



PRESS RELEASE

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DORIS DUKE
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Environment Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Grant Strengthens Oversight of Local Land Trusts

Funding Will Support National Accreditation Program

New York, NY—The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF) today announced a \$1 million grant over three years to the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) to launch a formal accreditation program designed to strengthen the governance and practices of the nation's land trusts.

According to Dr. Joan Spero, president of DDCF, the grant is intended to help maintain public faith and confidence in land trusts by assuring donors and others that these organizations follow a stringent set of standards and practices in all of their transactions.

"The grassroots conservation work of land trusts has never been more critical to the preservation of wildlife habitat throughout this country," said Dr. Spero. "At the same time, public and private partners are demanding transparency and impeccable integrity from nonprofits. The foundation is pleased to award this grant to help ensure that those who are protecting land do so in accordance with the highest ethical and legal standards."

A vital sector of the land conservation movement, land trusts undertake or facilitate conservation land transactions in communities throughout the country. Collectively, local and regional land trusts have protected 9.4 million acres and continue to conserve approximately 800,000 new acres each year.

The DDCF grant will enable LTA to create an accreditation program designed to evaluate land trusts by how they comply with a set of standards that cover such areas as conflicts of interest, board accountability, financial management, and real-estate transactions. The program will also assess if land trusts are properly managing lands in their care.

Dr. Mark Shaffer, DDCF Program Director for the environment, said that he hopes other funders will invest in this more rigorous approach to land trust governance and oversight. Land trusts are the fastest-growing institutional component of the land conservation sector, he said, with more than 1,500 nationwide. The vast majority has few or no professional staff and limited resources. He noted that LTA estimates it will take \$3.1 million to design and launch the accreditation initiative.

"The foundation believes that a robust, well-governed land trust movement serves the public interest and we are putting our money behind that conviction," Dr. Shaffer said. "But DDCF's investment, although

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significant, only covers about a third of the total cost. The land conservation community needs other foundations and individuals to help LTA implement this program across the country.”

Dr. Shaffer also applauded LTA’s leadership for addressing issues of oversight and governance in the land trust movement. For the past year, LTA has been revising its *Conservation Easement Handbook* and *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, and starting in July will require that organizations adopt these standards as a condition of membership. As the national service organization for local and regional land trusts, LTA’s membership represents 1,200 of the nation’s 1,500 land trusts.

“This accreditation program will go a long way toward reinforcing the credibility of land trusts as a whole,” said Dr. Shaffer. “The work of these organizations is too important to be undermined by the well-publicized abuses of a few rogue actors. In the future, when donors or landowners work with an accredited land trust, they can be confident that they are dealing with a reputable organization that puts conservation first.”

The mission of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation is to improve the quality of people’s lives through grants supporting the performing arts, wildlife conservation, medical research and the prevention of child maltreatment and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke’s properties. More information on the foundation is available at www.ddcf.org.

The mission of the Land Trust Alliance is to promote voluntary land conservation by providing the strategic leadership, training, and resources needed by the nation’s 1,537 local and regional land trusts to succeed in conserving land for the benefit of communities and natural systems. Land trusts are volunteer-led, local charities that accept private, voluntary donations of land, fulfilling landowners’ wishes to keep their land as it is for their children and future generations. For more information, please visit www.lta.org.