



Photo by Dan Eggert



Photo by Julie Scharfner



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UNDERSTANDING ACCREDITATION



- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship

The Door County Land Trust embarked on the process of becoming accredited nearly five years ago. On August 18, 2016, the Land Trust was awarded the seal of accreditation—a recognition of the quality of land protection work since the Land Trust’s inception in 1986. Preparing for the application and review of the Land Trust’s work required the skill and dedication of many board members and staff. To understand the significance of this new designation, we asked them what accreditation means for the Land Trust.

What is the significance of accreditation? How does it affect the governance of the organization?

CATHY FIORATO, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, SECRETARY
First off—what does accreditation mean? To continue to be a respected and integral

part of the nation’s conservation work, land trusts must uphold the public’s trust in the permanence of their conservation efforts. To this end, an independent organization, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, has established a process to confirm that land trusts conform to the Land Trust Standards and Practices developed by the Land Trust Alliance as the guiding principles for the operation of land trusts. The Standards and Practices are ethical and technical guidelines intended to strengthen the credibility and effectiveness of individual land trusts and the land trust community as a whole. To maintain accredited status, land trusts provide evidence of continued adherence to the Standards and Practices to the Commission every five years.

For the board of directors, the Standards and Practices provide structure and guidance in the effective conduct of the board’s key governance responsibilities: strategic planning and evaluation, ethics and managing conflict of interest, oversight of finances and operations, and legal compliance. They require a systematic process for recruiting, training, and evaluating board members who have the skills and commitment to undertake these responsibilities.

These requirements have helped the Land Trust’s board to adopt and operate by policies and procedures that support an active, engaged and informed board focused not only on today’s acquisitions, but also on the sustainability of our land management efforts and our organization itself.

The Land Trust’s work has been guided by a thorough land selection and acquisition process designed to last in perpetuity. How will accreditation ensure we uphold our conservation values and that our land protections are permanent?

TERRIE COOPER, DIRECTOR OF LAND PROGRAM
Accreditation means that landowners, supporters and the community at large can be assured that every decision made to protect a piece of land by the Door County Land Trust is solidly based in our mission, thoroughly vetted, and that all land transactions are being conducted to the highest possible ethical standards and practices. We are in this business forever. Accreditation means we are worthy of your investment, we are a strong, proven organization that meets national standards for excellence, upholds the public trust, and can ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.

Conservation easements offer landowners a way to permanently protect their property with the Door County Land Trust. What impact does accreditation have on the Land Trust's conservation easement program?

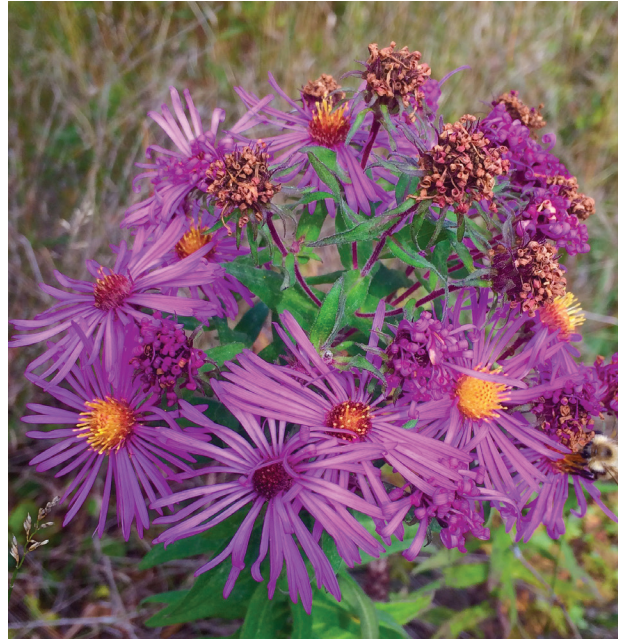
DREW REINKE, CONSERVATION EASEMENT SPECIALIST

Having surpassed 3,100 acres protected under conservation easement this fall, accreditation provides us with the reassurance that we are following standards that will ensure that the intent of conservation easement grantors lasts in perpetuity.

One of the most frequently used phrases at Land Trust meetings is, "In the interest of continual improvement..." In what ways has accreditation improved our recordkeeping?

JULIE SCHATNER, LAND PROJECT MANAGER You may have heard the Chinese proverb, "The faintest ink is more powerful than the strongest memory." One of the important take-aways we learned from becoming accredited is that it is not enough for an organization to have developed good policies and diligently follow their procedures. We must provide evidence we have followed them through documentation. The process of accreditation gave us the opportunity to take a comprehensive look at our recordkeeping systems, how we document our work and the best practices for safe, long-term storage of important information. Time was spent "extracting" information from people's heads, old emails, and dusty file boxes to organize and store it in a way that will help us preserve our institutional memory over time. The procedures we've put in place combined with a continued organizational focus on

recordkeeping supports the permanence of our conservation work.



We live in one of the state's most biologically rich counties, and we are dedicated to protecting lands and waters in the county so future generations will reap the benefits of clean air and water, a diversity of biological wealth, inspiring natural places to visit and enjoy, and a strong economy that is sustained by land and water protection efforts.

*TERRIE COOPER
DIRECTOR OF LAND PROGRAM*

How does accreditation assure that the policies and procedures that govern the finances of the Land Trust are sound?

KRISTI RICE, OFFICE MANAGER Accreditation requires us to follow many financial and ethical practices. We are required to comply

with state charitable solicitation laws, maintain our records with a GAAP compliant system, and ensure that our board of directors provides proper oversight of our finances. A policy of internal controls and accounting procedures for proper handling of our funds is required, as well as an annual financial audit conducted by an independent and qualified entity.

Directly related to our land acquisitions, we are required to determine the immediate and long term financial needs for our conservation work.

How will accreditation affect the Door County Land Trust's work in the coming years?

TOM CLAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR For me, being accredited is comparable to land restoration and stewardship. We acquire land and work hard at weeding out what doesn't belong and we work equally hard to maintain diverse and hearty native landscapes. But, as so many of us know, unless we remain vigilant our hard work can quickly slip away. As an accredited land trust we demonstrated that our business is rock solid. However, unless we stay vigilant and adhere to the highest standards of best-practice business management, we too can lose our organizational foothold. Five years from now we will seek renewal from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Between now and then, we will continue working to remain rock-solid and highly respected by our members and by this nation's land trust community.