

SAVING

LAND

WWW.LANDTRUSTALLIANCE.ORG

FALL 2022



HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

RETURN ON ENVIRONMENT

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

LEARN.INSPIRE.ACT

 Land Trust Alliance
Together, conserving the places you love

1982
40
2022

In Their Own Words

LAND TRUST LEADERS
ENVISION
THE FUTURE

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK LAND TRUSTS CAN DO OVER THE NEXT 40 YEARS, AND HOW CAN WE GET THERE?

In honor of the Land Trust Alliance's 40th anniversary, we asked land trust leaders to share their visions for the future of conservation and the land trust movement. These leaders—from land trusts big and small—shared their perspectives on the challenges we face and how we can tackle them. Engaging people to care, empowering communities and individuals, finding optimism, maintaining hope, making nature relevant, staying focused ... these are just a few of the ideas they share here.

1982

40

2022

CINDY MONTAÑEZ

CEO

TreePeople Land Trust, California

The future of conservation is about engaging people to care, and the strategy for how to do that is actually not new or groundbreaking. The truth is, the way to build a movement powerful enough to address the critical issues of conservation and climate change has been staring us in the face all long: It's called empowerment.

We are at a critical juncture in the health of our planet and now, more than ever before, we need everyone to step up, pay attention and act. At TreePeople, we passionately believe that trees, more trees, and everywhere, are a key component to reversing climate change. And science backs up our passion.

But none of it will work without the power of people. Our secret sauce is communities, or more precisely, the people in those communities—galvanizing them, educating them and empowering them to take ownership for the health of our planet. Our Community Forester program helps empower people across Southern California to plant a greener future for their communities. By becoming a Community Forester, people learn from experts on how to engage their own communities and plan their very own planting events. The four-session course provides step-by-step details, including how to choose the right tree for the right place and bring together resources, as well as how to plan, recruit for and run a tree planting event. The goal is to create climate-resilient neighborhoods powered by empowered leaders throughout Southern California and share our process as a model for the world.

Each and every one of us has the power to change the world in wonderful and profound ways. ☆



EMILY WARNER

Executive Director

Cacapon & Lost Rivers Land Trust, West Virginia

I want a world 40 years from now where streams run clear, mountains capture the imagination, sustainable farms thrive and children have plentiful occasions to go outside and explore, discover and wonder. This is why I work to conserve land.

Land trusts face many challenges. There is never enough money, time, staff capacity or information. Climate change looms. Our conservation easement language is never perfect. Development pressure builds. Prioritization of so many important challenges and projects is difficult. Yet, our work is too important to allow ourselves to be bogged down by scarcity against the enormity of our task or distracted into ineffectiveness. As we look toward the next 40 years, I hope the conservation community will focus its intentions with urgency, yes, but also with optimism.

To be successful, I believe land trusts must remain unapologetically focused on what we do best, and we must do so with hope. On my office wall, I have tacked the words “Protect Land” with two photographs and a map of the Cacapon Watershed. The words keep my mission in focus, so I avoid straying down important but “not-my-job” paths. The map and mountainscapes stir my love for this part of the world and encourage me to dream.

Whether our missions are to conserve a watershed's forests, protect farmland, save the greater sage grouse or enhance equity through outdoor recreation, we must keep the focus on our chosen missions. We must let go of the discomfort of what we are not doing and concentrate our passions on moving forward together with hope. ☆

TOM KAY

**Executive Director
Alachua Conservation Trust, Florida**

As the world faces more geopolitical instability, more extreme weather and increased demand for natural resources, the conservation movement will be tested like never before. While this may paint a bleak and dire picture, the land trust world is also made up of planners and optimists grounded in reality.

Over the next four decades, the land trust community must be prepared to face new challenges and threats, not only to lands and resources not yet protected, but also to lands and waters where conservation victories have already occurred. There will be pushes to tax conservation lands to generate new revenues for governments. There will be pushes to open lands conserved as nature parks and preserves. There will be new attacks on lands with conservation easements, to weaken or remove terms of the easements or to dissolve them entirely. Most likely, the argument for these actions will be to grow more food, extract a resource that is in demand or meet some other public need.

The land trust community must be ready to find alternative solutions to these issues, while continuing to conserve new lands and restore those that are already conserved. To succeed, there are several key steps to take going forward: build alliances with elected officials and decision makers; advocate for increased funding for conservation programs, especially around agriculture and areas most vulnerable to population migration as a result of climate change; and redouble our efforts to get children into nature to nurture their passion, curiosity and love for the outdoors and wildlife while furthering their education. None of these approaches are novel, but as the pressure on resources increases, the work needed to keep conservation at the forefront will become more nuanced.

Our jobs will not become any easier in the decades ahead, but the rewards of our increased efforts will be having communities that we serve across the country and globe that are livable and better prepared to handle the volatility of the future. ☆



SARAH KNEBEL

**Executive Director
Scenic Rivers Land Trust, Maryland**

The future of the land trust movement is exciting! There are so many opportunities to help our communities and improve quality of life for all (both humans and wildlife alike).

Always at the top of my mind is the fact that the work we do plays a critical role in saving the planet from a biosphere collapse in the coming decades. It's a tough call to action but I think we can evolve enough to help tackle it. Hopefully, we can grow fast enough to help reconnect our communities (all of them!) to nature in a positive way while protecting and restoring the great outdoors in our own neighborhoods.

To get where we need to be in the coming years, land trusts need to engage our communities in significant ways to help make nature relevant and integrated into lives again. Nature is not something that is "out there" or separate from the lives we lead every day. It's all around us: the foods we eat, the fibers we use to make our clothes, the water we use to brush our teeth, the air that we breathe.

We will need to look beyond conserving large expanses of land (though this still remains important!). We'll need to work with our environmental partners to advocate for more native diversity in everyone's backyards and other places where conservation easements don't make sense. We'll also need to be successful in protecting the biodiversity hotspots of the country, and restoring the habitats that animals desperately need to thrive. To top it all off, we will have to figure out how to handle invasive species that threaten the health of our native plants and wildlife.

There's much work to be done, and lots of incredibly smart, passionate and creative people to work alongside to make it happen. ☆



AIMÉE DORVAL

**Executive Director
Androscoggin Land Trust, Maine**

The land trust movement of the future isn't always going to be about saving land. The land resources will become more finite with every passing decade. The movement is going to be about protecting what we have, partnering and promoting to ensure that access is truly for all, and educating people on how to respect and cherish these natural areas. I think we're going to see a shift in who is visiting land. In the next 40 years, I think that we will begin to see a more representative world engaging with land trusts. That is my hope.

To get there, we need to be genuine and humble. We need to be resolute in our missions. We need to form solidarity in promoting and honoring diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ). Are we really serving all people and welcoming them? Is it safe? These are questions we ask of ourselves, and we know that we're falling short. But we're moving forward, learning and growing. When I've spoken with people from marginalized groups, a constant conversation is about safety. One example that we've demonstrated is hosting private unadvertised events with partner organizations. We hold public events for safety in numbers.

Our organization has been increasingly researching and learning about DEIJ initiatives to better serve our region. We have collaborated closely with partners, consultants and regional foundations to discuss and offer programming. We're also looking at our board and staff structure and hiring practices.

My biggest takeaway or advice is to be ready to pivot, be patient during extended periods and never be afraid to reach out. ☆



JONATHAN LOK

**Board Chair
Bayou Land Conservancy, Texas**

Optimism, aspiration, promise—or is it credulity, guilelessness and blind faith? Hope is both the silver bullet and the long shadow over the audacity to improve a distant future. This is particularly true in land conservation, where gains feel offset by forces focused on near-term incentives. Meanwhile, the business cases we make fall short in explaining why the immeasurables move us and fail to provide motivation on the timescale of conservation.

At times it can feel that progress takes a backseat to ideology and special interests. However, conservation professionals and supporters are unmatched in their willingness to think long-term with optimism. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us that the arc of the moral universe is long but bends toward justice. Progress happens through different avenues—sometimes through policy, sometimes through grassroots organizing, but almost always putting into perspective the issues of the moment with the vision of what is possible. Our part is having the audacity to believe in a future where people prosper and nature flourishes.

My worst days are when I question why I have the right to be hopeful. But then I think of the alternative: *Do I join them in the moment of greatest adversity?* I'm lifted as I arrive at the same conclusion as Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic philosopher: "No matter what anyone says or does, my task is to be good." Our country and institutions may feel like they are falling apart, but it doesn't change our responsibility. Knowing there is no alternative in the face of adversity is what brings me hope. ☆

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Send your thoughts on the future of conservation to editor@lta.org and we'll publish them on our website.

Thank you to the individuals who contributed to this story. ☺