



PROFILES IN EXCELLENCE

Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust

Leading by Example

BY KIMBERLY SEESE

“Lead by example,” says Chris West, executive director of Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT). “You can’t expect anyone to believe accreditation is valuable if land trusts aren’t willing to take a leap and dive into the process. We said ‘Yes, we’re going to do this, and do it now,’” he explained.

Leadership throughout the CCALT accreditation process was key to earning the seal — and the organization found guidance in various staff and board members with each step it took down the path toward accreditation.

“Since day one, this organization aspired to set its standards as high as they could be set,” said West. “When our organization announced it would become a land trust, many asked ‘What do these cowboys know about conservation easements?’ This doubt in the wider conservation and environmental communities caused us to be very sensitive about setting the bar high from the very beginning. We were ready to jump into accreditation,” he beamed.

As a relatively young land trust, CCALT had been working hand in hand with *Land Trust Standards and Practices* since its foundation 15 years ago. Their hard work and attention to detail

on deals throughout the years, matched what the accreditation process would require of the organization — and most of their policies were solid and in-hand.

After the decision to begin the process was firm, West stepped up to delegate the various sections of the application to his staff and board, choosing Alyssa Street, director of communications, as the shepherd of the project.

“I believe you need a point-person in the application process, and the executive director may not always be the best fit for that leadership role,” explained West. “As executive director, you get pulled in so many directions. There could be four or five fires that flare upon any given day and you need to address them. Accreditation would have been the one thing on my agenda to suffer in either quality or time. I also chose the person on our staff who had the focus that would ensure that our application was completed with the detail that is required to become accredited.”



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COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR ALYSSA STREET

Street spearheaded the revisions of policies that needed updating and collaborated with their database consultant to collect project information from their landowner database into the requested application format. “My role was to compile the entire application and give it one voice,” said Street.

“We took advantage of our board members who had been there from the start. They were always eager to answer questions,” said Street. “If questions such as, ‘Why do we do it this way?’, ‘Where is this document?’ or ‘Have we dealt with this issue before?’ ever arose, Chris or the board was always there to lend a hand,” she continued.

A three-member board committee was formed to review the application and answer questions, which Street believes was a good call. “Having a small committee allows each member to voice their opinion, and you don’t feel overwhelmed with comments. Waiting to involve the entire board until the final review of the application allowed us to be much more efficient with our time,” she said.

Accreditation not only made CCALT address its loose ends and become a stronger organization, but it also prepared them for Colorado’s state certification, a required process for all organizations holding a conservation easement for which a tax credit is claimed, and adherence to state standards and practices.

“If you had already been accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, you had a much easier, expedited state certification process. The state didn’t want to be redundant with their efforts,” West said.

Street believes it’s important to have the seal on your website and publications, showing you adhere to *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. CCALT also uses parts of their accreditation application materials in their board orientation packet.

What’s CCALT doing differently since accreditation? “We’re always revising our policies to be the best that they can be, looking at them annually to better evaluate what we should be doing, and we file more paperwork electronically. We’ve been keeping all of this in mind for the upcoming renewal process, which truly demonstrates our commitment to the perpetuity of our work,” said Street.

COLORADO CATTLEMEN’S AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

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ACRES OF LAND SAVED	370,000
STAFF	8
ACCREDITED	2009