

All In It TOGETHER

Commissioners Seek to Help Others

They volunteer their time as the governing board for the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, putting in hundreds of hours annually to review six to eight land trust accreditation applications and attend meetings each year. But who are the Commissioners, exactly?

In a nutshell, they are 19 men and women from the land trust community—a diverse group of land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country. Chosen to represent different geographic regions, types and sizes of organizations and needed skill sets, the Commission's ranks include attorneys, financial managers and conservation stewardship experts. Fourteen of the 19 are staff, board members or of counsel to accredited land trusts.

As for why they donate so much time to ensuring accreditation standards for the nation's land trusts, the reasons are as varied as their backgrounds. Bruce Runnels, an attorney who serves as The Nature Conservancy's conservation risk officer, joined the Commission in 2013. His work shepherding TNC through accreditation over a period of two years helped inspire his interest in joining the Commission.

The accreditation process for TNC, which has offices in all 50 states and also works globally, was "very complicated, complex and time consuming," Runnels says. "The accreditation process gave us the opportunity to stand back and reflect on the business elements we share with other land trusts. We realized some practices we could do better. Personally, I viewed it as an opportunity to

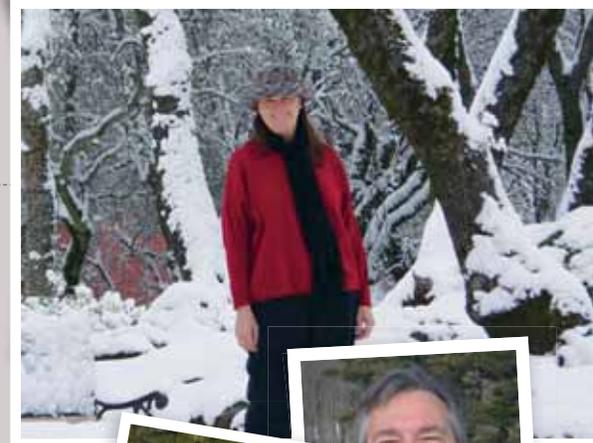
ensure we're improving our organizational practices and meeting the public trust."

Nonprofit attorney Dan Cline, another recent addition to the Commission, similarly applied to become a Commissioner after serving as president and board member of The Little Forks Conservancy in Midland, Michigan, where he helped the small land trust successfully obtain accreditation. "It had a strengthening effect on the organization," he says.

"I have done a lot of volunteering on behalf of nonprofit organizations," Cline says of his decision to seek a three-year, renewable term on the Commission. "I looked upon this as an opportunity to take some of the knowledge I've gained through my nonprofit and legal work and really help out a field that I care deeply about. I feel so strongly about the positive work that land trusts are doing throughout the country."

Marty Coleman-Hunt, a new member of the Commission, also believes the accreditation process was invaluable to her organization, Bear Yuba Land Trust. "I was so impressed with how it helped my organization," through increased discipline and focus, internal training and streamlined procedures, she says. As the executive director of the small- to mid-sized land trust in Grass

Land Trust 
Accreditation Commission
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Marty



Bruce



Dan

Valley, California, Coleman-Hunt shares an understanding of what other land trusts are going through when they seek accreditation.

"The people that make up the Commission really are the peers of the organizations that we are reviewing," she says. "We are extremely conscious of the kinds of issues that are faced by land trusts across the country."

The sense that "land trusts are all in it together" pervades the work of the Commission, says Runnels. In his role as conservation risk officer, Runnels helps TNC ask hard questions about its work and reputation. His belief that "reputation is everything" extends to his view of the necessity of the Commission's work.

"Land trusts are all part of the same important cause," he says. "Our work lives on beyond our lifetimes. Having public trust is everything. That's what accreditation really is about—making sure we maintain the reputation to live up to that trust." 

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