

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

Ready to Renew

The experience of first-time accreditation makes the renewal process easier—but it still takes lots of planning.

Achieving accreditation is a big milestone for any land trust, but the process doesn't end there. Land trusts apply for renewal of accreditation every five years, which ensures continued implementation of *Land Trust Standards and Practices* as groups grow and evolve. Does the application process get any easier the second time around? Yes...and no, say several groups in the midst of applying for renewal.

"The first time was a pretty big lift, and it took a lot of work," says Chris West, executive director of Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, which has worked with Colorado farmers and ranchers to protect over 400,000 acres. "The second time is more streamlined. Our project files are in great shape and we have a lot of systems in place because we went through accreditation the first time. We want to continue to be accredited because it means a lot to us to be on top of our game with our practices."

When Five Valleys Land Trust of Missoula, Montana, began tackling the online renewal application, they had a level of confidence among staff that they were well prepared for renewal, says Beth Cogswell, director of operations. But they had been strategic, preparing for months in advance by thoroughly reviewing and updating their practices after hiring an outside consultant to assess them.

"It was a good time for us to fine tune how we operate and help make our policies as strong as they can be, because policies can be fluid over time," says Cogswell, whose 41-year-old organization has protected more than 65,000 acres of agricultural land, wildlife habitat, riparian areas and open space in western Montana.

"Accreditation helped us to become the very best at what we do."—Wendy Jackson

Freshwater Land Trust—which protects lands that enhance the water quality and aquatic biodiversity of Alabama's many rivers and streams—also didn't take any chances when preparing for renewal. "We began preparing practically the day we were accredited," says Executive Director Wendy Jackson. "We developed a maintenance plan."



Landowner Randy Rusk (left) with the project and stewardship staff of CCAAL on the Rusk Ranch in Westcliffe, CO. Rusk is on the board and accreditation subcommittee.



Five Valleys Land Trust's board president and easement holder, Jim Valeo (left) with Ryan Chapin, stewardship director in the Grass Valley area west of Missoula, MT

Their renewal plan involved conducting yearly assessments of real estate transactions, board meeting minutes, stewardship activities and other aspects of their work.

"That has made the renewal process so much easier this time," says Jackson. "We're finding it just becomes a way of life—everyone knows we need to adhere to

standards and practices. If you are a recently accredited land trust, my best piece of advice is *do not wait*. That five years will fly by. It's very easy to get lost during that time. If you develop a plan and evaluate practices on an annual basis, it's much easier."

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IF YOUR ORGANIZATION'S ACCREDITATION TERM EXPIRES IN 2014 OR JANUARY 2015, THE COMMISSION HAS ALREADY SENT YOU INFORMATION ABOUT THE DUE DATE FOR YOUR APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR RENEWAL, VISIT WWW.LANDTRUSTACCREDITATION.ORG.