

WEANTINOGE HERITAGE LAND TRUST APPLIES FOR NATIONAL ACCREDITATION.

PUBLIC INPUT IS WELCOME

Founded in 1965 to benefit the general public through the preservation of natural areas, fish and wildlife, and working farmland, Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust is now the largest land trust in Connecticut and the 18th largest in the United States by the number of land holdings.

Over our almost 50 year history, Weantinoge has permanently protected more than 9,000 acres in 18 communities throughout Northwest Connecticut. The organization's protected lands include designated wilderness areas, 15 working farms, streambelts, viewsheds, critical watershed lands, and 14 nature preserves open to the public with 18 miles of hiking trails.

Weantinoge's Board of Directors prioritizes strategic regional acquisitions and science-based land preservation and management. Weantinoge works with local communities and conservation partners to identify threatened and ecologically valuable properties for permanent protection and to promote strategic regional conservation goals that extend beyond town boundaries. Once acquired, Weantinoge applies the highest stewardship standards and practices to ensure the lands' natural character is forever safeguarded.

As a leader in regional conservation, Weantinoge has received the state's highest land trust award for land preservation, was recognized by the Connecticut Land Conservation Council for its leadership role and collaborative land conservation efforts, and was awarded a 2013 EPA Environmental Merit Award for its outstanding commitment to preserving and protecting the natural environment.

In addition to its conservation work, each year Weantinoge provides free environmental education and outreach programs to more than 200 children and families.

But, Weantinoge is just one of many land trusts doing this kind of extraordinary work. Across the country, local citizens and communities have come together to form more than 1,700 land trusts to save the places they love. Conserving land helps ensure clean air and drinking water; safe, healthy food; scenic landscapes and views; recreational

places; and habitat for the diversity of life on earth. In addition to health and food benefits, conserving land saves tax dollars by encouraging more efficient development and reduces the need for expensive water filtration facilities. Community leaders in land trusts throughout the country have worked with willing landowners to save over 47 million acres of farms, forests, parks and places people care about, including land transferred to public agencies and protected via other means. Strong, well-managed land trusts provide local communities with effective champions and caretakers of their critical land resources, and safeguard the land through the generations.

To ensure its standards and practices meet the highest in the field, Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust is applying for accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. This accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. "Accreditation is a rigorous, top to bottom evaluation of Weantinoge's operations, from governance and record keeping, to land management and easement stewardship," says Catherine Rawson, Weantinoge's Executive Director. "Our application demonstrates Weantinoge's commitment to operating at the highest professional and ethical standards."

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs. Hiram Williams, Weantinoge's Board President, adds "Given Weantinoge's success as the largest land trust in Connecticut, and one of the largest in the country, the organization must lead by example. We have applied for accreditation so we can show landowners, community leaders, and the public that their trust in our work is well placed."

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how Weantinoge complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see <http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/tips-and-tools/indicator-practices>.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land

Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments: (fax) 518-587-3183; (mail) 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. Comments on Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust's application will be most useful by November 25, 2014.