

Land Trust   
 Accreditation Commission  
 An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

# Conservation Legislation Aided by Accreditation

**W**hen one land trust becomes accredited, that land trust increases trust, validation and respect in its work. When over 300 land trusts become accredited, the land trust community increases its collective might, making a difference in legislative actions for conservation around the country.

Cherie Kearney, forest conservation director for Columbia Land Trust (WA), says accreditation is “allowing us to speak with one confident voice on behalf of land trusts. When we have legislative discussions, we are able to say, with confidence, accreditation is our professional standard and our validation. We are holding the standard so the legislature doesn’t have to check out each individual land trust.”

According to Molly Doran, executive director of Skagit Land Trust (WA) and vice chair of the Accreditation Commission accreditation basically stands for what legislators want: “land trusts they can count on to meet professional standards.”

“Every time I approach my state legislature about funding and every time I discuss the conservation easement tax deductions with federal representatives, I make sure they know that not only is my land trust accredited but that there is a whole body of accredited land trusts working to meet high standards and meet the public trust,” says Doran.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program funds the state’s natural resource, fish and wildlife and parks agencies, she explains. “In 2016 the legislature finally allowed land trusts to apply and compete for these funds. This *big* change in the program demonstrated that land trusts had proven credibility and professional standards.”

“I have always felt strongly about safeguarding our environment for future generations,” says Rep. Rob Wittman (VA). “As a member of the House Committee on Natural Resources and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Caucus, I’m working to find ways to wisely and effectively protect the environment. That means streamlining processes, increasing accountability and collaborating with folks outside of government who have an understanding of the obstacles we’re facing. To that end, members of the land trust community that have attained the distinction of accreditation have been strong partners.”

Kearney notes, “Legislators asked hard questions: ‘How can we be sure land trusts will be able to steward these properties? Will land trusts be around deep into the future (like public agencies)? Can land trusts manage public funds to our standards?’ We were able to say ‘yes’ to all of these due to *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and accreditation.”

Fernando Lloveras, executive director of the Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico and Land Trust Alliance board member, says that in Puerto Rico the legislature went as far as incorporating *Land Trust Standards and Practices* into the conservation easement law. Lloveras says, “Recent amendments require that any land trust receiving easement donations must be accredited and follow *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. These



SUZANNE FOGARTY

Every time Molly Doran of Skagit Land Trust (WA) approaches her state legislature about funding, she makes sure they know that her land trust is accredited.

requirements guarantee that all land trusts perform rigorous baseline documentation, good governance practices and follow the correct appraisal methodology.”

Influencing legislators requires demonstrating “doing business in an ethically sound and highly professional manner,” says Caren Schumacher, executive director of Historic Virginia Land Conservancy. “As the number of accredited land trusts grows, so does the integrity of the entire land trust community.” Schumacher says that during her 15 years in land conservation, their work has come under greater scrutiny. “It’s so important that we’re doing business correctly: When we are all tied together through accreditation, the more effective we can be.”

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