

SAVING

# LAND

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FALL 2022



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## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

RETURN ON ENVIRONMENT

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

LEARN.INSPIRE.ACT

 Land Trust Alliance  
Together, conserving the places you love

1982  
**40**  
2022



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## Land Trust for Louisiana ornithologist Melanie Driscoll

observes birds at sunrise on Live Oak Farm. Rice farms are an excellent site for birding, thanks to an ecosystem that attracts and supports a large variety of coastal bird species. Operated by the same family for over 100 years, Live Oak Farm in Vermilion Parish is one of Louisiana's largest remaining rice farms. The farm is the site of the state's first Agricultural Land Easement (ALE), which will help safeguard agricultural production and bird habitat as Louisiana's coastal marshes disappear. The ALE project is a collaboration among the family, Land Trust for Louisiana (accredited), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Conservation Fund, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and North American Wetlands Conservation Act. At the farm, a new generation of family members— young producers in their 20s and 30s— are managing an integrated, symbiotic system with rice production, wildlife habitat enhancement and responsible protection of the watershed. ☺



BEN JONES

# CONTENTS

↑ Groundswell Conservancy's Patrick Marsh and Westport Prairie (above) inspire visitors, including student groups and, this year, two Writing the Land poets (see story on p. 36).

## DEPARTMENTS

- 5 From the President**  
A time for optimism.
- 6 Conservation News**  
Western bluebirds take flight, a sensory-sensitive outdoor program and new wildlife crossings.
- 10 Capitol Connections**  
Advocating for the 2023 Farm Bill.
- 12 Voiced**  
Finding common ground.
- 22 Land We Love**  
Partners protect a community forest.
- 28 Board Matters**  
Making 30x30 work for you.
- 31 Safeguarding Conservation**  
Water, rights and heirs' property in New Mexico.
- 32 Fundraising Wisdom**  
The latest on cryptocurrency.
- 34 Resources & Tools**  
A new report about the future of farming and a guide to renaming offensive place names.
- 36 People & Places**  
Writing the Land brings poets and land trusts together.
- 38 Accreditation Corner**  
Read these stories of commissioners and become one yourself.

## FEATURES

### 14 Taking the Long View

Working together to build relationships and connect youth to the land, Indigenous tribes and land trusts create lasting collaborations.

By **MARINA SCHAUFFLER**

### 18 In Their Own Words

In honor of the Land Trust Alliance's 40th anniversary, land trust leaders share their visions for the future of conservation and how we get there.

Featuring **AIMEE DORVAL, TOM KAY, SARAH KNEBEL, JONATHAN LOK, CINDY MONTAÑEZ and EMILY WARNER**

### 24 Seeing Anew the Value of Conservation

A new take on ROI (return on investment) brings the focus to nature's economic benefits along the Kittatinny Ridge.

By **MARINA SCHAUFFLER**

ON THE COVER:  
A new federal landscape designation will benefit Indiana's habitat and wildlife, including the short-eared owl. Read the story on p. 7.

MARTY JONES

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Land Trust Alliance supporter David Hartwell

# JOIN OTHERS WHO CARE

Have you noticed the impact of climate change or witnessed a special place you love lost to poorly planned development?

You are not alone. Each day, almost **5,000 acres** per day of natural and working lands are lost to development, wildlife habitat becomes more fractured and our changing climate takes its toll on our most vulnerable community members.

Thankfully you are not alone in doing something about it.

**"I'm only one person. But being a part of this mission and this community, I know I'm making a difference. It makes sense to support the Alliance because it strengthens all local land trusts."**

**—David Hartwell from Minneapolis, MN**

When you support the Land Trust Alliance, it powers land trusts to conserve the places people love, while there's still time.

Join David and many other caring supporters by donating to the Land Trust Alliance. It takes only a moment yet lasts for generations to come.



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# A TIME FOR OPTIMISM

**AS I WRITE THIS**, we are in the third year of a global pandemic, political polarization is worsening and climate change is accelerating. And yet, as I prepare to travel to the Alliance's first in-person Rally in three years, I have hope for the future.

What I love most about Rally is being together with colleagues from across the country. We are all in the business of protecting land, yet our work is as varied as the places we hail from and the people we work with. Coming together to be inspired by different approaches and perspectives, to celebrate victories and tackle shared challenges, is what makes Rally so special.

That diversity of voices is why I'm particularly excited to hear from some of our younger leaders about their thoughts for the future (see "In Their Own Words: Land Trust Leaders Envision the Future" on p. 18). What strikes me is their honest realism about the problems the conservation field faces, but also their optimism. Their determination and vision in the face of profound challenges offer reasons to be hopeful and positive. I hope you will find their words as inspiring as I do.

Passage of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 is another reason to feel optimistic. This landmark legislation (see p. 6) is the largest investment in climate action ever made by the federal government and includes a substantial increase in funding for Farm Bill conservation programs. This influx of funding represents a huge opportunity for land



ALEXIA KAUFMAN

trusts to make bigger conservation gains, and it acknowledges the critical role that voluntary private land conservation plays in addressing climate change and its impacts.

I am grateful to be a part of a community that is important, impactful and gaining ground every day. Thank you for all you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Bowman".

ANDREW BOWMAN

# INCLUSIVITY FOR SENSORY-SENSITIVE PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES



THE TRUSTEES OF RESERVATIONS

↑ A child spends time with a goat at Weir River Farm.

**L**and trust events and spaces aren't always accessible for sensory-sensitive people, but a partnership with the Autism Alliance is helping The Trustees of Reservations in Massachusetts make its properties more welcoming to everyone.

The Autism Alliance recently trained staff of the Trustees' Weir River Farm in Hingham on how to make simple but meaningful changes that help people with autism and their families enjoy the trails and barnyard. As a Sensory Responsive Property, the farm now offers calm kits with noise reducing headphones, visual story guides that can help families preview what to expect prior to their visit, and limited admissions to certain programs to decrease crowds and noise.

A sensory-friendly open barnyard event at the farm earlier this year was a hit among the families who participated.

"My son has been obsessed with cows since he was 2 years old. I have never felt comfortable bringing him to a farm for fear of crowds, excessive noise or the possibility of him acting out," wrote one parent who offered caregiver feedback after the event. "I found this event online, and I can't believe it—we are having our first barnyard experience."

A sensory-friendly sunset picnic at Weir River Farm in July featured live music, lawn games and food trucks. "Families felt safe because of the accommodations we made," says Anne Smith-White, Trustees director of South Shore, South Coast and Cape Cod properties. "They enjoyed being together with other families, and they were grateful to have a fun program that met the needs of both their neurodiverse and neurotypical kids." ☺

# Landmark Climate Legislation Signed into Law

**I**n August, President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 into law. Congress passed this historic legislation that includes \$369 billion to address climate change. It is the largest federal investment in climate action and has the potential to reduce U.S. emissions by 40% by 2030. The IRA brings many benefits for land conservation, including an investment of \$20 billion for Farm Bill conservation programs, which would be in addition to funding included in the 2018 Farm Bill.

"The increase in funding of Farm Bill conservation programs is a clear acknowledgment of the critical role that private landowners will continue to play in addressing climate change and its impacts," says Andrew Bowman, president and CEO of the Land Trust Alliance. "This is an unprecedented investment in voluntary private land conservation and the work of land trusts across the country



DI GLISSON, I/IFIRELY IMAGEWORKS

← In addition to the funding for Farm Bill conservation programs, the IRA includes billions of dollars to conserve, restore and enhance forests and coastal areas.

to protect our irreplaceable farmlands, forests, ranches and wetlands."

While the bill was passed along partisan lines, the Alliance will continue to work in a nonpartisan manner to advance natural climate solutions, which enjoy broad, bipartisan support. The bill presents an opportunity to highlight the benefits of investing in voluntary private land conservation, both to America's communities

and achieving the nation's climate goals. Land trusts and the landowners they work with can amplify their role in reaching climate goals by tapping these new federal resources to implement natural climate solutions, such as avoided conversion and improved forest management. ☺

—  
*Read more about how the Alliance is gearing up for the 2023 Farm Bill on p. 10.*



STEVE GIFFORD

↑ Wildlife and habitats in Indiana will benefit from an infusion of state funding and a new federal designation.

## NEW 3.5 MILLION-ACRE SENTINEL LANDSCAPE IN INDIANA

**A**n area larger than Yellowstone National Park is now designated a sentinel landscape in southern Indiana by a federal program that establishes natural buffers around military installations.

A sentinel landscape—as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense and Department of the Interior, which administer the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership program—is an area where natural and working lands are well suited to protect U.S. defense facilities from incompatible land uses.

More than 3.5 million acres in southern Indiana will form the Southern Indiana Sentinel Landscape, which buffers four DoD installations and ranges that provide testing and training for the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and National Guard. The landscape includes numerous state parks; forests and fish and wildlife areas; one national forest; three national wildlife refuges and 39 state-dedicated nature preserves. In addition to state and federal agencies, partners on the project include six land trusts. Within sentinel landscape boundaries, private landowners, land trusts and other groups can access additional state and federal resources, including funding for conservation easements and sustainable management practices.

There are now 10 sentinel landscape areas across the U.S. In addition to strengthening military readiness and conserving natural and working land, the landscapes also are meant to address natural resources concerns like climate change.

In other positive news for Indiana conservation, the state also recently dedicated \$25 million to acquire land for nature preserves, parks and other conservation areas—the largest amount of conservation funding at one time in state history. The money will bolster the state’s Next Level Conservation Trust, administered by Indiana’s Department of Natural Resources, which helps entities fund the acquisition of land. ☺

## Family Ranch Receives Colorado Leopold Conservation Award

**I**n 2018, a wildfire burned nearly half of the ranch where Keith and Shelley Pankey raise beef cattle and hay with their sons, Kevin and Justin, and their families in Moffat and Routt counties in northwestern Colorado.

But the Pankeys and their ranch were resilient. Following the fire, the Pankeys cleaned their ash-filled ponds and aerically reseeded native grasses on 900 acres in the fire’s path.

The family has a long history of conservation practices. The Pankeys are involved with a large-scale conservation effort led by Trout Unlimited to stabilize Elk Head Creek’s riparian corridor. The family’s leadership in raising awareness of the creek’s impaired health has inspired other landowners to adopt conservation practices.

For their land stewardship, the Pankey Ranch received the 2022 Colorado Leopold Conservation Award®. The award, given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, recognizes ranchers, farmers and forestland owners who inspire others with their voluntary conservation efforts on private, working lands.

The Pankeys were presented with the award in June at the Colorado Cattlemen’s Association’s Annual Convention in Colorado Springs. The family previously protected their Routt County property with an agricultural conservation easement through the accredited Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust.

“The Pankey family are tremendous land stewards and fully embody Aldo Leopold’s land ethic,” says Erik Glenn, Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust executive director.

Sand County Foundation and American Farmland Trust present the Leopold Conservation Award in 23 states. ☺



COURTESY OF SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

↑ The Pankey family worked with Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust to protect their ranchland.



SAMANTHA SEGEL

↑ A community effort to save the Angel Oak has moved into a new phase, with Lowcountry Land Trust planning a preserve to surround the massive tree.

## PLANNING UNDERWAY FOR ANGEL OAK TREE PRESERVE

**T**he magnificent tree known as Angel Oak in South Carolina’s Lowcountry region is estimated to be centuries old. Native Americans once used the tree as a ceremonial meeting place. The land surrounding the tree has also been a plantation, a freedman’s village and a place where Johns Islanders, including Civil Rights activist Septima P. Clark, could rest under the shade.

Over a decade ago, the accredited Lowcountry Land Trust partnered with nonprofits, public entities and community members to protect the tree and its ecosystem. The land trust named its Angel Oak Effect program after a grassroots effort that rallied, raised donations and saved the tree after the surrounding land was approved for development.

Now, Lowcountry Land Trust has moved into a new phase: a planning process for the Angel Oak Preserve, a 35-acre property surrounding the city’s 9-acre Angel Oak Park and the iconic oak.

The land trust selected landscape architecture firm Nelson Byrd Woltz of Charlottesville, Virginia, to design a publicly accessible green space that honors the rural and cultural context of the land. The process launched this summer and will include public meetings, surveys and stakeholder interviews with a completed design in 2023.

“We look forward to working with the community to bring this special place to life in a way that honors its history and its important role in today’s growing landscape,” says Ashley Demosthenes, Lowcountry Land Trust president and CEO. ☺

## Utah Monastery Preserved as Working Farm

**A** 1,050-acre monastery in Huntsville, Utah, has been protected through a collaboration between the Summit Land Conservancy (accredited) and Ogden Valley Land Trust. The Huntsville Monastery was a Trappist Cistercian monastery established in 1947 by monks who mostly were veterans of World War II.

The monks were also active farmers, ranchers and beekeepers who sold bread, jam and their famous creamed honey. The monastery closed in 2017 when the surviving monks were too old to sustain the operation. Current owners Bill White and Wynstonn Wangsgard continue farming, including alfalfa, barley, cattle grazing and honeybees.

The Summit Land Conservancy and Ogden Valley Land Trust worked with the landowners to complete a permanent conservation easement on the property, with help from an \$8.8 million grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

Located near the sub-alpine forests in the Wasatch Range, the easement area provides critical winter habitat for hundreds of Rocky Mountain elk, contains seasonal wetlands for migratory birds, and serves as a wildlife corridor for two endangered species: the Canada lynx and yellow-billed cuckoo.

“To Father Brendan: We hope that you and the other monks feel a sense of pride knowing that your generosity will yield benefits to the people of this valley for generations to come,” said White when the land was protected. “We know that you could have developed the property and made a lot more money, but in typical monk fashion, you put the spiritual above the temporal and now all of us are reaping the benefits.” ☺



COURTESY OF SUMMIT LAND CONSERVANCY

↑ Barn at Huntsville Monastery, Utah.



# NEW WILDLIFE CROSSINGS ARE COMING TO THE U.S.



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA

↑ Gov. Gavin Newsom joins elected officials and partners at the groundbreaking ceremony for the world’s largest wildlife overpass.

**T**his Earth Day, California celebrated the groundbreaking of the world’s largest wildlife overpass, slated to be finished in 2025. The Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing will provide a vital bridge for mountain lions, bobcats and other Santa Monica Mountain wildlife to roam safely between two large areas of habitat.

Spanning over 10 lanes of busy Highway 101 in the Agoura Hills area when complete, the crossing will be a global model for urban wildlife conservation.

Its groundbreaking is the culmination of over seven years of work by state and federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations, including The Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Federation and the state Coastal Conservancy.

Even low-flying birds will benefit, according to the National Audubon Society. The highway makes it extremely difficult for birds that are not strong flyers to move from the Santa Monica Mountains into habitats farther north, fragmenting a once-continuous ecosystem.

Another California wildlife crossing broke ground in May. Caltrans and the California Natural Resources Agency, along with the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County and the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission, are partnering on the Laurel Curve Wildlife Undercrossing.

The undercrossing will connect nearly 460 acres of land on both sides of the highway that have been preserved by the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County.

With funding for wildlife crossings available from the Biden administration’s \$1 billion America the Beautiful Challenge, the nation may soon see a growing number of projects that improve wildlife connectivity to support biodiverse ecosystems. ☺

## Bluebirds Take Flight

**F**ifteen years after Washington’s San Juan Preservation Trust (SJPT) launched a project to restore Western bluebirds, the accredited land trust’s conservation work is paying off. In June, volunteer Dan Clingaman spotted a Western bluebird nest in a natural cavity of a Garry oak tree, indicating that a bluebird family had moved from an artificial nesting box back to a natural breeding site—an important sign of the species thriving in its traditional ecosystem.

“We’ve been waiting for this moment throughout the history of the Western Bluebird Reintroduction Project,” says Kathleen Foley Lewis, SJPT’s conservation project manager. “It’s a major step toward our goal of reintroducing a self-sustaining population of Western bluebirds to this part of their northern range.”

Western bluebirds evolved alongside Garry oak trees—tied to prairie habitat that has been disappearing over the last 50 years. Land trust volunteers help by restoring oak habitat on the islands every year. Bluebird releases and nest-box placements have occurred on private land with help from local landowners.

“This documented cavity-nesting on San Juan Island highlights the original goals of the Western Bluebird Reintroduction Project: to tie the two species together and have the community understand the importance of oak habitat and the role these trees play, not only for bluebirds but for many other native species,” Lewis says.

Making the story even sweeter, in July the same pair that reared the first clutch of chicks was spotted raising more babies, this time with an older sibling (from the first round) assisting the parents with nesting and feeding duties. ☺

—  
To learn more, watch San Juan Preservation Trust’s video “What’s So Great About Garry Oaks” at [youtu.be/URes20j-6h0](https://youtu.be/URes20j-6h0).



ROSS LOCKWOOD

↑ The Western bluebird spotted by a San Juan Preservation Trust volunteer tends to its nestlings in the cavity of a Garry oak tree.



ASPEN VALLEY LAND TRUST

Farm Bill programs help protect family farms and ranches across the country.

# THE FARM BILL: GEARING UP FOR 2023

By **ROBERT SCHWARTZ**

**N**ext year will mark five years since the 2018 Farm Bill was signed into law. This means it's once again time for Congress to reauthorize this vital legislation. As the single largest source of federal funding for private land conservation, the 2018 Farm Bill allocated nearly \$60 billion to programs that conserve, enhance and restore working lands nationwide. Now, as congressional hearings get underway for the 2023 reauthorization, the Land Trust Alliance is once again leading the charge to ensure that the next Farm Bill delivers programs and funding that land trusts can access to help landowners conserve America's productive lands.



ASPEN VALLEY LAND TRUST

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

While it seems like just yesterday that the Farm Bill was last reauthorized, the Land Trust Alliance has been working for some time to prepare for the 2023 reauthorization. Through this process, we have developed a series of targeted recommendations focused on increasing funding to meet demand and streamlining existing programs to make them more effective and efficient. How did we get to this point? It all starts with our member land trusts and the 100-plus members of the Alliance's Farm Bill Working Group who have been the guiding force in helping us develop recommendations that work for a broad cross section of our community.

Our members have practical, on-the-ground experience working with landowners. As a result, they have the best knowledge of how Farm Bill programs are working and what elements can be improved. It is their expertise that puts us on solid footing going into 2023 and that helped us to achieve all we did in 2018.

## MAINTAINING AND BUILDING ON OUR WINS IN 2018

In 2018, the Alliance played a significant role in advocating for provisions that resulted in increased conservation of working lands across the United States. Then and now, one of our highest

priorities is increasing funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

Due in part to our advocacy efforts, the 2018 legislation included a \$2 billion increase over 10 years. In addition, the 2018 Farm Bill made several changes to the Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program, which provides financial and technical assistance to entities, including land trusts, to conserve working lands under easements. The 2018 bill also included a priority for our land trust members and a key policy change to streamline ACEP-ALE: removing the ALE plan requirement, which was an unnecessary hurdle that deterred landowners from applying for funding and hindered overall conservation efforts.

The 2018 bill also increased access to ACEP in areas lacking public and private conservation funding by authorizing landowner easement donations and expenses to count toward a match requirement and allowing certified entities to write their own minimum deed terms.

Going into 2023, we're focused on making sure these hard-fought provisions are maintained.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2023

Our 2018 wins were significant, and we'll work to retain them, but there is more to be done in 2023. While many of the Alliance's highest priorities were included in the 2018 Farm Bill, as with any legislation implementation is not always smooth sailing. Now, in addition to ensuring that we retain critical provisions from the 2018 bill, we will also fight for necessary changes to achieve the best possible results for future land conservation efforts.

The Alliance's 2023 recommendations are comprised of priorities aimed at streamlining program administration and implementation while fighting for increased conservation dollars to meet growing demand. This includes significantly increasing funding for ACEP to meet landowner demand. On the policy side, we will advocate to improve the Certified Entity program by clarifying the application and enrollment process. It is important that exceptional land trusts have a clear path to become certified and the benefits of certification lead to expedited completion of conservation easement projects with accountability. To support equity in land conservation programs, the Alliance is also focused on expanding access to historically underserved, beginning or resource-limited farmers.

While the Alliance hopes to achieve the same level of success that was achieved during the 2018 Farm Bill, it won't happen without another strong and organized effort. The Alliance will continue to lead the charge, but it will require the support and assistance of our entire community. With that said, if there is any community that can pull it off it is ours—a powerful, resilient one that continues to fight for the right tools and funding to advance private land conservation.

## LEND A HAND

In April, the Alliance began socializing our Farm Bill priorities on Capitol Hill. This is just the beginning, and more work needs to be done if we are to successfully enact all our recommendations. Land trusts can assist in advocating for the 2023 Farm Bill by:

- **Getting informed.** One of the simplest ways to advocate for a robust 2023 Farm Bill is by reviewing the Alliance's own recommendations. When meeting with your elected officials be sure to share these recommendations, ask them to support these priorities and obtain their feedback. Once complete, share any feedback with the Alliance by emailing [policy@lta.org](mailto:policy@lta.org).
- **Submitting stories.** While funding levels increased between the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bill cycles, ACEP continues to be in high demand. As part of the Farm Bill reauthorization process, the Alliance will be advocating for a substantial increase in conservation title funding with an emphasis on funding for ACEP to increase dollars that get out on the ground. Your land trust can help us show demand for the program by sharing project information on our ACEP-ALE Action Center at [lta.org/ale/overview](http://lta.org/ale/overview).
- **Joining the Alliance Farm Bill Working Group.** The Alliance Farm Bill Working Group is an advisory body comprised of land trust practitioners who participate in Farm Bill programs. The group meets monthly for both large and small-group discussions. To join the group, reach out to Nikki Nesbary, manager for NRCS programs at [nnesbary@lta.org](mailto:nnesbary@lta.org).

ROBERT SCHWARTZ is the senior government relations program manager with the Land Trust Alliance. NIKKI NESBARY, manager for NRCS programs at the Alliance, and SIMON WILLIG, former government relations intern, also contributed to this article.

## GOOD NEWS FOR FARM BILL PROGRAMS



AMY VAUGHN

### The recently passed Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

includes \$20 billion in funding for Farm Bill conservation programs, such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program. These funds are in addition to 2018 Farm Bill dollars. There is also \$1 billion in technical assistance for landowners who use these programs to reduce climate-related emissions.



COURTESY OF KARENA MAHUNG

← Karena Mahung.

**Q: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BRING COMMON GROUND TO LIFE?**

**A:** The Alliance is investing in building internal capacity and expertise to support strong implementation, developing new trainings and resources, and piloting an equity in grantmaking program in Oregon, among many other activities. Part of this work is the development of a course about the history of land conservation, tailored to land trust practitioners and the private land conservation movement.

**Q: CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF LAND CONSERVATION COURSE?**

**A:** The course aims to create a shared understanding of the policies and events in American history that shaped the form, function and practice of conservation today. There is a chasm in the way we talk about the origins of the conservation movement. By having these discussions, we can expand our understanding of the worldviews, characters, institutions and tools that define conservation today. Learning the history of land conservation is fundamental because much of the work around community-centered conservation and DEI starts with individual self-awareness and reflections of our values and worldviews about land. It's deeply personal.

**Q: WHAT KINDS OF CHANGE DO YOU SEE HAPPENING?**

**A:** Some of the most interesting conversations I've had are with practitioners grappling with how and why the system is the way it is, and what needs to be dismantled to better serve communities. It's very complex, and we want to prepare practitioners to be willing to engage with this complexity. Going through the history of land conservation course will help people understand why it's important to engage, because the last thing we want to do is perpetuate wrongdoing.

**Q: WHAT DOES THIS WORK MEAN TO YOU?**

**A:** As someone who came to the U.S. from Belize at a young age, the history of conservation that I was introduced to was very one-dimensional and didn't align with the realities I was seeing on the ground. Since then, my own understanding has deepened and evolved. What's interesting for me is that it's so interdisciplinary—we can't talk about the land conservation movement without talking about civil rights, women's rights, Indigenous rights, immigration, race relations and so much more.

I learn something new every time I engage with people on this material. It's amazing and very humbling to be able to capture people's stories and share them with permission. The shift on the individual level is the most meaningful to me. If one person walks away with greater curiosity and understanding, that's how I define success. ☺

—————  
*The Alliance's land history course will launch in 2023.*

# FINDING COMMON GROUND IS PERSONAL

**KARENA MAHUNG** is a senior consultant with Indufor North America and a leader in helping land trusts develop programs so communities can thrive. She brings her expertise in community-centered conservation and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to the Alliance's Common Ground Initiative.

**Q: WHAT IS COMMON GROUND, AND WHERE DOES IT STAND TODAY?**

**A:** In 2019, the Alliance took a step back to reflect after a decade of community-centered conservation work. The field was evolving quickly, as were the needs of practitioners. The Common Ground team posed the question, "How can land conservation best serve communities?" The team listened to and learned from leaders of community-based organizations across a wide range of sectors. This feedback informed the development of an organization-wide strategy to embed community-centered conservation into all aspects of the Alliance's work. Today, the Alliance is knee-deep in bringing this strategy to life.



Photo by Corby Hines, Sonoma Land Trust

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JEFFREY ALLENBY

# TAKING THE LONG VIEW

INDIGENOUS TRIBES AND LAND TRUSTS WORK TO BUILD LASTING COLLABORATIONS

By MARINA SCHAUFFLER



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIVE LAND CONSERVANCY

← (Left, top) Prior to contact with English colonizers in the early 1600s, the Rappahannock Tribe lived in villages located along these towering white cliffs—known today as Fones Cliffs—that rise more than 100 feet above the Rappahannock River in Virginia.

↓ (Left, bottom) A gathering to celebrate the signing of a legal agreement that ensures Indigenous access for traditional practices and ceremonies on all of Dennis Conservation Land Trust’s preserves in perpetuity.

→ (Right) Fones Cliffs is home to bald eagle nests and has been designated by the National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area with global significance. Eagles are sacred to the Rappahannock Tribe.



HILL WELLFORD



“It was like being in a dream that came true,” says Rappahannock Tribal Chief Anne Richardson. “You work with your head down for so long, and then you look up and it’s there.”

The reality before Richardson was the return in April of stunning lands along the Rappahannock River in Virginia that were once part of the tribe’s ancestral homelands. More than 300 people came to celebrate the historic moment, including U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland. Twelve years of concerted work by the tribe and numerous conservation partners led to the protection of this 465-acre property, where bald eagles gather throughout the year on a towering headland above the river. For tribal members, the restoration effort was actually 373 years in the making, since settlers stole their land and drove them inland, severing their bonds with the Rappahannock River.

A tribal village called Pissacoack, one of three along the river, once flourished on these cliffs. “It’s just incredible to be able to go there and walk the land,” Richardson says. “You can see miles and miles up and down river. The spirituality and power you feel on those cliffs—it’s like an updraft of air that lifts you up.”

This collaborative work to build relationships and reconnect youth to the land represents a new wave of conservation that seeks to address historic injustices and achieve lasting change.

## RETURN TO THE RIVER

Young members of the Rappahannock Tribe, following generations of displacement from their ancestral river, were at risk of losing touch with the tools, plants, medicines and ceremonies integral to their lifeways. So tribal leaders launched a Return to the River program in 2016 designed to foster youth teamwork and leadership through time spent canoeing, fishing and camping.

The next year, with help from the Chesapeake Conservancy and the family of the late U.S. Senator John Warner of Virginia, the

Rappahannock Tribe secured a 1-acre parcel close to the river, providing the fledgling youth program access to their ancestral lands.

That single acre was the first tangible step toward a 2,000-acre goal that Chesapeake Conservancy committed to pursue: helping restore land to the Rappahannock Tribe. In the 465-acre Pissacoack project that closed this spring, a generous family donation allowed the Conservancy to acquire the land, donating an easement to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) before transferring the deed to the tribe.

Working toward this ambitious goal has proven challenging, and a critical tract of riverfront land remains in limbo, threatened by plans to develop a luxury resort. Richardson now serves on the Conservancy’s board with its president and CEO, Joel Dunn, who she describes as a “warrior,” persisting through setbacks. Dunn in turn draws inspiration from the tribe, noting “the perseverance the tribe has demonstrated to deal with and rise above challenges.”

Despite the project’s historic and ecological significance, Dunn says he lost count of the number of times he was told “no” when the Conservancy first sought major foundation grants. And the Rappahannock Tribe faced concerns that it might set up a casino, which Richardson dismissed. For the tribe, reconnecting with the land is the goal. “To return my people to these ancient lands, these breathing entities, is like an umbilical cord for a baby,” she says.

The Rappahannock Tribe recently organized and hosted a Sovereign Nations of Virginia conference on Indigenous-led conservation at which Richardson and Dunn shared their model of collaboration. Plans are underway for a follow-up resource manual that tribes can use to learn the mechanics of returning lands to their ownership. Richardson seeks to establish an

# Richardson hopes that younger tribal members will become a force going forward who can help “teach the traditional knowledge we know of conservation practices and spiritual beliefs to protect all the species.”



Intertribal Conservation Council in the watershed that could elevate the political impact of Indigenous people advocating for land protection.

“Tribes are going to become a major conservation force in the Chesapeake,” Dunn predicts.

## RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING ON MANY LEVELS

Relationship-building across boundaries—including the ones between species—is central to conservation work so we can “be together as a larger community,” says Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk, cross-cultural programs manager at the accredited Montezuma Land Conservancy (MLC) in southwest Colorado and a member of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. She sees her role, newly created last year, as “reaching beyond the arbitrary lines that divide us.” It is work, she adds, that “should have happened a long time ago.”

Too often, Lopez-Whiteskunk says, tribal recognition is confined to passing apologies or “Indigenous People’s Day” celebrations. She seeks “to help people understand it’s not just one day. It’s our lives.” Her primary work at MLC is to be a conduit of conversation, fostering communication between tribal and non-tribal community members. “When neighbors don’t talk to each other, that is not healthy,” she observes.

Building relationships with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe has helped MLC become “less linear and transactional,” notes Executive Director Travis Custer. He sees this reorientation as essential to the practice of environmental and social justice, and to address existential threats like the climate crisis and biodiversity. “We need to slow down and rethink our relationship to place,” he says.

Youth programs have been a good entry point for strengthening collaboration and community. Tribal youth now participate in MLC’s high school internship program, and several interns are working with the tribe’s biology department on a riparian restoration project. A steering committee that helps plan youth programs is working with a tribal leader, a tribal member and a tribal employee on collaborative design. The time they have committed to this work “speaks volumes to relationship-building over a year,” Lopez-Whiteskunk says. “It’s hard to get them to take time out.”

A gathering last fall brought together conservation staff and tribal elders to exchange stories of their connections to the land. People were able to “share from very, very sacred places,” Lopez-Whiteskunk recalls, allowing the non-Indigenous participants to better understand the heartbreak that tribal members have experienced from losing places they treasured for ceremonies and harvests.

To help address that loss, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe recently

received grant funding for a Traditional Harvest Project in which tribal members will inventory and assess current plant communities on the reservation, develop management plans to ensure sustainable harvests and work with MLC to connect with owners of conserved lands that might be available for cultural harvest.

Farmers and ranchers often allowed harvesting historically, but those informal agreements ended as land changed hands. “This project can be the start of rebuilding those family-to-family relationships,” Custer says, and potentially incorporating those rights into future conservation easements.

The project involves “relationship-building on so many different levels,” Lopez-Whiteskunk notes, such as helping tribal members restore their relationships to the plant communities and gathering stories of those plants from elders to share with youth.

## TOWARD A NEW LANGUAGE OF CONSERVATION

When the Native Land Conservancy (NLC) in Massachusetts formed a decade ago, its founder and president Ramona Peters thought it would operate just like any other land trust, striving “to protect as much land as possible.” She soon discovered that being an all-Indigenous group made NLC an “odddity.”

“It took a while to build clarity,” Peters recalls. “What I needed to do was emphasize that we see all conservation groups as partners.”

NLC board members found that conservation language and policies rarely accounted for the needs of Native people. Many conservation narratives portray human beings as a “burden on wilderness” and define public access in ways that exclude Native rituals like plant harvests or ceremonies, Peters observes. “We need a new narrative that is honoring and welcoming of Indigenous people,” she says.

At the Alliance’s 2014 Rally, Peters met tribal representatives from California who shared the idea of creating “cultural respect easements,” legally binding agreements that ensure Indigenous people can enjoy traditional practices on conservation lands.

The first cultural respect easement in the eastern U.S. was signed in 2016, on a single preserve, and it grew from a partnership between NLC and the nearby Dennis Conservation Land Trust (DCLT). Late last year, DCLT and NLC completed a legal agreement that ensures Indigenous access for traditional practices and ceremonies on all of DCLT’s preserves in perpetuity. “Now we can confidently send Native people out on the land,” Peters says.

NLC is working with Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT), which owns a preserve adjoining the Wampanoag Common Lands (lands donated to NLC on behalf of all Wampanoag People), on the terms of a conservation restriction (easement) that NEWT



will grant to NLC. Through the process, Peters has tried to “shift toward a language that breathes more life into the description of the land.” Deed language is typically “very cut-and-dried and cold,” she says, so it’s an ongoing challenge “honoring the life in this land in these documents.”

NLC has become adept at “using tools within the legal system,” notes Diana Ruiz, who became NLC’s first executive director last year, adding that the differing approaches to language reflect the different values and cultural identities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

“You can’t change people’s values but through language and legal devices you can demonstrate yours,” she says. “Shifting ideologies takes a long time. If you want a sincere partnership, consider a long-term relationship-building approach.”

For tribal members who live off-reservation in Massachusetts and own their own properties, NLC is developing a Landowner Conservation Toolkit to help them continue holding and stewarding their lands in the face of escalating taxes.

NLC is stepping into a new sphere of long-term relationship-building that includes holding easements for other all-Native groups. Working in partnership with a Maskoke community in Alabama, NLC expects to close this fall on an easement covering 650 acres that will belong to Ekvn-Yefolecv, an intentional ecovillage of Maskoke People whose ancestors were forcibly removed from their homelands 180 years ago. They have returned to revitalize their language and culture and practice natural building, regenerative agriculture and ecological restoration. Part of NLC’s new role will involve training local land managers.

## THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON YOUTH

This past summer, NLC worked in partnership with NEWT to supervise an intern from the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe. “We view our role as giving him as many opportunities and experiences as we can,” Ruiz says. “He wants to bring his learnings back to his tribe.”

In Colorado, Lopez-Whiteskunk has already witnessed how time on the land is renewing young tribal members’ relationships with the natural world. Many of them are “taking the conversations home,” she says, prompting dialogue among families. “The biggest part of collaboration, and probably the best part, is working with the youth,” she says.

Back in Virginia, two Rappahannock youth will intern with FWS on lands adjoining the Pissacoack parcel, learning about land stewardship and refuge management, thanks to support from the William Dodge Angle, M.D., family. The tribe hopes that these youth will become leaders of the river programs.

The model of shared management and co-ownership emerging along the banks of the Rappahannock River is a “symbol of the change happening in the conservation movement,” Dunn reflects. Part of that transformation involves engaging more Indigenous young people in the work of land stewardship. “The future of conservation depends on engaging the youth of today,” he says.

Richardson hopes that younger tribal members will become a force going forward who can help “teach the traditional knowledge we know of conservation practices and spiritual beliefs to protect all the species.” ☺

MARINA SCHAUFFLER is an independent environmental journalist in Maine and a frequent contributor to *Saving Land*.



MONTEZUMA LAND CONSERVANCY



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIVE LAND CONSERVANCY

↑ Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk (top) enjoys time with a student beekeeper from Kwiyaqat Community Academy, a charter school focused on teaching Ute Mountain Ute culture and language on the tribe’s reservation in Towaoc, Colorado. Montezuma Land Conservancy hosted the students at its Fozzie’s Farm property earlier this spring.

New trail signage (bottom) reflects the cultural respect easement between Native Land Conservancy and Dennis Conservation Land Trust.

*In Their Own Words*

LAND TRUST LEADERS  
ENVISION  
THE FUTURE

**WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK LAND TRUSTS CAN DO OVER THE NEXT 40 YEARS, AND HOW CAN WE GET THERE?**

In honor of the Land Trust Alliance's 40th anniversary, we asked land trust leaders to share their visions for the future of conservation and the land trust movement. These leaders—from land trusts big and small—shared their perspectives on the challenges we face and how we can tackle them. Engaging people to care, empowering communities and individuals, finding optimism, maintaining hope, making nature relevant, staying focused ... these are just a few of the ideas they share here.

1982

40

2022

# CINDY MONTAÑEZ

CEO

TreePeople Land Trust, California

The future of conservation is about engaging people to care, and the strategy for how to do that is actually not new or groundbreaking. The truth is, the way to build a movement powerful enough to address the critical issues of conservation and climate change has been staring us in the face all long: It's called empowerment.

We are at a critical juncture in the health of our planet and now, more than ever before, we need everyone to step up, pay attention and act. At TreePeople, we passionately believe that trees, more trees, and everywhere, are a key component to reversing climate change. And science backs up our passion.

But none of it will work without the power of people. Our secret sauce is communities, or more precisely, the people in those communities—galvanizing them, educating them and empowering them to take ownership for the health of our planet. Our Community Forester program helps empower people across Southern California to plant a greener future for their communities. By becoming a Community Forester, people learn from experts on how to engage their own communities and plan their very own planting events. The four-session course provides step-by-step details, including how to choose the right tree for the right place and bring together resources, as well as how to plan, recruit for and run a tree planting event. The goal is to create climate-resilient neighborhoods powered by empowered leaders throughout Southern California and share our process as a model for the world.

Each and every one of us has the power to change the world in wonderful and profound ways. ☆



# EMILY WARNER

Executive Director

Cacapon & Lost Rivers Land Trust, West Virginia

I want a world 40 years from now where streams run clear, mountains capture the imagination, sustainable farms thrive and children have plentiful occasions to go outside and explore, discover and wonder. This is why I work to conserve land.

Land trusts face many challenges. There is never enough money, time, staff capacity or information. Climate change looms. Our conservation easement language is never perfect. Development pressure builds. Prioritization of so many important challenges and projects is difficult. Yet, our work is too important to allow ourselves to be bogged down by scarcity against the enormity of our task or distracted into ineffectiveness. As we look toward the next 40 years, I hope the conservation community will focus its intentions with urgency, yes, but also with optimism.

To be successful, I believe land trusts must remain unapologetically focused on what we do best, and we must do so with hope. On my office wall, I have tacked the words “Protect Land” with two photographs and a map of the Cacapon Watershed. The words keep my mission in focus, so I avoid straying down important but “not-my-job” paths. The map and mountainscapes stir my love for this part of the world and encourage me to dream.

Whether our missions are to conserve a watershed's forests, protect farmland, save the greater sage grouse or enhance equity through outdoor recreation, we must keep the focus on our chosen missions. We must let go of the discomfort of what we are not doing and concentrate our passions on moving forward together with hope. ☆

# TOM KAY

**Executive Director  
Alachua Conservation Trust, Florida**

**A**s the world faces more geopolitical instability, more extreme weather and increased demand for natural resources, the conservation movement will be tested like never before. While this may paint a bleak and dire picture, the land trust world is also made up of planners and optimists grounded in reality.

Over the next four decades, the land trust community must be prepared to face new challenges and threats, not only to lands and resources not yet protected, but also to lands and waters where conservation victories have already occurred. There will be pushes to tax conservation lands to generate new revenues for governments. There will be pushes to open lands conserved as nature parks and preserves. There will be new attacks on lands with conservation easements, to weaken or remove terms of the easements or to dissolve them entirely. Most likely, the argument for these actions will be to grow more food, extract a resource that is in demand or meet some other public need.

The land trust community must be ready to find alternative solutions to these issues, while continuing to conserve new lands and restore those that are already conserved. To succeed, there are several key steps to take going forward: build alliances with elected officials and decision makers; advocate for increased funding for conservation programs, especially around agriculture and areas most vulnerable to population migration as a result of climate change; and redouble our efforts to get children into nature to nurture their passion, curiosity and love for the outdoors and wildlife while furthering their education. None of these approaches are novel, but as the pressure on resources increases, the work needed to keep conservation at the forefront will become more nuanced.

Our jobs will not become any easier in the decades ahead, but the rewards of our increased efforts will be having communities that we serve across the country and globe that are livable and better prepared to handle the volatility of the future. ☆



# SARAH KNEBEL

**Executive Director  
Scenic Rivers Land Trust, Maryland**

**T**he future of the land trust movement is exciting! There are so many opportunities to help our communities and improve quality of life for all (both humans and wildlife alike).

Always at the top of my mind is the fact that the work we do plays a critical role in saving the planet from a biosphere collapse in the coming decades. It's a tough call to action but I think we can evolve enough to help tackle it. Hopefully, we can grow fast enough to help reconnect our communities (all of them!) to nature in a positive way while protecting and restoring the great outdoors in our own neighborhoods.

To get where we need to be in the coming years, land trusts need to engage our communities in significant ways to help make nature relevant and integrated into lives again. Nature is not something that is "out there" or separate from the lives we lead every day. It's all around us: the foods we eat, the fibers we use to make our clothes, the water we use to brush our teeth, the air that we breathe.

We will need to look beyond conserving large expanses of land (though this still remains important!). We'll need to work with our environmental partners to advocate for more native diversity in everyone's backyards and other places where conservation easements don't make sense. We'll also need to be successful in protecting the biodiversity hotspots of the country, and restoring the habitats that animals desperately need to thrive. To top it all off, we will have to figure out how to handle invasive species that threaten the health of our native plants and wildlife.

There's much work to be done, and lots of incredibly smart, passionate and creative people to work alongside to make it happen. ☆



# AIMÉE DORVAL

**Executive Director  
Androscoggin Land Trust, Maine**

The land trust movement of the future isn't always going to be about saving land. The land resources will become more finite with every passing decade. The movement is going to be about protecting what we have, partnering and promoting to ensure that access is truly for all, and educating people on how to respect and cherish these natural areas. I think we're going to see a shift in who is visiting land. In the next 40 years, I think that we will begin to see a more representative world engaging with land trusts. That is my hope.

To get there, we need to be genuine and humble. We need to be resolute in our missions. We need to form solidarity in promoting and honoring diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ). Are we really serving all people and welcoming them? Is it safe? These are questions we ask of ourselves, and we know that we're falling short. But we're moving forward, learning and growing. When I've spoken with people from marginalized groups, a constant conversation is about safety. One example that we've demonstrated is hosting private unadvertised events with partner organizations. We hold public events for safety in numbers.

Our organization has been increasingly researching and learning about DEIJ initiatives to better serve our region. We have collaborated closely with partners, consultants and regional foundations to discuss and offer programming. We're also looking at our board and staff structure and hiring practices.

My biggest takeaway or advice is to be ready to pivot, be patient during extended periods and never be afraid to reach out. ☆



# JONATHAN LOK

**Board Chair  
Bayou Land Conservancy, Texas**

Optimism, aspiration, promise—or is it credulity, guilelessness and blind faith? Hope is both the silver bullet and the long shadow over the audacity to improve a distant future. This is particularly true in land conservation, where gains feel offset by forces focused on near-term incentives. Meanwhile, the business cases we make fall short in explaining why the immeasurables move us and fail to provide motivation on the timescale of conservation.

At times it can feel that progress takes a backseat to ideology and special interests. However, conservation professionals and supporters are unmatched in their willingness to think long-term with optimism. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us that the arc of the moral universe is long but bends toward justice. Progress happens through different avenues—sometimes through policy, sometimes through grassroots organizing, but almost always putting into perspective the issues of the moment with the vision of what is possible. Our part is having the audacity to believe in a future where people prosper and nature flourishes.

My worst days are when I question why I have the right to be hopeful. But then I think of the alternative: *Do I join them in the moment of greatest adversity?* I'm lifted as I arrive at the same conclusion as Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic philosopher: "No matter what anyone says or does, my task is to be good." Our country and institutions may feel like they are falling apart, but it doesn't change our responsibility. Knowing there is no alternative in the face of adversity is what brings me hope. ☆

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Send your thoughts on the future of conservation to [editor@lta.org](mailto:editor@lta.org) and we'll publish them on our website.

Thank you to the individuals who contributed to this story. ☺

# A Forest Rooted in Community

Washington's newest community forest is the 3,714-acre Nason Ridge on Lake Wenatchee. Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC), Chelan-Douglas Land Trust (CDLT) and the community long sought to conserve the property formerly owned by a Seattle timber company. After a four-year effort, WRC negotiated the deal to purchase Nason Ridge and joined with CDLT, Chelan County and the community to raise funds to permanently protect it, including \$3 million from Washington's new statewide Community Forests Program. Nason Ridge is now owned by the county and any benefits, whether economic, educational, recreational or environmental, will remain local. A forest plan, developed by community partners, will determine how best to manage the land.

"Nason Ridge is a shining example of what a community forest can be," says Nelson Mathews, WRC vice president. "It's rooted in the community and a place where people can hike and ski, where salmon and steelhead can spawn in clean, cool water, and where the forest will be managed to meet the needs of fish, wildlife and people alike." ◉

Lake Wenatchee and the Wenatchee River.





# SEEING

↑ Scanning for hawks on the Kittatinny Ridge.

# ANEW

## THE VALUE OF CONSERVATION

By MARINA SHAUFFLER

# F

rom a hawk's perspective, Kittatinny Ridge must appear as the "endless mountain" it was to the Indigenous Leni-Lenape people who first named it. Part of the Appalachian Corridor, the ridge is nearly unbroken as it runs 185 miles through 12 counties in central and eastern Pennsylvania.

Hawks soar on thermals, riding a wind corridor that aids their migration. Kittatinny Ridge is recognized as a globally important bird area, and it stands out on maps that highlight lands rich in ecological value and climate resilience.

Conservation professionals have long recognized the importance of this corridor, the headwaters of countless tributaries flowing into the Susquehanna River, which empties into the Chesapeake Bay. But in neighboring communities, which range from agricultural small towns to fast-growing suburbs, it can be challenging to convey that ecological significance to local decision-makers.



# SEEING ANEW



TOM SKALA



MARK ZAKUTANSKY



Flickr User NICHOLAS, T/CC BY 2.0



Flickr User NICHOLAS, T/CC BY 2.0



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

**Broad-winged hawks** concentrate in large flocks along the Kittatinny Ridge and are frequently seen from Hawk Mountain Sanctuary during their fall migration.

**Kayaking and whitewater rafting** are popular sports on the Lehigh River, contributing to the region's outdoor recreation tourism.

**Violets found at the Pool Wildlife Sanctuary**, owned and managed by The Wildlands Conservancy.

**A striking red barn** in Hamilton Township, Monroe County, located at the northern end of the Kittatinny Ridge.

But an effort to quantify the economic benefits of land conservation is gaining traction, helping people to recognize the cost savings that natural lands can provide—by purifying air, filtering water and reducing stormwater and erosion—as well as the economic boosts that unbroken woods and mountains provide to property values, public health, outdoor recreation and tourism.

“If you talk about the science of nature, you don’t get a lot of political support,” observes John Rogers, an environmental consultant who helped develop Return on Environment (ROE), a calculus of the untabulated values of natural lands in central and eastern Pennsylvania. Greater understanding of the free services ecosystems provide, Rogers says, leads to the recognition that “it’s much cheaper to let the environment do that work” than it is to engineer solutions.

Many land trusts along Kittatinny Ridge can now estimate how much natural lands enhance economic well-being, thanks to a series of nine county-level ROE reports. Each one confirmed that the annual economic contribution from natural lands in their counties was in the neighborhood of \$1 billion, not counting tourism benefits, reports Jeanne Barrett Ortiz, a senior program manager with Audubon Mid-Atlantic, which helped coordinate many of the ROE studies.

The ROE process is empowering members of the Kittatinny Coalition, a long-standing network of conservation nonprofits, state agencies, county planning commissions and education partners, by offering a new tool for setting conservation priorities, influencing regional planning and advocating for open space.

## SETTING PRIORITIES AND GUIDING GROWTH

ROE’s potential was clear from the outset to one of the Coalition’s partners, Manada Conservancy, a small land trust serving a mix of rural and suburban communities in Dauphin County.

Sally Zaino, Manada’s president, notes the “ROE data helped identify priority areas for Green Ribbon Landscapes,” a term coined by Rogers for maintaining a 300-foot wooded buffer around waterways and wetlands. These buffers reduce flooding and stormwater costs and provide ecological connectivity to sustain species and ecosystems.

More than half of Dauphin County’s total annual ROE of \$939 million was attributed to “avoided costs of natural system services,” largely due to the benefits afforded by riparian buffers. That realization renewed Manada’s focus on Swatara Creek, a



COURTESY OF HAWK MOUNTAIN SANCTUARY

View from North Lookout at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.

72-mile tributary of the Susquehanna River, recognizing that—in Zaino’s words—it could be “so much more functional” ecologically with wider and more consistent natural buffers.

Manada is now working to maintain a buffer along the entire length of Swatara Creek through Dauphin County, promoting a “stewardship pledge” that encourages landowners to commit to a wide riparian buffer, and raising funds to provide them with free native trees and shrubs to plant.

By providing figures for cost-savings from undeveloped lands, the ROE report helped Manada engage county-level planners in discussions of which areas might be best-suited to development (where tax revenues would likely exceed the lost benefits provided by natural systems) and which are most valuable to preserve. “The county is getting a lot more aware,” Zaino says of the contributions natural lands make, but work remains to carry that understanding to the township level.

### **BUILDING COMMITMENT TO LANDSCAPE-SCALE PROTECTION**

Pennsylvania is unusual among states in providing ongoing funding to eight regions as part of its Conservation Landscape Program, a commitment begun in 2004 that recognizes the value of large landscapes.

One of the lead organizations for the Kittatinny Coalition, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), helped coordinate regional groups to complete Dauphin County’s ROE study and administers South Mountain Partnership, a designated conservation landscape in a diverse agricultural and urban region near the Kittatinny Ridge

(which is also a state-supported conservation landscape). Administering South Mountain Partnership has helped the ATC to develop its own Large Landscape Initiative along the trail’s 2,190 miles.

ROE studies offered South Mountain Partnership’s director Katie Hess a chance “to make the case for the broader value of nature” in ATC’s ongoing landscape conservation work. Landscape-level work is “not just a scaling [up] of geography; it’s supposed to be a different process,” she reflects. Priorities are set from the grass-roots, “meeting people where they are” and “taking the time to move at the speed of trust,” an approach that takes longer initially but can be more effective over time.

Among the 161 municipalities in the South Mountain Partnership region, strong traditions of local governance and landowner’s rights can decrease receptivity to landscape conservation. But with the profusion of ROE reports, some towns are putting that data to work—modeling what is possible to more resistant communities. Hess is hopeful that over time, more “cross-pollination will occur” among municipalities. There is, she says, “the beginning of a cultural shift of awareness in our region.”

Working in an area where there’s a high focus on economic productivity, Hess has found that “looking at land through the ROE lens” can help people realize the potential for “offsetting financial burdens by preserving what we have right now.”

Hess still encounters skepticism, though, particularly among those unfamiliar with economic and scientific terminology. “It’s such a new sort of science, and a new calculation,” she says, that even people “interested in making data-informed decisions

don't necessarily trust the methodology," despite the ROE project's efforts to make that transparent and accessible online.

ROE data can help reinforce a stewardship ethic in communities, particularly around water, which Hess has found "a very unifying theme." Her observation reflects national polling, in which 93% of Americans consider the right to clean air and water important.

## THE VALUE OF AN ECONOMIC LENS

In Berks County, home to one of the best-known landmarks along Kittatinny Ridge—Hawk Mountain Sanctuary—one long-time champion of the economic benefits from natural lands is Berks Nature. In its first State of the Environment report in 2010, the land trust selected 25 indicators of environmental health and gathered detailed data to start tracking trends.

Two years later, it issued an addendum, a flyer called "The Business of Nature." With compelling language and photos, the piece made the case for how clean streams, forested buffers and other natural assets help sustain local economies and the region's quality of life. It underscored, for example, that "more trees near a water supply mean less treatment and chemicals" and lower water bills—a 10% increase in forest cover results in a 20% drop in water treatment costs. Since that report came out, notes Executive Director Kim Murphy, the local water authority has made a stronger commitment to planting trees.

The publication "makes people who think about things from an economic perspective perk up and listen to what you have to say about the environment," says Murphy.

Talking about nature in economic terms has given Berks Nature a seat at the table it might not have had otherwise, on topics from economic development to transportation planning. Bringing "real data points" to these discussions has "changed our ability to communicate why our work is important to the public," adds Murphy.

The impact of this shift is clear. "There's a growing respect for what our organization does and a better understanding for what those ecosystems do for the community," says Murphy.

## OFFERING 'A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE' TO REACH DECISION-MAKERS

Translating landscape values into economic terms can be effective in both heavily developed areas and rural regions, notes Abigail Pattishall, vice president of conservation at The Wildlands Conservancy. The ROE study process worked well in the Lehigh Valley, what she calls "a concrete jungle," and in Carbon County, where two-thirds of the county is either in state game land or state park land. Local officials there, concerned about limited options for economic development, sometimes describe themselves as being in a "green prison."

ROE "gives you a different language to talk to decisionmakers," Pattishall says. Land developers, she notes, "come to meetings with all the data on the economic benefits of their project. You need to be able to match this [with economic data of your own]."

Pattishall initially resisted the "idea of assigning a dollar value to something with intrinsic value," but experience with the ROE process has convinced her how useful it is, particularly in rural areas "where the obvious need is not more open space but more economic development."

Being able to talk in the language of avoided costs helps land

trusts persuade rural residents that the green space around them is doing valuable work purifying water and mitigating stormwater—saving them money. The Carbon County ROE, coordinated in part by the Carbon Chamber & Economic Development Corporation, revealed that natural systems annually supplied more than \$650 million in services, in addition to supporting nearly \$109 million in outdoor recreation activities.

The Wildlands Conservancy has worked to help municipal officials understand that they can simultaneously "grow the economy and protect natural resources," says Pattishall, providing them with trainings, tools and examples, and even facilitating one-on-one sessions with prospective grant makers. In Carbon County, where Wildlands hopes to connect some larger protected landscapes, the ROE work has "opened a door that had never really been there." For the first time, Pattishall says, "we can truly say we do have local partners."

ROE projects draw land trusts into broad-based collaborations that include local officials, planners, representatives of the business community, local utilities and outdoor recreation interests. Participants describe these diverse partnerships in positive terms, and Pattishall notes that their breadth "helped ensure that the findings were widely accepted."

## TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING

As a result of sustained public outreach, ROE is gaining momentum in Pennsylvania, and more inquiries are coming in from new communities that want to participate, reports Ortiz of Audubon Mid-Atlantic. There is talk of creating a statewide model and an associated app to help communities gather localized economic data.

There may be further refinements to the ROE methodology so that it better reflects the value of habitat restoration and improved land stewardship. While looking forward to those, Ortiz is pleased by how the approach has already fostered greater "foresight and community caring." There's a "growing understanding of ecosystem services and economic values," she reflects. "The 'aha' moments are building." ☺

MARINA SCHAUFFLER is an independent environmental journalist in Maine and a frequent contributor to *Saving Land*.

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*This article is one of a series developed in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program that highlights how evaluating economic benefits can advance habitat conservation and create stronger conservation stories.*

**ECONOMIC THEMES** that consistently resonate with a broad swath of people are drinking water and economic development, says Jennifer Plowden, a conservation economist at the Land Trust Alliance. For local officials, some of the most resonant themes—beyond economic development—are the cost savings associated with reduced stormwater and air pollution, increased taxes (and revenues) from higher property values, and potential returns from more outdoor recreation and tourism.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDCOAST CONSERVANCY



OCOTILLO FILMS

# MAKING 30X30 WORK FOR YOU

By **TOM SPRINGER**

Land trusts across the country are **setting new and bigger goals** as part of a global movement to increase the pace of conservation and address challenges such as climate change, loss of habitat and agricultural lands, and to ensure equitable access to the land.

The America the Beautiful initiative—known as 30x30—is rooted in the scientific community’s goal of protecting 30% of the world’s lands and waters by 2030. The amount of protected land in the U.S. currently stands at 12%. By protecting an estimated 440 million more acres in the U.S., the initiative aims to forestall the impacts of climate change, increase biodiversity and make landscapes more climate-resilient; it also seeks to increase access to nature in places where people have historically been excluded or forcibly removed. Some \$1 billion in funding is planned to support 30x30 land protection efforts.

The initiative represents an incredible opportunity to bring urgent focus to conservation, as well as funding. Yet for all its promise, 30x30 faces challenges. Especially in the West and Midwest, some governors and legislators oppose 30x30, branding it as a federal “land grab.” In their criticism, they often conflate the tax-funded means used by governments to protect public land—such as national parks, monuments and forests—with the voluntary, charitable means that land trusts use to conserve natural areas on

private property. In some areas, misinformation about 30x30 is eroding public support for new preserves and conservation easements.

“The Alliance is working hard to help land trusts navigate the challenges and opportunities of 30x30,” says Lori Faeth, senior government relations director at the Alliance. “In particular, we want to help land trusts benefit from the increased funding that can help accelerate private land conservation.”

Here, a few land trust leaders from the West, Midwest and East share how they are pursuing 30x30 goals.

## CALIFORNIA DREAMIN’ ABOUT 30X30

In California, Kay Ogden, executive director/CEO of the accredited Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT), has reason to be optimistic. In October 2020, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed an executive order that commits the Golden State to protecting 6 million more acres of land and 500,000 more acres of coastal waters by 2030. The California Natural Resources Agency oversees the effort, which includes a range of state agencies. By collaborating on 30x30

with state and federal agencies, land trusts can tap into new resources and expertise. They can also keep in the loop about new grant opportunities and give land trusts a voice in 30x30 policy decisions.

“We need to ensure that private land conservation—and not just public land—is woven throughout 30x30,” says Ogden, who also volunteers as vice-chair of the California Council of Land Trusts (CCLT). It helps, Ogden says, that her board fully supports her expanded role in 30x30. ESLT trustees have also commented on state-wide plans and attended online meetings.

According to a CCLT survey, California’s 33 land trusts have protected 2.45 million acres, with 2.1 million acres in the queue and another 1.4 million on the horizon. But as Ogden points out, land trusts will require more staff—far more in some cases—to meet these goals. “We’re working with several state agencies to seek legislative funding that will build land trusts’ internal capacity,” Ogden says. “Getting that passed will give us the staff we need for more due diligence, land transactions, communication and data collection.”

At the same time, land trust leaders can take affordable steps on their own to



Midcoast Conservancy’s 30x30 Initiative will accelerate the protection of the unique landscapes of Midcoast Maine, such as Medomak River (top).

Rex and JoAnn Coffman (bottom) have donated their 141-acre ranch to Aspen Valley Land Trust to help protect wildlife habitat and ranching lands. Located on the Roaring Fork River and just a short distance from the town of Carbondale, the ranch will become a demonstration site for equitable access, farming and community engagement.

As Colorado’s oldest land trust, it took Aspen Valley Land Trust **55 years** to protect its first **45,000 acres**. In May, the organization committed to protecting another **40,000 to 50,000 acres** by 2032.

advance 30x30’s equity goals. For ESLT, this includes partnering with tribal communities to use land trust properties in ways that further their cultural heritage. “We’re working with attorneys to see how we can support Indigenous practices such as dances, ceremonies, overnight camping and gathering medicinal herbs,” Ogden says. “We want to put a stronger focus on restoring traditional rights on the lands we protect.”

**PURSUING 30X30 BY ANOTHER NAME**

While 30x30 has become a rallying cry for conservation in some places, it has become an obstacle in others, especially where political opposition to conservation easements already exists or is growing. In some Midwestern and Western states, land trusts go to great lengths to avoid mentioning 30x30 and conservation easements in the same breath “because that simply plays to our opponent’s narrative that the two are linked,” notes one executive director. This is prompting creative efforts to re-brand 30x30 or avoid talking about it altogether.

In Colorado, the accredited Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT) has readily embraced the goals of 30x30, but not always the language. As the state’s oldest land trust, it took AVLT 55 years to protect its first 45,000 acres. Then in May, AVLT committed to protecting another 40,000 to 50,000 acres by 2032. While the plan was in the works before 30x30, it does reflect its ethos: that conservation must evolve in response to changing needs.

AVLT’s board helped to create and distribute the plan. There’s also a board

committee that focuses on equity goals, and another that uses a new scorecard—based on the plan’s goals and data—to review potential conservation projects. Still, when it comes to discussing 30x30, AVLT knows that audience and context matters.

“It’s kind of a balancing act,” says Carly Bolliger, AVLT’s communications and engagement director. “In parts of our region, some people want to talk about 30x30 and climate change. In other parts, people typically discuss changing weather patterns, flash floods, wildfires and the unusually hot summers. Everyone is on board when we talk about these climate-related problems from a solutions approach.”

Here, too, AVLT has used 30x30’s equity focus to build common ground. While a map of AVLT’s service area shows a wealth of public land, it’s mostly on mountain tops with steep hiking trails, which may be a 30-to-60-minute drive from nearby towns. In response to community input, AVLT has focused on new preserves within walking distance of towns, as well as a rural property along the Roaring Fork River. River access is a rare commodity in the region, and AVLT will use the property as an outdoor classroom for pilot programs in conservation. “The more people who we connect to nature, the more people who can embrace this work,” Bolliger says.

**BEYOND LAND PROTECTION IN MAINE**

On the East Coast, 30x30 hasn’t greatly changed how staff at the accredited Midcoast Conservancy in Maine perceive

their mission. It has, however, inspired them to build on its momentum—and even add their own twists.

“30x30 ties into the work we’re already doing,” says Chris Schorn, Midcoast’s director of land conservation. “It gives us a great opportunity to throw our cap over the wall and achieve a conservation goal that aligns with the federal goal and with the Maine Climate Council’s goal.”

Midcoast has committed to protecting 30,000 acres across their 450-square-mile service area. This expansion will roughly double the amount they now conserve. But, as Schorn points out, acres alone aren’t the only metric that matters. For example, on Damariscotta Lake, a 4,300-acre body of water in Lincoln County, Midcoast staff teach conservation education programs for landowners. They cover topics such as lake-smart landscaping (to reduce sediment runoff), bird-friendly practices and water quality management. These practices allow Midcoast to improve the lake’s ecological health without buying more land or holding more easements.

“Engagement has been through the roof,” Schorn says. Of course, running more outreach programs and accelerating land conservation can also make personnel costs go through the roof. But that’s where Midcoast’s board has stepped in.

“Our board has strategically planned to implement 30x30 by budgeting for increased staff capacity,” says Pete Nichols, Midcoast’s executive director. “We’re also establishing a dedicated 30x30 conservation fund to provide working capital for priority land conservation opportunities.”

To further its impact, Midcoast is conducting a 30x30 analysis that looks at environmental conditions, land connectivity, development risks and criteria for land protection. By sharing this model, they want partners to understand the imperiled areas that most need protection in their region.

“It’s incumbent on us to show how land trusts are aiding and abetting local conservation to improve conservation in places that want increased public access,” Schorn says. “30x30 isn’t just about doing it fast, but doing it right.” ☺

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



↑ Farmland in Corrales, New Mexico.

# WATER, LAND AND HEIRS' PROPERTY IN NEW MEXICO

By **CLAIRE CATLETT**

**N**ew Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC) knows well the challenges and opportunities that come from working in diverse communities. As the nation's most Hispanic\* state by percentage of total population (48% overall, 80% in rural areas), it is important to understand the legacy of colonial Spain and its impacts today on land ownership and the issues surrounding land conservation in New Mexico.

Land grants were granted by the King of Spain and Governor of Mexico during the Colonial period to noblemen and were considered communal lands known as *mercedes*. Similarly, tribal lands were established as pueblos with tenancy in common, where each person has equal rights to possess the entire property, but with no right of survivorship. There were 295 original Spanish and Mexican land grants in New Mexico. Today, only 26 land grants remain active.

Family properties have been passed down for hundreds of years and can be burdened by heirs' property legal issues, might lack clean title, do not have surveys, and may not have records to prove legal ownership of land or water rights. Following the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 and into the 1970s, Hispanic family land became legally compromised by controversial court decisions, forcing millions of acres of private and communal lands to be effectively stripped from original heirs and transferred to new Anglo-American owners and the U.S. government.

Today, NMLC works to protect multi-generational farms with conservation easements, keeping land in the hands of families and enabling agricultural traditions to thrive in perpetuity. In places threatened by sprawling growth, conservation easements

protect land and water by legally tying surface water rights in traditional acequias (a type of irrigation ditch) to agricultural lands and restricting new residential development. NMLC worked with families to clear title issues for heirs' property using the state tax credit through the New Mexico Land Conservation Incentives Act, and in the case of one traditional Hispanic farm, the tax credit was used to pay probate costs, allowing the original family to keep land it farmed there since the late 1600s.

Complications with New Mexico's land ownership history underly the challenges we face as a Western state to deal with the present moment of catastrophic drought, aridification and wildfires. Much of the national forests we now see affected by wildfire were formerly land grants managed by Hispanic communities and Native American tribes. Historic farmland and acequias of the Middle Rio Grande under extreme drought conditions are now forced to forgo watering crops this growing season.

Against these odds, NMLC believes there has never been a better time to use conservation easements as a tool to secure land and water resources for our communities. Easements can serve as an assurance of greater security for farmers, ranchers and their family lands. The risks of losing it are all too real to their *querencia* ("life's purpose") and love of their land. ☺

CLAIRE CATLETT is a project manager for New Mexico Land Conservancy.

*\*Note about language: The term Hispanic is more commonly used and accepted by native New Mexicans than Latino/a or Latinx and is supported by a recent study hosted by the University of New Mexico indicating that 93% of 239 respondents described themselves as Hispanic rather than Latino/a.*

# THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF CRYPTO DONATIONS

By **JIM WYERMAN**

**T**he jury is out on whether land trusts should begin accepting donations in cryptocurrency. Some think it is a smart donor service, providing an alternative way to make a tax-incentivized gift. Others are wary, citing the adverse environmental impacts and the limited utility to their usual donor base.

Crypto is a form of digital money, such as Bitcoin or Ethereum, which is “mined” by using a cryptography system and stored in a series of computer databases using blockchain technology. If this all sounds like gibberish, you’re not alone—an estimated 98% of people don’t understand the basics of crypto. But the use of cryptocurrency is on the rise, especially among tech-oriented Millennials, and organizations don’t need to fully understand the complex processes behind it to begin accepting crypto payments.

The issue land trusts face accepting crypto gifts usually comes up in one of two ways. Either a current supporter wants to donate cryptocurrency, or development staff want to be ready if and when this becomes more common.

“You don’t want to lose a donation because someone only wants to give in crypto,” says Chris Beichner, president and CEO of Allegheny Land Trust (ALT).



↑ One of the biggest drawbacks to cryptocurrency is its high carbon footprint.

LINDSAY DILL/ALLEGHENY LAND TRUST



Current crypto users advise taking the time you need to weigh the merits and get your team on the same page.

**HOW IT WORKS**

The technology is complex, but the gifting process is straightforward. A widget on the nonprofit’s website automates the exchange. Once a crypto donation has been made, it is immediately converted to cash by a crypto processor that charges a credit card-type fee. Several processing firms exist, but Every.org is one of the few nonprofit processors that offers free conversions for other nonprofits.

Many land trusts use The Giving Block, which charges an annual fee of about \$2,500 for a package that includes marketing your group to its network of known crypto users and listing you on its website. It also offers prospective donors an index of charities in particular fields, giving a fractional share to the listed charities.

A donation in cryptocurrency that has appreciated in value allows the donor to reap tax benefits by donating the appreciated value without having to pay taxes on the appreciation. The transaction is akin to a gift of stock, which a brokerage immediately sells and then forwards the cash to the recipient. Since the exchange happens instantly, the land trust gets the market value at that moment. This minimizes the volatility risk otherwise associated with investing in cryptocurrency.

**LAND TRUST EXPERIENCES SO FAR**

A common pattern among land trusts is getting a first significant crypto donation, followed by a mixed bag. Typically, the gifts that arrive through an index portfolio have been small, just enough to offset the marketing fees. Of course, the hope is to attract new individuals at the major donor level.

The Georgia-Alabama Land Trust had a positive experience: It secured a large donation after posting a land success story to Twitter, which was retweeted by The Giving Block and in turn by a crypto donor to his network. Executive Director Katherine Eddins says the key is to understand that crypto users are heavy Twitter

users. Your message must be attuned to that. Engaging your communications team is essential, and you need staff who fully understand Twitter and hashtags.

Caroline Poteat, development director for the Blue Ridge Conservancy, agrees. “You have to up your Twitter game. It’s how we reach these folks.” All of their tweets are tagged to The Giving Block. This prompted one anonymous crypto gift of \$1,000.

Even small donations can be worthwhile in connecting you to new people. A movement to pledge “1% for the Planet” is gaining traction with some companies and individuals. These prospective donors are looking for a place to distribute their pledged donations, sometimes in crypto.

**CRYPTO CONCERNS**

“The biggest question is the environmental impact. Does that weaken your position as an environmental advocate?” cautions Ailla Wasstrom-Evans, Conservation Defense Fund & Education Manager at the Land Trust Alliance.

The environmental controversy is that crypto leaves a heavy carbon footprint. Mining and maintenance impose very large power demands for the computational process. A few new mining companies have been set up to run solely on renewable energy. The industry is evolving, and more sustainable methods are under development, albeit not yet deployed.

About 75% of crypto gifts are anonymous, prompting concerns about dubious sources, though crypto fans say it is no different than accepting any anonymous gift, such as from a donor-advised fund. Market volatility is another concern. A crypto gift itself does not make a land trust subject to market fluctuations, due to the instant conversion, but volatility can severely impact the likelihood of such gifts being made. “It’s been crickets since crypto lost half its value,” says Eddins. “It’s not a good time to be giving away crypto.”

Board members need to ask how crypto

fits into a board’s fiscal responsibilities. Standards and Practices hold board members to a duty of prudent fiscal management. Using an outside vendor for conversions is one way to minimize risk of any fiscal missteps.

**GETTING STARTED**

The crypto meltdown means there’s no urgency to start working with crypto donations. If your board does not yet have a policy on crypto donations, the slowdown allows time for careful consideration. Current crypto users advise taking the time you need to weigh the merits and get your team on the same page.

If your organization opts to move forward, start-up costs and time can be minimal. Simply select a crypto converter and create a website link. The rest is automated. One land trust is trying a pilot and will reassess after one year. You can take down your link at any time.

Of course, just posting a link may not interest your current base of supporters, so the next step is outreach. Poteat says the key is direct marketing to crypto users and potential crypto donors. Success may depend on many factors, including geography. A region with a heavy tech presence or affluent second homes might be expected to fare better than rural areas. In spite of some crypto successes, the California Rangeland Trust does not expect its ranchers to respond. Ultimately, the key question is how to reach the people using cryptocurrency.

“There’s real money out there, and it’s not the same donors we normally attract,” notes Mindy Milby Tuttle, director of principle giving at the Alliance.

With the right timing, outreach strategy, social media staff and a little luck, you may score big. Or you may have a website link that generates nothing but pushback from your members. ☺

JIM WYERMAN is a writer and the former director of development and communications at the Land Trust Alliance.

Accepting crypto donations presents issues, opportunities and limitations. The Alliance has a new Practical Pointer available on the Learning Center.

# GUIDE TO CHANGING OFFENSIVE PLACE NAMES

By **DARCI PALMQUIST**  
and **KATIE RUSHMANN**



GREG WOHHEAD/FLOCKR

↑ Visitors to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming look out over Hayden Valley. Tribal leaders want to rename the valley, which was named after an early explorer whose reports called for the extermination of Indigenous people.

Earlier this year, the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) and The Wilderness Society (TWS) released **“A Guide to Changing Racist and Offensive Place Names in the United States.”** While the guide is specifically for renaming efforts on public lands, it contains meaningful insights for anyone interested in this work, including useful history about public place names in the United States, information about what can and can’t be renamed, and the process for how renaming is achieved.

“Place names must be equitable and just, honor cultural diversity and advance dignity for all people,” says Paul Spitler, senior legislative policy manager for TWS, in the press release. “This guide will help people remove racist relics and replace them with new names that celebrate the diversity of our nation.”

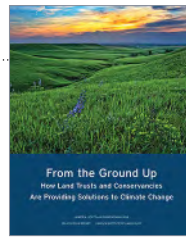
The guide can be a resource for land trusts as they strive to work in more equitable and inclusive ways—especially in instances where the public will access trails and conserved properties. For land trusts conserving lands adjacent to federal, state or local lands that contain offensive names, the guide offers advice on how to work toward change; land trusts can even share the guide with government officials and local partners to raise awareness of the issue.

## Land Trusts and Climate Change Solutions

The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy published **“From the Ground Up: How Land Trusts and Conservancies Are Providing Solutions to Climate Change”** earlier this year. Land conservation and efforts to combat climate change are closely linked, and one cannot succeed without the other. The guide, written by James N. Levitt and Chandni Navalkha, offers case studies about how land trusts and conservancies are working to address climate change. For instance, the accredited Vermont Land Trust (VLT), a Land Trust Alliance member, is profiled for efforts to protect 8,600 acres of forests in the Cold Hollow Mountains in one of the first aggregated forest carbon offset projects in the United States. Developed by a multi-consortium partnership led by VLT and implemented through its subsidiary, Vermont Forest Carbon Company, the project involves 10 landowners who work together to generate carbon credits to sell in a voluntary carbon market.

There are multiple stories about how Alliance members have collaborated to create solutions. For instance, Ranchland Trust of Kansas and the Kansas Land Trust (both accredited) worked to protect tallgrass prairie land that was then utilized to house wind turbines to create renewable energy. Extensive research was done to make sure the turbines would not disturb natural habitats, an idea that has been replicated worldwide.

Stories of success are paired with guidance and policy recommendations to empower land trusts to further their conservation efforts in sustainable and effective ways. Taken from both the United States and from around the world, the efforts model innovative policies that land trusts can adapt.



## COMING SOON!

### The Alliance’s new website debuts at the end of September.

The new site features a beautiful new look, plus easy access to all the information that land trusts and their supporters need. The new site will combine many of the Alliance’s current sites, including LandTrustAlliance.org and the Learning Center, and will include familiar features, such as the resource library, ways to connect with conservation peers and inspiring stories from land trusts across the country, with a streamlined design and new functionality. Look for emails announcing the site launch.

## On the Path to Equity

Resource Media is a nonprofit communications firm working to support social change. It started in 1998 with a focus on conservation campaigns and came to realize that “conservation causes are stronger when considered as part of a broader tapestry of issues.” Today, the firm focuses its work on increasing access to health, equity, justice and sustainability. Resource Media has partnered with many land trusts and environmental organizations over the years.

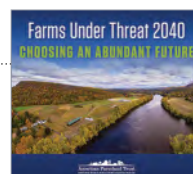
**“On the Path to Equity”** is Resource Media’s account of the organization’s ongoing journey toward equity and inclusivity. The document shares interesting insights about how to make work culture more welcoming to people with marginalized identities, how creating a staff equity committee allowed Resource Media to make changes from the ground up, and how the firm now brings equity into its work in the field of nonprofit communications. The firm’s story can be useful for all nonprofits on a similar path.



## New Report from American Farmland Trust

America’s farm and ranch lands are rapidly disappearing, threatening our rural communities and agricultural economy, and jeopardizing our very future. **“Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future,”** a new report and web mapping tool from American Farmland Trust (AFT), explains how smart growth and investment in America’s downtowns and main streets must occur now to secure the land that grows our food.

The AFT report uses high-resolution spatial analysis tools to identify where U.S. agricultural land has been converted to urban and low-density residential land uses. The report projects this data into the future to present three alternative development scenarios: business as usual, runaway sprawl and better built cities. The report shows that development choices have a significant effect on the future of working lands and urges Americans to embrace Better Built Cities to safeguard local farms and ranches, bolster the global food system and improve peoples’ daily lives. ☺



Scan the QR code with your phone to get links to all the resources listed here.



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## WRITING THE LAND

CONNECTING POETS  
AND LAND TRUSTSBy **DARCI PALMQUIST**

A footpath at Groundswell Conservancy's Westport Prairie, one of two "adopted" lands by Writing the Land poets.

BEN JONES

Lis McLoughlin had been a poet and an activist for a long time, but it wasn't until a proposed pipeline threatened her community—with potential impacts to some beloved natural areas—that she realized her poetry and activism could come together in land protection. McLoughlin helped organize a grassroots effort to fight the pipeline. It succeeded due in part, she says, to the help of her local land trust, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust based in Athol, Massachusetts.

"Part of the reason we won is because the land trust used its status as landholders affected by the pipeline, and knowledge of conservation law," says McLoughlin. "I didn't realize how important land trusts were until then. When you really need someone who knows land and cares about it, a land trust is where to go."

The event inspired McLoughlin to found Writing the Land in 2020. It's a collaborative project that connects poets with land protection organizations to help further

conservation and, as McLoughlin writes, "honor nature and our relationship with it in a way that is as equitable and transparent as it is deep and entangled."

Originally started in the Northeast, the project has grown to be nationwide, with some 235 poets and 96 land trusts and other partners participating. It's a passion project for McLoughlin, who typically puts in 13-hour days and says she feels "privileged to be able to do that." She pairs land trusts with poets who "adopt"

a conserved property, visiting it over the course of 9-13 months and creating poems inspired by the land. For land trusts, the project can help engage new audiences and raise awareness of the importance of land conservation as a whole or a specific project they'd like to showcase.

"Our involvement with Writing the Land inspired us to launch our own poetry contest," says Aimee Dorval, executive director of Androscoggin Land Trust in Maine (hear more from Dorval in the story "In Their Own Words" on p. 18). "We've never had a poetry contest before, but I can clearly see that we have a new audience. None of these people have ever engaged with us before—I have poetry submissions from people aged 11 to 73!"

There is little cost to the land trusts, who contribute a small amount that includes a stipend for the poets, and the poems are available to the land trusts indefinitely for use in their own media (print, web and video) and outreach. The poems are also collected into anthologies, in which each partner land trust is given a chapter, and the land trusts can then sell the anthologies above cost.

"Some land trusts sell the books for fundraising and outreach purposes, others use them as thank you gifts to board members and donors," says McLoughlin.

McLoughlin wants Writing the Land to be as inclusive as possible—stating that the project "gains strength, depth, beauty and energy from a multitude of voices"—and actively seeks out poets of all social, racial and ethnic backgrounds. This year, in addition to land trusts she is partnering with some public parks—for instance, two poets have been paired with Flushing Meadows Corona Park in New York City, where their poems are being translated into Spanish and Mandarin, two of the dominant languages in the communities surrounding the park.

"I hope that when people read these poems, they get a sense that the outside is for everybody. And even if we all interact with it differently, it's still needed, it's essential," says McLoughlin. ☺

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To learn more about Writing the Land and how your land trust can participate, visit [writingtheland.org](http://writingtheland.org).



PHOTO COURTESY OF WRITING THE LAND

## The Land Speaks V

by ANGELA (ANGIE) TRUDELL VASQUEZ  
for EGA HOCAK HOMINAL NI

Harvested fields  
sing with crane footsteps,  
the threshers, the turkeys  
fan plumage scratch itch the ground.  
Frog songs ripple from the pond say  
I'm here, I'm here, How about you?  
Slog through mud, stickers,  
branches and burs tag our clothes  
we find a spot relieve tired soles.  
Here, no bird pays rent  
they eat, swim, harvest the soil  
with tiny beaks robins, crows,  
red winged black birds, seagulls  
peck, plow the ground, water, air –  
they fly fish catch bugs midflight.  
There are footprints underwater here  
where a creature stood at dusk or dawn...  
The Earth keeps the mold little hands and feet  
some creatures who bent their necks to drink.  
A turkey vulture makes an appearance  
a hawk rests on an oak branch hunts  
barely visible against the tree trunk  
camouflage its best friend.  
When glaciers peeled back their edges  
little huts sprouted circled emerging  
kettle lakes, pools of ice in retreat.

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Angie Trudell Vasquez, the 2020 City of Madison Poet Laureate, is one of two *Writing the Land* poets who partnered with Groundswell Conservancy this year. Her poem is inspired by Patrick Marsh.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WRITING THE LAND

## We Dance Where We Are Planted

by ANGELA MARÍA SPRING  
for WARREN "JOHNNY" SHAW

We dance where we are planted,  
like the jazz of June, sweet trumpet trill afloat  
past a weekend barbeque pit cookout, laughter deep  
like the soil we unearth, sow beneath concrete,  
Black and beautiful and rich with nutrients,  
like our children and elders, future, present, past,  
this city we never stop flowering in, it's ours to reclaim  
like the wild pieces of us, this land still and waiting  
between alleyways and slanted backyards and edges  
like the stewards before and now: Lumbee, Piscataway,  
Accohannock, African kin, we seed and weave together,  
like Anansi holding all knowledge up to the sun, we  
remember how to garden, we remember how to become  
like trees. We raise up collards, green beans, Swiss chard,  
feed that green space in us so it grows and grows and grows.

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As a *Writing the Land* poet, Angela María Spring partnered with Baltimore Green Space to create poems inspired by Victorine Q. Adams Memorial Garden.

# INTEGRITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND SERVICE: HOW COMMISSIONERS HELP MEET THE PROMISE OF PERPETUITY

By **CAITY PINKARD**



↑ The current board of commissioners, Des Moines, Iowa, 2022.

## As one of the first commissioners at the Land Trust Accreditation Commission,

Larry Kueter can speak firsthand to the values of the Commission and its board of commissioners. “After the Alliance established the Commission, I joined the board and served for nine years,” Kueter recalls. “It was one of the most satisfying professional things I’ve ever done, filled with the most resourceful, engaging and intelligent people. Everyone who has been a part of it has loved it.”

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, the Commission was established in 2006 to build and recognize strong land trusts and foster public confidence in long-term land protection. The Commission is governed by a board of 18 hardworking volunteer commissioners with diverse

**“I’ve never been part of a group whose qualities—intelligence, thoughtfulness, professionalism and integrity—were so universal. Taken together, it remains the most rewarding experience of my professional life.”**

—Steve Swartz, former commissioner

expertise in land conservation, stewardship and management. The values of the Commission—integrity, accountability and service—apply equally to the commissioners. While Kueter experienced the founding of the Commission, as well as its evolution over the following decade, commissioners from every era of the Commission describe their time on the board in similar terms.

“I knew what I was getting into,” says Kevin McGorty, who served from 2009 to 2013. “But out of a spirit of giving something back, I knew I needed to serve on the board. I joined because of the quality and dedication of the commissioners to problem-solving and providing greater pathways for the land trust community.”

Steve Swartz, commissioner from 2009 to 2018, shares the sentiment. “In my entire professional career, I’ve never been part of a group whose qualities—intelligence, thoughtfulness, professionalism and integrity—were so universal. Taken together, it remains the most rewarding experience of my professional life.”

Of course, that doesn’t mean being a commissioner is easy work. “This was weekend and night work,” Swartz admits. “One of the commissioners wrote me a note saying, ‘Are you ready yet?’ but I knew the reviews took a long time. I thought I wouldn’t survive more than one term. Nine years later, I was still on the board!” Despite the rigor of the work or perhaps because of it, commissioners are united by their shared passion for conservation and their belief in the value of accreditation to the land trust community.

“The best way to show that we are meeting the bar set for us—to widely diverse audiences—is to have an accreditation program: an independent system of rigorous review by experts from our field,” says Molly Doran, commissioner from 2010 to 2020. “I think it is one of the most important things the community has done for the sustainability of the land trust movement. Commissioners focus on what’s important, so the process remains a true peer review and gives land trusts the confidence that they are being evaluated fairly.” As a result, the accreditation program has been an inward-looking process and a forward-looking one, evolving to strengthen the land trust community and respond to its collective challenges.

“The world around us changed, so we had to change to respond to those things,” says Kueter. “The value of accreditation is being prepared to respond with credibility and professionalism.”

To meet new challenges, commissioners work hard to understand the different issues that land trusts across the nation face. “We were always striving for the right balance between rigor, achievability and flexibility,” Swartz says. This requires commissioners to find the middle ground between supporting land trusts through the process and challenging them to grow because of it. “It’s a well-oiled machine, but a compassionate one that employs common sense,” adds McGorty. “You have to build trust to build strong leadership and a lasting legacy of stewardship.”

As the land trust community evolves, so too does the Commission. “I saw accreditation evolve substantially to become more accessible, to include land trusts of all sizes and with all types of programs and communities, and very importantly to meet emerging issues,” Doran says. “I have also seen the massive and positive impact it has had on land trusts around the United States. Commissioners love the work of land trusts. There is not a question they cannot solve, and they are focused on serving land trusts and accreditation. In the end, that helps us continue to enjoy the charitable tools we all use.”

For Kueter, this is the ultimate goal of the Commission: to ask land trusts to achieve excellence. “You have to hold yourself to high standards because you don’t know when you’re going to need them. Having excellence in what you do has always been there and is always going to be there. We rely on public resources and public funding, and you can’t get lazy. You can’t get excellence back—you have to work on it.” ☺

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



## LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

[landtrustaccreditation.org](http://landtrustaccreditation.org)

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEWEST CLASS OF ACCREDITED LAND TRUSTS

Accreditation involves a rigorous evaluation that ensures applicants are operating at the highest conservation standards. Congratulations to the newest class of accredited land trusts, and thank you for continuing to lead the way in conservation excellence.

### NEWLY ACCREDITED

- Greater Lovell Land Trust (ME)
- Payette Land Trust (ID)

### RENEWED

- Allegheny Land Trust (PA) ♦
- Avalonia Land Conservancy (CT)
- California Rangeland Trust (CA) ♦
- Chattooga Conservancy (SC)
- Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast (FL) ♦
- Desert Foothills Land Trust (AZ) ♦
- Ducks Unlimited and its affiliate, Wetlands America Trust (TN) ♦
- Eastern Sierra Land Trust (CA) ♦
- Five Rivers Conservancy Trust (NH)
- Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina (NC) ♦
- Frontera Land Alliance (TX)
- Indian River Lakes Conservancy (NY)
- Joshua’s Tract Conservation and Historic Trust (CT) ♦

- Land Conservancy of Ridgefield (CT)
- Land Savers United (VA) ♦
- Mendocino Land Trust (CA)
- NICHES Land Trust (IN)
- Palmer Land Conservancy (CO) ♦
- Piedmont Environmental Council (VA) ♦
- Ranchland Trust of Kansas (KS)
- Sakonnet Preservation Association (RI) ♦
- Shasta Land Trust (CA) ♦
- Shirley Heinze Land Trust (IN)
- Steep Rock Association (CT)
- Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust (CA)
- Texas Land Conservancy (TX) ♦
- Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (NY) ♦
- Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust (VA) ♦
- Westerly Land Trust (RI)
- Woods and Waters Land Trust (KY)

List as of August 2022

♦ Denotes second renewal

## JOIN US

Joining the Commission is a great opportunity to work with a dedicated group of volunteer conservation leaders from around the country and be part of a national program that fosters excellence, trust and permanence in land conservation. Land trust accreditation is only possible through the dedicated volunteers who make up the Commission. Collectively, the 18 commissioners—from across the country and with expertise in various areas of conservation—volunteer thousands of hours annually, governing and serving as peer reviewers.

Interested in learning more? Visit [landtrustaccreditation.org/about/jobs](http://landtrustaccreditation.org/about/jobs).

← A view of Lake George, New York, 2016. Commissioners have the opportunity to explore beautiful places when gathered for Commission meetings.



# GRATEFUL FOR YOU

You are the heart of land conservation.  
You are the reason our special lands and  
waters will be here for generations to come.

From the bottom of our hearts, THANK YOU.  
We couldn't do this good work without you.