



Your June accreditation news update

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Date Thu 6/26/2025 12:11 PM

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



Your news update June 2025

Commission spotlight

The Commission welcomed Megan Chapman to the team in May 2025 as review specialist. Review specialists serve as a primary evaluator of accreditation applications and are on hand to answer questions about the accreditation process, documentation, and requirements. Megan shared a bit about herself and her passion for land conservation.



Megan Chapman.

Q: How did you get involved in land conservation?

I was moments away from deciding to pursue a master's degree in fish genetics when a friend suggested that I might like land conservation and nonprofit management more. Turns out, they were right! I left my job in fisheries and spent a few months working at my local land trust doing outreach and programming. I also helped them prepare for accreditation by shifting through decades of paper project folders looking for Forms 8283. Along the way, I read the stories and the why behind the conservation, and I was hooked! I did a complete pivot and got a graduate degree in Environmental Studies with a concentration in land conservation and nonprofit management from the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University. My leadership practicum (or thesis alternative) centered on a study of the creation of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and the work of helping a local land conservation organization prepare for the process. After completing my degree, I worked as a Land Protection Specialist at Three Valley Conservation Trust in southwestern Ohio and then made my way home to New Hampshire to work as a Project Manager for the Upper Valley Land Trust.

Q: What inspires you to keep working in land conservation?

The pandemic brought changes to my life, as it did for many, that had me questioning my path. I stepped away from conserving land and instead focused on living with the land. My partner and I moved back to my hometown, the town where at least six generations of my family had come before, and put down our

own roots. Every year the fruit and vegetable gardens get bigger, and the bird and frog song gets louder, and the deer and turkeys get more and more comfortable, and dragon fly meet-up gets busier making you wonder how there is a mosquito left; every year I feel more and more connected to and in awe of the land that supports us.

After a couple years of settling in, I joined my town's Conservation Commission and within six months was named the Chair. While my love of the land and the natural world has never wavered, it took getting back down to the business of protecting land to reignite my professional land conservation passion. Now, I feel I've come full circle. I get to utilize my knowledge and expertise to support land conservation organizations around the country as they embrace good governance and sound organizational practices as tools to help protect and steward all the wonderful places that help to care for us all.

Q: What is your favorite way to spend time outdoors?

Lately, I've been attempting to spend more time in my hammock, reading a book, or just allowing the steady hum of forest activity to lull me to sleep. The key word being "attempting." As a new yoga teacher, I have been trying to embrace tuning into my body's daily rhythm. You'll actually find me tending a garden or making a new one with the goal of producing as much of our own food as possible. We start in the late winter with maple sugaring season and go all the way to the final harvest of squash before the frost. While we all come about our connection to the land from a different angle, mine is having the immense privilege to get soil under my fingernails and eat the literal fruits of my labor.

Lessons Learned: Title Investigation Update

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 and avoid risk to your land trust.

Trend

Having an attorney or title company investigate the title for each property and conservation easement the land trust intends to acquire has clear benefits. A title investigation allows the land trust to confirm they are working with the legal owner and to understand and address any issues that might affect the property's ownership or use.

Equally important is the need for the attorney or title company to update the title investigation at or just before closing. (For accreditation purposes, "just before closing" is defined as being no earlier than 30 days before closing.) That final step is crucial to confirm there have been no changes in ownership or no new use issues. In most cases, the update shows no changes. However, there are other times the update has identified a critical and unexpected issue, like a third party filing a claim on the property or a new mortgage. These high-risk issues, if not addressed before closing, can have costly impacts for the land trust and on the conservation values of the project.

Frequently asked questions

- **What documentation is required?** The accreditation process relies on a land trust documenting how it met the requirements in the accreditation application (both first-time and renewal). The application includes providing evidence of the title investigation and evidence that the title investigation was updated within 30 days before closing. A land trust can avoid additional questions during the accreditation process if it provides this information in the initial application.
- **What documentation can be used to show the title investigation update?** There are many ways to show a title investigation update has been completed. Some land trusts provide an updated title commitment or title report, some provide the title insurance policy, and some provide written communication from an attorney or title company that the investigation was brought current at closing and no new issues were found.
- **Is a title insurance policy required?** No. The Standards and accreditation requirements do not require a land trust to obtain a title policy. However, a title policy, if obtained as part of the closing process, can be used as evidence of both the title being investigated and updated prior to closing.

Resources

Requirements Manual: Transactions I.4 and I.5

Land Trust Alliance **resources:**

- Review **Practice Element 9F1(a)**
- Learn **Practice Element 9F1**
- Webinar on **Title Review**



Cleveland, Ohio | Sept. 3-6

Rally 2025: The National Land Conservation Conference

The Commission is excited to join the Land Trust Alliance and land trust community at Rally 2025, National Land Conservation Conference, at the Huntington Convention Center. We're ready to celebrate accredited land trusts, and we hope you'll join us! We'll be waiting to meet and chat with you during coffee breaks, and we hope to see you at our workshops (C14 and E13):

- **Getting Ready for Your Renewal of Accreditation:** Knowledge is power, and it is never too early to begin planning for your land trust's accreditation renewal! Bring your curiosity and your questions to learn more about the renewal process and timing, and how to get help and information throughout the process. You will leave this session confident about preparing, organizing and uploading application documents for review.
- **Put Your Best Foot Forward: Tips and Tools for Understanding the Requirements and Preparing Your Strongest Accreditation Application:** Be prepared! By actively using [Land Trust Standards and Practices](#) and the accreditation requirements in your daily practice, you will feel ready to prepare your best accreditation application. Learn from Commission staff about how they review your application and gain insights into the accreditation requirements and documentation. As a participant you will leave knowing time-saving shortcuts, how to pre-screen your documents to avoid common problems, how to leverage the [Requirements Manual](#) and more.

You can learn more about these workshops, the entire schedule of events and how to register on the Alliance's [Rally website](#).

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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