



FIELD GUIDE

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Photo courtesy of accredited Willowa Land Trust (OR) / David Jensen, photographer.

By and For the Community

The revised *Land Trust Standards and Practices* are ready

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Fair, comprehensive, inclusive, deliberative, current, responsive, flexible, affirming. Those are the “key words” that the Standards Advisory Team members used to describe the Land Trust Standards and Practices revisions process. They should know. They spent countless volunteer hours on the undertaking. On February 3 the Land Trust Alliance Board of Directors approved the final revised version of the *Land Trust Standards and Practices* (the Standards). You can download the document and find more

information at www.lta.org/sp. Now it's time for land trusts to adopt them.

Recap of the Revisions Process

The Standards are the ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust. The Land Trust Alliance drafted the first Standards in 1989 at the urging of land trusts and to affirm certain best practices as the surest way to secure lasting conservation. To maintain the land trust

community's strength, credibility and effectiveness, the Standards were updated in 1993, 2001 and 2004. In preparing the 2017 update, an advisory team, composed of land trust professionals from across the country, reviewed and discussed more than 1,600 comments from conservationists throughout the United States. These many voices were an invaluable asset throughout the revisions process.

The Standards are a collective product of the land trust community. The advisory team was as diverse in perspective as the comments the team reviewed. Unanimity was not necessarily achieved on each standard or practice, but the final product reflects the expressed values and recommendations of the overall community.

What Has Changed?

While the substance of the Standards remains the same, with 12 overarching principles (see sidebar) and supporting practices, we have made some significant changes, including

- a new format that improves clarity and reduces redundancy;
- a focus on those practices that apply broadly to the land trust community;
- greater alignment with the requirements for accreditation and Terrafirma eligibility.

The content reflects changes over the past decade in the legal and operational environment of the land trust community. For example, new practice elements call for land trusts to file an annual Form 990 (or equivalent), develop and implement

a fundraising plan and build relationships with community leaders and other stakeholders in their communities.

Over the next several months, the Alliance will be revising its current materials, including the Standards and Practices Curriculum, to reflect the revised Standards. Check the Standards webpage and The Learning Center for frequent updates.

Our goal is to help land trusts understand how best to implement the revised Standards given the size and scope of their organizations.

Time to Adopt and Implement

The nation's more than 1,300 nonprofit land trusts have conserved 56 million acres of wildlife habitat, farms, ranches, forests, watersheds, recreation areas and other open spaces as of 2015. The continued success of land trusts depends on public confidence in—and support of—our community as we build conservation programs that stand the test of time. It is therefore every land trust's responsibility to uphold this public confidence and ensure the permanence of its conservation efforts. Implementing the Standards positions a land trust to achieve these goals and, if it so wishes, to seek insurance through Terrafirma and pursue accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. In the final document Terrafirma enrollment prerequisites are denoted with a square and elements required to achieve accreditation are marked with a circle.

Together we must support our peers and hold ourselves to the highest standards as we continue to conserve the places we need and love. — The Land Trust Alliance

Each member of the Land Trust Alliance must adopt the Standards as guiding principles for its operations, pledging a commitment to uphold the public confidence and the credibility of the land trust community as a whole. (See the board adoption resolution in the document.) It is important to note that while the Standards are thorough, they are not exhaustive. There will be times when the Standards do not make clear a land trust's best path forward. In these moments the organization's board should exercise its best judgment as informed by the spirit of these Standards.

Land Trust Standards and Practices were first created by practitioners who understood that a strong land trust community would enable

conservation to last through time. Land trusts are a respected and integral part of our nation's land conservation work. Together we must support our peers and hold ourselves to the highest standards as we continue to conserve the places we need and love. The Alliance is committed to continuing to foster this process by and for the community. 🌱

Sylvia Bates is director of standards and educational services at the Land Trust Alliance.

For instructions on how to adopt
Land Trust Standards and Practices
go to www.lta.org/adoption

Field Guide is a Land Trust Alliance quarterly publication for land trust board members. To receive a copy or to add other recipients, please email boardservices@lta.org.

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12 GUIDELINES FOR ALL LAND TRUSTS

STANDARD 1

Ethics, Mission and Community Engagement

Land trusts maintain high ethical standards and have a mission committed to conservation, community service and public benefit.

STANDARD 2

Compliance with Laws

Land trusts fulfill their legal requirements as nonprofit tax-exempt organizations and comply with all laws.

STANDARD 3

Board Accountability

Land trust boards act ethically in conducting the affairs of the organization and carry out their legal and financial responsibilities as required by law.

STANDARD 4

Conflicts of Interest

Land trusts have policies and procedures to avoid or manage real or perceived conflicts of interest.

STANDARD 5

Fundraising

Land trusts conduct fundraising activities in a lawful, ethical and responsible manner.

STANDARD 6

Financial Oversight

Land trusts are responsible and accountable for how they manage their finances and assets.

STANDARD 7

Human Resources

Land trusts have sufficient skilled personnel to carry out their programs, whether volunteers, staff and/or consultants/contractors.

STANDARD 8

Evaluating and Selecting Conservation Projects

Land trusts carefully evaluate and select their conservation projects.

STANDARD 9

Ensuring Sound Transactions

Land trusts work diligently to see that every land and conservation easement transaction is legally, ethically and technically sound.

STANDARD 10

Tax Benefits and Appraisals

Land trusts work diligently to see that every charitable gift of land or conservation easement meets federal and state tax law requirements, to avoid fraudulent or abusive transactions and to uphold public confidence in land conservation.

STANDARD 11

Conservation Easement Stewardship

Land trusts have a program of responsible stewardship for their conservation easements.

STANDARD 12

Fee Land Stewardship

Land trusts have a program of responsible stewardship for the land held in fee for conservation purposes.