

What Are Land Trusts?

A land trust is a nonprofit organization that works with private landowners to voluntarily conserve land through fee title acquisitions—ownership that allows land trusts to have direct control over the land—and conservation easements—a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. Land trusts provide an ideal mechanism for connecting with landowners who may be interested in conservation.

Top 10 Tips For Working with Land Trusts on Bird Conservation

1. POWERFUL AGENTS OF LAND CONSERVATION

From 2005 to 2010, over 1,700 local, state, and national land trusts in the United States have more than doubled the number of acres conserved to 47 million acres – an area larger than 90% of all the land protected by national parks. In the West, there are 126 land trusts that have conserved a total of 4.9 million acres.

2. A COMMUNITY OF PASSIONATE PEOPLE

The land trust community consists of more than 15,600 board members, 12,000 staff, and 347,000 active volunteers nationwide. Local, state, and national land trusts are fueled by the support of dedicated everyday people, land use planners, lawyers, conservationists, and scientists who are all dedicated to achieving their conservation missions.

3. LEADING AUTHORITIES ON PRIVATE LAND ACQUISITION

Over 60% of the land area in the United States is privately owned, and more than 100 bird species have $\geq 50\%$ of their U.S. breeding distribution on private lands (*State of the Birds, Private Lands, 2013*). In addition, biodiversity conservation must include private land, as habitat for 95% of all federally threatened and endangered flora and fauna is on private land (*Wilcove et al. 1996*). Land trusts effectively work with private landowners through purchasing land, negotiating voluntary conservation easements, and providing stewardship.

4. BENEFITING BIRD HABITAT

Land trusts are largely benefiting birds and habitat. Of the total acreage protected by land trusts in the West, more than 50% of land benefits bird habitats, wildlife habitats, and various other important natural areas. Of these habitats, more than 50% of the lands are forest and agricultural regions.

5. ALL-ENCOMPASSING BIRD STEWARDS

Land trusts contribute to bird conservation in many diverse ways. Hundreds of land trusts from the West report inventorying birds (56%), hosting bird walks (54%), monitoring birds (37%), installing and maintaining nest boxes (32%), and managing invasive species (51%) and other habitat types (56%).

6. BIRDS AND LAND TRUSTS ACHIEVE A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

Land trusts can help birds, and birds can benefit land trusts as well. The shared passion for birds and bird conservation has the ability to raise funds for land protection, connect with new donors and members, educate the community about the benefits of land protection, and engage all people in achieving their conservation goals.



Pictured above: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Indian River Lakes Conservancy staffs collaborating during a site visit on Golden-winged Warbler habitat.

7. MORE RESOURCES MEAN MORE CONSERVATION

The greatest barrier for land trusts to conserve more bird habitat is funding. More than 70% of all land trusts in the West strongly agree that their ability to conduct bird habitat conservation would increase with the following types of resources: new grant programs and matching fund sources for grants for birds and habitat, time and tools to allow staff or volunteers to inventory or monitor birds, access to experts to conduct site visits and help sessions, and technical support for writing grants and navigating region-specific bird information.

8. EXPERIENCED CONTRIBUTORS TO BIRD CONSERVATION

In the last five years, nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ of all Western land trusts put land under conservation easement to protect birds, and nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of all Western land trusts considered information about birds when creating their management plans and prioritized land for protection due to bird conservation benefits.

9. LIMITED COLLABORATION DESPITE COMMON GOALS

Despite sharing numerous goals, there has been limited collaboration between land trusts and the bird conservation community. Several ongoing partnerships between land trusts and bird conservation organizations highlight the synergy and conservation benefits that can be realized when the groups come together. One example can be seen in the Wings Over Western Waters collaboration among land trusts, the Intermountain West Joint Venture, and the Pacific Coast Joint Venture.

10. BIRD CONSERVATIONISTS CAN HELP

Birds and land trusts currently need your support. You can do so by becoming a member or donor of your local, state, or national land trust, by becoming a volunteer and helping with tasks such as inventorying or monitoring birds, or by simply spreading awareness about the work and goals of land trusts.

These tips are based on a national survey of land trusts and their bird conservation interests and activities conducted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (Dayer, Rodewald, Stedman, Cosbar, and Rohrbaugh, 2014) and a national census of land trusts conducted by the Land Trust Alliance).

For more information on land trusts, see... <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/>
For more information about the Cornell Lab's research and Land Trust Initiative,
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