



What is a Land Trust?

A land trust is a non-profit organization that actively conserves land and water resources for the public benefit. Land trusts permanently protect important natural, recreational, scenic, historic or working lands in their communities. There is no legal definition for “land trust” – some are called conservancies, associations or foundations – “land trust” is a term used to describe organizations that, in pursuit of conservation missions, own land, hold conservation easements, or both. Most land trusts are incorporated as 501(c)(3) organizations. They are independent, non-governmental entities whose missions are determined by their volunteers and members.

Today, more than 1,500 land trusts nationwide have protected close to nine million acres -- wetlands, farms, wildlife habitat, forests, urban gardens and parks, watersheds, trails and river corridors.

Land Trusts Act Today to Conserve Land for Future Generations

One of the most important roles of a land trust is to work with landowners who choose to protect their own land, leaving a lasting legacy for future generations. They buy and accept donations of land, hold conservation easements on private property, and work in other ways with landowners to achieve mutual conservation goals. Land trusts provide advice on protection strategies that best meet the landowner's conservation and financial needs. They also have long term responsibility for managing and overseeing land they have helped conserve.

Land Trusts Protect Wisconsin's Special Places

The land trust movement in Wisconsin has grown out of a long tradition of respect for the land and a commitment to preserve natural areas from unplanned development. Wisconsin's land trusts focus on preserving areas with significant ecological, scenic, recreational, agricultural, social or historic value--all part of our natural heritage.

The land trust community nationally and in Wisconsin is a diverse group of organizations. Some have missions to protect local resources, the Green Lake Conservancy, for example. Others work regionally, like the Northwoods

Land Trust. Some define their service area by watershed, as does the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust. Still others focus on a particular ecosystem, like The Prairie Enthusiasts. These groups range from all-volunteer organizations to those with several staff members. The oldest, The Ridges Sanctuary in Door County, was established in 1937 and has protected 1200 acres of property. Most Wisconsin land trusts were founded in the last twenty years. There are close to 50 land trusts working in Wisconsin. Together they have protected nearly 500,000 acres.

Land Trusts are Important Public Partners

Many land trusts work cooperatively with government agencies by acquiring or managing land, researching conservation needs and priorities, or assisting in the development of open space plans. Land trusts can also access money and other resources available only to non-profits and with those, leverage public investment in conservation.

In Wisconsin, land trusts have been an invaluable partner to the State through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, also called the Stewardship Fund. Through the Stewardship Fund, land trusts have matched state dollars with private and federal money to more than double the purchasing power of state money to protect conservation land.

Land Trusts are Community Institutions

Land trusts have also been valuable partners to local governments, coordinating to protect working lands in Dane County, the Orchards of the Bayfield Peninsula and the Mississippi River Blufflands in La Crosse, among others. Land trusts work to protect the places that make Wisconsin a great place to live, work and play; they are as important to the health and vitality of Wisconsin communities as the public library or schools. Most land trusts were formed by neighbors and community leaders concerned about the loss or degradation of important natural resources. Individuals who become

involved in land trusts come from a variety of backgrounds: real estate, ecology, education, farming, communications, fundraising and management. It is this combination of skills and their abiding interest in protecting special places that has made land trusts the fastest growing conservation movement in the United States.

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Our Mission:

Preserve environmentally important land to protect rural character, water quality, and wildlife habitat for future generations