



## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

Connecticut Land Trust Advancement Initiative:  
*Growing Conservation & Stewardship Capacity  
by Building Stronger Land Trusts*

A Project funded by the USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Conservation Technical Assistance Program

Project Director

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Lead Partner

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Collaborating Partners

Land Trust Alliance  
Connecticut Environmental Review Team

*One of the following:*

Lower Connecticut River & Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange  
Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative  
Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership

## PROJECT SUMMARY

### **I. GENERAL SUMMARY**

The overarching goal of the *Connecticut Land Trust Advancement Initiative* (the Initiative) is to significantly strengthen Connecticut's land trusts and their capacity to save the region's natural heritage, agricultural lands, and its high quality of life. In support of this goal, we will:

- Invest in programs that will advance land protection and stewardship.
- Assist land trusts in strategically identifying and conserving critical lands.
- Help land trusts increase the pace of land conservation across the state.
- Raise the visibility of land trust work in Connecticut.
- Foster and support Connecticut's Regional Conservation Partnerships.
- Increase land trusts' knowledge of, and capability of, obtaining federal and state funding.
- Assist Connecticut land trusts that are accredited or preparing for accreditation—demonstrating their commitment to upholding national standards of excellence.

### **II. GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS**

The launch of this Initiative will focus on the land trusts that comprise **one** of the following Regional Conservation Partnerships in Connecticut, the boundaries of which are identified by the numbers on the map below. It is our goal to make this an established program of CLCC and expand the Initiative into the other two, and eventually all, Connecticut RCPs in the future.

- Lower Connecticut River & Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange
- Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative
- Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership

### **III. PROJECT TIMELINE**

October 1, 2014 – March 30, 2016

### **IV. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OPPORTUNITY**

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) was formed in 2006 as a coalition of land trusts, statewide conservation organizations, town conservation and open space commissions, garden clubs and private individuals working together for the common interests of Connecticut's conservation community. Since its founding, CLCC has worked to increase the pace, quality, scale and permanency of land conservation in Connecticut while assuring the perpetual, high quality stewardship of conserved lands.

CLCC contends that strategic investments in the all-volunteer land trust community will improve conservation excellence, impact, and sustainability at the local level, reduce risk to the entire land trust community with better business practices, and improve the conservation impact of these small organizations. To that end, CLCC's current programs and the work of its partners have demonstrated that training, peer networking opportunities and strategic collaborations are strengthening the conservation community in Connecticut.

### **V. SUMMARY OF PROJECT COMPONENTS AND LAND TRUST PARTICIPATION**

#### *A. Phase I: Assessing Land Trust Needs & Identifying Initiative Projects (October 2014 – April 2015)*

The first phase of the project will involve assessing the needs of the participating RCP land trusts, and identifying **2-3 Initiative Projects** structured around the following three (3) project goal areas (Initiative Goal Areas):

- **Organizational Sustainability**

- Long term stewardship and conservation defense
- Shared conservation vision

Note that each RCP land trust may only participate in one Initiative Project, as deemed appropriate by CLCC, the project partners and the Circuit Rider.

**1. Summary of Phase I activities:**

- **Identify Participating Land Trusts:** RCP land trusts interested in participating in the Initiative will be asked to sign a letter of commitment which will set forth the conditions of their participation including:
  - Organizational Membership in CLCC
  - \$500 cash contribution
  - In-kind contribution in the form of board/staff member participation, estimated at approximately 2-3 hours per month for 18 months (in addition to attendance at the regularly scheduled RCP meeting and one additional meeting described below).
  
- **Convene a Facilitated Retreat:** Participating land trusts will send at least one representative to a 6-8 hour, consultant-led retreat to fully explore their potential needs and identify areas of collaboration/strategic alliances structured around the Initiative Goal Areas. The retreat and resulting written meeting report will provide a clearer understanding of:
  - How well the RCP land trusts are implementing *Land Trust Standards and Practices*;
  - their readiness for land trust accreditation;
  - areas where they need to improve;
  - how the RCP land trusts could best use Circuit Rider support for the greatest benefit to their respective organizations and communities;
  - how to further engage board members in the work of the land trust; and
  - how to more effectively collaborate, share services and move forward on discussions related to potential organizational mergers between land trusts.

***NOTE: This meeting will be a more extensive version of the June 9 workshop that many of the RCP land trusts attended on Collaborations facilitated by Sharon Danosky.***

- **Project Recommendations:** The consultant will prepare a written meeting report that captures the results of the meeting and makes recommendations for next steps, including identification of potential Initiative Projects and RCP land trust alliances.
  
- **Individual Land Trust Board Input:** CLCC and project partners will attend individual RCP land trust board meetings, if desired, to further explore the written meeting report findings and recommendations as the same relate to their respective land trust needs.
  
- **Confirmation of Projects, Participants and Circuit Rider(s):** CLCC and project partners will confirm participants, select the Circuit Rider and additional consultants in preparation for project implementation.

B. *Phase 2: Implementation of Initiative Projects, Circuit Rider Coaching and Mentoring (April 2015- March 2016)*

## 1. Summary of Phase 2 Activities:

- **Circuit Rider will work with land trusts individually and collectively for each project:**  
Circuit Rider, with technical assistance as needed from additional consultants, will undertake organizational advancement work with 2-3 groups of land trusts within the RCP on Initiative Projects. *(For example, the Circuit Rider, with a technical assistance from ERT or other consultant, works with a group of 5 land trusts from the RCPs to develop procedures for completing management plans for their respective preserves and evaluation criteria for future projects. The Circuit Rider and consultant can help complete management plans and/or identify additional resources (i.e. students) to help complete plans.)*
  - Meetings with participating RCP land trusts will be scheduled as needed as determined by the Circuit Rider and other project consultants.
  - CLCC, project partners, and the Circuit Rider will attend regularly scheduled RCP meetings to report on and discuss progress on each respective Initiative Project.
  - Initiative Project deliverables will depend upon the particular project. See Sample Deliverables below.
  - CLCC, project partners, and the Circuit Rider will join Initiative Project participants in a RCP Summit convened at CLCC's 2016 Connecticut Land Conservation Conference.

## **VI. SAMPLE PROJECT DELIVERABLES**

1. Prepare management/stewardship plans and/or baseline documentation reports and strategic conservation plans for 5+ land trusts within the RCP, thereby improving their stewardship programs and enabling them to be eligible for national conservation defense insurance *(Goal Area: Long term stewardship and conservation defense)*
2. Enable 5+ land trusts within the RCP to organize its records and develop a record keeping policy in accordance with the Land Trust Standards and Practices *(Goal Area: Organizational Sustainability)*
3. Facilitate a collaborative project amongst 2+ land trusts within the RCP that want to partner with another entity to develop, for example, a community garden, urban bird habitat, composting facility, ambassador landscape, or other collaborative multi-faceted conservation effort. *(Goal Area: Shared Conservation Vision)*
4. Enable 5+ land trusts within the RCP to embark on a communications campaign to increase visibility and build a broad base of public support for their work. *(Goal Area: Organizational Sustainability)*
5. Assist 5+ land trusts within the RCP in their preparation for accreditation or re-accreditation, including, for example, providing clerical support to help clean up project files, scan documents, and compile their application. The Circuit Rider can support the application process, freeing up existing staff to keep the momentum on project-related work. *(Goal Area: Organizational Sustainability)*
6. Facilitate collaborations/merger discussions and implementation for 2-3+ land trusts within the region, including a project to share services, such as a stewardship coordinator to work on restoration activities, annual monitoring, trail work and other related activities. The Circuit Rider can facilitate a discussion with these land trusts to develop a job description and budget to collectively hire or identify a volunteer for the position. *(Goal Area: All three)*