

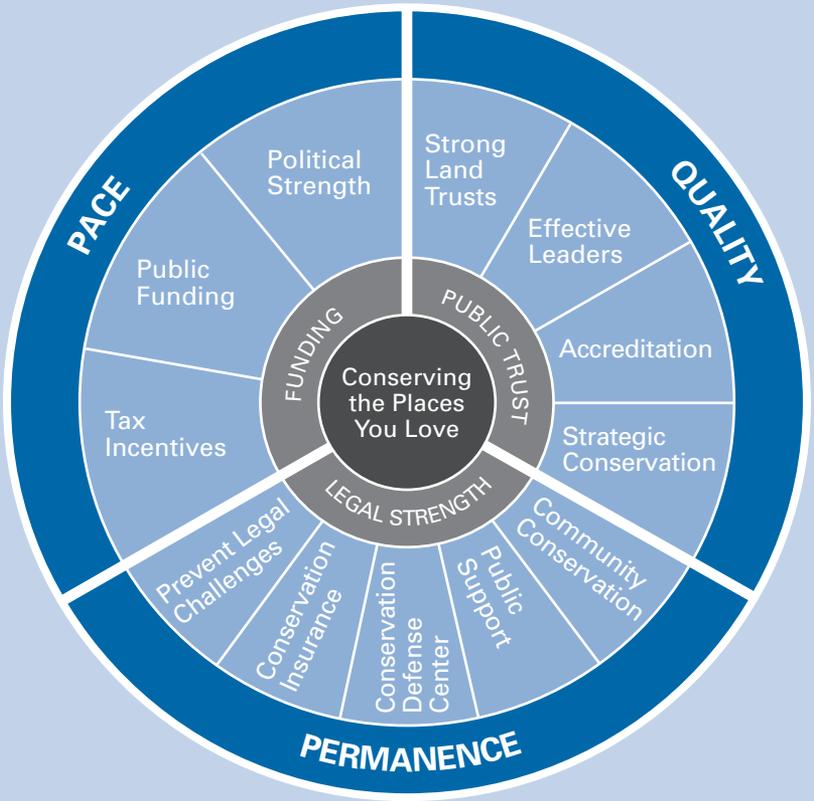
Land Trust Alliance

Strategic Plan

2011–2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Land Trust Alliance Strategic Approach to Private Land Conservation



Land is essential to our lives and our future—providing food, water and recreation to renew our spirits. Parks and trails help to keep our children healthy and make our communities livable. Farms and ranches strengthen rural economies, and historic and scenic landscapes define our national identity.

In the last century, federal and state governments created an impressive system of national parks, wildlife refuges and forests—a vital step toward conserving our natural resources. But, with the development pressures of the 21st century, these public lands are not sufficient to safeguard our water, ecosystems, agriculture and communities. We will need to work beyond the boundaries of public lands in order to conserve large, sustainable landscapes. Equally important, we need community parks and open space close to where people live.

Urgent Challenges

We are losing 1.5 million acres to development each year, and the population of the United States is projected to grow by 100 million in the next 40 years, bringing even greater development pressures. In the coming years, land will face additional threats from bio-fuels, energy sites, transmission lines and increased legal attacks. Land trusts will need to face these challenges at a time when government and private funding is declining.

But there may be no greater threat to our work than public apathy. With 80 percent of Americans now living in metropolitan areas, people are spending more time online and less time outdoors. Without a firsthand connection to nature, people may feel less compelled to support conservation. Land trusts will need to rekindle the relationship between people and land and promote the value of conservation, especially with the urban and ethnically diverse communities that will represent the majority of Americans by 2040.

Our Time is Now

We are at a pivotal time in the history of land conservation. Land trusts have the passion, creativity and the local knowledge to meet these challenges and protect America's most treasured lands.

Land trusts have now grown to a national network of 1,700 groups with 6,000 staff, 90,000 volunteers and 5 million members. They have protected more than 40 million acres—an area the size of Florida—and each year they protect over a million additional acres. Land trusts come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from large national groups with hundreds of staff to local volunteer groups, but they share

a common mission to protect the most treasured places in their communities.

The Land Trust Alliance serves as the national leader for land trusts by educating and empowering the organizations and leaders doing this vital work. It serves as the voice for land trusts on Capitol Hill, promoting funding, tax incentives and other policies to support land conservation. The Alliance builds public confidence in land conservation by elevating the quality of land trusts through training, accreditation and legal defense of conservation.

We have a limited opportunity to protect our most cherished places before they are lost forever. For land trusts to be successful, they will need to be respected institutions that enjoy wide public trust and support. Although each land trust is independent and local—which is the great strength of our movement—we need to show the public that we are united in our commitment to integrity and excellence. It is the goal of the Land Trust Alliance to create the national resources necessary for local land trusts to thrive.

To meet these challenges, the Board of the Land Trust Alliance has established three strategic goals for 2011-2015:

1. Accelerate the pace of land conservation.
2. Improve the quality of land conservation.
3. Ensure the permanence of land conservation.

GOAL 1: ACCELERATE THE PACE OF LAND CONSERVATION

Our goal is for land trusts to protect a total of 50 million acres by 2015. We will accomplish this by harnessing the political strength of the nation's 1,700 land trusts by expanding the relationships that land trusts have with members of Congress to increase federal tax incentives, funding and other policies. In recent years, the Alliance mobilized this network to pass enhanced tax incentives and secure co-sponsorships from a majority of the Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives. We will also expand our communication work to increase public support for land conservation and build stronger relationships with diverse partners including agricultural, sportsmen's, urban park, health and national environmental organizations.

Strategies

Increase tax incentives for land conservation

- Make the enhanced conservation tax incentives a permanent part of the tax code
- Expand the estate tax incentives for land conservation
- Defend the use of incentives from over-reaching regulation by the IRS
- Promote the use of federal tax incentives

Increase funding for land conservation

- Increase funding in the 2012 Farm Bill to purchase permanent conservation easements
- Revise the Farm Bill rules to make it easier for land trusts to use these funds
- Increase funding for the Land and Water Conservation

Fund and revise the program to provide funding for the purchase of easements

Increase the political strength of the land conservation community

- Cultivate and track relationships between land trusts and their representatives in Congress and increase active relationships from 1,000 to 2,000 by 2015
- Mobilize those relationships to achieve our policy goals
- Develop a long-term political strategy to accelerate the pace of land conservation

GOAL 2: IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LAND CONSERVATION

The Alliance will provide all member lands trusts with access to the training, information, resources and tools they need to be successful. This includes the online Learning Center, a 15-course core curriculum, webinars, and more than 300 workshops each year. The Alliance recognizes the importance of personal relationships in motivating change, and our regional staff will work to cultivate close relationships with land trust leaders. To expand the impact of its training services, the Alliance will train and mobilize consultants and local partners to help deliver services.

Half of America's land trusts are run entirely by volunteers. They have deep knowledge of local resources and cultivate strong political relationships that benefit the broader land trust community. To better serve the needs of volunteer land trusts, the Alliance will create a new training program for board members and will investigate new ways to encourage and recognize improvement in smaller land trusts.

The Alliance created the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in 2006 to build and recognize strong land trusts, foster public confidence in land conservation and help ensure the long-term protection of land. Accreditation is already motivating hundreds of land trusts to make a wide range of quality improvements, and the Alliance will offer a suite of assessment options, grants, training and other services to help land trusts prepare for accreditation.

In addition, the Alliance will invest in building strong land trust leaders, promoting strategic conservation and transforming land trusts that have the potential to increase the pace of conservation.

Strategies

Build effective land trusts

- Deliver training services to 10,000 individuals by 2015 and 700 land trusts each year
- Provide guided organizational assessments to 500 land trusts by 2015
- Provide strategic conservation training and tools so that 75 percent of active land trusts will use a strategic conservation plan to guide their work by 2015
- Evaluate the need for a new program to recognize excellence in land trusts that are not eligible for accreditation

Develop strong conservation leaders

- Provide training and peer-learning services for 1,750 board members by 2015
- Provide an intensive, week-long Leadership Development Program for 125 executive directors and emerging leaders by 2015

Increase the number of accredited and high-impact land trusts

- Accredite 350 land trusts by 2015 so that 70 percent of conserved lands will be held by an accredited land trust
- Deliver services to help 200 land trusts prepare for accreditation
- Make intensive investments in 70 land trusts that are poised to double the pace of their conservation work

GOAL 3: ENSURE THE PERMANENCE OF LAND CONSERVATION

When landowners donate land or an easement, they expect land trusts to protect that land for all time. As land is transferred to new owners, research shows an increased risk of easement violations and lawsuits. Land trusts are already seeing an alarming number of landowners violating the terms of their conservation easements, and this trend will only worsen as adjacent development increases the value of conserved lands. Conservation easements are a new legal tool, with very little case law to guide judicial decisions. Even a few adverse court decisions could create a precedent that could jeopardize easements throughout the country. The protection of conserved lands will require strong and enduring land trusts, keen legal skills, and, when necessary, the ability to go to court.

In 2008, the Alliance established the Conservation Defense Center—the national hub for the legal defense of conservation lands—which includes an online legal clearinghouse, a network of attorneys and conservation professionals, an attorney locator and legal education programs. We also established a Conservation Defense Fund to support

amicus briefs and other actions in cases where land trusts face potentially precedent-setting legal challenges. Since few land trusts have the funds to fight protracted litigation, the Alliance is now creating a cost-effective insurance program that would cover the costs of defending legal challenges.

The permanence of conservation will ultimately depend on broad public support. If people do not value conservation, we will increasingly lose land trust property to eminent domain for public purposes like roads, transmission lines and housing. Recognizing America's changing demographics, it is particularly important for the land trust community to engage people from a wide range of urban, rural, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and to ensure our conservation efforts remain relevant to our communities.

Strategies

Win every precedent-setting legal challenge

- Create a national conservation defense insurance program
- By 2015, ensure that 70 percent of conservation easements are protected by insurance or held by an organization capable of self-insuring
- Defend easements from legislative attacks and defend the interests of land trusts in tax policy and tax court

Prevent legal challenges to conserved lands

- Deliver training on risk management, easement and stewardship practices
- Research potential threats to conservation permanence
- Convene scholars, publish articles and help shape conservation law

Build broad public support for conservation

- Develop communication strategies to help land trusts make a strong case for the benefits of land conservation
 - Expand membership in local and regional land trusts 50 percent by 2015
 - Develop new metrics, beyond dollars and acres, to better quantify the value of land conservation to society
 - Conduct a needs assessment, develop a long-range plan and prepare training and publications to help land trusts serve urban and ethnically diverse communities
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Our mission is to save the places
people love by strengthening
land conservation across America.



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