

Land Trust 
 Accreditation Commission
 An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

THE ACCREDITATION JOURNEY: *Preparation is its own reward*

The green accreditation seal, a hard-earned mark of distinction for land conservation organizations, offers national recognition of their efforts to meet stringent quality standards for excellence and uphold the public trust.

But the accreditation seal, a trademark of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, is not the sole reason to tackle the extensive accreditation process. As Cape Elizabeth Land Trust in Maine discovered while preparing to enter the lottery for 2014 first-time accreditation, the journey of getting the group's standards and practices in order first was an immensely worthwhile process in itself.

"What the process enabled us to do is take a step back and standardize how we do things," says Executive Director Christopher Franklin. Volunteers had run Cape Elizabeth Land Trust—founded in 1985 to preserve natural areas in the scenic town with a spectacular coastline and historic lighthouses—for much of its history. But with the addition of paid staff and recent organizational growth, the land trust found it needed greater consistency in its standards and practices.

"Accreditation will give us a manual for how the organization is run—so there's no ambiguity," explains Franklin. "The overriding, most persuasive reason for us to apply was that accreditation will make the organization stronger by standardizing how we do our business, which is beneficial for training new board members and staff.

We'll have well-researched, well-documented practices to follow going forward."

Jim Welsh, executive director of Wisconsin's Natural Heritage Land Trust, a group also entering the 2014 accreditation lottery, makes a similar point about the value of undertaking the process itself. "Our board asked very good questions about the cost of [getting accredited]. I argued strongly that we should have all of these best practices anyway. We all agreed that standards and practices are very important for us to follow. Accreditation rolls it all together."

Both organizations participate in state land trust excellence programs. In

Wisconsin, the Land Trust Alliance partners with Gathering Waters Conservancy to offer the Land Trust Excellence and Advancement Program (LEAP). In Maine, the Maine Land Trust Excellence program is a joint project of the Alliance and the Maine Land Trust Network, a program of Maine Coast Heritage Trust. These programs helped both groups assess the priority areas they needed to work on before applying for accreditation. "We'd been talking about accreditation for a couple of years," says Welsh. "LEAP was a great final push through the door." 

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The Lucey family is pictured on their 178-acre Black Earth Creek Farm in Wisconsin, protected by Natural Heritage Land Trust and its partners.

SCOTT LUCEY

New: The Accreditation Lottery

Due to high demand, application slots for first-time accreditation in 2014 will be selected through a lottery, drawn in June 2013 (registration for the lottery closed May 31, 2013). Organizations that enter the lottery this year but are not chosen will be guaranteed a slot in 2015. There is a nonrefundable lottery registration fee of \$750. The lottery does not apply to organizations renewing accreditation. For more information, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, email info@landtrustaccreditation.org or call 518-587-3143.