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Land Trusts & Federal Agencies: A Mutually Beneficial Relationship

and trusts and federal agencies need each other, and it makes sense for them to work together. Each federal agency may have different goals in mind, but they all greatly value their partnerships with land trusts, large and small.

Kim Berns, acting deputy assistant director of Renewable Resources and Planning for the Bureau of Land Management, lists two reasons why it's important for land trusts and federal agencies to work together. First, she says, "There's a timing aspect. The federal government works on appropriations from Congress, which doesn't allow us a lot of flexibility. Funding is appropriated a year or two back. Land trusts have the flexibility to move quickly on a piece of land, whereas we might not get the money needed before the opportunity is lost."

Second, "Land trusts have the people, time and funding dedicated to that one goal of protecting land," Berns says, "while staff at the federal government have many things on their plate."

Berns cites the little square of land in the middle of Grand Teton National Park as an example of a property that could have easily been developed for a hotel if land trusts hadn't stepped in and helped the government acquire it. "There are so many great outcomes from our relationship with land trusts," Berns says, "but the most significant is saving important places for the public."

Nancy Natoli, program coordinator at the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations and Environment, views collaboration between the government and land trusts as important to national security because certain protected lands provide critical buffers to vital training spaces. When the Department of Defense partners with land trusts to conserve land, Natoli finds that people are more open to working with the military. Land trusts help make the process less intimidating and put a

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more personal face on the interactions: "Landowners are wary of government land acquisition. Historically, DoD took land and displaced landowners to create bases, so we sometimes encounter skepticism from private landowners when talking about our buffer program. When landowners see that the military's objectives align with a local land trust's for conserving land and natural resources, they are more interested in working with us."

Natoli particularly calls out the value of small, local land trusts: "We have around 60 long-term partnerships with land trusts throughout the country; about 30 are small, county-based organizations. These small, local land trusts

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are our most successful partners in land conservation because they understand their communities. They're regular people living their passion; they know the families, they are neighbors and they have an investment in the community's quality of life."

Nancy Parachini, land acquisitions program manager at the U.S. Forest Service, agrees, emphasizing the critical role that land trusts play in educating the public: "Land trusts can help further the mission of the Forest Service by demonstrating that Forest Service goals are aligned with those of the land trust and the community. Sometimes the Forest Service doesn't want to be out in front of a project. If a local group is leading the effort,

we can provide support and expertise and gain the benefits of those kinds of relationships." And whereas Forest Service staff can rotate frequently, Parachini notes that "land trusts are dialed into local moods and local politics because they're rooted in those communities and understand where the constituents are coming from."

Parachini reiterates the value of land trusts being able to move faster than the government: "We regularly partner with national groups, and sometimes local land trusts also, because they're more nimble than the federal government. The land trust purchases land and holds it until the federal government can get an appropriation for buying it." An example from this past fiscal year includes a 53-acre inholding in the Nantahala National Forest in Tennessee that protects the Chunky Gal Trail. The Land Trust for the Little Tennessee purchased the inholding, and the Forest Service is in the process of buying it from the land trust.

Eric Alvarez, chief of the division of realty for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, says land trusts can be helpful in purchasing land due to their flexibility, but also because of their ability

to work with Congress: "They talk to a lot of members of Congress. We can't lobby, so the land trust plays that role for the resource. They impress upon Congress the importance of buying a tract of land."

Alvarez also values land trusts' ability to be on the ground: "We have a hugely broad mission and can't be in all places at all times. Our goal is to conserve species and habitat, but we can't do it all by ourselves. Land trusts help us bridge the gaps."

The Fish and Wildlife Service works with many national organizations, but Alvarez says that their collaborative work with small land trusts is essential, citing recent successful partnerships. "Not only did these land

> trusts help in acquiring land, but they also help build up important goodwill in the community," says Alvarez.

> Elaine Vaudreuil, manager of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program, cites another advantage of working with groups so close to their communities. "Land trusts may be aware of a property before it even comes up for sale," Vaudreuil says. "Coastal lands can turn over quickly, so land trusts play a very important role by buying and holding property or negotiating an option to purchase the land until all the funding is in place. Coastal acquisitions—especially larger projects—often bring together a lot of different partners—national and local land trusts, state and federal agencies. Land trusts often play a key role in bringing all the pieces together. I've

Marines take on California's mountains to prepare for Afghanistan. Partnerships between land trusts and the Department of Defense's buffer lands program achieve common goals of protecting land and habitat, but also benefit nation<u>al s</u>



heard it described as stitching together a quilt."

Whether it be flexibility, education or community support, what land trusts bring to partnerships with the federal government is highly valued in their shared goal of land conservation.

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