
Your July accreditation news update

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To Jennifer Brady-Connor <jbconnor@landtrustaccreditation.org>



Your news update
July 2025

Lottery for 2026 first-time applicants

The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation. The lottery for a spot to apply for first-time accreditation in 2026 opens July 28 and will close September 10. In 2026, there will be one round for up to 8 first-time applicants. Any land trusts not selected to apply in 2026 will be assigned to be a 2027 applicant.

The registration link will be posted on the website on July 28.

[Learn more](#)

Before your land trust enters the lottery:

- Take the **[“Are you ready” quiz](#)**.
- **[Review the information](#)** needed at registration – including the special messages for mitigation land trusts and land trusts who engaged in tax shelter transactions in the past.
- **[Read the guidance series](#)** on being prepared for first-time accreditation.
- Learn more about the **[first-time accreditation](#)** process.
- Mark your calendar with these important dates: pre-application due Jan. 8, 2026 and application due April 30, 2026.



Photo courtesy Cumberland River Compact (Tennessee), accredited in February 2025.

Lessons learned: Management plans

The role of the Commission is to verify, through the accreditation process, that land trusts meet the requirements and [Land Trust Standards and Practices](#) (Standards). The Commission reviews about 100 applications for accreditation each year, which provides a unique view about trends in the land trust community. These trends can help you learn from others, avoid risk to your land trust, and save time in the accreditation process.

Management plans

Management plans create a record of the conservation values and why a conservation property was protected, communicate the management goals for the property and identify what activities are needed to meet the goals. A management plan serves as the property's strategic plan and helps a land trust allocate resources to meet its goals.

Accredited land trusts are required to complete a management plan that contains all the required contents within 12 months of acquiring the property. A land trust shows it meets the requirements with the data on the Land Conservation Project List and with the documentation in the application. Meeting the requirements over the accredited term can save the land trust time and avoid corrective action needing to be taken during the application process.

Frequently asked questions

- **What is a “conservation fee property”?** For accreditation, a conservation fee property is land held in fee simple ownership for conservation purposes or for its conservation values, even if the land trust plans to later transfer or sell the property. In contrast, properties that have no conservation values (such as a donated property in a subdivision that the land trust plans to sell to generate income or an office building) do not need to be reported on the Land Conservation Project List.
- **What needs to be included in the plan?** Each management plan must include identification of the property’s conservation values, the management goals, the activities to achieve the management goals and the date the plan was completed (or updated), if completed or updated since 2022. Most land trusts already collect this information and consider these points as part of its project due diligence and decision to protect and hold the property. A management plan simply puts those pieces together in one place. While the contents of a plan are specific, there is no prescribed plan length or format for the plan. The requirements give a land trust flexibility to scale the type of management plan documentation to the goals for the property and the type of property. For example, the plan for a property that will be transferred to a public agency shortly after one year could be part of the project materials reviewed by the board during the acquisition process, so as long as that documentation contains all the required contents. However, a property with active forestry or restoration efforts will likely need a more detailed plan to be able to effectively protect and manage the property.
- **How soon does a plan need to be completed?** Accredited land trusts are expected to complete management plans within 12 months of acquiring the property. Some land trusts take several years to inventory and develop a robust plan for each property. In those cases, the land trust can meet the requirement by creating an interim or first-year plan to help guide actions until the more comprehensive management plan is developed.
- **Is a plan needed for every property?** Yes. To meet the Standards and accreditation requirements, a land trust must have a management plan document that covers each conservation fee property and has all the required contents, no matter how small the property or how limited the activities are.
- **What if the property is going to be sold or transferred?** If the property is transferred or sold within 12 months, no plan is required. However, if it appears the property will not be transferred or sold within the 12-month period, the land trust needs to create a plan with the required contents.
- **What if the property is covered by a lease?** A lease can serve as a management plan if the lease covers all the required elements of the plan. If not, the lease can be supplemented with additional material as needed to meet the requirements.
- **What if a new parcel is simply added to an existing preserve?** A land trust can have a master management plan that covers all the parcels that are part of a preserve, if the plan clearly identifies which parcels it addresses. The plan can identify the parcels on a map, with a list or with written descriptions. If specific parcels have unique conservation values, those should be identified in the master management plan. If a new parcel is added to the preserve, the land trust needs to update the management plan to reflect the parcel addition within 12 months of acquiring the parcel. The land trust can incorporate the new parcel into

the management plan by updating the maps or by adding the new property information.

Resources

Land Trust Accreditation Commission resources:

- [Requirements Manual](#): Stewardship II.1-6.
- [Land Conservation Project List](#).
- [Reference Application Packet for Renewal](#).

Land Trust Alliance [resources](#):

- [Practice Element 12B1](#).
- [Self-guided course](#).
- Sample management plans
 - Sample [first-year management plan](#).
 - Sample [management plan](#).

We need to hear from you if you...

- | | |
|---|--|
| » Have a new executive director. | » Changed geographical area. |
| » Have a new contact for accreditation. | » Changed corporate structure. |
| » Changed names. | » Changed programming, such as accepting easements when previously only accepting fee lands. |
| » Decided to merge with another organization. | |

[Update your information now](#)

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The mission of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission is to inspire excellence, promote public trust and ensure permanence in the conservation of open lands by recognizing land trust organizations that meet rigorous quality standards and that strive for continuous improvement.
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