

**SAVING**

# LAND

[WWW.LANDTRUSTALLIANCE.ORG](http://WWW.LANDTRUSTALLIANCE.ORG)

SPRING 2026



---

## **HIGH-WIRE ACT**

**LAND TRUSTS AND THE ENERGY RACE**

**COLLABORATION TAKES US FURTHER**

**LEARN.INSPIRE.ACT.**

 Land Trust Alliance  
Together, conserving the places you love



---

## Headwater Bluffs

In January, the accredited Frenchman Bay Conservancy announced the permanent protection of 5,793-acre Headwater Bluffs in Downeast Maine. Located at the headwaters of the Union River, the landscape plays a direct role in protecting regional drinking water, fisheries, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation. The property also abuts other protected lands that together create a contiguous conservation corridor stretching 43,000 acres.

“Its dense woods, glistening waters and rugged bluffs will give residents and visitors increased access to more of what we love about our region: more space to hike, climb, hunt, fish and connect with nature,” says Joy Cartwright, communication and marketing manager at Frenchman Bay Conservancy. ☺

◀ Headwater Bluffs’ forests and wetlands will keep local drinking water clean and help local communities become more resilient to climate change.



# CONTENTS

↑ Galveston Bay Foundation holds multiple leases at its Chocolate Bay Preserve that support conservation goals and secure critical funds—read the story on p. 24.

## DEPARTMENTS

### 5 Letter From the CEO

Collaboration takes us further.

### 6 Conservation News

Relocating an endangered pawpaw plant, protecting Civil Rights landmarks, opening North America's largest wildlife overpass and more.

### 10 Capitol Connections

Leveraging national support for local land protection.

### 12 Voiced

Q&A with an author and rancher.

### 22 Land We Love

Art-inspiring landscapes in New Mexico.

### 29 Safeguarding Conservation

Stewardship for a shifting world.

### 30 Board Matters

Introducing six new board members.

### 34 People & Places

The mountain they never gave up on.

### 36 Resources & Tools

Your conservation story matters—participate in Census.

### 38 Accreditation Corner

Future storytelling starts with good easement stewardship records.

## FEATURES

### 14 High-Wire Act

Across the country, the rapid growth of energy infrastructure—from renewables to data centers—is putting pressure on communities to make smart land use and siting decisions. Land trusts can bring their skills and expertise to help balance the impacts on people, conservation and climate.

By MEGHAN MCDONALD

### 24 Leasing Your Way to Financial Sustainability

For many land trusts, leasing conserved lands can become a tried-and-true source of income—as long as leases are carefully drafted, with conservation protections and best management practices in place.

By OLE AMUNDSEN

ON THE COVER:

Sunrise view of Mount Hood near the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Friends of Columbia Gorge is working to protect the Gorge's natural resources and scenic beauty amidst expanding energy infrastructure.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL GOMEZ

**OUR MISSION** To save the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America.

**BOARD**

David Call  
CHAIR

Michael A. Polemis  
IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR

William C. Mulligan  
VICE CHAIR

Roberto J. Serrallés, Ph.D.  
TREASURER

Blair Calvert Fitzsimons  
SECRETARY

Ebonie Alexander  
Sam Cook  
Cheryl Fox  
Valerie Gordan  
Carolyn B. Hendricks, MD  
Glenn Lamb  
Douglas Land  
Roel Lopez  
Kristina Ortez  
William A. Plapinger  
Catherine Rawson  
Marissa Amaka Sams  
Simon Sidamon-Eristoff  
Fred Van Sickle  
Chuck Wolfe  
Chet Work

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM**

Ashley Demosthenes  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Jennifer Miller Herzog  
CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER

Monica Poveda  
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Lori Faeth  
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Erin Heskett  
VICE PRESIDENT OF CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

Renee Kivikko  
VICE PRESIDENT OF EDUCATION

Suzanne Erera  
VICE PRESIDENT OF DEVELOPMENT

Forrest King-Cortes  
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY-CENTERED CONSERVATION

**STAFF**

Zoë Abraham  
Akou Akakpo  
Marc Anderson  
Jorge Astorga Jr.  
Marcie Bidwell  
Lindsay Blair  
Jamie Brown  
Mary Burke  
Katie Chang  
Laura Eklov  
Laura Fagen  
Maddie Fishburn  
Emily Flynn-McCarthy  
Mariah Fogg  
Artis Freye  
Lindsay Frix  
Ajiah Gilbert  
Lawrence Greene  
Ethan Gu  
Kara Heckert  
Terry Hendrick  
Corey Himrod  
Nate Hodge  
Josh Holmes  
Dyan Holt  
Katrina Howey

Tom Kester  
Lisa Lauben  
Rex Linville  
Abi Locatis Prochaska  
Camilla Lorca Jimenez  
Anahi Malig  
Nora Mandelkern  
Gabriel Martinez  
Sarah McGraw  
John McKenzie  
Justin Merrifield  
Hiwot Mesgina  
Mindy Milby Tuttle  
Reilly Murphy  
Gabriel Naccarato  
Nikki Nesbary  
Diana Norris  
MaryKay O'Donnell  
Hannah Overton  
Darci Palmquist  
Brad Paymar  
Catherine Rawson  
Tristen Polensky  
Lindsay Reamer  
Sean Roome  
Robert Schwartz  
Liz Silverman  
Andrew Szwak  
Patty Tipson  
Jenny Tollefson  
Ailla Wasstrom-Evans  
Kelly Watkinson  
Owen Wozniak  
Michael Wubbenhorst  
Scott Yaw  
Hiwot Yemesgen

**LEGACY SOCIETY**  
We are grateful to the following individuals who have chosen to include the Land Trust Alliance in their estate plans.

Anonymous (6)  
David H. Anderson  
Robert A. Ayres  
Marilyn M. Ayres  
Mary Burke and Paul Dickerson  
Lisa Cashdan and Peter Stein  
The Estate of Pamela and Dennis Collins  
The Estate of Eugene and Virginia Connolly  
The Crane Family  
Jane and Philip Cresap Brekke  
Lauren B. Dachs  
Michael P. Dowling  
Allison Elder  
Mr. and Mrs. William Fitzhugh  
Cheryl Fox and David Staley  
Jameson S. French  
The Estate of the Judith A. Grandahl Family Foundation  
John M. Gusachik Trust  
The Estate of David C. Hardy  
Marjorie L. Hart  
Peter O. Hausmann  
John and Loretta Hayes  
Peggy A. Horner  
The Estate of Sherry F. Huber

Lucinda Hunt Stowell  
Tim Jacobson  
Laura Johnson and Arthur "Tooley" W. Rogers  
The Estate of Susan Kinsey  
The Estate of Dianne Kommsink  
Kathy Leavenworth  
Mindy Milby Tuttle and Brad Tuttle  
Marc E. Nichols  
Eileen Ann Nivera  
Kristopher A. and Jennifer Pickler  
Frederic C. Rich  
Helene Jill Rostock  
Bill Silberstein  
Stephen J. Small  
The Estate of Gail Smith  
Daniel M. Stowell  
Stephen W. Swartz  
Doris Walker  
Andy Weaver  
Rand and Sue Wentworth  
Alice E. White

**LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION**  
An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

Harry Pollack  
CHAIR

Shane Wellendorf  
VICE CHAIR

Dana Chabot  
TREASURER

Andrea M. Reese  
SECRETARY

Katharine Roser  
COMMISSIONER EMERITUS

Bruce Runnels  
COMMISSIONER EMERITUS

Chris Vaughn  
COMMISSIONER EMERITUS

Gerald Barber  
Hans Carlson  
Kelly Collins Choi  
Robin Fitch  
Ellen Gass  
Chris Jage  
Heather Jobst  
Aaron Lefland  
Clint Miller  
Michael Pope  
Misti Schmidt  
Kay Sohl  
Becky Thornton

**COMMISSION STAFF**

Melissa Kalvestrand  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jennifer Brady-Connor  
Megan Chapman  
Stacy Girmindl  
Valerie Roof  
Courtney Smith  
Siobhan Smith  
Jessica Whittaker

**SAVING LAND**

Darci Palmquist  
SENIOR EDITOR

Kirsten Ferguson  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



THOMAS ROWELL

# Empower a Land Trust

Land trusts conserve natural and working lands that provide access to local food, essential habitats for plants and animals, and natural spaces for people, promoting better health and a greater sense of well-being.

You can empower land trusts to save more land for their communities.

## BECOME A STEWARD OF THE LAND

Monthly giving is an easy and paperless way you can help. Become a Steward of the Land to ensure a continuous base of financial support for land trusts in your community and across the nation.



## Giving is Easy

To donate scan this QR code or visit [landtrustalliance.org/take-action](https://landtrustalliance.org/take-action).



SAVING LAND®, a registered trademark of the Land Trust Alliance (ISSN 2159-290X), is published quarterly by the Land Trust Alliance, headquartered at 1250 H St. NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20005, and distributed to members and donors at the \$50 level and higher.

© 2026 BY THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE

This publication is designed to provide accurate, authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is distributed with the understanding that the publisher, authors and editors are not engaged in rendering legal, accounting or other professional services. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

SAVING LAND  
SPRING 2026  
VOL. 45 NO. 2

DESIGN & PRODUCTION  
BY TINA TAYLOR

PRINTING BY MODERN LITHO,  
AN ECO-CONSCIOUS PRINTER

# COLLABORATION TAKES US FURTHER

## Welcome to the spring issue of Saving Land.

As you will discover, woven throughout the stories in this season's publication is the thread of collaboration.

Collaboration starts with curiosity and listening to learn and understand. Finding common ground and building trust—something land trusts excel at—is foundational to meaningful and lasting collaborations. I've seen this all over as I've traveled in my first year as CEO of the Land Trust Alliance, meeting with land trust leaders, generational land stewards and conservation supporters.

Something else I've observed is that there is a commonly held sense of urgency everywhere. The tasks before us are huge. We must: 1) accelerate the pace of land conservation and stewardship; 2) communicate clearly and powerfully the "why" of land conservation to decision-makers and the general public; and 3) innovate through cross-sector partnerships to diversify approaches for achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. If we don't, the future of our country is at risk beyond what we can imagine.

Land trusts know this and are already contending with urgent threats to conservation—the rapid expansion of energy infrastructure (read more on p. 14) is just one example of how land trusts are balancing short-term needs with long-term vision, rooted in our history of collaboration.



DJ GLISSON, I/FIRELY IMAGEWORKS

↑ Ashley Demosthenes.

Land is finite in quantity, yet it is living, breathing and constantly reshaping. Our work in conservation should be as dynamic and nimble as nature itself. As leaders in the movement, we can make profound advancements by developing and implementing entrepreneurial and relational approaches to the field in equal measure. At the heart of both genres, whichever flavor resonates with you the most, is collaboration.

When we collaborate with intention, toward a shared goal, we must bring forward trust, vulnerability and, in many cases, endurance. The results can be extraordinary.

**ASHLEY DEMOSTHENES**  
Land Trust Alliance CEO

By **KIRSTEN FERGUSON**

# NORTH AMERICA'S LARGEST WILDLIFE OVERPASS OPENS IN COLORADO

**R**ocky Mountain bighorn sheep, elk, pronghorn and other wildlife can now safely cross six lanes of interstate traffic near Larkspur, Colorado, thanks to the completion of the I-25 Greenland wildlife overpass.

The Colorado Department of Transportation recently completed the 200-foot-wide structure—now the largest wildlife overpass in North America. Finished with native soil and vegetation, the overpass reconnects more than 39,000 acres of habitat on either side of I-25, restoring a critical migration corridor long severed by traffic.

Developed in collaboration with Douglas County and land trust partners including Douglas Land Conservancy and Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (both accredited), the overpass is part of a broader network of wildlife crossings and fencing designed to reconnect large tracts of open space along southern Douglas County's I-25 corridor.

The Greenland overpass was specifically designed as a wide, open crossing to accommodate species such as elk and pronghorn that use open overpass structures more readily than narrow, enclosed underpasses.

"The I-25 Greenland wildlife overpass is not only an engineering achievement, it is a testament to what is possible when we come together to protect the resources that define Colorado," says Erik Glenn, chief executive officer of Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust.

The overpass closes a 3.7-mile gap between existing wildlife crossings and completes the I-25 South Gap project. Before construction, the corridor averaged one wildlife-vehicle collision per day during peak migration seasons. CDOT estimates the completed system could reduce wildlife-vehicle crashes by up to 90%.

"Working in partnership with so many different organizations to accomplish such an amazing conservation project is humbling. So many people from a variety of interests came together for our wildlife," says Laura Sanford, executive director of Douglas Land Conservancy. ☺



COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

↑ Looking west from the I-25 Greenland wildlife overpass toward a Douglas Land Conservancy conservation easement.

→ Pronghorn antelope are among the wildlife that will hopefully make use of the new overpass.



RY LAMSA



ANDY MORFEE

↑ Crested caracara are frequent visitors to the native tallgrass prairie at Redbud Preserve.

## Protecting One of Texas' Last Tallgrass Prairies

**O**ne of Texas' last remaining tallgrass prairies is now permanently protected, following the completion of a conservation easement, led by the accredited Bayou Land Conservancy, just south of Montgomery.

The first 88 acres of Cindy's Redbud Nature Preserve—part of a 176-acre property—have been safeguarded through a Phase 1 conservation easement after Bayou Land Conservancy completed a \$62,000 stewardship fundraising campaign to support the site's long-term protection and restoration.

Owned by Cindy Martin and Ray Audas, the preserve protects native prairie grasses, wetlands and forested grassland while providing habitat for rare and declining species, including Texas windmill grass and the crested caracara. With less than 1% of Texas' historic tallgrass prairie remaining today, the preserve harbors an increasingly rare and valuable landscape.

"As Houston continues to grow, it's more important than ever to conserve wild places where native species can thrive, floodplains can function naturally, and clean water flows freely to our communities," says Justin Hicks, board chair of Bayou Land Conservancy.

Ongoing restoration efforts include prescribed burns and invasive species removal, conducted in partnership with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, with future phases planned to protect the remaining acreage.

"Redbud is full of life—from native grasses waving in the wind to birds you just don't see anymore," says Cindy Martin. "Partnering with Bayou Land Conservancy gave us a way to ensure it stays wild forever." ☺

# Historic Land Return Advances Indigenous Stewardship



ELIZABETH CARMEL

↑ Wélmelti? Preserve, formerly called Loyaltan Ranch, is the largest tribal land return in the Sierra Nevada.

**A**n Indigenous-led land trust in California recently completed the largest tribal land return ever in the Sierra Nevada, marking a significant milestone for tribal stewardship and conservation partnerships.

The California Wildlife Conservation Board awarded a \$5.5 million grant to the Waší-šiw Land Trust last fall to support the

acquisition of 10,274 acres within the ancestral homelands of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California. The property, formerly Loyaltan Ranch and now called the Wélmelti? Preserve, was purchased for \$6 million from the city of Santa Clara and closed in February 2026.

The acquisition will triple the amount of land currently held by the Washoe Tribe and represents one of the largest land returns in the Sierra Nevada region. The Waší-šiw Land Trust was formed in 2025 by the Washoe Tribe to facilitate the return and stewardship of lands throughout its historic Sierra homelands.

“The reclamation of these Washoe homelands is of great importance,” said Washoe Tribe Chairman Serrell Smokey following the board’s vote. “Now the land is calling the Washoe people home, and we are answering that call.”

The project is the result of a four-year collaboration among the Washoe Tribe, the accredited Feather River Land Trust and the Northern Sierra Partnership, with partners supporting surveying, landowner coordination and grant writing.

Loyaltan Ranch spans a diverse landscape of sagebrush scrub, grasslands, mountain meadows, conifer forests and aspen groves. The land also includes pinyon pine, a species of deep cultural significance to the Washoe people, which the tribe plans to steward through restoration and long-term land management. ☺

## ENDANGERED “BEAUTIFUL PAWPAW” RELOCATED TO CONSERVATION LANDS

**U**nder Florida’s punishing summer sun, volunteers and conservation professionals relocated the endangered “beautiful pawpaw” (*Deeringothamnus pulchellus*) to protected lands owned by the Cape Coral Wildlife Trust (CCWT) last year. The rare plant is endemic to Florida and found in just three counties: Lee, Charlotte and Orange.

Danny Young of Young Bear Environmental Consulting led the project in partnership with Bok Tower Gardens and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. CCWT provided secure relocation sites on its conservation properties, expanding its work beyond protecting iconic species like burrowing owls and gopher tortoises to include imperiled native plants.

Support came from the Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife, a volunteer-led group that helps CCWT acquire and maintain undeveloped parcels across the city.

CCWT currently owns 87 lots across 35 parcels, all donated by community members for conservation.

The day’s mission was twofold: survey conservation parcels for undiscovered pawpaw populations and relocate plants threatened by development. Volunteers discovered up to 10 plants already growing on one lot, now added to CCWT’s monitoring program.

Relocation proved painstaking. Pawpaw plants develop deep, carrot-like taproots, requiring excavations up to 4 feet deep and more than an hour per plant. Roots were carefully exposed, wrapped in wet towels and transported in coolers before replanting with transplant stimulants and moisture-retaining gel to reduce shock.

“This work was hot, physical and incredibly detailed,” says CCWT President Cheryl Anderson.

The following day, the team continued



MIRTA BARNET

↑ A volunteer holds up an excavated pawpaw plant, showing its long taproots.

their work on Pine Island, partnering with the accredited Big Waters Land Trust to relocate additional pawpaw plants. The effort capped four years of planning, grant writing and coordination, resulting in a rare conservation success for a species few have ever successfully transplanted. ☺



HEIDI SOURWINE

↑ Children play on a sensory trail on an Indian River Lakes Conservancy preserve.

## New Sensory Trails Open in New York

**T**he accredited Indian River Lakes Conservancy (IRLC) has unveiled northern New York's first sensory trails at its Baker Woods property in Lewis County and its Redwood Hill Preserve in Jefferson County.

The trails are designed to engage visitors' senses through interactive elements with a focus on neurodivergent children, a group that can struggle with over- and under-stimulation in nature. From a sensory path with diverse surfaces to a musical corner echoing the sounds of the forest, each element invites exploration and engagement. Kids can sift through stones, climb stumps, walk on balance beams and roll balls toward a target.

The projects are a collaboration with Encompass Recreation, a nonprofit that provides recreational opportunities for youth in northern New York, especially those with higher support needs such as ADHD, autism, Down syndrome, anxiety, and mobility or communication needs.

"This endeavor was born from a desire to infuse existing spaces with the spirit of inclusivity, starting with the two IRLC trails," says Kylie Schell, Encompass Recreation founder. "We identified IRLC as an ideal partner in this project due to the long-standing reputation for caring about kids, but also because IRLC had existing trails in two counties—one of our goals."

The trail complements the conservancy's digital Accessibility Menu, which enables website users to adjust contrast, text size and navigation for improved usability—part of the organization's broader commitment to removing barriers both on the land and online. ☺

## HUGE STRETCH OF WORKING LANDS CONSERVED IN WYOMING

**T**he accredited Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust has permanently protected 17,757 acres of working ranchland in one of Wyoming's most historically and ecologically important regions through a conservation easement completed last fall.

Located near the Sweetwater and North Platte rivers, the Pathfinder Sand Creek Ranch lies along the historic Emigrant Trail, where the Oregon, Mormon, Pioneer and California trails cross its northern boundary. Nearby landmarks such as Independence Rock, Devil's Gate and Martin's Cove highlight the area's central role in westward migration and settlement.

The Sweetwater River Conservancy Conservation Bank operates on the property, restoring and managing habitat to support greater sage grouse, a species threatened by habitat fragmentation. The bank generates conservation mitigation credits that offset unavoidable impacts to sage grouse habitat from development, including wind energy projects.

"The conservation of the Pathfinder Sand Creek Ranch builds on generations of stewardship that define Wyoming's history," says Christine Adams, executive director of Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust. "Through our partnership with the ranch, we're ensuring that this working landscape continues to support agriculture, wildlife habitat and open space for generations to come."

An active cattle ranch since the 1870s, the property reflects Wyoming's formative ranching era, including the open-range conflicts that culminated in the Johnson County Cattle War of 1892. Following completion of the conservation easement, the ranch was sold to a neighboring operation, ensuring it remains in the hands of experienced owners committed to long-term stewardship. ☺



PHOTO COURTESY OF WYOMING STOCK GROWERS LAND TRUST

↑ Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust has permanently protected 17,757 acres of Wyoming ranchland, which will benefit the greater sage grouse, shown here, a species that requires large amounts of contiguous prairie to thrive.

# Conserving Key Civil Rights Landmarks in Alabama



JAY BRITTAIN

↑ The historic Ben Moore Hotel in Montgomery, Alabama, a Civil Rights landmark, is being restored as part of The Conservation Fund's Legacy Places Initiative.

**I**n Alabama, The Conservation Fund (accredited) has moved to protect culturally significant sites central to the Civil Rights Movement through its Legacy Places Initiative, an effort to conserve African American heritage sites and other sites important to America's history.

Among the recently protected locations is the Edistone Hotel in Selma, where the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery marches galvanized the Civil Rights Movement and led to the Voting Rights Act.

The hotel was built in 1855 on land once used for slave auctions.

After the Civil War, the hotel became home to the Freedmen's Bureau—one of the first places in the South where newly emancipated African Americans were treated with dignity. In the 1870s, the hotel's owner made history by offering equal accommodations regardless of race.

"By saving the Edistone Hotel, we're not just protecting the physical location. We're protecting the stories and legacies of all those who passed through its doors, or stood at this site, and are ensuring those stories live on as part of our shared American history," says Phillip Howard, director of the Legacy Places Initiative.

In Montgomery, The Conservation Fund stepped in to protect another historically significant but physically deteriorating site: the Ben Moore Hotel. The hotel was listed in the Green Book, a Jim Crow-era travel guide that listed safe businesses, lodging and routes for Black travelers in a segregated America. It was also one of the few safe havens for Black travelers in Alabama, and a rare symbol of Black entrepreneurship and cultural pride during segregation.

Working with community partners and heritage organizations, The Conservation Fund secured the Ben Moore Hotel before it could be sold or lost to deterioration. It will be stabilized and restored with plans for adaptive reuse, while the Edistone Hotel is being reimagined as a place for the community as a museum, co-working space and grocery store. ☺

## PROTECTING CAVE HABITAT AND WATER QUALITY

**T**he accredited Ozark Land Trust and the Missouri Department of Conservation recently partnered to acquire and permanently protect an ecologically critical 80-acre tract of land near the city of Perryville, Missouri, safeguarding habitat for the federally endangered grotto sculpin and other cave-dependent species.

The property contains at least eight sinkholes and a key entrance to the biologically rich Moore Cave System. Former farmland will be restored to natural habitat, supporting both surface and underground species and helping safeguard water quality within the cave system. The newly protected tract

contributes directly to the recharge zone that sustains the Moore Cave System's ecological function.

Found only in Perry County, the grotto sculpin depends on clean, undisturbed cave and karst habitats. Because surface activities directly affect underground water quality, conserving land above cave systems is essential to the species' survival.

"This acquisition will enable the restoration of 80 acres of habitat of great benefit to the grotto sculpin, help protect the Moore Cave System and the diverse wildlife it supports, and provide valuable opportunities to connect people to nature," says Missouri Department of Conservation Fisheries Biologist Levi Frazier.

The acquisition was made possible through a collaborative conservation partnership. The Missouri Department of Conservation secured a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Recovery Land Acquisition Grant covering up to 73% of the acquisition cost and provided a \$200,000 Land Conser-



PHOTO COURTESY OF OZARK LAND TRUST

↑ The protection and stewardship of 80 acres near the city of Perryville, Missouri, will safeguard habitat for the federally endangered grotto sculpin and other cave-dependent species.

vation Partnership Grant to fulfill the required match. The Conservation Fund (accredited) led negotiations with the landowner and helped secure the purchase.

Ozark Land Trust will take on long-term ownership and stewardship of the property and begin restoring the former farmland to natural habitat. The cave system will be managed for conservation, education and research in cooperation with the Missouri Caves and Karst Conservancy and the Cave Research Foundation. ☺

# LEVERAGING NATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LOCAL LAND PROTECTION

By **JOSH HOLMES** and **DYAN HOLT**



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEVADA LAND TRUST

↑ With the Alliance's NCAT support, Nevada Land Trust is applying for federal conservation easement funding to protect Twist Ranch (pictured).

**W**hen a conservation-minded family in Wisconsin asked Kettle Moraine Land Trust to partner with them on an application for federal conservation easement funding that would help protect their farm from future development, the land trust wanted to say yes—but knew it needed support.

“When we learned about NCAT from an Alliance e-mail newsletter, we were thrilled to leverage this national resource for our local project,” says Doug Marconnet, vice president at Kettle Moraine Land Trust.

“NCAT”—NRCS Conservation Acquisition Team—is the Alliance’s special-ops force for helping land trusts apply for funding through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs. Comprised of a senior project manager, two project specialists and a project assistant, NCAT supports land trusts from

application all the way to closing, helping prepare strong project documentation for submission while maintaining data and analytics crucial for tracking projects and identifying process issues and bottlenecks within the programs. So far, NCAT has helped land trusts get \$8.2 million in obligated funding to permanently conserve working lands in their home region.

## A STEP TOWARD ADDRESSING FARMLAND LOSS

Loss of local farmland is a growing problem across the country—American Farm-

land Trust estimates that the U.S. loses 2,000 acres of agricultural land per day.

“Our county is approximately 60% farmland, and we hold two agricultural easements already,” says Marconnet. “As we grow, we recognize local farm fields are increasingly being developed into new subdivisions, and we are losing our open space.”

To confront this loss, land trusts like Kettle Moraine are working to build capacity to take on new easements and preserves. In the meantime, leveraging tools and resources like NCAT can make all the difference.

“After careful consideration of the effort involved, and especially knowing we had the full support of the Alliance’s NCAT staff, we decided to proceed with an application only two weeks before the deadline,” says Marconnet. “The tools, insight and assistance we received were invaluable. We submitted our application on time, and we could have never accomplished that without the support of NCAT.”

*“NCAT helped us become better partners to our landowners and to our state NRCS office in a relatively short amount of time. We are so grateful!”*

—ALICIA REBAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT NEVADA LAND TRUST

While the land trust is still waiting to hear the results of its application, successful submission—on time and with proper documentation—is the first step. In the 2025 cycle, over half of the projects NCAT assisted with were ultimately awarded funding.

**HISTORY OF A GROWING PARTNERSHIP**

Kettle Moraine Land Trust’s story is one of many that Alliance staff could tell about its NRCS partnership work.

“It’s really exciting to see how this support is helping land trusts. In less than two years, NCAT has assisted on applications in 17 states, and our overall NRCS partnership has demonstrated significant impact in 46 states,” says Justin Merrifield, senior project manager for NCAT.

For nearly two decades, NRCS—an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture—has worked in partnership with the land trust community to protect America’s working farms and ranches through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program: Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) and, more recently, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). These two conservation easement programs play a vital role in allowing farmers and ranchers across the country to permanently protect their land and keep it in production.

In 2018, NRCS and the Alliance partnered to develop new trainings, enhance technical resources, and create opportunities to facilitate and expand access to ACEP-ALE and RCPP for land trusts. The partnership kicked off with a summit held in Austin, Texas, for land trust practitioners, NRCS and the Alliance. This summit established new communication channels between senior agency officials and land trusts, and two subsequent summits have been held, in 2022 and 2024, yielding new initiatives such as working groups and national online resources like

the ACEP-ALE Toolkit.

The NRCS-Alliance partnership also resulted in a growing presence at Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference. NRCS has served as a lead sponsor since 2022, offering tailored workshops and one-of-a-kind events including the annual summit roundup and, in 2025, the first-ever (sold out) Mastering NRCS Entity-Held Easements seminar. The need for land trust-focused programming has only increased over time, with the Alliance receiving regular requests to expand these opportunities.

In response, the partnership has grown, with the Alliance adding an RCPP program manager in 2023 and the four NCAT staff in 2024.

**‘I JUMPED AT THE OPPORTUNITY’**

Nevada Land Trust was one of the first land trusts to contact NCAT.

“It [had been] a few years since our land trust had the capacity to pursue any NRCS applications, so when NCAT was formed and the land trust community was invited to come on board, I jumped at the opportunity,” says the land trust’s conservation manager, Samantha Wagner.

Wagner explains how NCAT helped her fast-track her learning and skills development around the NRCS program. “I consider Josh [Holmes, NCAT project specialist] a mentor, and am grateful for his support, from double checking applications and answering multiple questions, to helping me navigate the many nuances of this work.”

Nevada Land Trust’s executive director, Alicia Reban, agrees, noting how NCAT support helped the entire organization. “NCAT helped us become better partners to our landowners and to our state NRCS office in a relatively short amount of time,” says Reban. “We are so grateful!”

Looking ahead, the team hopes to continue the momentum in 2026. With

an RCPP Notice of Funding Opportunity on the horizon, the team stands ready to provide continuing support to its members. If interested in support, please reach out to [NCAT@lta.org](mailto:NCAT@lta.org).

JOSH HOLMES and DYAN HOLT are project specialists with NCAT.



DI GLISSON, IIFIREFLY IMAGEWORKS

Join us for Land Trust Alliance  
**ADVOCACY DAYS**  
 APRIL 13-16, 2026

Advocacy Days brings land trust staff, board members and volunteers to Washington, D.C., to advocate for shared policy priorities and educate members of Congress about the important work undertaken by land trusts. This is an opportunity to show up and speak out about voluntary private land conservation and the federal programs, such as NRCS, that support our work.

This annual event offers advocacy training and the opportunity to build political influence on Capitol Hill through one-on-one meetings with members of Congress and their staff. The event also offers the opportunity for attendees to meet with officials at various relevant agencies and departments.

**To learn more, visit**  
[lta.org/advocacy-days](https://lta.org/advocacy-days)



PHOTO COURTESY OF ETHAN TAPPER



Donna Erickson today (above) and in her early ranching days (right).

the hilly skirt of ground at the northern boundary of Missoula, separating the town from the Rattlesnake Wilderness beyond. The North Hills region represents the critical—and often highly personal—issues at play at the edge of many Western towns.

**Q: What inspired you to write this book?**

I was raised on a ranch in Montana’s North Hills, and my professional path was rooted in the ranching landscape I’d known as a child and young adult. I studied landscape planning and spent much of my career in academia, teaching and conducting research on changing rural landscapes. I also worked as a consultant with land trusts across a dozen Western states. This book shares my experiences and perceptions of the issues faced by North Hills ranchers, which are also found across the West.

**Q: What are some of the challenges that ranchers face?**

North Hills ranchers, like landowners in many places, are impacted by high property taxes, succession issues, high land values, aging owners and low commodity prices. In addition, ranchers next door to urban neighborhoods often struggle with inappropriate and even illegal behavior at their fence lines. Only a very small percentage of neighbors cause these problems; most urban neighbors honor private property rights. And we want them to love these lands. Urbanites are critical to helping conserve open lands near towns.

**Q: Your book explores the idea of Old West and New West. How has ranching changed?**

Over the past century, generations of ranching families have evolved with cultural, technological, political and economic shifts. Development pressure causes ways of life and ways of work on ranchlands to transform or even disappear. Statistics about development do not show people’s deep attachment to the land and how rootedness affects decision-making and life choices. While the values of ranchers who remain on lands near town are embedded in ‘what comes off the land’—such as beef, produce, eggs—urban neighbors are often more concerned about ‘what stays on the land’—scenery, habitat, recreational opportunities.

**Q: What do you hope readers take away from your book?**

I hope that people gain insight into the factors that create attachment to place and appreciate that those attachments matter. And I hope land trusts understand that to be effective, they must honor landowners’ values, perceptions and constraints. I’m hoping that “Rooted at the Edge” reveals nuances about how ranchers view their lands—as investment, career, family heritage, stewardship obligation and home. I am confident that land trust personnel recognize landowners’ mindsets; perhaps my book will deepen that appreciation. ☺

COREY HIMROD is the Alliance’s media relations manager.

*This is an edited version of a longer Q&A with Erickson. Read the full interview on the Alliance’s blog, The Dirt, at [lta.org/blog](http://lta.org/blog).*


# OLD WEST MEETS NEW WEST

By **COREY HIMROD**

**Donna Erickson** is a founding board member of Legacy Land Conservancy (formerly Potawatomi Land Trust). Her new book, “Rooted at the Edge: Ranching Where the Old West and New West Collide,” explores the intersection of traditional ranching and modern development in the American West.

**Q: Can you give us a brief synopsis of your book?**

“Rooted at the Edge” paints a portrait of a ranching landscape steeped in history, conflict and beauty. In this narrative nonfiction work, I explore



“I can’t emphasize enough how much we value our partnership with the Land Trust Alliance and are looking forward to finding new and innovative ways that we can collaborate in the future through the Alliance’s new strategic plan.”

—MIKE CARLSON, Gathering Waters

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIQUE PLACES TO SAVE

## Poised for the Future

What does it take to plan for the future when the present is full of uncertainty and rapid change? How does an organization stay true to its values and mission while evolving to meet new challenges and opportunities?

These are some of the many questions the Alliance is exploring right now as we develop a new strategic plan that will guide us—and the land trust community—forward over the next 10 years.

Fortunately, we are not doing this alone. We’re counting on you to be active participants in shaping our collective future. Thank you to the hundreds of you—members, partners, donors and friends—who have already shared your thoughts and time with us.

---

**And a special thanks to our generous supporters** in 2025, who are making this planning process possible. We are especially indebted to the members of the Alliance’s Land Trust Leadership Council for their insights and for collectively raising over \$250,000 in support of the Alliance’s mission at this important time.

### Land Trust Leadership Council 2025:

- Carol Abrahamzon, Mississippi Valley Conservancy
- Angela Anderson, San Juan Preservation Trust
- Brent Bailey, The West Virginia Land Trust, Inc.
- Oliver Bass, Natural Lands
- Nicole Braddock, Solano Land Trust
- Melissa Campbell, Washington Farmland Trust
- Mike Carlson, Gathering Waters: Wisconsin’s Alliance for Land Trusts
- Robyn Carlton, Lookout Mountain Conservancy
- Kevin Case, Mohonk Preserve
- Glen Chown, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy
- Rich Cochran, Western Reserve Land Conservancy
- Katie Cox, Kaniksu Land Trust
- Kristin DeBoer, Kestrel Land Trust
- Kaila Dettman, The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County
- Katherine Eddins, Georgia-Alabama Land Trust
- Brent Fenty, Oregon Desert Land Trust
- Cheryl Fox, Summit Land Conservancy
- Erik Glenn, Colorado Cattleman’s Agricultural Land Trust
- John Halsey, Peconic Land Trust
- Rebecca Jewett, Palmer Land Conservancy
- Christine Johnson, Big Waters Land Trust
- Tom Kay, Alachua Conservation Trust
- Kris Krouse, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, Inc.
- Kris Larson, Minnesota Land Trust
- Jon Leibowitz, Northeast Wilderness Trust
- Andy Loza, WeConservePA
- Marie McCarty, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust
- Jessica McDonald, Greenbelt Land Trust
- Joe McGovern, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
- Liz McLaurin, The Land Trust for Tennessee
- Linda Mead, D&R Greenway Land Trust
- Chris Miller, Piedmont Environmental Council
- Ryan Owens, New England Forestry Foundation
- Mary Anne Piacentini, Coastal Prairie Conservancy
- Catherine Rawson, Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy
- Alicia Reban, Nevada Land Trust
- Gavin Ricklefs, Heart of the Rockies Initiative
- Tom Saunders, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
- Bob Stokes, Galveston Bay Foundation
- Kate Stookey, Maine Coast Heritage Trust
- Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis, Big Sur Land Trust
- Jordan Vana, Montana Land Reliance
- Laurie Wayburn, Pacific Forest Trust
- Chet Work, Gallatin Valley Land Trust

Visit our strategic plan web page to stay informed and find out how you can get involved: [lta.org/about/strategic-plan](https://lta.org/about/strategic-plan)

# HIGH-WIRE

**AS ENERGY DEVELOPMENT ACCELERATES,**



# ACT

## LAND TRUSTS BALANCE THE CONSERVATION IMPACTS

By **MEGHAN MCDONALD**

# W

hat do data centers, transmission lines and large-scale renewable energy facilities have in common? They require huge tracts of land and, if not sited wisely, could impact critical places needed for agriculture and conservation, including for biodiversity and clean water.

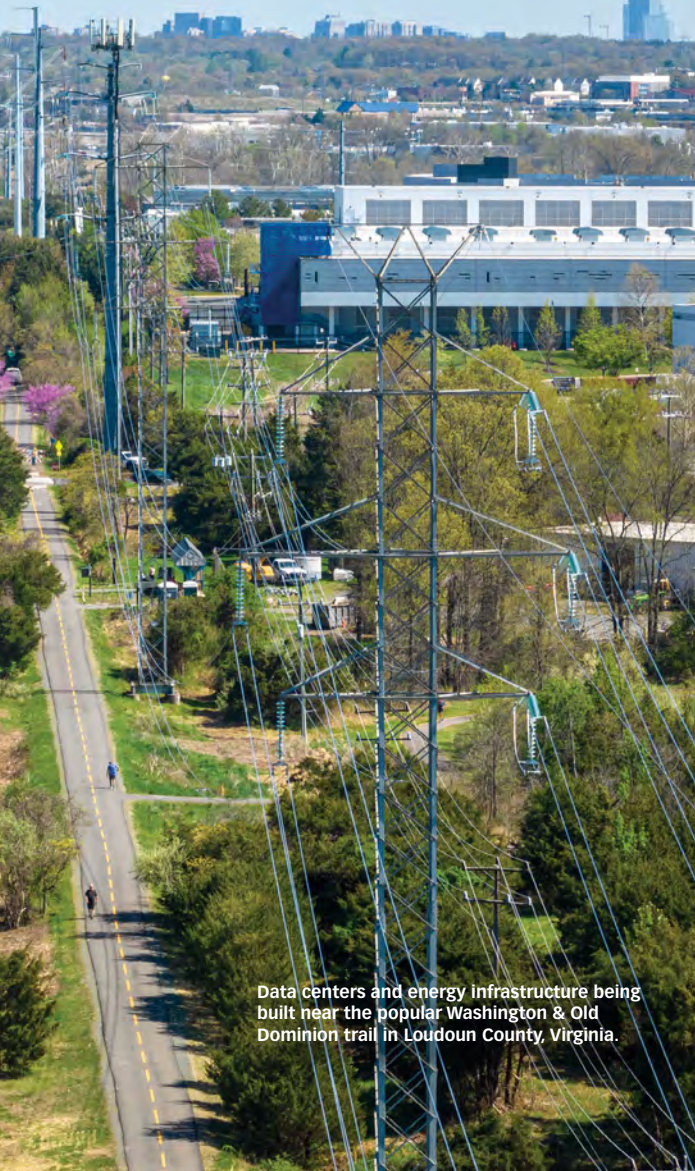
Data center electricity demand, which could triple by 2028, is a driving factor in what could be a 25% rise in overall U.S. electricity demand by 2030. The nation's push for leadership in energy and artificial intelligence, supported through federal initiatives such as Speed to Power, is accelerating large-scale infrastructure development proposals in and around high-value conservation lands.

"There's real opportunity for land trusts across the country to engage proactively with policymakers, utilities and developers to integrate conservation priorities into decisions about where to site these facilities," says Andrew Szwak, the Land Trust Alliance's Mid-Atlantic senior program manager. He works regularly with organizations in Virginia, which has the largest concentration of data centers in the world plus renewable energy goals written into law.

"Rapid, unchecked development—even if it's renewable energy, which is essential in the fight against climate change—can create damaging, unintended consequences," adds Kelly Watkinson, director of the Alliance's Land and Climate Program. "The land trust community is well-positioned to help guide infrastructure siting decisions that benefit land, communities and climate."



DJ GLISSON, I/FIREFLY IMAGEWORKS



Data centers and energy infrastructure being built near the popular Washington & Old Dominion trail in Loudoun County, Virginia.

HUGH KENNY/PEC



↑ Tall Timbers has developed a positive relationship with a solar utility to help mitigate impacts and protect important habitats.

TALL TIMBERS



↑ The Columbia River Gorge is quickly becoming an energy corridor, with dams, transmission lines and wind turbines.

IAN DEWAR

## SIZING UP THE CHALLENGE

The largest solar and wind facilities in the U.S. cover thousands of acres. “Hyperscale” data centers that power artificial intelligence can require anywhere from 200 to 2,000 acres, use as much electricity as 100,000 households and enormous amounts of water—in 2023, U.S. data centers directly consumed more than 17 billion gallons of water, impacting drinking water, wildlife habitat, river and lake ecology, and agricultural systems. And transmission lines associated with either type of facility can cover miles—and may end up slicing through conserved land.

A poorly sited infrastructure project can fragment ecosystems, alter water drainage patterns, degrade prime farmland and ignore local land-use priorities. Loss of carbon-storing forests can undermine renewable energy’s climate benefits.

“Infrastructure siting will affect us all eventually, even if there’s no data center across the street,” Szwak says. “I’ve seen land trusts thrust unprepared into this realm when a large-scale proposal suddenly threatens a property,” he adds. “The more proactive land trusts can be, the more likely they are to have a positive influence.”

Szwak advises networking with peers, building rapport with local experts in utility regulations and energy systems, and participating in local planning and state policymaking processes.

Midwest Senior Program Manager MaryKay O’Donnell is seeing large-scale infrastructure move into her region too. “Land trusts can’t ignore this, but shouldn’t panic, either,” she says. “Get your board involved and start defining your position: What makes a site good or bad for large-scale infrastructure? In what ways are you willing to channel your resources to engage? Where can you plug into relevant coalitions?”

“Infrastructure siting is incredibly complex, but land trusts can bring so much to the table,” O’Donnell says. “They understand real estate, title law, planning, coalition building and the science behind why properties are protected. That’s all relevant.”

“And,” she adds, “land trusts have skills and expertise to propose smart strategies to avoid high-value conservation land, minimize negative impacts and mitigate what can’t be avoided or minimized.”

How are land trusts learning to apply those skills and expertise? Four organizations around the U.S. describe their diverse insights and approaches.

## SUPPORTING CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area straddles the border between Washington and Oregon. This 80-mile-long strip of the Gorge is home to endangered salmon and hundreds of wildflower species, including 15 that live nowhere else in the world.

Friends of the Columbia Gorge, the scenic area's advocacy organization, established an accredited land trust in 2005. "Friends of the Columbia Gorge land trust preserves sensitive lands and stewards public preserves. They brought community partners together to create a vision for a 200-mile trail system," says Friends Executive Director Kevin Gorman.

As the only sea-level passage through the Cascade Mountains, the Gorge is a historic travel corridor. "Now it's become an energy corridor, with dams, transmission lines and, more recently, wind turbines just outside the scenic area boundaries," Gorman says. "We're trying to support renewables while protecting scenic, natural, cultural and recreational resources."

That support takes multiple forms, from state-level policy advocacy to successfully working with a wind developer to alter their site plans so turbines would not be visible within the scenic area.

The expanding energy infrastructure in counties along the Gorge is attracting data centers. "The lack of transparency into their impacts on natural resources is a big concern here," Gorman says.

In 2023, when a data center was proposed for the small town of Cascade Locks, Oregon, the developer and local officials met behind closed doors. The developer publicly claimed the data center's energy load wouldn't increase local electricity rates; the mayor claimed the opposite. Potential water impacts weren't clear.

"Community members started mobilizing against the data center—they felt it was too speculative. But they didn't know how to get the word out," Gorman says. "Rather than carry the flag for this issue, Friends decided to provide technical guidance and make sure community voices were heard."

Gorman recommended community activists get the local publication *Columbia Insight* to investigate the project. The resulting articles unearthed the developer's history of failed business ventures and revealed the data center's energy load would factor into higher local electricity rates.

With more information available, the town scrapped the proposal.

Forty miles east of Cascade Locks, The Dalles has continued to welcome data centers. While they bring jobs and tax revenue, they also consume about one-third of the city's water. The city now aims to triple the size of its water reservoir—although it says

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is home to endangered salmon and hundreds of wildflower species, including 15 that live nowhere else in the world. "We're trying to support renewables while protecting scenic, natural, cultural and recreational resources," says Kevin Gorman, executive director of Friends of the Columbia Gorge.



FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE

## DATA CENTERS THAT POWER ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Can require anywhere from  
**200-2,000**  
ACRES



Use as much electricity as  
**500,000**  
HOUSEHOLDS



Consume more than  
**5 MILLION**  
GALLONS OF WATER  
PER DAY



↑ A data center close to homes in Loudoun County, Virginia.

these plans are unrelated to data centers. Its proposed strategy would significantly affect a nearby national forest and Columbia River tributaries. Friends is watching for the right opportunities to engage, whether in the background or in a more visible role.

“Land trusts need to be civically engaged in our communities,” Gorman says. “Part of the concept of ‘community conservation’ is making sure communities are thriving and that their systems work in concert with conservation goals. Our communities’ everyday decisions will eventually impact our ability to steward land and water resources.”

## CULTIVATING DIALOGUE WITH DEVELOPERS

Tall Timbers, a research station and accredited land conservancy, works across the greater Red Hills region of north Florida and southwest Georgia. The area is one of America’s few remaining hotspots for wild bobwhite quail.

“Our previous strategic plan, written in 2015, didn’t include the words ‘utility-scale solar.’ It wasn’t on our horizon,” says Planning and Advocacy Coordinator Neil Fleckenstein. “But by 2020, it was the No. 1 land use issue for us.”

Tall Timbers had an abrupt introduction to the topic when a developer clear-cut a longleaf pine forest to build a solar facility. “That certainly got our attention,” Fleckenstein says. The organization began working with several county governments to develop site decision guidance.

A few years later, a landowner who donated a 1,000-acre conservation easement learned that a 3,000-acre solar facility was being proposed next door. Concerned, both the landowner and Tall Timbers got involved in local permitting and approvals processes. They first met the developer’s representative at a county commission meeting.

Tall Timbers seized the opportunity, not to fight the developer, but to build ongoing dialogue.

“Silicon Ranch (SR) takes their status as a long-term neighbor seriously,” Fleckenstein says. “Over the next year, we talked about potential impacts to easement habitats. We asked for, and they agreed to, an enhanced vegetative buffer between the properties, native plantings and working with our landowner to use prescribed burns. The relationship made this possible.”

“Our engagement with organizations such as Tall Timbers helps us better identify stewardship opportunities and understand how to optimize them in ways that benefit both our project sites and the surrounding communities,” explains Loran Shallenberger, vice president for regenerative energy and agrivoltaics at SR.

Fast-forward to 2026. SR proactively notifies Tall Timbers about proposed projects located near easements. Tall Timbers, which has served SR as a resource for gopher tortoise management and prescribed burns, is preparing to recommend mitigation strategies for a new project. They’re also talking with Duke Energy in Florida about how to protect working rural lands and scenic views as the utility plans new solar facilities.

“We have to open the door to dialogue ourselves,” says Tall Timbers planner Ben Naselius. “When we do, nearly all the companies we’ve contacted have been receptive to talking. This won’t always be the case, but you don’t know if you don’t try.”

Tall Timbers created its Board Position Statement to define



HUGH KENNY/PEC

↑ Members of the Virginia Data Center Reform Coalition, co-founded by Piedmont Environmental Council, at the Virginia State Capitol in Richmond to lobby for data center legislation.

## “Land trusts need to be civically engaged in our communities.”

—KEVIN GORMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE

what smart siting and mitigation strategies mean to them. They also helped create recommended practices for solar siting and design as part of the Georgia Utility Scale Solar Siting Initiative Partnership, a collaboration among conservation groups, utilities, solar developers and government agencies.

“We’re seeing greater benefits,” Fleckenstein says, “by being proactive and engaging at multiple levels: representing our landowners, forming relationships with companies doing business in our backyard and working with local governments and other NGOs.”

### UNDERSTANDING IMPLICATIONS OF EASEMENTS

Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy (MMLC) is a small, accredited land trust comprised of an executive director and a volunteer board of directors. The new owner of one of MMLC’s oldest conservation easement properties received a tantalizing offer: let a utility build a solar facility on his farmland and earn more

than \$100,000 annually.

MMLC had to determine whether the use was allowed under the terms of the easement and, if not, whether the landowner’s amendment request would meet best practices as articulated in the Alliance’s publication “Amending Conservation Easements.”

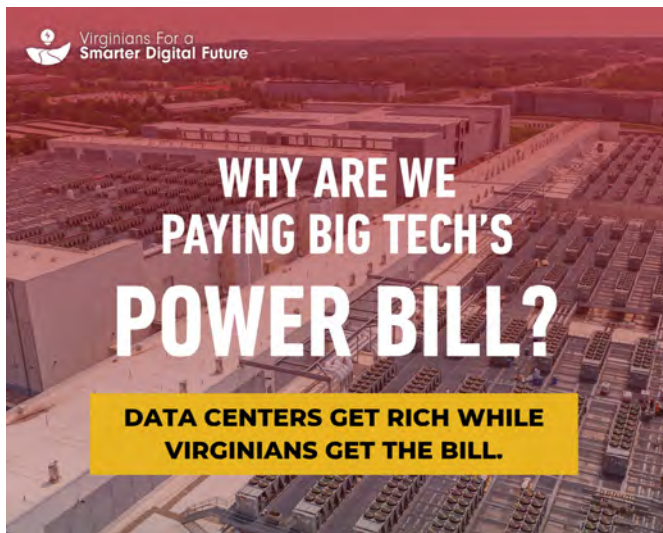
“When the easement agreement was written, there was no thought of solar,” says board member Kenneth Rosenman. Although Michigan’s Department of Agriculture considers solar on farmland as an agricultural land use, could a utility solar facility be deemed a prohibited commercial development according to this easement? “It wasn’t a clear decision,” adds Rosenman.

For existing easements, the language of the easement itself dictates whether renewable siting is permissible or not. Since many easements prohibit structures outright, renewable siting is often not an option. Land trusts must also analyze numerous other clauses of an easement, such as restrictions on commercial use, grading and vegetation removal. MMLC’s board worked



MARCO SANCHEZ/PEC

↑ Piedmont Environmental Council's President Chris Miller speaks about data centers at a community meeting in Warrenton, Virginia.



COURTESY OF PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

↑ A digital ad published under Piedmont Environmental Council's "Virginians for a Smarter Digital Future" data center campaign encourages people to write to the Virginia State Corporation Commission in support of a proposal to make data centers pay their fair share of energy infrastructure costs.

with Alliance experts to identify and navigate these issues.

One important question arose, says Rosenman: Would granting the landowner's request to site large-scale solar on a conservation easement property result in the conservancy, a charitable organization, impermissibly benefiting a private party? Prohibitions on impermissible private benefit are set forth in federal tax law for charitable organizations and are designed to ensure that charitable assets are used to further public (or charitable) purposes, not private ends. Violation of private inurement and private benefit rules could result in monetary penalties and, in extreme cases, loss of the charity's tax-exempt status.

After a thorough analysis, including preparation of necessary documentation to properly answer the question of impermissible private benefit, MMLC's board determined that an alternative path should be found. (For more on how to conduct this analysis, see the Alliance's practical pointer, "Private Inurement and Impermissible Private Benefit Prohibitions.")

As of autumn 2025, the landowner was negotiating a new option with the utility to site the facility on a nearby property he owned.

"We've learned to proactively address solar in new conservation easement agreements," says Rosenman. "If the landowner desires, we can allow for the possibility under the right conditions."

Rosenman is helping draft language MMLC can use for future easements. He's drawing inspiration and best practices from resources like the "Powering Up Conservation" guide created by Colorado Open Lands with a grant from the Alliance, and the Alliance's practical pointer "Siting Renewables on Conservation Easements: What Land Trusts Need to Know."

When drafting a new conservation easement, land trusts must assess whether renewable energy is an appropriate activity. This is a site-specific question that can only be answered after careful analysis of the conservation values of a given property, in the full context of an individual project and using best practices.

"Land trusts have to address energy development not only from the conservation perspective, but also from the legal perspective for easements," Rosenman says. "It's worth thinking about owned land, too. If the utility made us the same offer, the finances would be tempting. But we'd have to carefully investigate, ensuring nothing could jeopardize the land's conservation values or our nonprofit status."

## COMMUNICATING THE STORY OF COSTS AND BENEFITS

Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) is a grassroots advocacy organization and accredited land trust. Staff stationed in nine Virginia counties work on local issues that ladder up to state and federal priorities. Today, the rapid surge in large-scale renewable energy and data center development and the associated impacts on land use, water resources and Virginians' energy costs are at the forefront of PEC's efforts.

"Virginia's energy system will need to triple in size to serve this one industry," says Executive Director Chris Miller. "Data center issues are taking up to 30% of all PEC staff time, so we're very aware of what's at stake. Eminent domain for transmission lines is a real threat. And without regulatory and legislative intervention, the infrastructure costs will be passed to average Virginians."

However, relevant infrastructure decision-making processes increasingly take place outside PEC's counties. PEC advocates for state policies and a regulatory framework that support sustainable energy planning and data center development. The framework would enhance transparency, establish a state-level regulatory review process, protect ratepayers and create a robust mitigation system funded by data center development.

"In 2025, several bills were introduced to the Virginia General Assembly thanks to direct legislative and community mobilization action from organizations like PEC and our partners in the Virginia Data Center Reform Coalition," Miller says.

# “Land trusts are in the forever business.

Creating public and policy support for smart infrastructure siting is part of our stewardship and enforcement. It helps make that perpetual investment in conservation truly meaningful.”

—CHRIS MILLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

With all this work at the state level, PEC decided to extend its communications. Miller made the case to PEC’s board and donors to run statewide digital communications campaigns. “It makes sense. Our conserved lands could be impacted negatively. We have the right skillsets to show Virginians why they will want to pay attention to these issues and how to participate in decision-making processes,” he says.

To create the campaigns, PEC staff quantified and visualized the statistics about Virginia’s data center boom. “Helping people see the aggregate impacts is powerful,” Miller says.

This fits with PEC’s overall approach: increasing awareness of potential community and conservation impacts “so we can avoid, minimize and mitigate those impacts based on transparent and holistic assessments of data centers and infrastructure,” explains Miller.

The ads, articles, social posts and videos reached millions in 2025. Based on key performance metrics, Miller notes, “We can see the campaigns are helping change conversations around these topics.”

PEC’s new campaign, “Pause the Plan,” is running during the General Assembly’s fast-paced 2026 session. “We’re saying ‘pause’ because we’re not pushing for moratoriums or bans. We’re saying, let’s make time for a real conversation about how it will change things. Let’s honestly account for impacts so we can manage them,” Miller says.

“Land trusts are in the forever business,” he continues. “Creating public and policy support for smart infrastructure siting is part of our stewardship and enforcement. It helps make that perpetual investment in conservation truly meaningful.”

“I hope our experiences and the work the Alliance is doing will rally more land trusts to engage early on data center and energy infrastructure development,” Miller concludes.

## POWERING CONSERVATION BENEFITS, TOGETHER

The scale of infrastructure development can feel daunting, but land trusts of all sizes have valuable skillsets and resources at their fingertips. Together, the land trust community is learning how to apply them to these new challenges.

“It’s time to engage,” says the Alliance’s Kelly Watkinson. “Together, we are developing smart solutions.”

The Alliance has a new renewable energy siting toolkit (read more at right) and many other resources, from practical pointers to peer networks, that can assist land trusts. ☺

MEGHAN MCDONALD is a freelance writer focused on science, sustainability and community impacts.

## NEW ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE SITING TOOLKIT

The Land Trust Alliance advocates for conservation-minded infrastructure policies and practices at the national level. But the immediate consequences of a poorly sited energy facility, transmission line or data center are felt locally. Local and regional land trusts can help minimize and mitigate potential damage by engaging in infrastructure siting processes. The earlier they get involved, the greater their chances to help shape win-win solutions for increasing renewable energy generation while conserving natural and working lands.

To help land trusts navigate those challenges, the Alliance has developed a new digital toolkit on energy infrastructure siting. The toolkit delves into why energy infrastructure siting matters, what to advocate for, and how to engage within state policy and regulatory frameworks. It’s designed to help land trusts of all sizes engage with relevant authorities to site wind turbines, solar arrays and data centers in ways that protect conservation and community priorities.


Toolkit users will:

- Learn why developers prioritize certain landscapes, including prime farmland.
- Review detailed examples of how to apply the mitigation hierarchy to make smart-siting recommendations.
- Explore opportunities to engage with the range of infrastructure stakeholders, including legislators, county commissioners, solar and wind developers, utility regulators and community partners.

The toolkit shares vetted resources, case studies and decision-making aids along the way. At every step, it draws on the valuable perspectives of conservation organizations that are already participating in the development of sustainable siting policies and practices.

Explore the toolkit and learn how your land trust can take action: [lta.org/resources/energy-siting-toolkit](https://lta.org/resources/energy-siting-toolkit).





↓ The conservation plan protects 6,000 acres of a diverse ecosystem in New Mexico, in addition to the viewshed that inspired Georgia O’Keeffe.

## Preserving the Art-Inspiring Landscapes of Ghost Ranch

By **TRISTEN POLENSKY**

**M**odernist painter Georgia O’Keeffe saw her surrounding environment as inspiration, evident in her seven decades’ worth of internationally recognized paintings. In the 1940s, O’Keeffe purchased a casita on Ghost Ranch in northern New Mexico that overlooks an expansive stretch of native grasslands, desert washes, sandstone bluffs and a view of the Cerro Pedernal mesa.

This year, New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC), Ghost Ranch and

the state of New Mexico have partnered to create a conservation plan to protect 6,000 acres of Ghost Ranch and the vistas that served as O’Keeffe’s muse. The first phase could be closed by the end of 2026, while timing for the second phase, which includes 1,500 acres directly surrounding O’Keeffe’s former home, will likely close in 2027.

While this region has been called “O’Keeffe Country,” it has also been the continuous home to six Tewa Pueblos since time immemorial.

The current exhibit “Tewa Nangeh/ Tewa Country” at the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in nearby Santa Fe highlights the Indigenous community and the themes of sacred spaces, belonging and identity of the land. These themes are being incorporated into NMLC’s conservation work through consultation with Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, identification and protection of cultural sites, and access for Pueblo people to continue using the land as they have for generations. ☺



PHOTO COURTESY OF PECONIC LAND TRUST

# LEASING

## Your Way to Financial Sustainability

By **OLE AMUNDSEN**

### DELIVER FRESH FOOD

Peconic Land Trust's Quail Hill Farm in Amagansett, New York, is both a stewardship project and a CSA that delivers fresh food to local restaurants, farmers markets and food pantries.

**In these days of unstable federal funding and strained philanthropic sources, having reliable income revenue streams to support land trusts' work has never been more important. Enter the humble lease, an old-fashioned tool that, when wielded by a thoughtful conservationist, can result in stable revenue for the land trust and a host of community and environmental benefits. The key to success is to understand how a lease can be a dynamic instrument and an instrument of partnership between the land trust and the tenant.**



ROSS BAXTER



PECONIC LAND TRUST

## 💡 RESTORE NATIVE HABITAT

**Boylan Farms was donated to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. The land trust leases cropland and rents the house and building on the farm; the income allows the land trust to conduct native habitat restoration on the land, while keeping most of it as a working farm.**

Hill Farm CSA has 280 members and generates around \$342,200 in annual revenue.

As Peconic Land Trust grew its expertise in real estate and conservation planning, developers and landowners would approach the organization with complex deals. One such deal involved an attorney representing a local landowner of a 22-acre coastal property that included a dormant oyster hatchery upon which a 40-unit condominium and marina had been proposed. Instead, the land trust helped the landowner create four lots on 8 acres, and a 14-acre parcel that included the hatchery was donated to the land trust. To help with the management of the shellfish operation, the land trust entered into a cooperative agreement with Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Marine Program, which had a complementary facility about a mile away.

The property is now called Shellfisher Preserve and is home to a fully operational mariculture facility that produces seeds for oysters, clams and scallops—one of just three hatcheries still in operation on Long Island. Peconic Land Trust has four leases at the preserve, with three of the leases for small growers, providing the opportunity to harvest shellfish and bring them to shore more easily for sorting and selling. The facility also has a barn built over the water that allows these small growers to overwinter some of their oysters. The fourth lease is with a more experienced oyster grower who manages the hatchery onsite. The hatchery equipment and infrastructure are expensive to establish, so this lessee has the advantage of renting a one-of-a-kind facility and has been able to make improvements to the existing system, thus expanding productivity and efficiency.

Through this project, the land trust is helping promote small marine businesses, provide seafood for the local market, and grow and distribute shellfish regionally through seed programs that improve the water quality of Long Island.

Leasing farmland offers a modest yet steady income and, like many things, what you get out of it is determined by what you put in. The land trust needs to research the going rate of commercial agricultural leases and charge a fair market rate to prevent private inurement (where an economic benefit like a below market rate lease results in enriching a business or an individual). On Long Island, Halsey estimates that unimproved agricultural land can be leased for about \$150 per acre. If the landowner invests in a deer fence to protect crop land, the price jumps to \$400 per acre, and if you then add a water source, like a well, the price is \$700 per acre. The revenue from the land trust's leases is deposited into an overall stewardship and operations account.

## Honoring Donor Intent

As you move west across the country, the size and scale of farming generally increases. The accredited Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation has found solid footing in leasing around 50 properties. There are many different leases and wide variability in revenue depending on the quality of the land and management goals of the land trust. For example, in Iowa, crop leases can generate

## 💡 IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

**Peconic Land Trust's Shellfisher Preserve is home to a fully operational mariculture facility that grows oysters, clams and scallops. The project supports small businesses and local food production and helps improve water quality on Long Island.**

## Leases On Land—and Water

In 1985, a farmer walked into Peconic Land Trust's office in Long Island, New York, and asked if the organization had any land available to lease. He was already operating a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program with 12 members but needed to move his operation.

John Halsey, the land trust's president, considered the request. Since the farmer had the experience and skills both as a land steward and a businessman—he was earning a living from his current CSA—Halsey decided to lease the land to the prospective farmer and hire him as a farmland steward who could help the land trust with future projects. It has turned out to be a highly successful venture for the land trust. Today, Quail



### PRESERVE COASTAL WETLANDS

Galveston Bay Foundation in Texas has a triple play with three leases on its 5,200-acre Chocolate Bay Preserve that support conservation of the preserve's native grasslands and coastal wetlands while providing income to the land trust.

between \$200 to \$300 per acre per year, whereas pasture or custom grazing can be \$30 to \$80 per acre per year.

“Iowa farmland always rents,” says Joe McGovern, president of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

Each year, the land trust processes many land transactions. However, only a few of the deals result in the land trust owning the property for the long term. In accepting a donation of farmland for the long term, donor intent is important. “When someone says, ‘I just want my farm to stay a farm and be managed the way my granddad did for the long-term health of the land—can you help us do that?’ the answer is usually ‘yes!’” explains McGovern.

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation assesses a potential donation of land for its conservation value, its value as working farmland in a lease arrangement and the intentions of the donors. In its planning process, the land trust will take marginal land on the property out of agriculture and restore that land for its ecological function, leaving the focus for farming on the high-quality soils. The acreage in farming on a property might go down but profitability per acre goes up since the enterprise is focused on the best land for farming and not trying to make marginal land farmland. The land trust then looks for a tenant who has a passion for farming and who gets the big picture of

the value of conservation.

“We don’t try to squeeze every nickel in the lease from the tenant and the donors’ wishes—we aim to strike a balance,” says McGovern.

Carl and Margie Boylan had a deep sense of stewardship as farmers, practicing no-till farming and managing 60-foot grass perimeters around all their fields to promote water retention and improve soil health. It still came as a surprise when the couple gave their 1,243-acre farm to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation in 2021, as they had only donated to the land trust once in a conservation campaign in 1990. Their wishes were clear: The land was not to be sold, and funds made from leasing the land could be reinvested into the farm and the land trust’s statewide efforts.

After a planning period, the land trust began a series of restoration efforts in partnership with the tenants. In managing the grasslands, the land trust started a rotational grazing regime on four paddocks converted to warm season pasture interseeded with flowering plants, using cattle to enhance low-diversity grassland habitat. Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation also gets income from leased cropland and by renting the house and buildings. The income has allowed the land trust to do more native habitat restoration on the land, while keeping most of the land as a working farm, in line with the wishes of the Boylans.

## Multiple Leases Yield Multiple Benefits

An interesting aspect of leases is that they allow a land trust to capture several revenue streams from different tenants on a single property—maximizing the public benefits and income. The accredited Galveston Bay Foundation in Texas has a triple play with three leases—for carbon sequestration, cattle grazing and duck hunting—on its 5,200-acre Chocolate Bay Preserve.

The land trust acquired the property in 2021 with funding from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill recovery fund and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The property was prioritized for its vast wetland habitats and high-value coastal grasslands, since it had never been plowed and leveled for row crop farming, but it did have about 2,000 acres of overgrazed and poorly managed native

grasslands. Restoration of the native plant community became an immediate priority for the land trust.

The qualities of an intact native grassland and a defined restoration plan attracted the attention of Grassroots Carbon, which entered into a five-year carbon sequestration lease that generates, on average, about \$80,000 per year. When the carbon project started, the land trust classified the revenue as unrestricted. However, with several years of experience on the project, future revenue will be restricted for land stewardship on the preserve.

The upland components of the preserve are utilized for cattle grazing. The land

WHEN CONSIDERING A NEW TENANT, YOU NEED SOMEONE YOU CAN REALLY TRUST, WHO SHARES YOUR VISION AND CONSERVATION ETHIC, AND CAN BE FLEXIBLE ADJUSTING LAND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS.

— MATT SINGER,  
Director of Conservation  
at Galveston Bay Foundation

trust structured a lease for \$45,000 per year with a neighboring ranch. As part of a long-term management strategy, the land trust invested in new fencing that provides four grazing pastures between 400 to 600 acres for rotation. This allows significant rest to promote the recovery of the native plant community. To reduce the impacts of grazing pressure on the land, solar water troughs were installed away from the natural watering areas to spread the cattle out more evenly across the grassland. The grazing lease and carbon lease are, in fact, connected since if the pasture is overgrazed, it will impact the amount of funding provided by the carbon lease. So both leases are, in effect, mutually supportive.

The same neighboring ranch also operates as a high-end hunting club and has leased the coastal wetlands for duck hunting, generating an additional \$15,000 per year. The hunting lease was negotiated at a greatly reduced rate compared to market value

due to terms of the lease that limit the number of allowed hunting days to help keep the bird population robust.

“When considering a new tenant, you need someone you can really trust, who shares your vision and conservation ethic, and can be flexible adjusting land management techniques to environmental conditions,” says Matt Singer, director of conservation at Galveston Bay Foundation. “Our tenants are our eyes and ears on the land as we often don’t visit our preserves every day or every month.”

When it comes to carbon leases, land trusts need to do extensive due diligence in advance to make sure they are prepared and capable of managing the lease agreement.

“Carbon leases are complex, sophisticated deals that a land trust shouldn’t enter into lightly,” notes Ailla Wasstrom-Evans, conservation defense fund and education manager at the Land Trust Alliance. She advises land trusts to review the practical pointer “Legal Considerations for Carbon Offset Projects, Part V: Navigating Carbon Offset Project Related Agreements,” found on the Alliance’s Resource Center.

(See the sidebar on page 28 for additional tips and considerations for drafting leases.)



BRIDGETT MCCANN

### PROMOTE LAND TRUSTS' WORK

Thousand Islands Land Trust manages over 500 acres at Zenda Farms Preserve in Clayton, New York, where leases support its conservation work. Leases with honey and maple syrup producers at Zenda Farms Preserve bring in income and promotion of Thousand Islands Land Trust’s work. “Having products derived from our lands is like having our mission statement in a bottle sitting on kitchen tables across New York state,” says Executive Director Jake Tibbles.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THOUSAND ISLANDS LAND TRUST

 **PROTECT GRASSLAND BIRDS**

To protect grassland birds such as bobolinks, haying at Zenda Farms Preserve is delayed until after nesting birds have fledged. But the land trust has found ways to offset any lost income through creative leases.

## TIPS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Leases need to be carefully drafted, with conservation protections and best management practices in place. Proactive risk mitigation is critical—the Alliance recommends land trusts hire legal counsel for proper due diligence. Some questions to consider:

- Will the leased use impact any beneficial property tax treatment the land trust receives for that parcel of fee lands?
- Does the income generated constitute an unrelated business income that is taxable?
- Does the lease agreement allow the land trust access to do annual property monitoring?
- Does the lease specify whether improvements are allowed—such as drainage systems, fencing or other structures—or if there are restoration requirements?
- How will the land trust use the revenue from the lease—will the lease income be invested back into the property or distributed more widely in the organization?
- If the tenant is in breach of the lease and eviction is required, does the land trust have legal counsel knowledgeable in landlord tenant disputes? (Remember that TerraFirma insurance coverage will likely not apply, as there is an exclusion for business disputes.)

## ‘You Have To Be Willing To Try New Things’

Along the Canadian border of New York, the Thousand Islands Land Trust (TILT) manages over 500 acres at Zenda Farms Preserve in Clayton, New York, where innovative land leases support both conservation and community.

At Zenda, grassland bird habitat takes priority. To protect grassland birds during the nesting season, haying is delayed until after August 15th, when the birds have fledged. While hay harvested after August 1st loses some nutritional value, the land trust’s tenants have found a creative solution: turning the hay into high-quality compost that’s sold to mushroom producers in Pennsylvania. This practice not only safeguards wildlife, but also turns a potential loss into a savvy environmental and economical solution.

TILT’s executive director, Jake Tibbles, sees this as essential. “As conservationists, we are not big risk-takers,” reflects Tibbles. “But without taking risks, there’s very limited reward. Not all of our ventures have worked out, but you have to be willing to try new things.”

That spirit of innovation has led to other successful partnerships across Zenda Farms Preserve. One such collaboration is with Yessi’s Bees & Honey LLC, one of the largest bee operations on the East Coast. Through a barter-style agreement, TILT provides land in exchange for honey that is then bottled and sold as Zenda Farms Honey. That same model applies to TILT’s maple syrup leases, where sugarbushes are tapped to produce Zenda Farms Maple Syrup.

These ventures are more than strategic agreements—they’re purposeful collaborations that bring conservation to life. Annual profit sales of honey can average from \$9,000 to \$11,000, while maple syrup sales bring in \$5,000 to \$6,000. Beyond financial return, these products carry the spirit of TILT’s work into homes around the community.

As Tibbles describes, “Having products derived from our lands is like having our mission statement in a bottle sitting on kitchen tables across New York state.”

## Finding Your Entrepreneurial Spirit

In sum, leasing land can provide a reliable and stable income. With some additional entrepreneurial spirit, a lease can raise the profile of the organization in a meaningful fashion. One way to start exploring if leasing land makes sense for your organization is to include a revenue plan as part of your strategic plan. Exploring a range of approaches to raising revenue as you are thinking about the goals for conservation and stewardship is a natural fit. As mentioned before, you need to do your homework on the leasing values in your region, so doing this research as part of a strategic plan is very efficient. ☺

**OLE AMUNDSEN** is principal of ARC LLC, where he advises land trusts and communities on strategies to leverage their natural assets as part of their economic sustainability.

# STEWARDSHIP FOR A SHIFTING WORLD



ROBERT RODRIGUEZ, JR./COURTESY OF SCENIC HUDSON

↑ Scenic Hudson engages on smart siting of solar installations like this one near Hudson, New York.

By **LESLIE RATLEY-BEACH**

**T**he land trust community is navigating the changing landscape of the world in which we work and the heightened complexity, severity and frequency of challenges. An increasingly significant challenge is emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), large language models (LLM) and data centers, and their associated energy, water and land consumption (see the article on p. 14). This challenge, while new, still requires old forms of infrastructure such as power lines, pipelines, equipment and large buildings. And, like other challenges facing land trusts, stewardship staff are on the front lines. Are they prepared and supported to respond appropriately to these new threats?

Without proper planning, transmission expansion will likely follow data center expansion. Unfortunately, governmental taking of lands, including conserved lands, for the construction of transmission infrastructure is the most frequent means of grid expansion. Human and natural communities near these developments will disproportionately experience adverse impacts.

Land trusts have worked with landowners to collectively conserve more than 61 million acres of land—critical

forests, farms, ranchlands, wetlands and grasslands—that provide benefits such as clean air, clean drinking water and food, and safe spaces to live, work and play. The public benefits of conserved lands, and the billions of taxpayer dollars invested, need to be safeguarded from conversion to energy infrastructure.

Fortunately, there are opportunities to address the needs of energy generation and transition in less impactful ways that protect the critical resources, public benefits and taxpayer investment of conserved lands.

One example is to maximize the transmission potential of the existing grid through measures such as reconductoring, which replaces conventional aluminum steel cables with advanced, more efficient conductors. This minimizes harm to conserved lands and communities by reducing the buildout of new transmission infrastructure.

For land trusts to meaningfully engage and be effective with government, industry and the public on proposed data centers and related transmission infrastructure, they need to understand the necessary technical details to avoid or minimize impacts on conserved lands. This includes understanding and having access to data on current and future energy use, water conservation technology, pollution reduction measures and how to avoid detrimental impacts to communities. Land trusts can also help communicate about how energy infrastructure and permanent land conservation are connected. For example, efficiencies in data center water usage will lead to energy efficiencies and, in turn, less strain on the grid and less condemnation of conserved lands for new transmission infrastructure.

Land trusts need knowledgeable staff or volunteers who have compensation, resources and systems to do their jobs well, that can engage in productive conversations with landowners and community stakeholders, and are able to respond when a proposed transmission project could affect conserved lands. Identifying potential problems will allow time to anticipate and respond appropriately. Stewardship staff will hear of these first, and they need ample support and systems to be able to respond effectively.

Land trusts with strong stewardship teams that are fully funded and supported will be better positioned to navigate the new challenges posed by emerging technologies and energy development. ☺

**LESLIE RATLEY-BEACH** is conservation defense director for the Land Trust Alliance.



ALEXIS BONOPOFSKY

---

# WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

---

## **At their best, boards accelerate and amplify the mission of an organization.**

Board volunteers share their time, talent and treasure. They help organizations stay rooted in long-standing work, deepen existing connections and create new ones. Boards take a horizon-level view to see future opportunities while also managing near-term risks.

My favorite thing about the Alliance board is that it brings together a group of people with diverse life experiences and professional skills who share the belief that private land

conservation makes communities strong, more vibrant and more resilient. I am thrilled to be welcoming six new members to the Alliance's board. Together, they bring expertise in land conservation, working lands, accreditation, advocacy, law, finance and marketing.

Importantly, our new board class has experience executing comprehensive campaigns, at different types of organizations—something that will be invaluable to us as we build a stronger Alliance. Our new board class joins during the development of the Alliance's next strategic plan, bringing perspectives we need to move us forward.

One of the reasons that we have a large new class this year is because of term limits. I want to thank outgoing board members Judith Stockdale, Julie Sharpe, Kathy Leavenworth and Tom Saunders for their service. Over the past 9-12 years, they have helped shape the Alliance we know, from achieving legislative victories like the Charitable Conservation Easement Program Integrity Act to launching our Common Ground Initiative, and growing our community-centered conservation program and field services—all of which have led to greater impact. We know that land trusts that engage in Alliance resources are twice as likely to increase conserved lands.

Please join me in thanking our exiting board members and in welcoming our new ones. I hope you enjoy learning a bit more about them.

—DAVID CALLE, LAND TRUST ALLIANCE BOARD CHAIR

## Bill Mulligan

**B**ill Mulligan is board chair of the accredited Western Reserve Land Conservancy, which received the 2025 National Land Trust Excellence award for its work serving the people of Ohio. He previously served on the Land Trust Alliance board for 10 years, including a term as treasurer.

Though he always loved the outdoors, Mulligan's introduction to land conservation started 25 years ago when his family moved to a rural suburb outside Cleveland and decided to place a conservation easement on their property. "As I worked with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, I came to appreciate the importance of its work and the value of land conservation to the health of our community," says Mulligan.

Mulligan is excited to return to the Land Trust Alliance board to support the organization as it pursues defining strategic priorities. Given his previous role as treasurer, he expects to focus on finance and fundraising as a new board member. He is eager to use his passion and skills to support the Alliance to increase unrestricted funding.

He believes that land conservation has never been more important. With land disappearing at a chilling rate, Mulligan says, "the Alliance is uniquely positioned to support the important work of local land trusts in reversing that trend."

Mulligan also serves on the boards of the Cleveland Clinic, Denison University and the Conservancy of the Sea Islands. His work spans industrial marketing, consulting, finance and investment; he retired in 2022 as managing partner of Primus Capital Funds, a private equity firm.

**"The Alliance is uniquely positioned to support the important work of local land trusts."**



## Bill Plapinger

**B**uilding on many nature experiences in childhood, Bill Plapinger began devoting a significant amount of time to the outdoors at the beginning of his college years, pursuing interests in rock climbing, hiking and mountaineering in the United States and throughout Europe. He first became seriously involved in land conservation in 2017 when he joined the board of directors of Sheriff's Meadow Foundation, the largest private land trust on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, where he has been a seasonal and permanent resident since 1969. At Sheriff's Meadow, he has served on committees devoted to finance, investment, fundraising and strategic planning, as well as on the executive committee.

Since 2012, Plapinger has dedicated most of his time to activities in the nonprofit sector, focusing on education, land conservation and the arts, where he's been able to apply his experience in governance, finance and investment.

He is thrilled to join the Alliance board and says he "hopes to bring the skills he has developed in other areas of the nonprofit sector to bear with the Land Trust Alliance and land trusts generally."

With a law career spanning decades, Plapinger is now senior counsel at the global law firm Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, where he has represented a diverse group of private and governmental clients on transactions in more than 30 countries. He and his wife, Cassie Murray, split their time between Martha's Vineyard and New York City, and have three grown children.



### Catherine Rawson

Catherine Rawson has more than 20 years of experience in the environmental field, but her love for the outdoors began as a child, where she can never forget the moments when nature would transform from ordinary to extraordinary. But as she worked with land trusts, she began to understand that loving nature is not the same as conservation.

“It was not until I began working for my land trust that I truly understood that conservation is not about what you love about or receive from nature, but about what you give—and the patience, resolve and dedication it takes to hold a place steady over time,” says Rawson.

Rawson is the executive director of Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy (NCLC), board member of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council and steering committee member for the Working Lands Alliance. She previously served as a commissioner of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and as a member of the Land Trust Alliance Conservation Defense Advisory Council.

Under Rawson’s direction since 2011, NCLC has achieved significant growth in its regional impact and capacity for long-term, sustainable conservation. Recognized today as a conservation leader in Connecticut and beyond, NCLC was awarded an EPA Environmental Merit Award in 2013.

Having spent many years running a land trust, Rawson has seen the impact of the Alliance as a resource and leader for its members. She hopes to use her on-the-ground experience to strengthen the Alliance’s ability to serve the land trust community, especially through the launch of a new strategic plan.



### Simon Sidamon-Eristoff

A walk in the woods changed Simon Sidamon-Eristoff’s life. As a young real estate lawyer at a Wall Street law firm, he was invited by two Trust for Public Land leaders for a walk through a completed conservation project in the Hudson Valley of New York—convincing him to change his entire career path.

Since that fateful walk, Sidamon-Eristoff left Wall Street and dedicated himself as legal counsel for land conservation. From the Trust for Public Land to Rails to Trails Conservancy to American Farmland Trust to Kalbian Hagerty LLP, he’s spent his career advocating and fighting for land conservation in-house and as a legal representative for land trusts and landowners alike.

And the Alliance was right there with him. Sidamon-Eristoff says, “The Alliance’s impact on my career in land conservation has been enormous. Since the first edition of *The Conservation Handbook* was published in 1988, I have relied on the Alliance’s publications—I have a bookshelf full of them.”

You may have seen him around the land trust community too, whether at Rally: The National Land Conservation Conference, which he first attended in 1990, on a webinar or at the Symposium on Advanced Legal Topics. Sidamon-Eristoff calls the Alliance “essential,” and hopes he has the chance to expand its good work and impact in the years to come.

“I have been energized by the opportunity to learn from, and share my experience with, other land conservation professionals through the Alliance’s educational programs,” he says.

**“I have been energized by the opportunity to learn from, and share my experience with, other land conservation professionals through the Alliance’s educational programs.”**

## Chuck Wolfe

One of Chuck Wolfe's earliest memories is backpacking the Appalachian Trail at age 6. From there he fostered his love of the outdoors as an Eagle Scout, eventually becoming the National Explorer President of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). He later joined the BSA as a national board member, which reinforced for him the importance of leadership development, community service and respect for the natural world.

Wolfe has woven together business leadership, public service and nonprofit work into his career. He co-founded a strategic consulting firm, served for 12 years as CEO of the Victory Fund, a national nonpartisan political action committee, and was a senior aide to Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles. Wolfe's background in politics is one of the reasons he's excited to join the Alliance's board, as he hopes that he can support expanding the Alliance's deep government relations work.

As the CEO of the Chiles Group, Wolfe currently focuses on operations of the organic Gamble Creek Farms, managing investment ventures and stewarding a diverse real estate portfolio with care for both community and landscape. "Stewardship of Gamble Creek Farms and other conserved lands has deepened my commitment to protecting natural character," he says.

Wolfe enjoys spending time outdoors and hiking, especially in his home state of Florida. He says, "These experiences continually remind me what is at stake and what we have a responsibility to preserve for generations to come."



## Chet Work

Chet Work grew up in a family that moved around a lot, and his only real constant was time spent outside. He got to know his new homes through fishing, hiking, hunting and exploring the land, and it was a natural first step to pursue a career preserving those special places.

Work has spent the last 25 years working in conservation, most of that time within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Work is the executive director of the Gallatin Valley Land Trust in Montana. Prior to that, he led two of the nation's most successful land trusts, the Teton Regional Land Trust in Idaho and the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County in California.

Through his land trust tenure, Work has seen how the Alliance benefits its members. "The Alliance has such a special place in my heart. Having served as the executive director for three different land trusts, I know the value of the Alliance, from lobbying to accreditation to resources and training," he says. He calls the Alliance the glue of the land trust community and is looking forward to helping position it for the future.

"I am beginning to think about the next era of conservation and the new tools that may be necessary," says Work. "I am excited to be part of the Alliance, as I believe it is the diversity of land trusts across the country that is likely to crowdsource the next great conservation tools."

You can find Work, his wife and three children exploring the trails and rivers around southwest Montana. ☺

**"I am beginning to think about the next era of conservation and the new tools that may be necessary."**

# The Mountain They Never Gave Up On

THIRTY YEARS LATER, A LAND TRUST FINALLY SAVES THE PLACE THAT SPARKED ITS BEGINNING

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLUE RIDGE CONSERVANCY

↑ Above: Howard Knob. Right: Eric Hiegl, director of land protection at Blue Ridge Conservancy.



By **DAVID RAY**

**L**and trusts are often born from a community's determination to save one deeply loved, highly threatened place. But what happens when decades pass and that original goal remains out of reach?

This question hovered over Blue Ridge Conservancy until the end of 2025, when the accredited land trust completed the purchase of 74 acres atop Howard Knob and brought its founding story full circle. During the three decades since its founding in 1995, the land trust has protected thousands of acres of open space, trails and working farmland in north-west North Carolina, becoming a beloved and highly valued community institution.

## CLIMBERS RALLY TO 'SAVE THE KNOB'

Howard Knob is a 4,396-foot mountain that towers over Boone, North Carolina, and Appalachian State University. Beginning in the 1980s, App State students and climbers fell in love with bouldering beneath its northern hardwood forest canopy. This wasn't just another climbing spot. Howard Knob became a place of pilgrimage—technically challenging, deeply atmospheric

and central to the identity of a growing climbing community in the High Country of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

In 1993, the property was purchased by a private individual, closed to public access, subdivided and approved for development. The community's response was immediate and passionate. App State students and climbers launched a grassroots "Save the Knob" campaign—spearheaded by well-known climbers Jeffrey

Scott and Joey Henson—which quickly drew regional and national attention. Scott and friend Jarrett Franklin hiked the 1,175-mile Mountains-to-Sea Trail across North Carolina to raise awareness and funds, and Scott famously lodged himself in a treetop to block a bulldozer from destroying the terrain. At the same time, student-climber Jim Horton secured permission to host a bouldering competition on the rock outcrops at Hound Ears, a golf club located near Howard Knob, to support the effort.

Momentum swelled. Nearly a thousand people marched through Boone. Local leaders convened a community board. Stories appeared in national climbing magazines. Though the land was not saved at the time, the effort became legend—preserved in faded t-shirts, bumper stickers and stories retold with equal parts pride and regret.

## BIRTH OF AN ORGANIZATION

Out of that movement, the Watauga Land Trust was formed in 1995. While Howard Knob remained the dream, its founders quickly recognized that many other irreplaceable places in the Blue Ridge Mountains needed protection. “We didn’t really know what we were doing,” recalls Scott, now a successful businessman. That changed after co-founder Michelle Merritt Leonard attended a Land Trust Alliance Rally in the late 1990s. She came back and said, “Now I know we can do this.” Watauga Land Trust eventually evolved into today’s Blue Ridge Conservancy, a dedicated team of 11 full-time staff working across a seven-county region.

In the mid-2000s, longtime climber and conservation professional Eric Hiegl joined the land trust as director of land protection. Under his leadership, Blue Ridge Conservancy’s protected portfolio has grown to more than 26,000 acres of natural areas, working lands and recreational sites across seven counties. But Howard Knob was never far from his mind.

“Jeffrey Scott was one of the first people I met when I moved to Boone in 1999,” says Hiegl. “He loved telling stories about Howard Knob. And a couple times every year someone would ask, ‘When are you going to get Howard?’” he laughs. “So, it’s been on my mind for 26 years. It was always on our to-do list.”

In October 2025, the 30th Hound Ears Bouldering Competition took place. The event had become part of the renowned “Triple Crown of Bouldering” series in the Southeast, which Horton and co-founder Chad Wykle had made the difficult decision to retire. A commemorative film was nearly complete, with Horton and Wykle essentially saying in the last scene, “We did all this, but we never protected Howard Knob.”

Then Hiegl called.

After three decades, Blue Ridge Conservancy had the mountain under contract.

Horton was stunned. “We’d had such mixed feelings about ending the Triple Crown,” he says. “And then to learn that the original goal—the thing that started all of this—was finally about to happen...” Wykle finishes the thought: “It was surreal. Almost supernatural. It felt meant to be.”

## THE POWER OF LAND TRUSTS

One need not invoke cosmic mystery to recognize what this story reveals about the power of the land trust movement. From shared values and instinctive action, a community forms around a single, urgent goal. Over decades, volunteers and advocates keep the vision alive, even when success seems impossible. The land trust they create becomes a durable institution—one capable of patiently building relationships, applying professional expertise and ultimately seizing the moment when opportunity finally arrives.

In the end, it was the community that made the conservation deal possible. Blue Ridge Conservancy purchased Howard Knob in December 2025, fully funded by private support from more than 130

donors. A celebratory event that October at Boone’s SouthEnd Brewing—featuring a special “Howard Knob Golden Ale”—honored these donor-heroes, including original “Save the Knob” organizers alongside a new generation of supporters. The sense of coming full circle was unmistakable.

Thirty years earlier, community members had lit a founding flame. Over time, that flame protected 26,000 acres; launched major projects that provide trails, greenways and river access for people; and ultimately returned to accomplish its very first goal. It was a rare and powerful moment—one that perfectly captures how communities can realize their highest aspirations through the land trust movement. ☺

DAVID RAY is executive director of Blue Ridge Conservancy.

*“This story shows how communities can realize their highest aspirations through the land trust movement.”*

—DAVID RAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF BLUE RIDGE CONSERVANCY

↓ The early days of climbing at Howard Knob.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLUE RIDGE CONSERVANCY



Students in Great Peninsula Conservancy's Land Labs program participate in hands-on science lessons at protected lands on Washington's Puget Sound.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GREAT PENINSULA CONSERVANCY

# YOUR CONSERVATION STORY MATTERS

By **KATIE CHANG**

## Participate in the National Land Trust Census

**Every land trust has a story**—rooted in its community, driven by local priorities and grounded in a shared commitment to lasting conservation. Collectively, these stories form the backbone of a national movement. Once every five years, the Land Trust Alliance brings those stories together through the National Land Trust Census, the nation's longest running survey of private land conservation. The 2025 Census is now open, and your organization's participation is essential.

For more than four decades, the Census has served as both a benchmark and a snapshot of the land trust community's progress. It captures far more than numbers: it documents how land trusts are evolving, responding to community needs and deepening engagement with people and places. At the state level, Census results show conservation's local impact, helping land trusts articulate the value they bring to the landscapes and people they know best. Nationally, the data paints a powerful portrait of a strong, united movement advancing shared goals.

The impact of this collective effort is undeniable. Five years ago, the Census showed that land trusts had protected **61 million acres nationwide**—more than all national parks combined. This staggering figure is a testament to decades of dedication, collaboration and stewardship across the entire United States. It also raises a compelling question: How far have we come since then?

While the numbers are impressive, the real meaning of the Census is in what it helps us communicate to funders, policy-makers, partners and the public. Census shows that land trusts are valued community institutions already delivering measurable results. It shows the potential for even greater impact in the years ahead. And it informs the resources the Alliance will produce—from state summaries to infographics to press materials—to help every land trust tell its story more effectively.

We recognize that completing a detailed survey is no small task. The Alliance has designed tools such as a preparation checklist and save and resume functionality to make your participation as smooth as possible.

Beyond measuring progress, the Census provides a moment for reflection. It allows us to look back, take stock and acknowledge how far the movement has come together. It highlights both achievements and trends we can all celebrate. Land trusts are expanding community engagement, building climate resilience and creating social impact. These insights will help shape strategies, inform funding priorities and inspire the next generation of conservation leadership.

Every land trust, regardless of size or geography, contributes a vital piece of the national conservation story. By participating in the Census, you help ensure that this story is complete, compelling and reflective of the extraordinary work happening in communities everywhere.

Thank you for making the time to add your voice. Your story matters—now more than ever. Census is open through March 31. Submit your organization’s responses at: [lta.org/census](https://lta.org/census).

### New Resource for Land Trusts: K-12 Education Evaluation Toolkit

Land trusts across the country provide meaningful learning opportunities for school-age children (K-12) through place-based education programs. Such programs serve to deepen children’s connection to nature and place while

fostering a lifelong dedication to conservation—ultimately cultivating future stewards of the lands that land trusts are working hard to protect in perpetuity.

But what makes a good K-12 land trust education program? How do land trusts know their programs are working? A new evaluation toolkit offers practical tools with step-by-step guidance, real-world examples and flexible navigation for educators seeking to assess and strengthen their programs.

The toolkit helps land trusts design evaluations tailored to their program’s unique goals, activities and outcomes, yielding meaningful data and insights to demonstrate the impacts of K-12 programs to board members and other key stakeholders, including funders.

“I was seeing the impacts that we were having, but all I had was my own stories to tell the narrative. I didn’t have any data to back that up,” says toolkit user Michala Hendrick, youth programming director at Hudson Taconic Lands in New York. “When searching for funding, I saw evaluation as a tool to get to where we needed to be to convince funders about the impacts that we were having.”

The toolkit is the result of a three-year collaboration between the Land Trust K-12 Community of Practice (CoP) and Catalyst Consulting Group. CoP is led by Rob Wade of Feather River Land Trust and includes a total of 25 educators from 19 U.S.-based land trusts. Explore the toolkit at: [lta.org/resources/learn/explore/land-trust-k-12-education-evaluation-toolkit](https://lta.org/resources/learn/explore/land-trust-k-12-education-evaluation-toolkit).

### Western Voters Support Conservation

The 16th annual “Conservation in the West” poll by Colorado College’s State of the Rockies Project surveyed more than 3,000 voters across the political spectrum from eight Western states—Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. The poll shows that, regardless of party affiliation, Western voters prioritize conservation, recreation and renewable energy over fossil fuel development and are concerned about

rollbacks of conservation laws and funding cuts for public lands management.

The survey explored views on key topics—including water, climate change, energy development, public lands and wildlife—and by specific demographics—such as Gen Z, Black, Latino and Native American voters.

Key findings include:

- 90% say “uncontrollable wildfires that threaten homes and property” are a serious problem.
- 87% say inadequate water supply, water pollution and PFAs (“forever chemicals”) in water sources are serious problems.
- 86% say funding cuts to public lands are a serious problem.
- 84% say that the rollback of laws that protect our land, water and wildlife is a serious problem, a sharp increase from prior years.
- 76%—more than ever before—say they would prefer their member of Congress place more emphasis on conservation and recreation of public lands over maximizing energy production.

Importantly, with midterm elections coming up later this year, the poll finds that 85% of Western voters say public land, water and wildlife support is important to them when choosing a candidate.

All findings from the survey are available online, including state-by-state summaries, at: [coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2026.html](https://coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2026.html). ☺

↓ Annual polling of Western voters shows conservation is more important than ever.



DI GLISSON, I/FIREFLY IMAGEWORKS



← Upstate Forever's permanent protection of Grant Meadow in Pickens, South Carolina, ensures this idyllic view will remain unspoiled.

## EASEMENT STEWARDSHIP RECORDS:

# STORYTELLING FOR THE FUTURE

UPSTATE FOREVER

By **KIRSTEN FERGUSON**

**Stewardship recordkeeping** can be a painstaking process of tracking activities on conservation easements, including landowner requests, approvals and exercised rights. But good recordkeeping can also be a form of storytelling, says Lauren Ulich, director of stewardship and land management at the accredited Upstate Forever in Greenville, South Carolina.

“Good recordkeeping shows what happened on a property at a glance,” says Ulich. “So that in the future, say 30 years from now, a future stewardship person doesn’t have to dig through a million documents to figure out what happened on a particular property.”

It’s also truth-telling.

“You can’t document too much. It’s just not possible,” Ulich says. “Whenever we have an important conversation with a landowner, we create a note to file. The most important thing about stewardship is that if there is an activity on a property, there needs to be one source of truth for how that issue or rights request arose, how we dealt with it and why we made that decision.”

## FROM BINDERS TO ‘ONE SOURCE OF TRUTH’

The world of land trust stewardship and recordkeeping has changed a great deal in recent years. When Upstate Forever was founded in 1998, stewardship monitoring was handled by staff from different departments, with records stored largely on paper.

“Historically, for stewardship recordkeeping, we had a stewardship binder for each property,” Ulich says. “Every year, we would print out copies of our monitoring reports, important correspondence ... all of the things were in these binders.”

When she joined Upstate Forever nearly five years ago, Ulich took one look at the

shelves and realized those binders might eventually fill the entire office. That prompted a shift to an electronic archive that replicates the completeness of the binders without the space constraints.

Today, Upstate Forever’s stewardship records follow a clear duplication strategy that lines up with Practice 9G—critical information is stored in at least three places. “All of the important information is in electronic form in the cloud. It’s also printed out and sent to off-site storage. Then we have an electronic archive, too, that has limited access,” she explains.

Landscape, the land conservation software Upstate Forever adopted in 2020, is a fourth layer. The web-based platform brings together mapping, task lists, monitoring routes, photo points, structures, issue histories and landowner contact information for each stewardship site.

“Historically, that information existed in disparate Word documents and Excel spreadsheets,” Ulich says. “Landscape helped us combine it all into one place. Stewardship staff are easily able to see who the landowner is, their contact information, and any monitoring challenges or issues.”

The team has also embedded the Land Trust Alliance’s easement violation decision tree as a custom form within the system. When an issue is identified, staff walk through the decision tree in Landscape to evaluate severity and determine how to respond.

## A RIGHTS SUMMARY FOR EVERY EASEMENT

Another key tool for Upstate Forever is its rights summary document. For every conservation easement, the stewardship team creates an Excel spreadsheet that distills the major rights and restrictions into clear language.

“We try to cut out legalese while still keeping the important elements of what each clause allows or restricts. It’s descriptive without being overwhelming,” says Ulich.

Each section of the easement gets its own row with columns describing what, if anything, has happened under that provision and when. If a landowner submitted a forest management plan in 2015 and

Upstate Forever approved it that year, that activity and date are recorded beside the relevant clause.

The summary is created soon after closing, “within a month or so,” Ulich says. New landowners receive it along with their welcome letter. The document is then updated and resent annually with the monitoring report.

For stewardship staff, the summary offers a fast way to understand the history of a property and focus monitoring on high-impact areas or past problem spots. For landowners—especially successors who did not negotiate the original easement—it provides a practical guide. It also helps keep the landowner relationship healthy so that problems surface early.

“We’re in the business of compliance and also relationship building,” Ulich says.

To increase touchpoints beyond the annual visit, Upstate Forever sends a short email or letter about six months after monitoring: a friendly check-in plus a one-page PDF of “things to let us know about,” such as harvesting timber or building a structure.

“We’ve found that when we send that email or that letter, landowners say, ‘Oh, yeah, actually, I was thinking about building a tractor barn here,’ and it starts that conversation where otherwise we may not have been top of mind,” she says.

## DESIGNING FOR YOUR FUTURE SELF AND FOR ACCREDITATION

Some of the most powerful changes to Upstate Forever’s recordkeeping came after its most recent renewal of accreditation.

“There are predictable questions they ask stewardship staff, about any violations and how you dealt with them, who was involved, and why you made those decisions,” she says. “That used to take a long time because the information was in different places.”

In response, the team built those questions into their own process. Now, when a violation or rights request is resolved, staff complete a short internal report that captures the critical facts and the reasoning behind the decision—structured around the questions they know the Land Trust Accreditation Commission will eventually ask.

It’s another way of being kind to her future self—and to whomever holds the role after her. As easements age and histories grow more complex, that consolidated story becomes essential. In the end, those notes to file, rights summaries and carefully duplicated archives tell the story of how a land trust keeps its promises—and how someone 30 years from now can understand the work and keep it going. ☺

## LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

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

## ACCREDITATION ACHIEVEMENTS

**Congratulations to the nearly 40 land trusts** that recently achieved first-time accreditation or renewal of accreditation for either the first, second or third times. Accreditation involves a rigorous evaluation that ensures applicants are operating at the highest conservation standards. Thank you for continuing to lead the way in conservation excellence!

### First-time accreditation:

- HeartLands Conservancy (IL)
- Madison-Morgan Conservancy (GA)
- Siskiyou Land Trust (CA)
- Westmoreland Land Trust (PA)
- Woodlands Conservancy (LA)
- Working Lands Trust (NC)

- Hunterdon Land Trust (NJ) ♦
- Lake George Land Conservancy (NY) ♦
- Lancaster Farmland Trust (PA) \*
- Leelanau Conservancy (MI) \*
- Lemhi Regional Land Trust (ID) ♦
- Middlebury Land Trust (CT)
- New Mexico Land Conservancy (NM) ♦
- Northern Neck Land Conservancy (VA) ♦

### Renewal of accreditation:

- 7 Lakes Alliance (ME)
- Androscoggin Land Trust (ME) ♦
- Blue Mountain Land Trust (WA) ♦
- Boothbay Region Land Trust (ME) ♦
- Buzzards Bay Coalition (MA) ♦
- Cape Elizabeth Land Trust (ME) ♦
- Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust (ME) ♦
- Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust (MA) ♦
- Dutchess Land Conservancy (NY) \*
- Feather River Land Trust (CA) ♦
- Great Peninsula Conservancy (WA) ♦
- Great Rivers Land Trust (IL)
- Groton Conservation Trust (MA) ♦
- Hill Country Conservancy (TX) ♦
- Hunterdon Land Trust (NJ) ♦
- Lake George Land Conservancy (NY) ♦
- Lancaster Farmland Trust (PA) \*
- Leelanau Conservancy (MI) \*
- Lemhi Regional Land Trust (ID) ♦
- Middlebury Land Trust (CT)
- New Mexico Land Conservancy (NM) ♦
- Northern Neck Land Conservancy (VA) ♦
- Northwest Arkansas Land Trust (AR) ♦
- Open Space Institute and its affiliate, Open Space Institute Land Trust (NY) \*
- Orange County Land Trust (NY) ♦
- Santa Fe Conservation Trust (NM) ♦
- Sharon Land Trust (CT) ♦
- Sierra Foothill Conservancy (CA) ♦
- Southeast Alaska Land Trust (AK) ♦
- St. Simons Land Trust (GA) ♦
- Tejon Ranch Conservancy (CA) ♦
- The Conservation Fund and its affiliate, Sustainable Conservation (VA) ♦
- Warren Land Trust (CT) ♦

♦ Denotes second renewal

\* Denotes third renewal



SAVE THE DATE

# RALLY 2026



September 16–19 | Denver, CO • Sheraton Hotel

National Land Conservation Conference • Land Trust Alliance

## Learn, Connect and Grow

Join us at Rally 2026 in Denver, CO, where you will be re-energized and inspired. Share new ideas and network with a robust conservation community representing land trusts and partners across the nation.

Rally has all the resources you need to take your conservation career further. There's no better way to invest in your future.

**Registration will open in May.** We can't wait to see you there!



WELCOME DINNER



FIELD TRIPS



WORKSHOPS



RECEPTIONS



NETWORKING



SPECIAL EVENTS