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# Table of Contents

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 3

*Land Trust Standards and Practices in the United States* ................................................. 4
  - History and Background .................................................................................................. 4
  - International Land Conservation Network ...................................................................... 6
  - Land Trust Accreditation .............................................................................................. 7

Guidelines for Establishing Standards and Practices .......................................................... 9
  - Suggested Process Steps ............................................................................................... 9
    - Tips to Guide a Successful Process ........................................................................... 9
    - Tips for a Successful Public Participation Process ................................................... 11
    - Tips for Drafting Standards and Practices ............................................................... 12
  - Marketing and Communications .................................................................................. 12
  - Standards and Practices Implementation ..................................................................... 12

Case Examples .................................................................................................................. 13
  - Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices ............................................................ 13
  - Guía de Buenas Prácticas para la Custodia del Territorio ........................................... 14
  - Chile ............................................................................................................................. 15
  - IUCN Guidelines for Privately Protected Areas ............................................................ 16

A Framework for Standards and Practices Content: Sample Templates ............................ 17
  - Twelve Standards ....................................................................................................... 17
  - Four Categories ........................................................................................................... 22
    - Governance ............................................................................................................... 22
    - Finance ...................................................................................................................... 22
    - Transactions ............................................................................................................... 22
    - Stewardship ............................................................................................................... 23

Additional Resources ......................................................................................................... 24

Appendix A ........................................................................................................................ 26
Introduction

Land trusts in the United States know that for private land conservation to succeed over the long term, they need to secure the public’s confidence and support. All land trusts must demonstrate effectiveness and credibility — otherwise the ones that fall short could undermine the whole conservation movement. Establishing and implementing standards and practices can help meet that challenge. The public benefits from more effective and efficient land trusts; the entire land trust community benefits from a commitment across the sector to excellence and continuous improvement; and individual land trusts commit to pursuing continuous improvement.

As private land conservation initiatives grow and mature in other countries, many are considering establishing their own standards and practices to ensure the integrity of their work. Standards and practices can help protect the investment of public and private financial resources in land conservation. They can also serve as a catalyst for organizations and individuals to strive for excellence in their operations and activities. Lastly, they can help ensure the permanent protection of conserved properties.

This document provides guidelines for establishing standards and practices in private land conservation based on the decades of experience of the Land Trust Alliance in promulgating Land Trust Standards and Practices (the “Standards”), the ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust in the United States. The document discusses the history and context of the development of the U.S. Standards and presents a framework for a suggested process. We have also included several case examples of similar or related standards and practices in other jurisdictions and links to helpful resources, as well as two possible templates, based on the U.S. Standards, which you can adapt to fit your laws and customs. The publication concludes with a list of additional resources that go deeper into specific topic areas covered by the Standards. We hope other countries or jurisdictions that are considering establishing standards and practices for private land conservation will find this a useful resource.

This paper was commissioned by the International Land Conservation Network, a project of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. It was authored by Sylvia Bates, the Director of Standards & Educational Services at the Land Trust Alliance. Joint copyright to the paper is held by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the Land Trust Alliance.

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Land Trust Standards and Practices in the United States

History and Background

Founded in 1982, the Land Trust Alliance is a national land conservation organization that today represents more than 1,000 member land trusts supported by more than five million members nationwide. It began almost 40 years ago when a handful of lawyers started to talk to each other and some to Kingsbury Browne, a Boston tax lawyer. Browne soon embarked on a sabbatical from his firm, traveling the American West in 1980 as a fellow of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. Following his trip, Browne was instrumental in persuading the Lincoln Institute to convene the first meeting of land trust leaders from around the country. This initiative led to the establishment of the Land Trust Exchange, the name under which the Land Trust Alliance was incorporated in 1982.

At the time of the Alliance’s founding, more than 400 local and regional land trusts existed in the United States, most in the Northeast, three-fourths with no paid staff and half with annual budgets of less than $50,000. The majority of land was protected through outright (fee) ownership, but the use of conservation easements was growing. The provisions in the Tax Reform Act of 1976 and the Tax Treatment Extension Act of 1980 led the way for the use and success of conservation easements by providing federal tax incentives for their donation.

At the same time, the explosive development trends of the 1980s across the United States spurred conservation efforts throughout the country. The 1980s saw a surge in growth in the number of land trusts and the use of conservation easements as a private land protection tool. The growth trend that began at the end of the 1980s set the pace for the next 10 years, when more than 63 percent of the nation’s land trusts formed. Today, there are approximately 1,300 land trusts across the country that have protected more than 56 million acres of land, an increase of nine million acres since 2010. Conservation easements cover almost 17 million acres.

Anyone who has watched the use of conservation easements burgeon over the last 30 years understands what a compelling tool easements are for protecting endangered natural areas, scenic properties and working farms and forests. Yet anyone who understands conservation easements is also acutely aware of how much of the work of protecting land begins after the easement is signed. Monitoring and enforcement are tasks for perpetuity. Very early on the Alliance recognized the challenge of perpetuity and the importance of establishing standards and practices.

The Alliance developed the first Standards in 1989 at the urging of land trust practitioners who believed a strong land trust community depends on the credibility and effectiveness of all its members and who understood that employing standards and practices was the surest way to secure lasting conservation. Land Trust Standards and Practices (the “Standards”) are the ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust in the United States. They were created by and for the land trust community at a time when conservation leaders began to recognize the importance of professionalism in land conservation to preserve the credibility and public trust in the growing number of land trusts and to ensure conservation permanence.

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The 1989 Standards were largely drafted in-house by Alliance staff and board members. They were then vetted with the larger land trust community through focus groups at Rally: the National Land Conservation Conference, which was then an every 18-month event. Changes were made based on feedback received at Rally, and the Standards were finalized shortly thereafter. They were amended slightly in 1993 by adding a new Standard on fee land stewardship, which was inadvertently omitted in the 1989 draft due to the heightened focus on conservation easements. Also in 1993, the Alliance published the first edition of The Standards and Practices Guidebook to aid in the implementation of the Standards. The guidebook provided the rationale for each of the practices and information on how land trusts should implement them through detailed background narratives, sample documents and policies and additional resources. Another minor revision to the Standards occurred in 2001, when a new practice was added to the then Standard 13.

In 2003, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the world’s largest private land conservation organization, found itself in the national media spotlight when The Washington Post published a series of articles criticizing TNC’s practices. The newspaper raised specific concerns about conflicts of interest, accountability and public disclosure. This media exposure eventually prompted independent investigations of the organization by both the Senate and the IRS, as well as a broad self-review of TNC practices by an expert, independent advisory panel. It also spurred the Alliance to conduct a comprehensive revision of the Standards, the first thorough review since they were issued in 1989.

The 2004 revision was a major undertaking, involving listening sessions, one-on-one meetings and surveys. Once completed, the Alliance spent the next several years developing supporting materials to help implement the revised Standards. The Alliance updated The Standards and Practices Guidebook, premiered an online Learning Center with sample policies, easement language, research results and technical materials, developed an 18-course Standards and Practices Curriculum and finalized an assessment tool, Assessing Your Organization, to help land trusts gauge their progress in implementing the Standards. For the first time, Alliance land trust members were required to submit a board resolution adopting the 2004 Standards, pledging a commitment to uphold the public confidence and the credibility of the land trust community as a whole. Shortly thereafter, the Alliance launched an accreditation program based on the 2004 Standards (see below).
International Land Conservation Network

In 1981, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy played a crucial role in launching the Alliance (then called the Land Trust Exchange). Thirty years later, the Lincoln Institute played much the same supporting role by hosting the first organizational meeting of the [International Land Conservation Network](http://www.landtrust.org) (ILCN) in September 2014 and continuing to support the organization as its long-term institutional host.

The ILCN is distinctive as a global network for private and civic land conservation. Its mission is to connect organizations and people around the world that are accelerating voluntary private and civic sector action that protects and stewards land and water resources. Over the past five years, the ILCN has catalyzed networks, built relationships, shared experience and created an international knowledge base amongst a group of recognized and up-and-coming conservation leaders. Strategy 6 of the ILCN’s 2018-2003 strategic plan is to improve impact and confidence through best practices. The ILCN is currently working in collaboration with the Alliance to determine the applicability of voluntary standards and practices to non-U.S.-based private and civic land conservation networks and organizations.

The Standards were most recently updated in 2017 to reflect the invaluable lessons learned in the practice of conservation over the last 13 years since the prior revision, recent changes in the law of tax-exempt organizations and the need for every land trust to take responsibility for safeguarding the public’s trust in land conservation. The two-year process was extensive and forms the basis for our suggested guidelines starting on page 9. In preparing the 2017 update, an advisory team, comprised of 14 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 revision process.

The 2017 Standards (like the 2004 version) sets 12 broad principles or standards. These standards are broken down into 59 practices and 188 practice elements, which describe the essential actions needed to fulfill the standards. They cover the broad topic areas of governance, finance, land transactions and stewardship. They exist not to protect a minimum level of performance, but to make the entire land trust community aspire to excellence and continuous improvement. Over the last two years, the Alliance has updated all its supporting materials and online courses to reflect the 2017 revisions, including revised background narratives for each of the practice elements and an updated Assessing Your Organization.

While the Standards are a publication of the Land Trust Alliance, they represent a collective product of the U.S. land trust community. The advisory team was as diverse in perspective as the comments the team reviewed. We did not necessarily achieve unanimity on each standard or practice, but the Standards reflect the expressed values and recommendations of the overall land trust community. Each member of the Alliance was required to re-adopt the 2017 Standards as guiding principles for its operations. 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 land trust’s board exercises its best judgment, as informed by the spirit of the Standards.

The continued success of land trusts in the United States depends on public confidence in—and support of—the land trust community as they 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.

In addition to the English language version, the Standards have been translated into Spanish and French.

**Land Trust Accreditation**

While the Standards are the guidelines for an organization’s operations, land trust accreditation is a mark of distinction, showing that a land trust meets these high standards for land conservation. The Alliance had considered establishing some form of credentialing program based on the Standards as early as the late 1990s. However, it wasn’t until the Senate investigations in 2003 that the Alliance pursued this option in earnest, partly as a way to avoid government regulation of land trusts.

The [Land Trust Accreditation Commission](#) was established as an independent program of the Alliance in 2006. It is governed by a volunteer board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country. The Commission conducts an extensive review of an applicant’s policies and programs before making a determination to award accreditation. The Commission tested the voluntary accreditation program in 2007 and began operations in 2008.

When a land trust applies for accreditation for the first time or to renew its accredited status, the Commission evaluates its implementation of the Standards based on a subset of the practices (called **accreditation indicator elements**) that are selected by the Alliance. The Commission establishes the **requirements** for accreditation and publishes accreditation application materials. Accreditation demonstrates that a land trust has successfully implemented the Standards.

The primary goals of the accreditation program are to:

- Build and recognize strong land trusts
- Foster public confidence in land conservation
- Help ensure the long-term protection of land

The Commission follows best practices in accreditation. It has a comprehensive conflict of interest policy and manages conflicts to ensure fair and consistent decisions. It makes independent decisions that are not influenced by political or donor concerns. It maintains a help desk and instructional materials to coach land trusts through the accreditation process and how to document compliance. And it keeps all applicant material confidential, sharing only aggregate data about challenges facing land trusts to help inform the Alliance’s training and technical assistance program. A confidentiality policy governs how information is shared between the two organizations.

The Alliance provides training and technical assistance to help land trusts achieve and maintain accreditation. It elects commissioners to serve on the Commission’s independent board, manages an endowment to keep the program costs low and provides administrative services to the Commission.

A 2018 independent external [evaluation](#) of the impact of the first 10 years of the accreditation program shows the land trust community’s investment in accreditation paid off, and the impact can continue to grow. Fifteen years ago, the land trust community was ill prepared to live up to the promise of
perpetuity and was under legislative and regulatory threat. The Alliance created the accreditation program and the Land Trust Accreditation Commission as a solution and offered a suite of related accredited preparation services to its members. Today, there are approximately 420 accredited land trusts that range from all-volunteer organizations to national groups and protect more than 80 percent of all land and easements held by land trusts in the United States.

Accredited land trusts far outpace those not yet accredited. They have significantly bigger budgets, more staff and volunteers and eight times more money invested to steward and defend their conservation lands than their peers of similar size – they also save three times more land.

Accreditation was a strong motivator for change in land trusts; 87 percent of accredited land trusts state that accreditation moderately or substantially motivated them to make organizational improvements. These groups strengthened their governance, transaction, stewardship and financial systems as part of the accreditation journey.

Public confidence in land trusts has increased as a result; 85 percent of public agencies and foundations say accreditation increases their confidence in land trusts, and 83 percent of landowners feel the same way. Instead of legislative or regulatory disruption, there was acceleration of tax benefits and conservation funding in the United States as a direct result of both the accreditation program and the Alliance’s increased emphasis on helping organizations implement the Standards.

The Commission’s primary objective is to have 450 accredited land trusts that hold 90 percent of the conserved land in the United States.
Guidelines for Establishing Standards and Practices

As the previous section demonstrates, establishing standards and practices and engaging practitioners to implement them successfully takes time, effort and often tremendous resources. But how does one start to establish standards and practices for a given community or jurisdiction? What follows is an outline of suggested process steps and some tips for ensuring a successful process. These suggestions are based on the decades of experience the Alliance has with the creation and multiple revisions of Land Trust Standards and Practices.

Suggested Process Steps

1. **Lay the groundwork through initial planning.** In the beginning, a determination will need to be made whether the time is right to establish (or revise) standards and practices. Circumstances will vary depending on the political, cultural and legal context of private land conservation in the country or jurisdiction. Some questions to ask include:
   - Have there been changes in the legal or operational environment of those groups who practice private land conservation?
   - Have practices changed in related industries (scientific, nonprofit, financial) that might impact this work?
   - Is there a need to secure the public trust?
   - Has a public funding program recently been established to assist with private land conservation efforts?
   - Are conservation organizations operating responsibly and fulfilling their obligations?
   - Are there key concepts or emerging issues (climate change, indigenous rights, diversity and social justice) that should be addressed through standards and practices?

Consider a survey or other study to determine the answers to these questions and whether establishing standards and practices is an appropriate course of action.

Once a determination has been made to proceed, there are other key considerations:
   - What entity or group will take the lead to ensure the process has credibility and is successful?
   - Who else needs to be involved?
   - What will it cost and where will the funding come from?
   - Are there potentially controversial issues that will need airing and discussion?
   - What is the overall timeframe?

**Tips to Guide a Successful Process**
- The process should be transparent to the stakeholders in order to assure acceptance and participation.
- The process should include an easy and effective means of generating relevant feedback from all stakeholders, defined as those who will use the standards and practices in their organization’s decision-making process.
• The feedback generated must be specific enough to provide solutions and not give voice to debate over the relevancy or effectiveness of the standard or practice
• The process should include hands-on representation from all stakeholders, representing the diversity of private land conservation interests throughout the country or jurisdiction in equal measure
• External expertise must be sought to ensure that the standards and practices also represent input from thought leaders in related sectors (nonprofit, scientific, government institutions), as appropriate, in addition to those experienced in private land conservation
• Consider using an external facilitator(s) to ease the process and provide objectivity in specifically defined areas

2. Establish a core team. Designate a core group of individuals (no more than four to six people) who can work effectively together to guide the entire process. The role of the core team is to define how the overall system will work, identify the goals and outcomes for establishing standards and practices and plan and oversee the details of the process.

3. Establish a larger advisory team. Designate a larger group of individuals (perhaps 12 to 15 members) who can represent all the stakeholders who will be affected by, and expected to follow, the standards and practices. This team’s role is to advise the core team to ensure that the full range of stakeholder perspectives and concerns are understood and considered. The advisory team can also serve as liaisons during the public participation process, help consider the feedback received and provide direct input to the core team to shape the final draft of the standards and practices.

4. Prepare a preliminary discussion draft. Ultimately, a small workgroup (perhaps a subset of the core team) can prepare an initial draft of the standards and practices for preliminary review. How that draft comes together will vary depending on the circumstances. It may be that the core team already has identified the most important issues to include in a set of standards and practices. Perhaps you will choose to conduct broader listening sessions among your constituency to identify the critical topics. Or, maybe you will choose as a starting point the content presented in Land Trust Standards and Practices or in the sample templates beginning on page 17.

Whatever approach you choose, it is usually easier for a small group of knowledgeable, well-informed individuals to create a first draft for review and comment than to attempt to generate a draft through a large group consensus process. Before the initial draft is distributed to a wider audience, it should receive additional internal review and feedback from key stakeholders, such as staff and board members. The final discussion draft should reflect an internal collaboration on key concepts rather than exact wording and tone.

5. Collect feedback on initial draft. Public input from a diverse array of stakeholders is key to the success of establishing standards and practices. Establish a realistic timeframe to allow for review and feedback. Depending on the nature and complexity of the practices, this may range from four to eight months. Keep the request for feedback at a high level, but allow people to provide more detailed comments, if they choose. You will find that many people enjoy the
detailed editing of language, and the resulting product will be better if you take the time to thoughtfully consider all suggestions.

Feedback can be collected in a variety of different formats, and you should consider offering as many different opportunities for stakeholders to engage as possible.

- **In person.** Identify existing meetings and events of the community where in-person discussions of key issues related to the standards and practices can take place.
- **On line.** There are many commercially available on-line public engagement platforms, such as Ethelo, MetroQuest and OpenGov. These platforms are a cost-effective way to collect comments and to allow participants to view comments made by others. They also offer analytical tools to aid in group decision-making. Less expensive tools, such as SurveyMonkey or Typeform, are also options.
- **Via written comments.** Be sure to provide a way for stakeholders to submit written comments or through email, especially for those people who are averse to participating through an online platform.

For a transparent and credible process, consider posting all public comments received on a publicly accessible website or similar location.

### Tips for a Successful Public Participation Process

- Create a meaningful community-wide conversation about the overall importance of standards and practices and the responsibility of the community in their development
- Assure stakeholders that their input has influence on the final outcomes of the process
- Ask specific questions to focus that input
- Provide a variety of ways for people to provide feedback on the discussion drafts
- Maximize the use of online technology and social media to create opportunities for sharing information, gathering input and providing forums for discussion
- Coordinate with the communications plan to create a common understanding of the purpose, context and approach of establishing standards and practices

6. **Create second discussion draft.** Based on the feedback received during the public input phase, create a second discussion draft. Throughout the process, provide opportunities for participants to view the changes that have been made based on their feedback by making available a track changes document. Similarly, it is important to provide a rationale for changes that have been made and for changes not made.

7. **Solicit additional feedback.** The second feedback period can be shorter (two or three months) and can also be limited to those areas where there was disagreement, controversy or major changes made based on the initial input.

8. **Finalize the standards and practices.** Finalize the standards and practices, secure any necessary approvals and release them broadly to the stakeholder community and beyond.
**Tips for Drafting Standards and Practices**

- Focus on those practices that apply broadly to the private land conservation community
- Strive for clarity, specificity and to reduce redundancy
- Eliminate or redraft practices that are so broad as to not be helpful
- Organize the practices in a logical framework
- Provide detailed explanations and measures for practices through web links to support documents and other resources

**Marketing and Communications**

As with all communications efforts, the proper place to begin is by listening. Start by identifying and segmenting your audiences and then seek to understand their perspectives. Anticipate perceived impacts and concerns from different perspectives and help to address those concerns before misinformation can take root. Establish a detailed communications plan to ensure that the stakeholder community understands the purpose, importance and impacts of the standards and practices and to encourage them to adopt and implement them. If your public participation process was well planned and effective, it will be easier for the stakeholders to understand their value to the community.

**Standards and Practices Implementation**

Once the standards and practices have been issued, turn your attention toward their implementation. Consider how you can ensure the community of stakeholders understands the standards and practices and is taking steps to incorporating them into their operations, activities and programs. At the outset, this will generally involve some form of education and outreach, such as discussion forums and workshops. Over a longer period of time, it may take the form of webinars, online training opportunities or a more formal curriculum. Assessment tools can be useful in determining the progress an organization or entity is making in meeting the standards and practices. Ultimately, you may decide that a third-party verification or accreditation program is the best way to measure implementation of the standards and practices among your constituency.
Case Examples

Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices
The Canadian Land Trust Alliance (CLTA) first adapted the U.S. Standards for use in Canada in 2005 with the assistance of the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA) and the Land Trust Alliance of BC. After the U.S. Land Trust Alliance’s revision of the Standards in 2017, CLTA followed suit and published the revised Canadian Land Trust Standards in Practices in January 2019. Given the similarities in law and culture between the United States and Canada, the Canadian Standards are modeled closely after the U.S. Standards.

CLTA recognized the advantage in using such a rigorously developed set of standards and practices to maintain alignment of industry practices in Canada with the most current, internationally recognized standards – those developed by the Alliance in the United States. CLTA tailored the recent U.S. revision to the Canadian context and designed a 15-month consultation within the Canadian land trust community to develop practices that are more readable, accessible and up-to-date.

Although the adoption of the Standards is entirely voluntary for Canadian land trusts to exist and operate, adoption is a mandatory eligibility requirement for at least two federal programs:

- The Ecological Gifts Program requires eligible recipients to demonstrate “that the organization has adopted, or a board resolution that the organization has made a commitment to work towards adopting, a recognized national or provincial set of ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust to guide the organization’s land securement and management practices.” The Canadian Standards are the national set of guidelines recognized by Environment and Climate Change Canada.
- The Natural Areas Conservation Program also requires all applicants to be in compliance or substantially in compliance with the Canadian Standards.

While the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices are designed primarily for land trusts with charitable status, they also provide important guidance for any organization or government agency that holds lands or conservation agreements for the benefit of the public. As with the U.S. Standards, they are also available in French.

The Canadian model provides space for the provincial alliances to develop training programs that are specific to their own needs, both in terms of where their members stand with respect to adoption of the Standards and also regarding the specifics of provincial law. For example, OLTA is currently launching an education and training program to help Ontario land trusts implement the revised Standards. The program consists of a survey on Standards implementation, two workshops, focus groups to identify ongoing training needs and a project to develop, collate and share best practice materials.
Established in 2003, Xara per a la Conservació de la Natura (XCN, formerly XCT) is a national conservation organization representing more than 170 land trusts, environmental and volunteer organizations and public institutions in Catalonia, Spain. XCN’s work focuses on supporting its members and their efforts to preserve nature and it uses advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns to advance its national conservation mission.

In 2013, XCN presented a first draft of Guía de Buenas Prácticas para la Custodia del Territorio (“Land Stewardship Guidelines,” in English) and, in 2018, it published a revised version. In the same year, XCN released an implementation manual. The U.S. Standards inspired XCN, and the handbook follows a similar general structure, with the first part covering organizational management issues and a second section focusing on land stewardship. Several workshops and consultation processes took place before XCN published the final version.

XCN does not require land trusts to adopt these standards, but strongly recommends it. In Catalonia, the civic and private nature conservation movement is strong, but few organizations are strong enough to fully implement the standards. Some land trusts and even the authors already acknowledge that a more accessible and readable version will be necessary soon.

XCN is currently working with the Environmental Department of the Catalan government on the development of the Conservation Land Registry. This registry will be a single-source database of information on conservation agreements and projects in Catalonia, with the aim of having reliable information on the conservation initiatives led by civil society. All registered agreements will be eligible for future tax incentives, especially those that allow for maximum long-term security. XCN expects the Guía de Buenas Prácticas to play a more central role in this context.

XCN also led the first attempt to propose European recommendations for land stewardship. In 2013, as a product of an EU funded project called LandLife, XCN published the European Land Stewardship Manual, “Caring Together for Nature: Manual on land stewardship as a tool to promote social involvement with the natural environment in Europe.” This report includes case studies from different European countries, explanations of land stewardship principles and advice on setting up successful and effective land stewardship agreements. In 2014, XCN also published the Land Stewardship Toolkit, which provides European land stewardship organizations with the tools they need to develop and implement land stewardship projects.
Chile
Private land conservation activity has accelerated steadily in Chile for more than a decade. While this work has been strategic and its leaders have looked closely to the United States in general and the Land Trust Alliance in particular as a model, it has not resulted in a formal standards-setting process. Chile’s only fully functioning land trust, Fundacion Tierra Austral (FTA), has formally adopted the U.S. Standards and it has sought to follow and implement them while informally adapting them to the Chilean experience.

In addition, during the past several years, there have been numerous conversations within the Chilean private land conservation community about its readiness to embark upon a standards-setting process. However, because this discussion has encompassed a diverse group of conservation NGOs, most of whose missions are not specifically focused on private land conservation, these conversations have not led to a consensus decision to formulate and adopt standards. To accomplish this, it may be necessary to develop more general standards for Chilean NGO governance first, possibly through Fundacion Lealtad Chile, and then develop a parallel set of standards for private land conservation organizations.

Fundacion Lealtad Chile has an existing program to certify NGOs in Chile. Their standards focus primarily on governance, communications and finances. Supporters of this program believe that this type of certification has the potential of playing a significant role in ensuring the public trust as use of the new Derecho Real de Conservacion agreement, which is the Chilean equivalent of a conservation easement, gains popularity and grows.

One of the sessions at the second Chile California Conservation Conference in October 2018 included a discussion of the consideration of forming a national organization that would serve as a network of Chilean conservation NGOs, including “developing standards for institutional integrity and conservation practices.” The discussion produced enthusiasm for doing so but, again, the diversity of missions of Chilean conservation NGOs and the absence of a collective umbrella organizational or leadership structure makes it challenging, at least in the immediate future, to form a national organization or establish a set of comprehensive standards and practices.

Nevertheless, in December 2018, Asi Conserva Chile (a national service organization representing the owners of private protected areas) and FTA jointly received a grant from Innova CORFO (a governmental institution under the Ministry of the Environment) to draft and disseminate best practice templates for private conservation agreements in Chile. This effort will focus on Chile’s new private land conservation enabling statute and the expected increase use of the Derecho Real de Conservacion agreement.

Although Chile’s private land conservation law represents a major breakthrough, it is broadly written, and there is an urgent need for clearly drafted and annotated templates laying out both the core Derecho Real de Conservacion agreement, the accompanying baseline information and the processes that land trusts and landowners will follow to steward the agreements (easement monitoring and defense).

The CORFO grant represents an important opportunity and stride in professionalizing land trust practices in Chile. Asi Conserva Chile has hired a consultant to lead the process. The focus will be how to
develop land trusts more fully in Chile and what NGOs need to think about and how to be prepared when they consider adding land conservation to their missions. The project includes extensive consultation and participation with partner entities and is anticipated to last through the end of 2019. A kick-off workshop was held on May 17, 2019, and the slides from the presentation can be found in Appendix A. While complete funding for implementation still needs to be secured, FTA will likely pilot the standards that emerge from this initiative.

It remains too early to know whether Asi Conserva Chile will evolve into an entity that can assume the role of a national private land conservation service organization. Its members have resisted this role in the past, but both its board and staff leadership have changed and are becoming more engaged beyond the circle of informally established private protected areas.

IUCN Guidelines for Privately Protected Areas

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a protected area (PA) as “a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.” Privately protected areas (PPAs) include protected areas held or owned by:

- Private governance (individuals and groups of individuals)
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Corporations (both existing commercial companies and sometimes corporations set up by groups of private owners to manage groups of PPAs)
- For-profit owners
- Research entities (such as universities, field stations)
- Religious entities

In November 2018, the Privately Protected Areas and Nature Stewardship Specialist Group of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas released its Guidelines for Privately Protected Areas, which offer a range of best practices for establishing PPAs and securing effective long-term conservation on private properties. Hundreds of people around the world provided input, comment and review to drafts of the guidance. They offer specific guidance applicable to areas under private governance and management, including appropriate legal and institutional arrangements and useful insights into funding mechanisms.

While different from Land Trust Standards and Practices in scope and scale, the best practices are grouped under 34 principles, which cover all aspects of PPA establishment, management and reporting. Each best practice contains descriptive text with examples drawn from many different parts of the world. Aimed principally at practitioners and policymakers, the purpose of these guidelines is to shape the application of IUCN policy and principles toward enhanced effectiveness and conservation outcomes, focused on PPA managers and administrators.

Deriving guidance that is both universal at a global level but specific enough to be useful is quite a challenge. Many topics beg for further work and elaboration, such as PPA finance, and separate workgroups are currently undertaking these tasks. The Guidelines are currently being translated into French, Portuguese and Spanish, with several other languages under discussion. The specialist group is planning a series of trainings based on the Guidelines, to be delivered through June of 2020.
A Framework for Standards and Practices Content: Sample Templates

What follows are two templates that you can use as a starting point to create standards and practices for private land conservation in your country or jurisdiction. Both are largely based on the U.S. Standards.

Twelve Standards
This template follows the 12-standard format of Land Trust Standards and Practices. It offers a short rationale for the importance of each standard and suggests practices for consideration.

1. Ethics, Mission and Community Engagement. [Land trusts] maintain high ethical standards and have a mission committed to conservation, community service and public benefit.

The practices under this standard form the foundation of every land conservation organization’s operations. Public trust in an organization’s performance is the bedrock of its legitimacy. Land conservation organizations should adhere to the highest ethical standards, not only because it is the right thing to do, but as a matter of pragmatic self-interest. An organization’s success ultimately depends on community goodwill. It needs to build lasting relationships with the community it serves. A mission defining what the organization’s public purpose is and what it does is a prerequisite for developing conservation programs and taking action. Once the mission and methods are clear, the organization needs to decide on its strategic goals and a plan of action to achieve these goals.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:

- Ethics
- Mission, planning and evaluation
- Community engagement

2. Compliance with Laws. [Land trusts] fulfill their legal requirements and comply with all laws.

While laws differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, a good understanding of and compliance with the basic legal requirements for organizational existence are necessary to operate a sound private land conservation program.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:

- Compliance with laws
- Any requirements for nonprofit or similar incorporation
- Bylaws for how the organization will operate and govern itself
- Other legal requirements specific to your activities and jurisdiction

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.
Service on a board is a serious commitment. The board of directors carries the ultimate management responsibility for the organization. The board has legal and ethical responsibilities to maintain the public’s trust and the organization’s credibility. To fulfill their duties, board members must be knowledgeable about the activities of the organization and provide the appropriate level of oversight.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:
- Board responsibilities, including financial and operational oversight
- Board composition and structure
- Board governance procedures
- Board approval of real estate transactions

4. Conflicts of Interest. [Land trusts] have policies and procedures to avoid or manage real or perceived conflicts of interest.

Organizations working in private land conservation may have many opportunities for conflicts of interest to arise among their board members and staff – through real estate transactions, management of finances and assets, business dealings, advocacy activity and so on. The fallout for the organization from conflicts of interest can be serious. Some, if mishandled, may result in a violation of the law or a successful lawsuit against the organization. But more probable are the potential internal and external problems that may result from conflicts of interest – or even the appearance of conflicts: financial losses; loss of credibility in the community; and a corrosive atmosphere of distrust and decaying morale among the board, executive director and staff.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:
- Conflicts of interest
- Payments to board members
- Real estate transactions with board members, staff or others close to the organization

5. Fundraising. [Land trusts] conduct fundraising activities in a lawful, ethical and responsible manner.

Every active private land conservation program needs money to perform its work. Fundraising must be done not only with an eye to meeting short-term needs, but also with the goals of maintaining the organization’s integrity and the goodwill of its donors over time. Fundraising practices that shake donors’ confidence in the organization will reduce its fundraising success over the long term and, ultimately, undermine its ability to carry out its fundamental land conservation mission.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:
- Legal and ethical issues in your jurisdiction
- Accountability to donors
- Developing a fundraising plan
6. Financial Oversight. [Land trusts] are responsible and accountable for how they manage their finances and assets.

Sound financial and asset management is critical for any private land conservation program. Many jurisdictions have financial reporting requirements, and financial records should be available to donors upon request. Poor financial management may jeopardize the future of the organization and its land conservation program. It could even lead to legal challenges against the organization.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:
- Fiscal health issues, such as:
  - Developing an annual budget
  - Addressing deficit-spending trends
  - Diversifying revenue sources
  - Operating reserves
  - Stewardship and defense funding
- Financial records
- External financial evaluations or audits
- Written internal controls
- Risk management and insurance

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

The work of private land conservation organizations is substantial, diverse and often technical or specialized and includes fundraising, public relations, financial management, landowner relationships, designing and carrying out transactions, legal and tax matters and land and/or easement management and monitoring. An organization that acquires, owns or manages land or easements, even temporarily, is dealing with complex issues and valuable assets. Conducting this work properly takes trained individuals, whether volunteers or staff. All groups must engage outside expert help in the event they do not have sufficient time or expertise in-house.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:
- Capacity
- Volunteers
- Consultants or contractors
- Transition planning
- Staff matters, such as job descriptions, personnel policies and training


The land it protects, more than anything else, defines a private land conservation organization. An organization must have a well-defined process and established criteria for selecting projects.
and must evaluate every potential project with great care. It must also find a balance between being strategic and being opportunistic. In order for the organization to maintain public credibility, it must carefully screen projects for the public benefit they will provide. For each property, it must gather sufficient information to make sound judgments and avoid unacceptable risks.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:

- Strategic conservation planning
- Project selection criteria and public benefit
- Project evaluation, including property inspection and evaluating threats
- Project planning
- Partnerships and partnership documentation

9. Ensuring Sound Transactions. [Land trusts] work diligently to see that every land and conservation easement transaction is legally, ethically and technically sound.

Most organizations usually intend to protect the property they conserve in perpetuity. To help secure the perpetual conservation of land, an organization’s transactions must hold up over time and withstand challenges. Sound transactions rely on the organization performing due diligence in its transaction steps. Carefully documenting the steps it takes can help secure the perpetual conservation of property.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:

- Legal review and other technical expertise
- Legal and financial advice
- Environmental due diligence
- Determining property boundaries
- Drafting conservation easements, restrictions or covenants
- Title investigation and public recording
- Recordkeeping
- Purchasing land or interests in land, including appraisals
- Selling or transferring conservation land

10. Tax Benefits and Appraisals. [Land trusts] work diligently to see that every charitable gift of land or conservation easement meets legal requirements, to avoid fraudulent or abusive transactions and to uphold public confidence in land conservation.

Many jurisdictions offer tax incentives for private land conservation. While the specifics may vary, private land conservation organizations should take what steps they can to encourage compliance with the tax laws. The organization’s role is important in that deductions overturned by taxing entities or abusive deductions may make future potential donors wary of working with the organization, could lead to investigations and, ultimately, can reduce public support for land conservation incentives.
Consider developing practices under this standard that address:
- Landowner notification, that is, what the organization will tell a landowner about any tax incentives
- Legal requirements and the organization’s responsibilities under the law
- Avoiding fraudulent or abusive transactions

11. Conservation Easement Stewardship. [Land trusts] have a program of responsible stewardship for their conservation easements.

Whether a conservation easement, restriction or covenant, if an organization accepts and holds these interests, it commits itself to their annual stewardship, usually in perpetuity, to enforcement of their terms and to building positive landowner and community relationships to support the organization’s conservation programs and enforcement actions. An organization that fails to do so may eventually lose its credibility, could cause its conservation program to be invalidated, may erode public confidence in these instruments and, ultimately, risk the protection of the land. These practices will help ensure that the conservation values protected by the organization are sustained over time.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:
- Funding conservation easement stewardship
- Baseline documentation reports
- Monitoring
- Landowner relationships
- Conservation easement enforcement
- Approvals and permitted rights
- Contingency strategies
- Amendments
- Condemnation
- Partial or full extinguishment

12. Fee Land Stewardship. [Land trusts] have a program of responsible stewardship for the land held in fee for conservation purposes.

A private land conservation organization must be a responsible steward of its lands. All the work and resources invested in acquiring the land are wasted if the property is not defended against encroachment and misuse or if its resources are not managed to maintain their conservation values. Failure to manage and monitor a property could lead to loss of or damage to the property’s conservation values, injury to visitors or even loss of the property itself.

Consider developing practices under this standard that address:
- Funding land stewardship
- Land management and stewardship, including management plans
- Inspecting properties
- Contingency strategies
• Condemnation

Four Categories
This approach divides the practices into four broad categories that reflect how private land conservation organizations do their work. The suggested practices under each category represent the most critical functions of an organization that is working responsibly, ethically and in the public interest.

Governance
Consider developing practices under this category that address:
• Strategic planning and goals
• Compliance with laws
• Any requirements for nonprofit or similar incorporation
• Bylaws for how the organization will operate and govern itself
• Board oversight and evaluation of the executive director (if any)
• Board composition
• Board development process, including recruiting and training board members
• Frequency of board meetings and adopting board minutes
• Conflicts of interest
• Recordkeeping

Finance
Consider developing practices under this category that address:
• Compliance with any financial reporting requirements
• Board oversight of financial matters, including:
  o Annual budget
  o Securing sufficient financial resources
  o Financial reports and statements
  o Reviewing external financial evaluations or audits
• Gift acknowledgment
• Financial systems to track any donor restrictions
• Addressing deficit-spending trends
• Diversifying revenue sources
• Operating reserves
• Stewardship and defense funding
• Obtaining an external financial evaluation or audit
• Written internal controls
• Insurance

Transactions
Consider developing practices under this category that address:
• No participation in fraudulent or abusive transactions
• Board approval of real estate transactions
• Project selection criteria and public benefit
• Property inspection prior to acquisition
• Title investigation and public recording
• Recordkeeping
• Purchasing land or interests in land, including appraisals
• Drafting conservation easements, restrictions or covenants

Stewardship
Consider developing practices under this category that address:
• Baseline documentation reports and/or land management plans
• Monitoring conservation easements and/or property inspections
• Conservation easement enforcement
• Conservation easement approvals and permitted rights
• Conservation easement amendments
• Conservation easement extinguishment
• Land management problems
Additional Resources


**Avoiding Conflicts of Interest and Running an Ethical Land Trust**, by Konrad Liegel, Land Trust Alliance, 2006.


**Caring Together for Nature**, Manual on land stewardship as a tool to promote social involvement with the natural environment in Europe. Coordinated by Pilar Rodríguez (XCN) and Xavier Sabaté (Espai TReS), LandLife, 2013.

**Checklist for Transactions**, Land Trust Alliance, last revised October 19, 2018.

**Checklist of Written Materials, Policies or Procedures**, Land Trust Alliance, last revised October 19, 2018.


**Guía de Buenas Prácticas para la Custodia del Territorio**, coordinated by Montse Maso and Jofre Rodrigo, Xara de Custodia del Territori, revised 2018.


**An Impact Evaluation of the Land Trust Accreditation Program’s First Ten Years**, by Peter Szabo, Bloomingdale Management Advisors, July 2018.


The Learning Center is a huge resource for implementing the Standards. You can find extensive background information for all 12 standards, 59 practices and 188 practice elements. And, you can follow links to related case studies, sample documents and templates. Access is limited to Alliance members, affiliates and donors.


Manual de Implementacion, coordinated by Montse Maso and Jofre Rodrigo, Xara de Custodia del Territori, revised 2018.


Selling and Transferring Land and Conservation Easements, by Laurie Hunter and Margaret Kohring, Land Trust Alliance, 2009.


Strategic Conservation Planning, by Ole Amundsen III, Land Trust Alliance, 2011.

Appendix A

The following slides are from a presentation given by Ralph Benson of the Chile California Conservation Exchange on May 17, 2019 to a group of conservationists in Chile. We include them as an example of the kinds of conversations that NGOs are having in other countries around the issue of establishing standards and practices.
STANDARDS
FOR PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION IN CHILE
The U.S. Experience with Land Trusts & Conservation Easements

ESTÁNDARES PARA LA CONSERVACIÓN DE TIERRAS PRIVADAS EN CHILE
La Experiencia de Estados Unidos con los Land Trusts y las Servidumbres de Conservación

RALPH BENSON
CHILE CALIFORNIA
CONSERVATION EXCHANGE
TOPICS / Temas

1. WHAT IS A LAND TRUST?
¿Qué es un Land Trust?

2. THE ROLE OF U.S. TAX LAW IN ESTABLISHING STANDARDS
El rol de la Ley Tributaria de los EEUU al establecer normas

3. THE LAND TRUST MOVEMENT
El movimiento Land Trust

   • 50+ Years of Growth
      Más de 50 años creciendo
   • Standards & Practices
      Estándares y Buenas Prácticas
   • Accreditation
      Acreditación
   • International Guidelines
      Pautas Internacionales

4. CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AND THE DERECHO REAL DE CONSERVACIÓN
Servidumbres de Conservación y el Derecho Real de Conservación.
¿Qué es un Land Trust?

- A LAND TRUST IS A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

- ITS MISSION IS THE ACQUISITION AND STEWARDSHIP OF CONSERVATION LAND AND/OR CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

- GREAT VARIETY OF TYPES OF LAND, SIZE OF ORGANIZATIONS

- GENERALLY NOT AN ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION

- CONTRAST WITH OTHER TYPES OF INICIATIVAS DE CONSERVACIÓN PRIVADA (ICP) AND ÁREAS PROTEGIDAS PRIVADAS (APP)
TAX LAW → STANDARDS

STANDARDS → TAX LAW
501c3 ORGANIZATIONS

1. NONPROFIT
   Sin fines de lucro

2. NON POLITICAL
   Sin vínculos políticos

3. ORGANIZED AND OPERATED EXCLUSIVELY FOR “CHARITABLE” PURPOSES (WHICH INCLUDE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT)
   Organizado y operado únicamente con fines benéficos, lo que incluye la conservación y protección ambiental.
1. EXEMPTION FROM INCOME TAXES
Exención de los impuestos a la renta

2. ELIGIBILITY FOR FOUNDATION GRANTS
Idoneidad para postular a fondos

3. DONATIONS (INCLUDING LAND AND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS) ARE DEDUCTIBLE FOR THE DONOR (WITH LIMITS)
El donante podrá, con ciertos límites, descontar las donaciones de sus impuestos (incluyendo terrenos y servidumbres de conservación)
TAX LAW / Ley tributaria

TAX LAW REQUIRES DONATIONS OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS TO BE
La ley tributaria exige que las donaciones de servidumbres de conservación sean:

1. TO A “QUALIFIED ORGANIZATION” (501c3 OR GOV)
   A una organización calificada

2. EXCLUSIVELY FOR CONSERVATION PURPOSES
   Únicamente con fines de conservación

3. IN PERPETUITY
   A perpetuidad

4. NO SURFACE MINING
   Sin fines mineros de explotación superficial
THE LAND TRUST MOVEMENT
El movimiento de los Land Trust

1970  Earth Day
1976  Land Trusts come to the Western U.S. / Temp. tax legislation
1981  Uniform Conservation Easement Act
1982  Land Trust Exchange founded

1985  First Rally – 257 participants
1989  Name changed to Land Trust Alliance
1989  First Standards & Practices published
2006  Land Trust Accreditation Commission founded

2017  Latest edition of Standards & Practices
2018  Most recent LTA Rally - 1644 participants
2019  1056 LTA member Land Trusts / 421 Accredited Land Trusts

LTA MEMBER LAND TRUSTS HAVE PROTECTED OVER 56 MILLION ACRES (22.6 MILL HÁ) OF LAND IN THE U.S.

El Land Trust Alliance protege al día de hoy mas de 22.6 millones de há. en EEUU
LAND TRUST STANDARDS AND PRACTICES
Ethical and Technical Guidelines for the Responsible Operation of a Land Trust (12 Standards)

ESTÁNDARES Y BUENAS PRÁCTICAS
Directrices Éticas y Técnicas para el Manejo Responsable de un Land Trust (12 estándares)

STANDARD 1
ETHICS, MISSION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Ética, Misión y Participación de la Comunidad

STANDARD 2
COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS
Cumplimiento de las Leyes

STANDARD 3
BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY
Responsabilidad de la Directiva
STANDARD 4
CONFLICTS OF INTEREST
Conflictos de Interés

STANDARD 5
FUNDRAISING
Recaudación de Fondos

STANDARD 6
FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT
Supervisión Financiera

STANDARD 7
HUMAN RESOURCES
Recursos Humanos

STANDARD 8
EVALUATING AND SELECTING
CONSERVATION PROJECTS
Evaluar y Seleccionar
Proyectos de Conservación

STANDARD 9
ENSURING SOUND TRANSACTIONS
Asegurar Transacciones Sanas y Transparentes

STANDARD 10
TAX BENEFITS AND APPRAISALS
Valoraciones y Beneficios Tributarios

STANDARD 11
CONSERVATION EASEMENTS STEWARDSHIP
Administración y cuidado de Servidumbres de Conservación

STANDARD 12
FEE LAND STEWARDSHIP
Administración y cuidado de los Terrenos Adquiridos
ACCREDITATION / Acreditación

• A PROCESS FOR DOCUMENTING AND RECOGNIZING LAND TRUSTS THAT ADHERE TO THE STANDARDS & PRACTICES
  Proceso que Documenta y Reconoce la Adopción de Estándares y Buenas Prácticas por los Land Trusts

• AN INDEPENDENT COMMISSION
  Una comisión Independiente

• HEAVY DOCUMENTATION
  Mucha Documentación

• EMPHASIZES
  Enfatiza
  - Fiscal accountability / Responsabilidad Fiscal
  - Strong Organizational Leadership / Fuerte Liderazgo de la Organización
  - Sound Transactions / Transacciones Transparentes
  - Lasting Stewardship of Protected Lands / Administración Estable de Áreas Proyegidas

• RENEWED EVERY 5 YEARS
  Se Renueva cada 5 años
CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AND THE DERECHO REAL DE CONSERVACIÓN

Servidumbres de Conservación y el Derecho Real de Conservación.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS MUST BE
Las Servidumbres de Conservación deben cumplir con

• TO A “QUALIFIED ORGANIZATION” (501c3 OR GOVERNMENT)
Ser una organización calificada

• EXCLUSIVELY FOR CONSERVATION PURPOSES
Tener Exclusivamente Fines de Conservación Ambiental

• IN PERPETUITY
Ser a perpetuidad

• NO SURFACE MINING
No tener minería superficial

COMPARE WITH THE DERECHO REAL DE CONSERVACIÓN
en comparación al Derecho Real de Conservación
CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AND THE DERECHO REAL DE CONSERVACIÓN
Servidumbres de Conservación y el Derecho Real de Conservación.

SOME ISSUES / Algunos Asuntos

• BASELINE DOCUMENTATION
  Documentación Básica

• STEWARDSHIP & MONITORING
  Administración y Monitoreo

• SUBSEQUENT OWNERS
  Propietarios Posteriores

• ECONOMICS – POST CREATION VALUE
  Economía y Creación de Valor

• AMENDMENTS
  Enmiendas
WHAT MIGHT WORK IN CHILE?
¿Que podría funcionar en Chile?

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE WEB SITE

https://www.landtrustalliance.org/
THANK YOU VERY MUCH
Muchas gracias !