accreditation **CORNER**

Meet the COMMISSION

XPECT A LOT OF NIGHT AND WEEKEND WORK, a minimum commitment of 200 hours a year, and no pay." That's part of the job description for a volunteer commissioner with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

Commissioners are the governing board of the Commission, a nonprofit incorporated in the District of Columbia but operating out of Saratoga Springs, New York. Each volunteer also serves an important program role, reviewing six to eight accreditation applications a year. Commissioners provide an essential peer-review perspective when establishing accreditation requirements and when reviewing each application.

"Simply saying that we review applications does not begin to convey the level of detail and thoughtful discussion that goes into each of those reviews," says Commissioner Jean Hocker. Commissioners spend an average of 20 to 30 hours on each application and participate in three conference calls for each one. They also serve on committees and participate in Commission meetings, including two multi-day in-person meetings a year.

In 2013 there are 19 commissioners and one commissioner-designate. Half of the commissioners are board or staff members of accredited land trusts, some are advisors to accredited land trusts, and others come from various sectors of the land conservation community. Anyone interested in volunteering on the Commission can submit the online application survey (see below).

Each spring the Commission's board development committee examines the skills on the board, vacancies projected for the next year and candidates that have applied. It looks at the mix of geography, gender, age, land trust diversity and other characteristics

needed to maintain a dynamic board and to effectively evaluate accreditation applications. Here are two examples of how it works.

Last year the Commission identified the need for additional expertise in conservation easement stewardship and in financial management. Anne Murphy, the conservation stewardship director for the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) and online land protection and stewardship expert for the Ask an Expert forum on The Learning Center, applied via an online application survey. Prior to joining MLT, Anne gained valuable experience in stewardship, strategic conservation planning and land protection at Western Reserve Land Conservancy in Ohio and Little Traverse Conservancy in Michigan. This on-the-ground experience and familiarity with a variety of land trusts allows Anne to share an important perspective when the Commission reviews practices under Standard 11: Conservation Easement Stewardship.

"It's an honor to serve on the Commission and a very rewarding experience to not only learn about, but also get to know, the diverse land trusts seeking accreditation," says Anne.

Jennifer Sims recently retired from her position as the chief financial officer for the City of Portland, Oregon. She was active on the board of Columbia Land Trust (WA, OR) and was finishing her fifth year as chair when a commissioner encouraged her to apply. Her experience as board chair and background in finance make her an invaluable resource when evaluating practices under Standard 3: Board Accountability and Standard 6: Financial and Asset Management.

"An amazing level of care and consideration goes into the review of each application," says Jennifer. "It is definitely more work than I expected but it is extremely interesting and Land Trust Accreditation Commission

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance



rewarding. The review process is truly a team effort between staff and the Commission. That means patience, listening and meeting deadlines are essential."

The board development committee reviews all candidate applications and talks with those who best suit current needs. A final slate of candidates is recommended by the Commission to the board of the Alliance.

Consistent with the rules governing supporting organizations, the Alliance appoints new commissioners, who then undergo an extensive orientation and training program. Each is mentored by staff and other commissioners as they conduct the review of their first applications.

It falls to Larry Kueter, chair of the Commission since 2006, to meld the diverse interests represented on the Commission into a cohesive, effective board. "It's essential that people join the Commission with an open mind and a willingness to examine all sides of an issue," says Larry. "We operate primarily by consensus. Egos are checked at the door when taking on this job."