weekends. "The first time you lock a schoolyard gate, you're telling someone they're not welcome," Kelly says. "We don't want to send that message. Instead of locking gates, it's best when our partners actively use schoolyards for things like ballgames or yoga. With regular activity, we have fewer problems."

The community-driven message also extends to maintenance, which is done by residents with barriers to employment, trained in horticulture by A Safe Haven, a Chicago nonprofit. Once the schoolyards are built, the work changes focus to providing trainings for teachers, parents and community members to maximize use of the new space. From food to art to nature studies, they want to see the schoolyards become a hub of health, equity and hope. This, in neighborhoods of color where school investments have long lagged behind those in white neighborhoods.

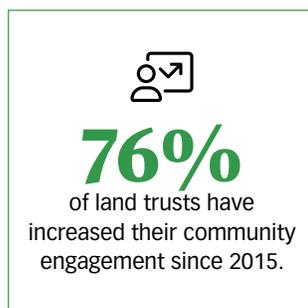
"We just started doing ribbon cuttings for new schoolyards," Pereira says. "And I've had neighbors come by and say, 'This is so beautiful! If this is where my tax dollars are going, then I'm all for it.'"

Blazing Trails for Community Conservation

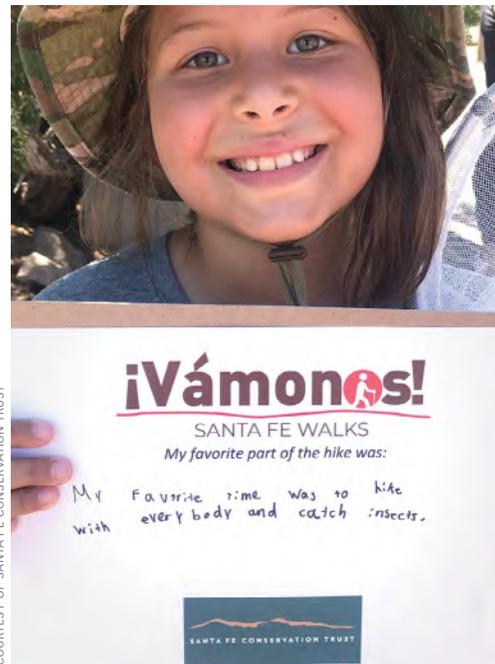
There's a simple, but powerful way for land trusts to get closer to the people they serve: Ask them to take a walk with you.

"It's amazing—when you walk with someone, you get to know each other in a different way," says Sarah Noss, executive director of the Santa Fe Conservation Trust (SFCT). "There's a big push around community conservation and this has broadened our constituency and opened more funding opportunities."

What's made such foot-powered positivity possible has been a free urban walking program known as *Vámonos* ("let's go" in Spanish). SFCT staff and volunteers lead 23 scheduled walks from May to October, mainly on trails near Santa Fe parks certified by the Americans with



Top: A young *Vámonos* participant holds a sign.
Bottom: *Vámonos* walkers enjoy the outdoors as part of a program sponsored by the Santa Fe Conservation Trust.



COURTESY OF SANTA FE CONSERVATION TRUST™



COURTESY OF SANTA FE CONSERVATION TRUST™

Disabilities Act. The 2- to 3- mile walks, which last about one hour, are held weekdays at 5:30 or 6 p.m. and Saturdays at 10 a.m. Typically, 10-20 walkers turn out for each session, with 393 total participants in 2021.

The city's well-regarded trail network spans 75 miles and SFCT has long been involved with its development. There's even a 35-mile loop named for Dale Bale, SFCT's first executive director. "Some people find it interesting that we have a strong trails program," Noss says. "They say, 'Are you a land trust or a trails program?' We're both."

SFCT also convenes the Santa Fe Walking Collaborative, whose members support *Vámonos* events. They include the City of Santa Fe Parks and Recreation Department, New Mexico Department of Health, City of Santa Fe Senior Services Division and La Familia Medical Center.

While trails on land trust preserves may evoke images of serious birder types and lug-soled power walkers, that's not the *Vámonos* way.

"Dirt trails are great if you're fit and live near one," Noss says. "But there are people who don't like to walk alone because they're afraid ... or don't even know the trails exist."

Vámonos hikers are a varied lot in terms of age, ability and socioeconomic background. You'll see elderly hikers bused in from nearby retirement homes. You'll see "biggs" hiking with their "littles" as part of a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor outing. During hikes in southwest Santa Fe, you'll see a higher number of Spanish-speaking families.

On Saturday mornings, more kids and adults come out for nature scavenger hikes. They'll slow down long enough to sniff the caramel scent of Ponderosa pine bark and learn the difference between a piñon pine and a juniper. To the fascination of some—and horror of others—they might even find their first desert tarantula.

SFCT's outreach reflects a growing trend that surfaced in the 2020 Census: 76% of land trusts have increased community engagement since 2015. Likewise, 78% are engaging groups historically underrepresented in conservation, including people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, older adults, veterans or active-duty military, people living with disabilities and LGBTQ+ individuals.

"It's meaningful to take an older person into nature if only to walk 20 feet and sit on a bench," Noss says. "One example is a man with an inner-ear problem who needs us to hold his arm when he walks. He wouldn't be out here except for *Vámonos*."

For all the good that *Vámonos* does for residents, it's also been good for SFCT. While it costs around \$7,000 in staff time to run the program, SFCT has leveraged \$25,000 to \$30,000 per year in related funding. Recently, its track record with urban trails helped SFCT to land a federal grant through the Safe Routes to School program. Similar to *Vámonos*, it will encourage more children to bike and walk to school.

Vámonos walkers have also started to attend other SFCT events, which doesn't surprise Noss. She says that "fun experiences where people just hang out with us" builds connections in ways that simply touting how many acres they've protected cannot.

"This isn't 'mission drift' for us," Noss says. "It's about finding where the unmet needs of people and nature intersect. The chances of us surviving long term are challenging unless we engage more deeply with the community."

Dampening the Flames of Climate Change

On Oct. 14, when the first autumn snow dusted the streets and mountains around Moscow, Idaho, Lovina Englund did more than enjoy the frosty ambience. After months of perilous heat, lingering smoke and anxious days when every kiln-dry tree felt prone to catastrophe, she breathed a deep sigh of relief. The fire season was finally over.

"Out here, everything is so exacerbated by climate change," says Englund, executive director of the Palouse Land Trust (PLT). "Between the fuel buildup [in forests] and the drought, we're constantly barraged by more severe fires that require more resources. We usually have seven to 10 days of extreme weather conditions, but this year it went on for weeks and weeks."

This includes the heat dome event in July, a lethal weather phenomenon that Englund describes as "eye-poppingly scary." It drove temperatures in Idaho to 95 degrees or higher for 20 straight days, a new state record.

Into this breach steps PLT and other land trusts like it in the Mountain West. Along with its usual work to save land, restore habitat and promote access to nature, PLT has become what the military calls a force multiplier. They have no heavy trucks, no legions of firefighters,

no aircraft to rain tons of red fire retardant on smoldering forests. What they can do, however, is leverage the powerful tools of knowledge and prevention to stop fires from starting in the first place.

"This is an evolution of our programming," Englund says. "We collaborate with landowners around fuel prevention and how to prepare for the fire season. We know it's not if the fire is coming but when."

With a staff of three, PLT covers a 12 million-acre service area in north-central Idaho and southeast Washington. The diverse topography includes federal wilderness, the loess soil wheatlands of the Palouse prairie and canyons along the Snake River. Setting clear priorities and building partnerships around stewardship has long been crucial to PLT's success. Now, faced with the dire exigency of an extended fire season, PLT's public engagement takes on new urgency. Their partners include Idaho Firewise, AmeriCorps and the fire ecology program at the University of Idaho (UI) campus in Moscow. This combined effort puts PLT among the 74% of land trusts that increased their focus on climate change in the last five years, according to the 2020 Census.

Much of PLT's landowner outreach targets the "wildland-urban interface." These are places where structures built close to forests create inherent fire hazards for homeowners. PLT's guidance here focuses on the practical: Don't use cedar shakes as shingles or siding; keep pine needles out of rain gutters; trim low-hanging limbs from trees and remove excess woody debris from the ground.



74%

of land trusts have increased their focus on climate change since 2015.



↑ Members of University of Idaho’s Student Association for Fire Ecology (SAFE) in 2020. Student crews help thin the forest to reduce fuel loads.

In August, PLT’s prevention measures—part science, part neighborly cohesion—were severely tested. It started with a faulty battery charger that set a barn on fire near the Stage Easement, an 81-acre PLT preserve. When a local farmer saw smoke, he jumped on his tractor and began to disc a firebreak to contain the flames. Meanwhile, landowners directed firefighting helicopters to fill their “Bambi buckets” with water from irrigation ponds. The fire destroyed the barn and a home that belonged to a PLT board member. Yet without a fuel reduction project carried out earlier by UI students and faculty, the fire could’ve been disastrous. They had thinned overstocked trees, removed dead trunks and cleared low-level “ladder fuels” that can carry flames into the overhead canopy.

“Their work was our saving grace,” says Jaime Jovanovich-Walker, PLT communications and development coordinator. “If they hadn’t done what they did, the fire would’ve spread to the Moscow Mountain corridor. Instead of 116 acres, it would’ve burned hundreds of thousands.”

Despite a 35-mph wind, the wildfire singed trees but did little heavy damage. PLT staff consider it a “miracle” that the fire switched course and didn’t spread to their beloved Idler’s Rest preserve nearby. Still, PLT isn’t counting on fate to protect the people and wild places of the Palouse.

“Now, the reality of being a Westerner involves living differently during the fire season,” Englund says. “We can’t always rely on firefighters to be heroes and save us. But a land trust can leverage its prevention resources in ways that have a meaningful impact.”

Working Big, While Staying Small

It doesn’t take a big land trust to be a great land trust. By “playing above their weight,” small land trusts can achieve conservation gains that rival those with more staff and deeper pockets. The 72% of land trusts that operate with three or fewer full-time staff achieve more with less on a daily basis.

And that especially holds true in underserved places like the Pelican State.

“We are, quite literally, the only statewide accredited locally-based land trust in Louisiana,” says Cindy Brown, executive director of the Land Trust for Louisiana (LTL). “We fill a really important niche, but because we’re small and nimble we take on a



NEUWYN MCINNIS

↑ A field trip to the Land Trust for Louisiana's Abita Creek Flatwoods Preserve in St. Tammany.



70%

of acreage protected since 2015 was achieved by state and local land trusts.

lot. We get thrown a lot of projects by groups like Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy.”

Size hasn't been—and shouldn't be—a dealbreaker for land trusts. Taken together, local land trusts have a big collective impact. As revealed by the 2020 Census, 70% of the acreage protected since 2015 was achieved by state and local land trusts—not big

national groups. Still, Brown says it's even more important for small land trusts to stay focused, efficient and responsive as they pursue their mission.

For starters, when small land trusts are eager for growth, it's easy for them to accept land for preserves that's most available and affordable, or accept a marginal property from a well-intended donor that becomes a headache later. (Sometimes, the best land deals are the ones that land trusts don't make.) Likewise, Brown says some of LTL's early projects wouldn't fit their criteria today. Instead of being opportunity-driven they've become “more proactive in matching opportunities to community needs.” This includes targeting preserves that offer floodwater retention or protecting rice farms that benefit wildlife, feed local economies and preserve cultural traditions.

Mitigation preserves are one way a small land trust like LTL has been able to grow. When corporations or governments damage natural areas, such as wetlands, they're required by law to restore or purchase similar lands elsewhere to mitigate that loss. Rebuilding these areas can pay dividends in perpetuity, just as other land trust holdings do. LTL receives management fees for the easements they hold on seven mitigation properties that total more than 6,000 acres of wetlands, floodplains, bottomland hardwood forest and longleaf pine savanna. “I kind of wondered at first about the practice of mitigation,” Brown says. “But I've come to realize that these will become some of the state's highest quality wild properties.”

It's not always easy for small land trusts to get the attention and credibility they deserve, but here they can benefit from a mark of distinction that's like the land trust version of the “S” on Superman's cape: the infinity symbol that shows they're an accredited land trust. To receive accreditation, land trusts undertake a thorough review of their practices in governance, finance, transactions and stewardship. Of the nation's 1,281 trusts, 453 are accredited—including each of the land trusts featured in this story—and they protect 81% of land and easements held by all land trusts.

LTL became an accredited land trust in 2015, before Brown arrived. “It was tough, I've heard the war stories,” she says. “But it's hugely important to say we've passed these incredibly rigorous standards to receive accreditation.” And, it's this process itself that proves invaluable. It requires land trusts to take stock, fill operational gaps and plan wisely to achieve what the infinity icon promises: to protect land in perpetuity.

As a “small and nimble” land trust, LTL has learned to readily focus on emergent needs. Consider the cluster of pushpins that hover over St. Tammany Parish on LTL's statewide property map. They represent five LTL properties on the vulnerable North Shore of Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans. The North Shore has increasingly become a refuge for residents who build homes there to flee hurricanes that batter the Gulf Coast. These lush lands upstream from Lake Pontchartrain can provide much-needed flood storage and storm surge protection, but only if left undeveloped.

Now, LTL has become a key conservation partner in this fast-growing region. “The coast is moving and there's no doubt that the North Shore will become our new coast at some point,” Brown says. “We have to build in enough natural resiliency to help plug the holes.” ☺

The National Land Trust Census was developed in cooperation with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

TOM SPRINGER has served in several roles for the accredited Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, including board member, volunteer and writer.

THE ALLIANCE supports land trusts in their work by providing trainings, resources and guidance. We also help connect people to the land trusts in their community—check out our newly launched “Find a Land Trust” website at findalandtrust.org. ☺

CENSUS 2020 AT A GLANCE



61 million

Acres conserved by land trusts as of year-end 2020—an increase of 6.18 million acres since 2015



16.7 million

Visitors to land trust properties in 2020—up from 6.25 million in 2015, more than double

Community Impact



80%

Land trusts that provide public access to their protected lands



6.4 million

People who participated in land trust programs and activities in 2020



1.2 million

Acres of land trust properties open to the public



9,761

Miles of trails for public use, including 997 trail miles designed for universal access



76%

Land trusts that have increased their focus on community engagement since 2015



78%

Land trusts that are engaging people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, older adults, veterans, people living with disabilities or LGBTQ+ individuals since 2015

Land Trusts' Top Three Areas of Community Partnership

- 1 Youth education and development (80% of land trusts)
- 2 Community and economic development (64% of land trusts)
- 3 Food security and agriculture (58% of land trusts)

Climate Change



74%

Land trusts that have increased their focus on climate change in the past 5 years



33%

Land trusts that have received funding to address climate change in the past 5 years

About Land Trusts

12,716 FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME STAFF
13,672 BOARD MEMBERS
233,574 OTHER ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS
6.3 million MEMBERS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS
81% PROTECTED LANDS THAT ARE HELD BY ACCREDITED LAND TRUSTS



Cleveland sign at Upper Edgewater Park.



Some of the smiling faces at Rally.

RALLY 2021: A POSITIVE PLACE FOR EVERYONE

By DARCI PALMQUIST

For the second year in a row, virtual Rally was a success, bringing together 2,665 conservationists from across the country and some international locations to connect, learn and reimagine conservation.

Though we had all hoped to gather in person in Cleveland for Rally 2021, the decision to meet virtually again was the right one for the health and safety of our community. As Land Trust Alliance board Chair Jamey French said in his welcome speech, “The essence of Rally—comradery, education and celebration—is something that we can still enjoy in this virtual format.”

The comradery was evident from beginning to end. When a technical difficulty delayed the start of the opening session on Oct. 5, attendees took the opportunity to share positive words and beautiful photos of their off-screen landscapes. The days started with chair yoga, proceeded with

informative and inspiring sessions, and ended in true Rally fashion with fun and games like “Mappy Hour” and “Rock ‘N’ Roll Trivia.” Other special activities—including virtual field trips, a photo booth and group networking sessions—fulfilled the promise of Rally as a place to reenergize our passion for conservation.

“The program was inspirational, informative, provocative and impactful,” said Andrew Bowman, the Alliance’s president and CEO. “I couldn’t be more proud of the Rally team for producing such an incredible event.”

Conference organizer Patty Tipson, the Alliance’s associate director of training, says the deep benefit of Rally is the infusion of positive energy it provides the land trust community.

“After a long year, Rally is the time to come together and recharge. This conference reinvigorates the passion we have for conservation that leads to a bigger impact in our community,” noted Tipson.

Throughout the event, participants shared their appreciation. “Best Rally to date for me!” enthused Pamela Berndt of Wild Rivers Land Trust in Oregon. “Thank you, Land Trust Alliance and everyone else who has come together to deliver another great Rally. It is especially impressive and important considering the challenging times in which we live,” wrote Ted Clement of Save Mount Diablo in California.

STAR-POWERED PLENARIES

For many attendees, the three plenaries by Andrew Bowman and Drs. Dorceta Taylor and Mark Anderson were highlights. The airwaves (i.e., Zoom chat boxes) exploded with exclamations and enthusiasm as each speaker took the virtual stage.

Bowman set the tone with a welcome speech that looked back on the challenges we have experienced since Rally 2020 and forward toward achieving the 30x30 goal. He highlighted the 30x30 goal as a way to address biodiversity loss, climate change and issues of equity in conservation—in short, “to ensure that enough land is conserved to serve *all* people living in all locations across the U.S.”—and noted the immense opportunity for land trusts to advance private land conservation across the country.

Outstanding, thought-provoking and powerful were some of the words used to describe the plenary by Dr. Dorceta Taylor, professor at the Yale School of the Environment and adjunct faculty at the University of Michigan’s School for Environment and Sustainability. Dr. Taylor’s groundbreaking work examines the intersection of race, class and gender in conservation. In her plenary, she deconstructed the history of conservation, pulling back the curtain on traditional icons such as John Muir to reveal a more complicated truth about who is behind the conservation movement and how this history informs who has access and opportunities within conservation today.

“This presentation is so enlightening. I keep thinking about what I was taught in college about the history of conservation. So very, very different, and a sad misrepresentation,” commented April Newlander of Sanctuary Forest in California.

While Dr. Taylor challenged attendees to rethink what we know about the people and history of conservation, Dr. Mark Anderson inspired us to rethink what we know about plants and animals. As director of The Nature Conservancy’s Center for Resilient Conservation Science, Anderson has spent the past decade



↑ Andrew Bowman

DI GLISSON, IIFIREFLY IMAGEWORKS



↑ Dr. Mark Anderson

DI GLISSON, IIFIREFLY IMAGEWORKS



↑ Dr. Dorceta Taylor

PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. DORCETA TAYLOR

identifying and mapping climate resilient lands and waters across the continental U.S.

Amazing, dazzling and uplifting were some of the adjectives viewers shared. In his plenary, Dr. Anderson presented current research on plants and animals that is helping to “reanimate the land” and transform the field of conservation science. He highlighted new understandings of how plants and trees create underground networks of shared resources and new science pointing to the importance of animal families.

“I posit that some of the old, faulty science made us comfortable treating nature in ways that we might not do with the new science,” said Dr. Anderson, asking listeners to “bring this new science into your decision making. You’re going to have to do your own thinking about how to work with plant and animal nations.”



Rally 2021 participants were able to virtually experience some of host city Cleveland's natural beauty.

“THIS SESSION REVEALS THE POSITIVE SIDE OF THE STORY, THAT COMMUNITIES CAN WORK TOGETHER.”

Keymah Durden, board member of Western Reserve Land Conservancy, founder & CEO of Rid-All Green Partners and presenter for session D05, “Reimagining Land Trusts as Leaders of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice”

SESSIONS ON DEI, CLIMATE CHANGE AND MORE

What makes Rally stand out is the wide range of offerings that appeal to everyone, from seasoned conservationists to newcomers alike. Sessions covered hot topics, including climate change, 30x30 and remote monitoring; conservation nuts and bolts, such as stewardship, fundraising and leadership; and everything in between, from conservation burials to rewilding and more.

Inclusion was a primary theme of Rally this year, and numerous sessions focused on community-centered conservation topics such as urban work, Indigenous partnerships and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Aside from the plenaries, the most attended workshop was session A05, “Reimagining Our Tools and Processes to Restore Indigenous Rights through Private Land Conservation,” with 381 participants. Led by a diverse group of conservationists, this session discussed ways to restore Indigenous rights and use of land with a focus on the historical injustices underlying conservation that perpetuate inequities today.

And more than 200 registrants attended session D05, “Reimagining Land Trusts as Leaders of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice,” a case study of Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s trans-

formation from serving predominantly white, affluent places in northeastern Ohio to more diverse, urban communities in the greater Cleveland area. Kathy Leavenworth, board member for Western Reserve and the Alliance, shared the result: “We’re no longer just saving land for the wealthy. We’re making life better for people. This change has transformed the work we do and the way we are viewed.”

Climate change topics were a focus for many, with sessions on climate resilience, climate adaptation and carbon markets. Attendees tuned in to learn about opportunities to fund climate change work (session A02, “Financing Forest Stewardship through the Carbon Market: New Opportunities for Landowners”) and climate change communications (session C02, “Storms and Floods: Talking to Conservatives about Water and Climate”).

On the nuts and bolts side of conservation, popular sessions included A08, “Real Estate Fundamentals: A Primer for New Land Trust Staff and Board Members,” C08 “Steve and Karin’s Drafting Tips: The Ever-Changing Conservation Easement” and B09, “It’s Not Just What You Say, It’s How You Say It.”

A COMMUNITY OF CARING

During the plenaries, one Kingsbury Brown Conservation Leadership Award and two National Land Trust Excellence Awards were given, and nine new conservation scholars were announced (see page 36). Participants enjoyed inspiring videos featuring the award winners. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission also shared a new video about the power of accreditation, and newly accredited land trusts were celebrated with shout-outs on the kudos board.

Rounding out the formal workshop sessions were informal opportunities to share and learn through exhibit rooms, break-out sessions, virtual tours and roundtable discussions. Special events allowed time for connecting and networking, including the Communicators' Network, International Land Conservation Network Virtual Meet and Greet, Conservationists of Color Happy Hour Discussion and the LGBTQ+ Networking Session.

"Rally is the time to forge new connections and to share ideas and learning. The Alliance has been able to successfully do that virtually two years in a row, and the virtual format has invited in more younger conservationists and junior staff to be able to participate," said Brandon Hayes, founder of Bold Bison Communications and Consulting and a Rally presenter. "I've been particularly gratified to receive proactive support from the Alliance in welcoming my fellow LGBTQ+ conservationists into the community, both as deeply knowledgeable professionals and as individuals with unique perspectives."

MOVING FROM TALK TO ACTION

In his closing remarks on Oct. 7, Bowman brought the focus back to two important themes: the need to move from "talk to action" on issues of diversity and equity and the need to address the many challenges to federal funding for conservation.

Bowman highlighted the Alliance's five key areas of growth as identified by a cross-departmental team charged with helping to articulate and prioritize community-centered conservation and DEI activities.

"Like so many other organizations, the Alliance is on a journey of continuous learning. We are committed to being transparent and vulnerable about this journey," said Bowman. "We know that mistakes are inevitable, and we ask our community to hold us accountable. Please reach out to me, or any Alliance staff or board member if you have input or concerns."

When it comes to federal policies, Bowman acknowledged "there is much at stake" and encouraged all land trusts to speak up to their representatives in support of the legislation that makes so much conservation work possible, from restoring forests through the Healthy Forests Reserve Program to protecting working farms and ranches through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program of the Farm Bill.

Our sights are set on hosting an in-person Rally next year—see you in New Orleans in September 2022!

Participants will have access to all recordings and other features of the Rally platform until March 1, 2022. If you missed it, you can still register for access to all the recordings at alliancerally.org/registration2021/. ☺

DARCI PALMQUIST is editor at the Land Trust Alliance.

RALLY BY THE NUMBERS

2,665

Registrants

<p style="text-align: center;">32 Board Member Registrations</p> <p style="text-align: center;">95 International Registrations</p> <p style="text-align: center;">89 Student and AmeriCorps Registrations</p> <p style="text-align: center;">53 States, Countries or Territories Represented</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">752 Total Organizations Including Field Offices</p> <p style="text-align: center;">773 First-Timers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">61 Virtual Workshops</p> <p style="text-align: center;">6 Virtual Field Trips</p>
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THANK YOU to our lead sponsor, The Nature Conservancy. With more than 1 million members, 400 staff scientists, offices in every U.S. state and work in 72 countries, The Nature Conservancy is proud to work with the Land Trust Alliance and other partners to create a world where people and nature can thrive. ☺



NATURAL CONNECTIONS

In May 2021, TennGreen Land Conservancy, The Conservation Fund and the Open Space Institute (all accredited) expanded the popular Fiery Gizzard Trail in South Cumberland State Park in southern Tennessee. The acquired land contains rich forests essential for wildlife habitat and outdoor enthusiasts. By purchasing this land and adding it to the park, the partners connected three popular areas of the large park system: Denny Cove, Foster Falls and the Fiery Gizzard Trail. Conservation of unprotected forests along the Cumberland Plateau, particularly at Fiery Gizzard, are priorities for conservation groups in the area.

TennGreen utilized The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Land Mapping Tool to evaluate the importance of this property, which helped the organization secure funding to conserve resilient landscapes. Recently expanded with new carbon data, the tool can zoom in on forests as small as a quarter acre to determine how much carbon they store currently as well as how much carbon they will store over the next 30 years if they stay standing. Across the country, land trusts, government agencies and other land managers are using the mapping tool to identify forest carbon "hotspots"—places with the most potential to store carbon—as priorities for protection. Such places are frequently among the most important for plants and animals to find refuge from the impacts of climate change. ☺

A portion of Little Gizzard Creek runs through the newly protected property. ↓



TOM WOOD

HIRING YOUR NEXT LEADER

By **KIRT MANECKE**

THE 10 MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS TO LOOK FOR IN AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The time has come to bring on your organization's next executive director. Many land trusts are facing this situation now, whether due to pandemic-related job turnover or a glut of retirements (we are now 10 years out from "the retirement bomb" featured in the spring 2011 issue of *Saving Land*). The person you choose as your executive director will determine the direction of your land conservancy, the amount of land you protect over the next decade or more, and the impact you can have in your community.

This is always an important decision, but the stakes are even higher now as the conservation community strives to achieve the 30x30 goal, an international effort to protect 30% of lands and waters by 2030. As Land Trust Alliance President Andrew Bowman has laid out, land trusts play a critical role in meeting 30x30 and must aspire to the "audacious" goal of doubling the amount of land conserved by the end of this decade. Doing so will not only protect more land, but also help us tackle the challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change and many other social and health issues facing society, while making conservation more accessible to everyone.

LOOKING BEYOND BUSINESS AS USUAL

To get to the 30x30 goal, land trusts will need to "move at lightning speed," in the words of entrepreneur and investor Lori Greiner from the hit TV show *Shark Tank*. You will need a results-oriented leader who moves quickly and gets the job done. A supportive board chair or president and board who fully support your executive director's vision is critical.

Hiring someone with a strong business and sales background is a smart investment. Nonprofits are often wary of sales, marketing and other business strategies, but in fact these skills need to be nurtured. All too often, land trusts hire the smart scientist or biologist who knows a lot about conservation but doesn't have business skills. We need to rethink this if we are to accelerate conservation.

Financing these efforts is one of the biggest challenges. A capable, confident leader will launch strategic campaigns that raise funds to purchase important tracts of land or conservation easements, including working forests, farms and ranches, to help your land conservancy soar. They will listen to what the community needs and recognize how the land trust can fill an invaluable role by achieving conservation that benefits the community.

There are rare exceptions, and I know a few of them, but in 90% of cases the skills that I present here hold true for even small- to medium-sized land conservancies that are protecting fewer than 500 acres per year and may only have one or two full-time or part-time staff. In many cases these land conservancies don't, for example, have the luxury of hiring an expert marketer or public relations person from the for-profit world. Often the executive director must perform these duties.



HIRE AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WHO KNOWS ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

ALBERTO_VOS, LICENSED UNDER CC BY 2.0

10 IMPORTANT SKILLS TO LOOK FOR IN AN EFFECTIVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

- 1. Go-getter.** As entrepreneur Stephanie Stuckey says, “Good things happen to those who hustle.” You need someone who accomplishes a lot every day and works with a sense of urgency. Little wins add up over time. We are losing a football-field-sized piece of land every 30 seconds and competing with savvy, fast-moving land developers. Passivity does not compete in this arena. A go-getter will dramatically increase your land protection results.
- 2. Visionary.** Someone with vision, who is a big-picture thinker with a big-picture plan, will take your land conservancy to the next level and accomplish big things, meaning lots of land protected and new projects that engage and serve more sectors of your community. They will do what many others think is impossible.
- 3. Successful sales, fundraising, marketing/PR or business experience.** Knowing how to succeed and win in business means your land conservancy will have many victories and will always be growing. Successful public relations experience is critical because land conservancies often don’t have the funds available to advertise, yet consistent PR will dramatically increase your visibility, keeping your name and accomplishments top of mind and attracting more financial donations and land protection inquiries. It will help to make your organization more relevant and worthy of support to broader segments of the community.
- 4. Strong people skills.** Conservation is all about relationships. You want the person representing your organization to be a great communicator, professional, friendly, honest, trusting, genuine and approachable. This person will be motivating your employees and board and interacting with donors and landowners.
- 5. Passion and energy.** There is nothing worse than talking to someone who lacks enthusiasm and energy. It will bring down your organization and

impede growth. Enthusiasm is contagious. Passionate leaders motivate and inspire others and are eager to engage and learn.

6. **Results oriented.** The person you want leading your land conservancy should be able to set concrete goals that, at the end of 10-30 years, add up to a huge impact. Have any possible candidates for executive director take the Clifton Strengths Assessment. There are rare exemptions, but for the most part achievers are who you want running your land conservancy.
7. **Creativity.** Thinking outside the box will help your organization stand out, enabling you to acquire additional land and donors and build new partnerships. A leader with this crucial skill will come up with innovative ways to make your land trust more effective and relevant. Creativity fuels big ideas. It's what made Apple successful. It's what land trusts need to succeed.
8. **Determination.** Eighty percent of sales are made on the fifth to twelfth contact. The same is often true of fundraising,

especially when going after corporate donors. When you are in fundraising, you are in sales. Excellent follow-up skills are required. You have to be disciplined to not give up, be persistent to get people to change their minds and persuade donors to invest in your organization, and appeal to landowners or members of the community who may at first be hesitant.

9. **Listening.** Being a good listener is the top skill of an effective leader. It's important in many professions and for building relationships with donors and landowners. Leaders need to be able to listen to what's going on around them and to what their staff/board/communities are asking for.
10. **Empathy.** The ability to put oneself in another person's shoes is a highly desirable trait. From a landowner inquiring about donating or protecting their beloved family land, to a donor making a memorial gift, to a staff person struggling with personal challenges, these situations are highly emotional. Having empathy and making people feel understood and at ease is invaluable.

THE TIME IS NOW

Approximately 20 years ago, I attended a land preservation seminar by Boston tax attorney Steve Small. He told the audience that most landowners are 55 to 65 years of age and older and that over the next 25-30 years we will witness the largest transfer and sale of lands—much of it to development—in our nation's history. That time has come.

If your land conservancy can protect a significant amount of land every year and maximize publicity and fundraising opportunities for every project, not only will you be combating climate change, protecting biodiversity, wildlife and clean water, and providing all residents in your community with access to nature, you will be creating a recipe for success that gets noticed and attracts more supporters.

So keep these words from Michelangelo in mind when you hire your next executive director: "The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it." An effective executive director will determine whether you meet or exceed Bowman's goal. ☺

KIRT MANECKE is an award-winning author and former executive director of a northern Michigan land conservancy. He is a consultant to land conservancies. Find him at KirtManecke.com.



YOU WANT A LEADER WHO IS DETERMINED TO PURCHASE AND PROTECT THAT BEAUTIFUL TRACT OF NATURAL LAND YOUR COMMUNITY CHERISHES BEFORE IT'S BOUGHT FOR DEVELOPMENT.



DI. GLUSSON, IJFREELY IMAGEWORKS

CALCULATING THE COST OF PERPETUITY

↑ The costs of stewardship are varied but you can plan for them.

How can a land trust best plan for the true costs of conservation in perpetuity, including stewardship and legal defense costs? Disputes are increasingly common, with neighbors and successor owners making land conservation stewardship costly. TerraFirma's 541 land trusts have filed 1,339 claims since 2013, with 66% filing at least one claim. There are two calculators that can assist with projecting these costs.

You will have better results with the calculators if you have:

- Established policies on funding, investment and conservation management.
- Specific annual stewardship activities.
- At least two years of itemized tracking of all costs and expenses.
- Tracking of date, cost, frequency and severity of problems.
- Tracking of frequency and difficulty of approval and interpretation requests.
- Tracking of notices and exercise of permitted uses and rights.
- Knowledge of your insurance portfolio.
- A complete list of all your conservation holdings.

STEWARDSHIP FUND CALCULATOR

A stewardship fund calculator can help you set aside the appropriate amount for owned land, conservation easements, trail easements, restrictions and covenants.

Land trusts must consider funding for problem identification, documentation and resolution. The costs and risks associated with your land trust's policies and activities are part of the cost analysis in obtaining perpetual stewardship funding.

To use the calculator to estimate the long-term stewardship costs associated with conservation, both owned land and partial interests, your organization must have tracked costs and time—both of which tend to be more than anticipated. Stewardship administration varies in intensity over time and has become more difficult and expensive, given frequent extreme natural disasters. Neighbors and successor owners also increase routine stewardship administration and the need for problem resolution.

Ideally, your stewardship funds, separate from your operating account and reserves, should generate sufficient

income to cover between 75-100% of a land trust's annual routine stewardship costs and all of your exposure on legal defense liability, as discussed below.

CONSERVATION DEFENSE CALCULATOR

Unavoidably, some problems escalate into full disputes involving experts, mediators and lawyers. About 3% of the time, a full dispute needs judicial intervention. The median cost for TerraFirma's open covered claims is approximately \$41,321.50 in 2021. This is more than two-and-a-half times the 2019 median of \$16,263 and almost five times the 2018 median of \$8,500.

Dispute resolution costs are trending upward steeply. Most of this rise appears to relate to the duration of disputes. TerraFirma is seeing disputes increase with determined successor owners and neighbors who are unwilling to accept that the conservation organization has property rights that they must protect. Accounting for infrequent but very expensive disputes, as well as the more typical lower cost but frequent disputes, is what the legal defense reserve calculator does.

With this starting information, you can assess what your organization's needs to fund perpetual stewardship administration and the costs to uphold permanent land conservation.

TerraFirma insures its members against the liability and costs of defending conservation. Learn more at terrafirma.org. ☺

RESOURCES

Stewardship administration calculator at: nature.org/stewardshipcalculator

Legal defense reserve calculator at: terrafirma.org/info/calculator

Land Trust Standards and Practices, elements 12A1, 12A2, 11A2, 6A5, at: landtrustalliance.org/topics/land-trust-standards-and-practices

Long-Term Stewardship Calculator Handbook: conservationgateway.org/ConservationPlanning/ToolsData/Pages/stewardshipcalculator.aspx



PHOTO COURTESY OF INDIAN RIVER LAND TRUST

↑
Kayaks ready for a paddle
on Indian River Lagoon.

CAMPAIGN 101: IS YOUR LAND TRUST READY?

By **TIM NURVALA**, **HOLLIS HUNT**, **KEN GRUDENS** and **CHRISTINE WALKER**

If you are wondering whether now is a good time for your organization to launch a campaign, consider the current state of philanthropy: There has never been more giving in the United States than at this moment in time. In 2020, the total amount of giving was \$471 billion across all sectors—that’s a 5.1% increase over the year before—with about \$16 billion going to environmental groups. Despite how tough a year 2020 was, people remained generous. And younger people are giving more to environmental causes than other cohorts, a trend that’s expected to continue as they become more successful in their careers and build up their own net worth.

CASE STUDY: INDIAN RIVER LAND TRUST

Based in Vero Beach, Florida, Indian River Land Trust (IRLT) is a county-wide land trust focused on protecting Indian River Lagoon—an estuary of national significance—to preserve the wildlife habitat, natural resources and scenic waterfront of the lagoon and to provide access for public education and recreation. Over the past 10-plus years, IRLT has acquired 1,200 acres and 12 miles of shoreline along the lagoon.

In 2019, IRLT launched a campaign to raise \$10 million to acquire and restore important property on the lagoon and bolster its land stewardship endowment. Through a carefully planned and executed campaign, the organization exceeded its goal—raising \$12 million before the public campaign launch this past November. Here are some of the steps they followed to get there.

READY, SET, GO: FROM PLANNING TO LAUNCH

There are many reasons to have a campaign, from achieving your strategic goals to building awareness. Identifying the “why” is the first step of getting ready. For IRLT, the opportunity to purchase an important property was the catalyst that motivated their staff and board members. Next step is to assess your land trust to determine its readiness for a campaign—do you have defined goals? Is your database in good shape? Do you have a compelling story to tell? Do you have volunteers?

Once you’ve done this, it’s critical to conduct a feasibility study. This is a very important thing to do because it will protect your organization in many ways. The feasibility study conducted by an external campaign consultant gives you and your volunteers the confidence that you can raise the money. Along with additional data and analytics, this study will help you establish a campaign goal that is challenging yet achievable. It is always better to exceed a modest goal than it is to set a high goal and struggle to reach it.

CAMPAIGN BUILDING BLOCKS

There are four fundamental building blocks of any successful campaign: a compelling case for support, committed

THANK DONORS OFTEN AND PROFUSELY WITH HANDWRITTEN NOTES, PHONE CALLS AND STEWARDSHIP EVENTS.

leadership, abundant prospects and a comprehensive plan.

The case for support is your rationale for the initiative. It has to be persuasive and compelling. Use the case to tell a story of why this is important to do now and why you are the right group to do the job.

Leadership is an essential pillar to any successful campaign. Your board of directors and executive director are important, but you also want to engage other volunteer leaders. Identify a campaign chairperson and create an executive committee made up of various constituent groups that will become the guiding body of the campaign. For all these people, set clear expectations about their roles. Your committee doesn’t have to be new. IRLT actually used an existing standing committee, the marketing and fundraising committee, which was a natural fit.

It will take some research to identify your prospects, but the best donors are people who have affinity for your cause, the capacity to give and to whom you have access. If you put all of these three things together, you come up with your most likely donors—start here. Remember to always ask for the largest gifts first. That’s somewhat jarring to many people, but it helps you create the momentum you need in a campaign. Major gifts inspire other gifts.

Finally, develop a comprehensive plan that contains your timeline, structure, roles and responsibilities, goals and benchmarks, gift-acceptance policies and more. The most important part is the phasing, because you don’t want to be doing everything all at once. You want to have a sequence to this that will help your volunteers and your staff understand what you’re going to be doing at every step along the way.

An important note about budget: You need to put some resources in at the very start to get the campaign off the ground. For local or regional campaigns, you can usually budget about 6 to 8 cents per

dollar you expect to raise. For larger, broader campaigns where there is some national focus, you’re looking at 10 cents on the dollar or more. Identify all your costs—marketing materials, meetings, events, postage for mass mailings and big-ticket items like staffing.

SUCCESS!

You’ve planned your campaign, launched it and succeeded! What happens after the campaign? Make sure that you’re delivering all of the donor recognition that you promised during the course of the campaign, and that you’re collecting on the pledges that people have signed—we usually see a pledge redemption rate of around 90-95%. Refocus your message on the impact of the campaign. You want people to feel good about what they enabled you to do with their gifts and their donations. That will set you up very well for the next campaign, which is probably not too far around the corner after people are done paying their pledges on this current campaign.

TOP TIPS:

- Engage your board and key stakeholders early in the process to generate buy-in.
- Conduct a feasibility and planning study.
- Identify, research and prioritize your top prospects.
- Set a challenging but achievable goal.
- Craft a formal campaign plan with a realistic timeline, policies, budget and benchmarks to evaluate your success.
- Develop a compelling case for support that will inspire a wide audience.

This article was adapted from a Rally 2021 presentation. If you registered for Rally but missed this session, it’s not too late to view—all session recordings will be available until Mar. 1, 2022, at the Rally website: alliancerally.org/registration2021/. ☺

TIM NURVALA is executive vice president at CCS Fundraising. HOLLIS HUNT is assistant vice president at CCS Fundraising. KEN GRUDENS is executive director of Indian River Land Trust. CHRISTINE WALKER is former director of marketing and philanthropy at Indian River Land Trust.



Members of the Disability Network Northern Michigan make their way to the overlook at Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy's Arcadia Dunes: The C.S. Mott Nature Preserve.

ENSURING NO ONE GETS LEFT BEHIND

A NEW GUIDE FROM THE ALLIANCE HELPS LAND TRUSTS IMPROVE DISABILITY INCLUSION AND ACCESS TO NATURE FOR ALL

By **CHRISTINA SOTO**

MaryKay O'Donnell loves the outdoors and she loves for her son Jack, an adult with multiple disabilities, to be able to go outdoors as often as possible. "Those two loves go together in my mind. I can personally attest to the importance of accessibility so everyone can benefit from spending time in nature."

been largely overlooked. All people should be provided the opportunity to enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of being in nature. But what are the steps that land trusts can take to expand their diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to include people with disabilities?

The guide begins by defining and describing various types of disabilities, from those that can be seen to those that cannot. It also talks about the power of language, for instance, the outdated term "wheelchair-bound."

"The image I get of being 'wheelchair-bound' is that I'm strapped into my wheelchair," says Lewkowicz. "But the reality is my wheelchair is very liberating."

Then the guide features a brief legal overview of a land trust's responsibilities regarding accessibility. Next come sections on how land trusts and other conservation groups can take steps to expand programming, find partners, improve organizational culture and enhance their communications to better include people with disabilities, with the ultimate goal of inclusion to provide people with disabilities the same opportunities not just to access nature, but to experience its power to inspire, to excite, to educate, to soothe and to heal.

Case studies tell the stories of how four land trusts (all accredited) took practical steps toward opening up their programs to people with disabilities.

- **Grassroots Gardens of Western New York** created a Therapeutic Gardening Initiative to promote places for healing in times of crisis and also formed a "Gardening for All" task force. Through the support of the New York State

She also had an epiphany of sorts. "It wasn't until Jack was a teenager, when he was no longer able to be lifted over boulders or carried on our backs, that it hit home for me: Barriers to accessibility don't just affect the person with a disability," says O'Donnell, Midwest senior program manager with the Land Trust Alliance. "If that person can't go, neither will their families, friends or caregivers. Additionally, if information is scarce, people living with disability are often forced to make choices to not attend events or explore trails because they don't know if they can."

O'Donnell's work on the Land Trust Alliance's new online guide, "Open to All: A Disability Inclusion Guide for Land Trusts," was both professional and personal. She co-led a council made up of people in conservation with direct experience of how barriers to access affect them or their loved ones—people such as Bonnie Lewkowicz, program manager for the Bay Area Outreach & Recreation Program in California.

"People with disabilities want the same connection with nature for all the same reasons as people without

disabilities," says Lewkowicz. "It's much more than just getting out and enjoying nature together; it really becomes about creating a sense of community."

Disability crosses all lines. In the United States over 26% of adults have a disability. There are many types of disability, generally falling into the following categories: physical or mobility, sensory, developmental/intellectual/cognitive, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and mental health conditions and mental illness. Someone can be born with a disability or acquire it later in life. It is also important to understand that not all disabilities are obvious. During a session at Rally 2020 called "Engaging People with Disabilities to Improve Access to the Health Benefits of Nature," one participant shared, "Really appreciate you mentioning hidden disabilities. I have been frequently told that my invisible disabilities 'do not count' by people in the outdoor industry!"

The "Open to All" guide explains how land trusts can play a transformational role in improving access to nature for people with disabilities. The Land Trust Alliance—with funding from Lakeshore Foundation—produced the guide to raise awareness that people with disabilities living in land trusts' communities have



ART BUKOWSKI



GRASSROOTS GARDENS OF WESTERN NEW YORK



ANTHONY TUSLER



(Left) Bonnie Lewkowicz leads a bird walk on the Bird Walk Coastal Access Trail in Bodega Bay, California.

(Right) Gerldine Wilson, who is legally blind, is Grassroots Gardens' lead gardener and founder of the Victoria Avenue Community Garden.

Conservation Partnership Program and the Land Trust Alliance, they evaluated the local community and school garden network to determine what needed to change and created an accessibility initiative to make the gardens physically and programmatically accessible to everyone, including local gardeners living with disabilities.

- **Blue Hill Heritage Trust** in Maine participated in a pilot program with Speaking Up For Us (SUFU), a statewide advocacy group run by and for adults living with developmental disabilities.
- **Mohonk Preserve** in New York realized that schoolchildren with disabilities were being left behind on field trip days

to the preserve and set out to take down the barriers keeping the children from being able to attend.

- And **Solano Land Trust** in California partnered with Access Adventure to invite community members living with disabilities to join them at the “design table,” pulling together an accessibility advisory team to help the land trust improve recreation facilities with the goal of making everyone feel comfortable accessing everything the land trust properties have to offer.

The guide wraps up with a “Where to Begin Checklist” and a link to a comprehensive list of resources.

By developing inclusive programming, land trusts can provide all people the opportunity to experience the joys and benefits of being in nature, and no one gets left behind. Find the new guide at: landtrustalliance.org/topics/community-conservation/disability. For questions or comments on the guide, please send an email to: disabilityguide@lta.org.

CHRISTINA SOTO is the former editor of Saving Land.



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Award Winners

CELEBRATING LEADERSHIP AND EXCELLENCE

One of the most joyful aspects of Rally is honoring the winners of the Alliance’s conservation awards. This year, three awards were presented to outstanding leaders in the land conservation community.



DI GLISSON / IFFREELY IMAGEWORKS

↑ Dr. Mark Anderson

KINGSBURY BROWNE CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP AWARD AND LINCOLN INSTITUTE OF LAND POLICY FELLOWSHIP:

MARK ANDERSON

Since 2006, the Alliance has presented the Kingsbury Browne Conservation Leadership Award to an individual who enriches the conservation community with their leadership, innovation and creativity. Named after the conservationist who inspired the Alliance’s founding in 1982, the award ranks among the organization’s highest honors.

At this year’s virtual Rally, the Alliance was thrilled to present the award to Dr. Mark Anderson, director of The Nature Conservancy’s Center for Resilient Conservation Science. Anderson was recognized for his scientific leadership and his “incredible collegiality, kindness and humility,” in the words of Alliance President and CEO Andrew Bowman.

“For years, Mark has been at the forefront of climate science and how to combine it effectively with ecology,” says Bowman. “For his visionary climate work and his longstanding commitment to the land trust community, we are honored to name Mark this year’s Kingsbury Browne Conservation Leadership Award winner.”

Over the last decade of his 30-year career in conservation, Anderson has led the effort to identify and map climate resilient lands and waters across the continental United States, a project considered groundbreaking and “a game-changer for the conservation community,” says Jan Glendening, The Nature Conservancy’s regional managing director for North America. “We now have a roadmap that shows how nature can thrive in the face of climate change,” says Glendening.

The Kingsbury Browne Fellowship is hosted by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and provides recipients with the opportunity to engage in research, writing and mentoring, and facilitate a project that builds upon and shares their experience with the broader community.

In accepting his award, Anderson turned attention toward his colleagues in the conservation field.

“I want to thank all of you in the land trust community. In a world that seems to thrive on bluster and confrontation, it is amazing to be part of a community that is centered on caring. And not just for people, but for the trees, mosses, egrets, bobcats, salamanders and the very land and water that sustain us, and all the things that make life so rich and beautiful,” says Anderson. “When I wake up in the morning, what inspires me and keeps me going is the work that you do, so thank you for that.”

**NATIONAL LAND TRUST EXCELLENCE AWARD
FOR AN ALL-VOLUNTEER GROUP:**

TEWKSBURY LAND TRUST

The accredited Tewksbury Land Trust received a National Land Trust Excellence Award for its work on the 10 Mile Trail, a network of trails and preserved lands located just 50 miles west of New York City in northern New Jersey.

“A project of this scope would be impressive for any land trust to undertake,” says Bowman. “But it’s particularly impressive for an all-volunteer organization to take on.”

Development of the 10 Mile Trail was a collaborative project by Tewksbury Land Trust, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Raritan Headwaters, Hunterdon County Division of Parks and Recreation and local landowners that has fostered unity and “knitted this little community together,” says Chris Teasdale, secretary for Tewksbury Land Trust.

“It’s so important that we preserve the last vestiges of open space in the township, because the development pressures are intense,” adds Teasdale.

“Long after we’re gone, generations of future Tewksbury residents and the broader community will have the 10 Mile Trail to enjoy,” says Ken Klipstein, Tewksbury Land Trust’s founder and past president.

**NATIONAL LAND TRUST EXCELLENCE AWARD
FOR A STAFFED GROUP:**

WOOD RIVER LAND TRUST

Idaho’s Wood River Land Trust (accredited) received a National Land Trust Excellence Award for its work on Hailey Greenway, a project that creates a refuge for people to connect with nature in a place “where there is so much open space around but much of it is inaccessible to everyday use,” says Executive Director Scott Boettger. Located close to the center of the city’s business district, Hailey Greenway encompasses 450 acres and two public parks with beautiful trails along the banks of the Big Wood River.

“I think the land trust has proven to be the best partner any community could have,” says Martha Burke, mayor of Hailey, Idaho. “I am so grateful that this is part of my community and whenever things get tough, I can come here and feel restored.”

Hundreds of visitors seek out the Hailey Greenway each week, to stroll across the Bow Bridge, walk the trails by the river and find respite and renewal in nature.

In accepting the award at Rally, Boettger offered these words to other land trusts: “I’d like to encourage others to continue to lean-in when it comes to different issues in our communities and what is relevant. Don’t shy away from mission creep, think about what your organization can do to make a difference.” ☺



PHOTO COURTESY OF NINA JEFFRIES

↑ Fellowship winner Nina Jeffries plans to apply for law school in the future and work toward justice-centered approaches to conservation and environmental law.

**Congratulations to Our
Conservation Scholars**

For the third year in a row, the Alliance’s Scholars for Conservation Leadership Program will provide career and leadership development opportunities for college students of underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds interested in pursuing careers in natural resource management and conservation. In addition, one student is selected to receive a fellowship with a host land trust in 2022. If your land trust is interested in being a host, please apply at lta.org/scholar-fellowship-host by Jan. 31, 2022.

THE NINE SCHOLARS ARE:

Cean'e Batten

University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Courtney Belcher

University of Maryland, College Park

Kendall Griffith

North Carolina State University

Destiny Hester

College of Charleston

Nina Jeffries

University of Maryland, College Park
(fellowship winner)

Summer Lauder

North Carolina Agricultural and
Technical State University

Lisette Perez

University of Missouri-Columbia

Natashia Sawabi

University of Massachusetts, Amherst



Watch inspiring
videos of our
award winners at
[youtube.com/
LandTrustAlliance.](https://youtube.com/LandTrustAlliance)



DEVON CASE



Presumpscot Regional Land Trust's Hawkes Preserve features trails that run alongside the Presumpscot River in Gorham, Maine.

ACCREDITATION AT ANY SIZE: By CAITY PINKARD

WHAT MOTIVATES LAND TRUSTS TO APPLY FOR ACCREDITATION

When the Presumpscot Regional Land Trust in Maine merged with three nonprofits in 2016 and 2017, the organization was at a crossroads. “As a small regional land trust that had grown quickly, our leadership was motivated to create systems that would ensure our future sustainability,” recalls Rachelle Current Apse, the executive director of Presumpscot, and one of two full-time staff. “It was clear that accreditation was a key component toward becoming more sustainable.”

Going through the accreditation process helped Presumpscot bring all of its internal policies up to best practices, and meet their promise of protecting land in perpetuity. “With accreditation, we joined the hundreds of land trusts around the country leading the land conservation movement,” says Apse. “The seal offers us the

assurance that we have the systems in place to keep the promise of forever conserving land.” And while land trusts apply for accreditation for diverse reasons, meeting this promise of perpetuity is chief among them. Even with one full-time and one part-time staff at the Historic Virginia Land Conservancy (HVLC), Executive Director Patrice Sadler describes a similar motivation behind HVLC’s application for accreditation after nearly 25 years of business.

“Accreditation is referred to as a mark of distinction,” Sadler says. “After decades dedicated to the same national quality standards that the Commission professes, including sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship, accreditation became a clear and natural conclusion for us.” Since achieving its first accreditation in 2015, Sadler feels HVLC has only continued to benefit from the standards implied by the seal. “The value of accreditation is demonstrated every time we meet with a landowner,” Sadler explains. “A landowner’s initial thoughts about giving up any property rights—forever—is often met with trepidation. That accreditation seal helps to authenticate the organization and its mission.”

While the benefits of accreditation are well known, the application process can still seem intimidating to land trusts applying for the first time. Sadler notes “the volume of information requested is enormous and involves projects spanning the life of the business.” That said, she doesn’t think the added work should deter land trusts motivated to apply. “I strongly suggest reaching out to the Commission for direction if one finds themselves standing at a crossroads,” she says. Not only can the Commission guide the organization through unexpected issues, but they can also support land trust staff in navigating the overall process.

Of course, the Commission and the Alliance aren’t the only sources of support for land trusts approaching accreditation. As Apse notes, there is already a network of land trusts nationwide waiting to be tapped into. “We had support from many lands trusts in the region who had already been accredited,” Apse says. “As such, we didn’t have to reinvent the wheel, and instead learned from others.”

Despite the rigors of accreditation, the process is well worth the effort. “A land trust cannot help but be strengthened by the process,” Sadler explains. But it’s also more than that. “The landowner, organization and community benefit from an accredited organization, which is fortified, and can comfort the public when making huge decisions about permanently forfeiting property rights in the name of land protection.” And that means land trusts all across the nation can better meet their fundamental promise: protection in perpetuity. ☺

This is the second story in a series that explores how land trusts of any size can achieve accreditation.

CAITY PINKARD is a freelance writer and communications manager at the NDC Partnership.

CELEBRATE RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION

Renewal of accreditation keeps land trusts on the leading edge of conservation practices. Renewal shows your land trust's commitment to sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance and lasting stewardship. It is an investment that helps strengthen your organization, engage your board and staff and better position your land trust to defend and steward its land. Congratulations to the newest renewal class of land trusts and thank you for continuing to lead the way in conservation excellence.

RENEWALS

- Aiken Land Conservancy (SC)
- Candlewood Valley Regional Land Trust (CT)
- Central Arizona Land Trust (AZ)
- Colorado Headwaters Land Trust (CO)
- Cornwall Conservation Trust (CT)
- Door County Land Trust (WI)
- Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust (CT)
- Hilltown Land Trust (MA)
- John Muir Land Trust (CA)
- Katy Prairie Conservancy (TX)
- Kent Land Trust (CT) ♦
- Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley (CA)
- Little Forks Conservancy (MI) ♦
- Maine Coast Heritage Trust (ME) ♦
- Mainspring Conservation Trust (NC) ♦
- Pacific Forest Trust (CA) ♦
- Piedmont Land Conservancy (NC) ♦
- Potomac Conservancy (MD) ♦
- Ridge and Valley Conservancy (NJ)
- Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (NM)

List as of November 2021
♦ Second Renewals

WE'RE ACCREDITED! WHAT'S NEXT? Achieving accreditation is an exciting time for your organization. It is also a great opportunity to let your community know you have been verified to be practicing at the highest conservation standards. The Commission has resources that can help your organization share what it means to be accredited. Your organization can display the seal proudly; you've earned it, now you can use it!

Promotion packets: Check out our new media packets for promoting first-time and renewed accreditation. Featuring social media posts, a press release template, tips and resources, these packets will help your organization form a plan to get the word out.

New video: Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words ... and a video even more! You are encouraged to share our newest video with your community; it's a great way to explain what accreditation means for your land trust and for the land trust community.

Find both resources at landtrustaccreditation.org/promoting-your-accreditation.



Children work on building a fairy house at Presumpscot Regional Land Trust's Black Brook Preserve in Windham, Maine.



COURTESY OF PRESUMPSCOT REGIONAL LAND TRUST

BY THE NUMBERS

SMALL STAFFED LAND TRUSTS

(Data compiled from part-time staff only and up to two full-time staff.)

137

Accredited

608,365

Acres in conservation easements

108,239

Acres in fee properties

\$237,783

Average operating budget

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

landtrustaccreditation.org



LET'S KEEP GAINING GROUND

Land trusts have already conserved **61 million acres of private land in the U.S.** — more than the total area of all national parks combined. Help us keep gaining ground by doubling that by 2030.

Your support will ensure we can continue providing land trusts with the vision, tools and resources to keep conserving more land.

**61
MILLION**

Conserved Acres of
Private Land in the U.S.

MAKE YOUR GIFT BY MIDNIGHT ON DECEMBER 31, 2021
at donate.lta.org or by using the envelope enclosed in this magazine.