

# 2015

## NATIONAL LAND TRUST CENSUS REPORT

Our Common Ground and Collective Impact



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# PURPOSE OF THE FIVE-YEAR CENSUS

The National Land Trust Census measures the important conservation work of state, local and national land trusts in the United States.

The first Census was conducted in 1981, a year before the Land Trust Alliance was established. Though much has changed in 35 years, the importance of protecting the special places we love is stronger than ever.

The Census is both a benchmark and a snapshot of the land trust movement and its collective impact on people and communities across the country. We're pleased to share some of their stories in the following pages.





## What is a Land Trust?

A land trust is a nonprofit organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by:

- Acquiring land or conservation easements (or assisting with their acquisition), and/or
- Stewarding/managing land or conservation easements

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### CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

A conservation easement, also known as a conservation restriction or conservation agreement, is a voluntary, legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently restricts uses of the land to protect its conservation values.

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### KEY FINDINGS



**56 MILLION**

Total acres conserved by state, local and national land trusts as of year-end 2015—an increase of 9 million acres since 2010



**6,250,000**

Number of visitors to land trust properties in 2015



**77%**

Percent of total acres owned and under easement held by an accredited land trust



**\$2.18 BILLION**

Amount in endowments and dedicated funding managed by state, local and national land trusts

# PROTECTING FAMILY LAND FOR THE FUTURE

## Blue Mountain Land Trust (WA), *accredited*

Imagine a place in the Blue Mountains where springs and streams run clear, cold and pure. Where steelhead spawn and swim with juvenile Chinook salmon. Where elk live and roam almost year round. Where three miles of important tributaries to the Grande Ronde River are conserved in an undeveloped state forever. Where lack of development provides spectacular scenic views of the surrounding mountains and countryside.

The Cunha Ranch is just such a place, now conserved forever by a conservation easement held by the Blue Mountain Land Trust. Known officially as the Dark Canyon Conservation Easement, the nearly 3,000-acre property is nestled in the foothills near Starkey, Oregon, where Meadow Creek enters the Grande Ronde River. It contains two miles of Dark Canyon Creek and more than 250 acres of wetland and riverside habitat.

The original Cunha family ranch encompassed 12,000 acres in the Grande Ronde Valley. Joe Cunha is the last family member who owns part of the original ranch. In recent decades, nearby ranches have been sold and subdivided as land use in the area has transitioned from ranching to residential or recreational use.

Current property owners Joe and Patti Cunha are excited to be partners in conservation. As Patti is fond of saying, "Everything the land trust wants for the property we want as landowners."

Partners in this project include the Bonneville Power Administration, which funded the acquisition, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, which identified the project opportunity and initiated the acquisition.



BLUE MOUNTAIN LAND TRUST/HEATHER IBSEN, PHOTOGRAPHER



## CENSUS 2015: Protecting Family Land for the Future

### GAINING GROUND

 **56 MILLION**

Total acres conserved by state, local and national land trusts as of year-end 2015—an increase of 9 million acres since 2010

 **30%**

Percent protected through voluntary agreements with private landowners

 **23%**

Percent acquired and reconveyed to government agencies and other entities

 **15%**

Percent owned by land trusts

 **32%**

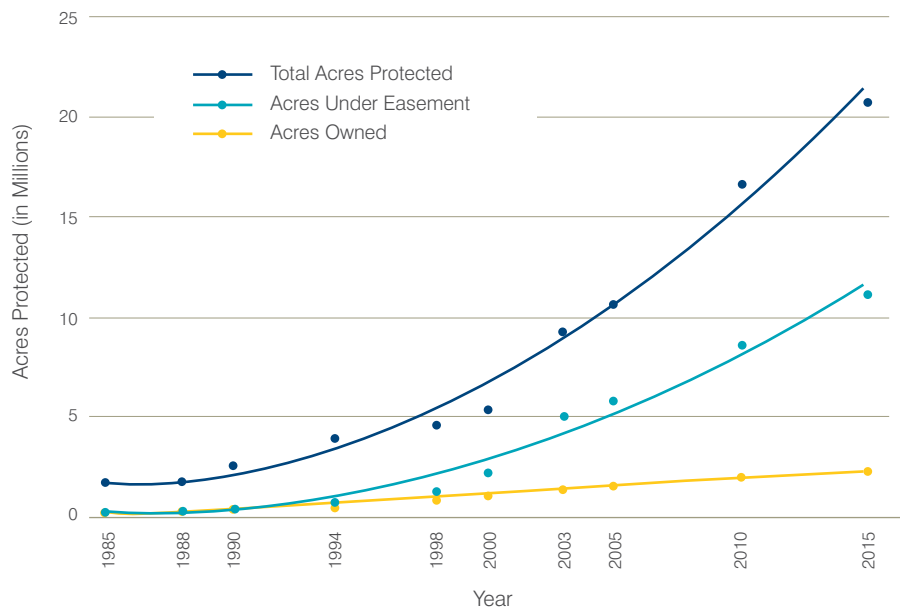
Percent protected by other means

### Land Conserved by Land Trusts

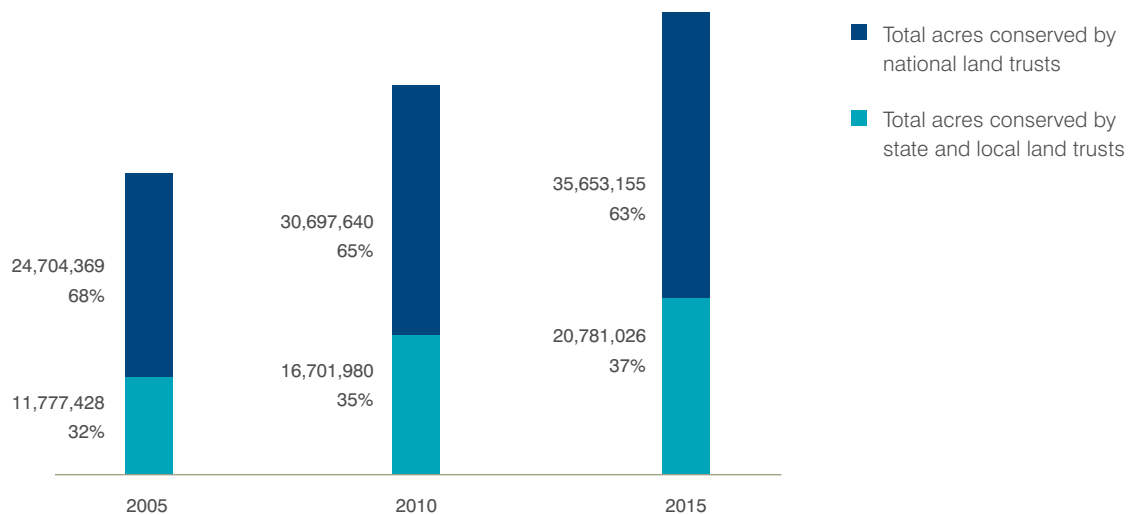
	2005	2010	2015
Acres owned	1,632,661	7,540,440	8,103,562
Acres under easement	6,113,108	13,180,786	16,784,077
Acres acquired and reconveyed	1,785,189	11,037,608	12,615,024
Acres protected by other means*	2,034,922	14,463,881	17,767,192
Acres protected not broken down by category	24,915,917	1,176,905	1,164,326
<b>Total acres conserved</b>	<b>36,481,797</b>	<b>47,399,620</b>	<b>56,434,181</b>

\*Acres conserved by other means refers to land protected as a result of the activities of the land trust, but which the land trust did not directly acquire in fee or under easement. Common examples include negotiating or preparing for acquisition by other organizations or agencies, or deed restrictions.

## Land Conserved by State and Local Land Trusts, 1985–2015



## Comparison of Acres Conserved by National vs State and Local Land Trusts





Everything the land trust wants for the  
property we want as landowners.

–Patricia Cunha, Cunha Ranch (p.4)



# BRINGING PEOPLE TO THE LAND TODAY

## Bear Yuba Land Trust (CA), *accredited*

Henry, 14, a freshman at Nevada Union High School, sat in the cool shade on the grass with a group of other high school students from the boys and girls basketball teams and Special Education Department. He and a classmate examined the papery scales of a rattlesnake skin. "They shed," said Henry.

For many parents, the idea of going outdoors to explore nature with their children can be daunting. Concerns about safety and accessibility often result in kids spending lots of time in indoor environments far from the natural world.

Yet that warm April day at Burton Homestead, 41 curious teens were hiking hand-in-hand or being pushed in wheelchairs outside in the open air. They were learning, exploring and all smiles. For the third consecutive year, Bear Yuba Land Trust's Encounter Nature Program has partnered with the high school and local Rotary Club to bring students to one of its preserves.

Earth Skills Educator Rick Berry from Four Elements Earth Education passed around preserved fox pelts, an assortment of skulls and turtle shells. Lawrence Laughing from the Tsi Akim Maidu tribe told stories around a campfire inside the bark house, an active cultural center on a three-acre section of the property called "Pata Panaka." Farmers from Sierra Harvest shared freshly pulled beets and carrots and talked about the inhabitants of healthy soil. "I learned that worms have five hearts," said Izaiah, 15.

## THE PUBLIC INTEREST

 **47%**

Percent of land owned by land trusts that allows public access


 **6,250,000**

Visitors to land trust properties in 2015 for educational programs, recreational activities and other events



BEAR YUBA LAND TRUST/LAURA PETERSEN, PHOTOGRAPHER





If you will stay close to nature,  
to its simplicity, to the small things  
hardly noticeable, those things can  
unexpectedly become great and  
immeasurable.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

# ACCOMPLISHING MORE TOGETHER

## New Haven Land Trust (CT)

Around her block in the Hill neighborhood, the kids know her as “Miss Leslie.” Otherwise, she’s Leslie Radcliffe, an outgoing woman who has made the Truman Street Community Garden her mission. To the kids, she’s the one who calls to them to work in the garden, hands out tools and puts out snacks. But, she’s quick to point out, it’s not her garden. “People knock on the door to ask if they can use the garden, and I say, ‘You can use your garden. It’s not Miss Leslie’s garden, it’s yours.’”

Leslie got into gardening when she bought her house in 2009. A friend suggested she plant some day lilies. A border garden was next, then still more flowers—she was hooked. Later, when health issues convinced her to eat more vegetables, she started growing her own to save money. “It’s really not as hard as one might think,” she said. The street still had its rough patches, including some drug houses, Leslie noted. She decided the best way to stay safe was to meet all the neighbors. But passing hellos weren’t enough. A veteran of block watches and leadership workshops, Leslie is a doer. She organized a street



NEW HAVEN LAND TRUST/JUSTIN ELCKER, PHOTOGRAPHER

cleanup. That led to turning an empty lot into a neighborhood green space. Then she talked to the New Haven Land Trust and started the community garden. Neighbors caught on. One man, unprompted, brought 100 collard seedlings, which became the first harvest. Leslie said kids become calmer in the garden, adults become friendlier, and even people watching from their houses seem to approve. They just needed to see the seeds of a better neighborhood.

Anybody can do this. If you’ve got dirt,  
water and seeds, it can’t help but grow.  
All we’ve got to do is do our part.

—Leslie Radcliffe



## A COMMUNITY THAT CARES



**8,184**

FULL-TIME AND  
PART-TIME STAFF



**207,646**

OTHER ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS



**15,779**

BOARD MEMBERS



**4.6 MILLION**

MEMBERS & FINANCIAL  
SUPPORTERS



# MEETING THE HIGHEST STANDARDS



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

## Land Trust for Louisiana, *accredited*

The Lake Ponchartrain-Maurepas Swamp was at one time the world's largest cypress swamp. All of this changed from 1876 to 1956 when many of the thousand-year-old trees were felled for timber. It changed again when, thanks to a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Land Trust for Louisiana purchased 700 acres of cypress and tupelo swamp to create the West Ponchartrain-Maurepas Swamp Important Bird Area. The purchase prevented further development along the primary access to the swamp. The land trust also partnered with Audubon to enhance the area's

ecological value as habitat for species such as roseate spoonbills and blue herons.

Becoming both accredited and state-certified this year has greatly strengthened the land trust's ability to permanently protect this pristine wilderness. While achieving accreditation was a monumental effort, the public now knows that the Land Trust for Louisiana operates according to the highest standards and that the resources it protects will be secure for future generations.

President and CEO Dr. Jay Addison shared, "We know how precious our natural resources are to the people of Louisiana and we make it a priority to protect our lakes, streams, rivers and bayous so that our children and their grandchildren will have safe clean water to live by and enjoy."

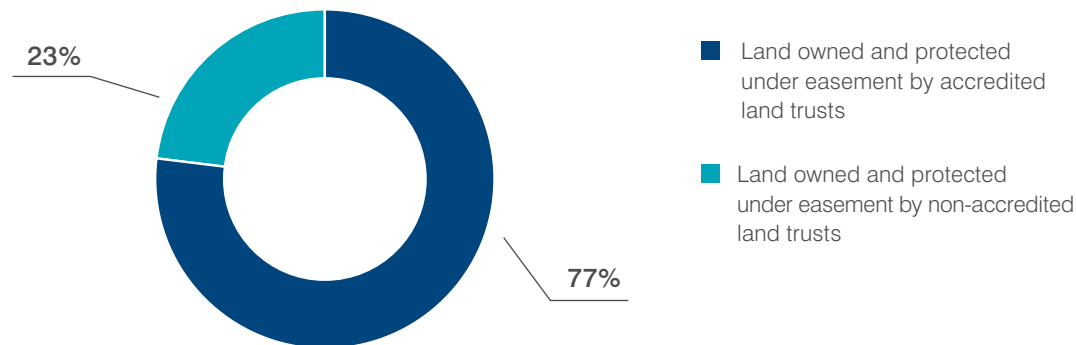
For more information, please visit  
[www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org)



LAND TRUST FOR LOUISIANA/ROBERT BAUMGARTNER, PHOTOGRAPHER



### Percentage of Land Protected by Accredited Land Trusts



Accreditation is awarded by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. Each accredited land trust has demonstrated fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions and lasting stewardship of the lands they conserve.

### ACCREDITED AND THRIVING

 **77%**

Percent of total acres owned and under easement are held by an accredited land trust

 / **5x**

Accredited land trusts **added more staff capacity** and **protected five times as much land** as eligible, non-accredited land trusts.

**5x**

Accredited land trusts are **five times more likely** to have baseline documentation reports on 100% of their easements than are eligible, non-accredited land trusts.

**5x**

Accredited land trusts are **five times more likely** to monitor 100% of their easements at least once per year than are eligible, non-accredited land trusts.

## Comparison of Accredited Land Trusts from 2010 to 2015

	Land trusts accredited since previous Census	Eligible, non-accredited land trusts
<b>Average Change in Staff Capacity</b>		
Full-time staff	2.30	1.60
Part-time staff	1.70	0.48
Average increase in acres owned	3,209	388
Average increase in acres protected under easement	5,251	1,492

Of the more than 350 land trusts currently accredited, 257 were accredited between 2011 and 2015. Of these, 233 responded to the Census in both 2010 and 2015. Their responses are compared to 294 land trusts who also responded in both Census years and meet basic eligibility criteria but are not accredited.



OUA VALLEY LAND CONSERVANCY/CHAD RESS, PHOTOGRAPHER



Accreditation was the catalyst we needed to review our records and update or complete baseline documentation reports for our older easements. With these baselines we are better prepared than ever to defend our conservation properties in perpetuity.

—Catherine Rawson, Executive Director, accredited Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust (CT)



QUAI VALLEY LAND CONSERVANCY/BRIAN STARK, PHOTOGRAPHER



# HONORING OUR COMMITMENTS

## Legacy Land Conservancy (MI), *accredited*

Nestled at the edge of the village of Stockbridge, Michigan, is a peaceful 30-acre natural area where you can see deer, wild turkeys and, if you are lucky, a great horned owl. Donated to Legacy Land Conservancy by the Laird family in 1999, the forested Beckwith Preserve has over 800 feet of frontage on Portage Creek, one of the cleanest tributaries to the Huron River. When out on the preserve, you may also encounter local runners and the high-school cross-country team out for practice, as this trail is part of the Stockbridge Lakelands Trail State Park and part of the Stockbridge Community Pathways.

Legacy Land Conservancy, founded in 1971, takes its commitment to donors like the Lairds seriously. To demonstrate its commitment, it was an early accreditation leader—applying in the pilot round in 2007. At that time, Legacy had approximately \$20,000 for the

stewardship and defense of the 32 easements and preserves it held. As part of the accreditation process, it needed to create a plan to increase its stewardship and defense funds.

“We promise our landowners ‘forever.’ Our donors understand this and when we reached out with our campaign to build our stewardship and defense funds, they responded,” said Doug Koop, the conservancy’s executive director. When Legacy applied for renewal, it had a stewardship and defense fund of over \$650,000 for its nearly 80 properties. That fund has grown to more than \$800,000 today.

Campbell and Frances Laird care about natural places, emphasizing that “if you value open spaces and open land, you must protect it now, not wait.” With Legacy’s commitment to stewardship, the land is in good hands.



LEFT: LEGACY LAND CONSERVANCY/KATERI FAHEY, PHOTOGRAPHER; RIGHT: LEGACY LAND CONSERVANCY/ROBERT HUFFMAN, PHOTOGRAPHER



## STRENGTHENING OUR RESOURCES



**\$588 MILLION**

Dedicated funding for stewardship and legal defense



**\$2.18 BILLION**

Total endowments and dedicated funding held by state, local and national land trusts

### Designated Funding Managed by State, Local and National Land Trusts

Type of Fund	Amount
Monitoring and stewardship	\$257,878,804
Legal defense and enforcement	\$38,739,917
Monitoring, stewardship and legal defense (if combined)	\$291,476,751
Land acquisition	\$694,610,950
Operating reserve	\$438,928,194
Other dedicated funding	\$455,336,042
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,176,970,658</b>



# BALANCING OUR PRIORITIES

## Nebraska Land Trust, *accredited*

It was snowing hard as Dave Sands, the Nebraska Land Trust's executive director, drove up Highway 385 toward Chadron in the Pine Ridge region of northwest Nebraska. Visibility in the evening darkness was poor, which seemed like a good metaphor for the trip. Dave was scheduled to give a presentation on conservation easements the next morning and he was unsure of the road ahead. Other organizations had already failed to make in-roads in this scenic corner of the state. Given the locals' skepticism of land trusts, he had no idea if anyone would show up to hear or trust what a conservation organization from eastern Nebraska had to say.

Optimism for a successful meeting took another hit the next morning, which dawned with a foot of snow. Nevertheless, Dave picked up two dozen donuts,

hoping there would be people to eat them. By the end of the meeting, the donuts were gone. About 20 landowners had braved the slick roads to learn about permanently protecting their land. They were concerned about changing land use in the Pine Ridge and with changing land ownership, as local ranch families were being replaced by absentee owners. As the skies began to clear outside, it became clear in the meeting room that people cared deeply about the future of their landscape. They wanted to preserve its beauty, ranching, history and wildlife.

Despite the winter weather, Dave planted seeds that morning—seeds of interest that led to the formation of the Nebraska Land Trust's Pine Ridge Advisory Committee. With ranchers from three counties, community leaders and local conservation professionals, the land trust worked with this 22-member group to establish priorities for land conservation in the Pine Ridge. Rather than telling people what the land trust wanted to protect, the committee asked, "What makes this region special? What would you like to preserve for your grandchildren? What are your priorities for protection?" This approach has now led to site visits to assess eight properties covering 13,400 acres of spectacular Pine Ridge land, using the conservation criteria developed by the local advisory committee.

*The Nebraska Land Trust received a community conservation grant from the Land Trust Alliance.*



NEBRASKA LAND TRUST/DAVE SANDS, PHOTOGRAPHER

Rather than telling people what we wanted to protect,  
we asked, "What makes this region special?"

—Dave Sands, Executive Director, Nebraska Land Trust

## Land Trusts' Top Three Conservation Priorities



1. Important natural areas  
or wildlife habitats



2. Water quality,  
including wetlands



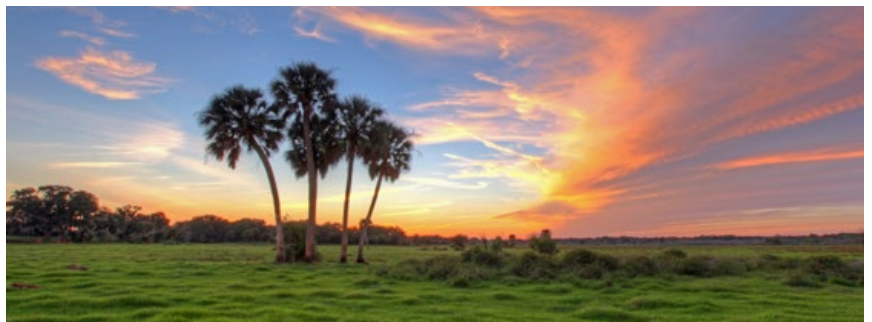
3. Working farms  
or ranchlands

## Priorities for Types of Land Protected

Very or Extremely Important Priorities	Count	% of Land Trusts	Rank in 2010
Important natural areas or wildlife habitats	907	88%	#1
Water quality, including wetlands	865	83%	#2
Working farms or ranchlands	536	52%	#4
Recreation lands	515	50%	
Scenic views or landscapes	491	47%	
Working forestland	449	43%	
Historic or cultural resources	402	39%	
Urban parks and gardens	202	19%	

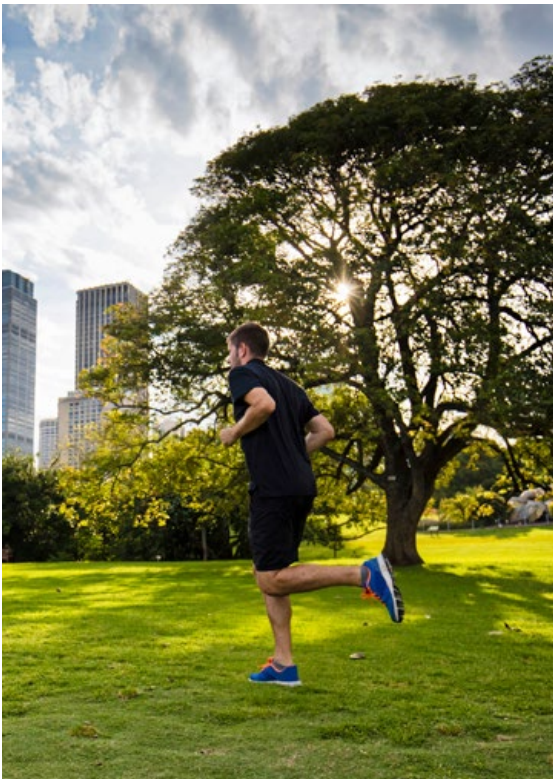
The “Open space, in general” option was replaced by “Scenic views or landscapes” in the 2015 survey.

Respondents rated each land protection priority on a scale of extremely important, very important, somewhat important, slightly important or not at all important. Ratings were not exclusive—for example, more than one land type could be rated “extremely important.”



LEFT: BRISTOL BAY HERITAGE LAND TRUST/JENNY WEIS, PHOTOGRAPHER; RIGHT: CONSERVATION FOUNDATION OF THE GULF COAST/GLENN GARDNER, G2PHOTOS, PHOTOGRAPHER





MIDDLE RIGHT: LANCASTER FARMLAND TRUST/JOHN MARTIN PHOTOGRAPHY; PHOTOGRAPHER: BOTTOM RIGHT: NEW MEXICO LAND CONSERVANCY/EVALYN BEMIS, PHOTOGRAPHER



## ABOUT THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE

Founded in 1982, the Land Trust Alliance is a national land conservation organization that works to save the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America. Based in Washington, D.C., and with several regional offices, the Alliance represents about 1,000 member land trusts nationwide.

The Alliance's leadership serves the entire land trust community—our work in the nation's capital represents the policy priorities of land conservationists from every state; our education programs improve and empower land trusts from Maine to Alaska; and our comprehensive vision for the future of land conservation includes new partners, new programs and new priorities. Connect with us online at [www.landtrustalliance.org](http://www.landtrustalliance.org).

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Land Trust Alliance collected data from January to April 2016 for the 2015 Census, beginning with a survey sent to about 1,900 land conservation organizations in the United States by email and postal mail. All respondents were asked to report on their land conservation and organizational activities as of December 31, 2015. More than 740 organizations responded to the 2015 survey.

**Author** Katie Chang, Educational Services Manager

**Editor** Elizabeth Ward, Vice President of Communications

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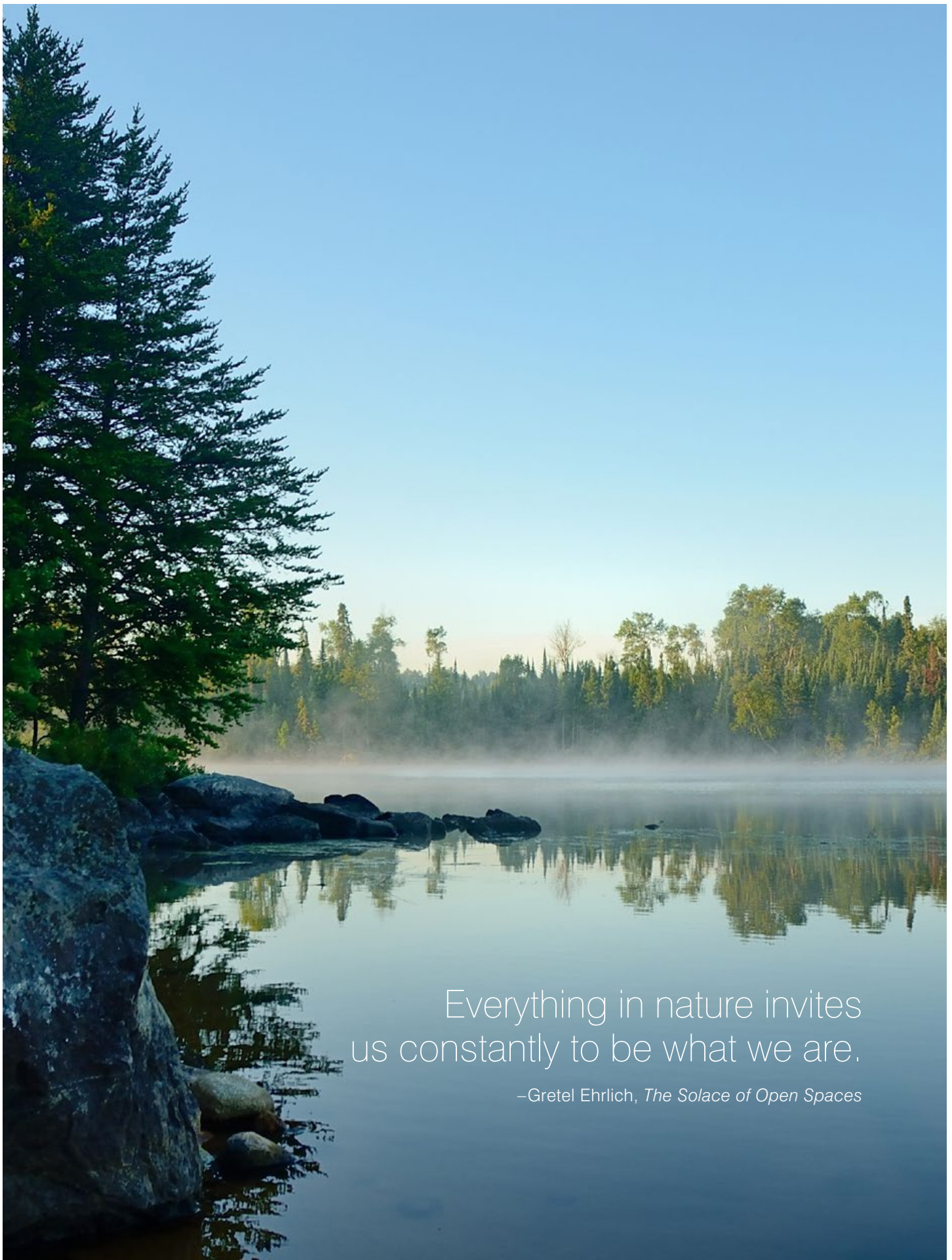
Very special thanks to the 742 land trusts who responded to the 2015 National Land Trust Census survey and to the entire land trust community.



The 2015 National Land Trust Census was developed in cooperation with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and with the generous support of the U.S. Forest Service. The Land Trust Alliance is an equal opportunity provider.



The 2015 National Land Trust Census report was released in November 2016.



Everything in nature invites  
us constantly to be what we are.

—Gretel Ehrlich, *The Solace of Open Spaces*

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# 2015 NATIONAL LAND TRUST CENSUS AT A GLANCE

 **56 MILLION**

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**8,184**

Full-Time and Part-Time Staff



**15,779**

Board Members



**207,646**

Other Active Volunteers



**4.6 MILLION**

Members & Financial Supporters



**\$588 MILLION**

Dedicated funding for stewardship and legal defense



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## Land Trusts' Top Three Conservation Priorities:

1 | 

Important natural areas or wildlife habitats

2 | 

Water quality, including wetlands

3 | 

Working farms or ranchlands



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For more information about the National Land Trust Census  
or to download data for your state, visit

[www.lta.org/census](http://www.lta.org/census)



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