

Assisting Land Trusts - for 25 Years¹

PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES OF
THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE OF BC

Ben van Drimmelen | May 2021

¹ From Goal 2 of the LTABC Strategic Plan – “Encourage and assist member land trusts to achieve excellence”.

Introduction

The Land Trust Alliance of BC has accomplished much since its incorporation in 1997. While most of the resources and publications produced over those years are available under the “Resources” tab at <https://ltabc.ca/>, the context and sequence are missing. A brief overview of the early history of the organization was described in the September 2020 issue of the LTABC E-News newsletterⁱ. That article focused on the formation and evolution of the organization and dealt with only a few of the many initiatives undertaken. Sheila Harrington was the executive director of LTABC from its formation through 2010. Ben van Drimmelen was a board member for several scattered terms between 2000 and 2020. Ben, assisted by Sheila, compiled this second report to capture more of what LTABC produced and accomplished.

When BC’s *Land Title Act* was amended² in the summer of 1994, government-approved non-government organizations were for the first time able to buy or accept a conservation covenant on any parcel of private land. A provincial-scale land trust was already in place – the Nature Trust of BC had been created in 1971 and Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy of Canada were seasoned national land trusts. However, most community-based conservation groups did not have experience in acquiring such interests in land.

Fortunately, one nonprofit society, Turtle Island Earth Stewards, was familiar with similar “conservation easements” in the United States, so it co-hosted a one-day workshop on land trusts in 1995. Thus informed, a number of land trusts incorporated and acquired charitable status. They quickly realized that operating a land trust was a complicated matter. There was much sharing of information but it became increasingly apparent that there was a need for an umbrella organization that could provide information for new and developing land trusts.

In February 1997 several land trusts gathered in Nanaimo and unanimously voted to create a land trust alliance. A board of directors drafted a constitution and bylaws for incorporation. A few months later, Sheila Harrington was hired to coordinate a land trust conference, and the first Seminar Series was held in Victoria, bringing together emerging land trusts and interested individuals for presentations and workshops. It drew keen participants from Galiano, Comox, Victoria, the Fraser Valley, Salt Spring Island, the Islands Trust Conservancy and other developing land trusts. The Seminar Series became an annual gathering to keep its members connected and inspired by each other’s successes and lessons. It also kept land trusts informed about diverse responsibilities: engaging landowners, technical requirements of land deals, monitoring, mapping, legal requirements and dealing with potential but inevitable infractions down the road. Each two-day conference was held in a different region or location and featured visits to nearby areas of natural interest.

The Land Trust Alliance of BC was formally registered as a charity in 1998 and had 20 members (individuals and land trusts) at its initial annual general meeting.

² *Land Title Amendment Act*, SBC 1994, c. 44.

The First Decade

The task of the new board and its executive director was bringing land trusts together to share the tools and methods of protecting private land and to celebrate and publicize their successes. There was also an outreach component, so LTABC immediately began working with groups across Canada, the US Land Trust Alliance and, later, the American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts.

An annual summer training program was established in 1999. Rather than each small land trust having to provide its own training, students were offered a week of intensive training at a camp on Salt Spring Island with instructors from various land trusts and professionals in both government and resource sectors. Over the years, over 50 students completed this training and many have gone on to work in the conservation movement.

By 2000, LTABC had 25 member land trusts and another 65 individual and other associated organization members. A new provincial insurance program reduced costs for member land trusts. The organization's D. Barstead developed an intricate *Protected Land Registry*. That fall, the first semi-annual magazine, *The Kingfisher*, was issued; there would be 22 issues produced over the next decade.

LTABC was also contributing to research papers. One such was *Three Landholder Contact Programs in British Columbia*ⁱⁱ, which examined the strengths and weaknesses of contact programs from the perspective of participating landholders and described the biological and community consequences of their actions. In 2003, LTABC conducted and reported on a survey on the state of land trusts in the provinceⁱⁱⁱ. That same year, the organization directed and supported a study on options to protect agricultural land - *Protection of Land with Agricultural Uses*^{iv} - in response to government refusal to allow conservation covenants on lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve.

In 2004, LTABC was invited by the federal government to research national trends. The result, *What Makes a Successful Stewardship and Conservation Organization?*^v, was an early look into best practices of six Canadian non-profit stewardship and conservation organizations. Concurrently, the organization carried out a *National Ecogift Monitoring Survey*^{vi} of monitoring practices across Canada. That produced improved guidelines for the national Land Trust Standards and Practices which would be finalized in 2005.

LTABC also undertook a very large project of collecting and compiling over 800 sample land trust documents onto a compact disk (*Land Trust Best Practices*^{vii}) for the membership. The organization assisted in the formation of a national organization, the Canadian Land Trust Alliance. In the meantime, workshops continued, sharing expertise on subjects such as drafting covenant agreements and effective monitoring.

In 2005, LTABC's L. Horsfall wrote *Safeguarding Canada's Wealth Bringing Stewardship and Conservation into the Economy*^{viii}, a report that examined contemporary economics, introduced new ecological valuation methods and suggested values specific to stewardship and conservation. By then, 28 of the 34 member land trusts owned land or covenants, so LTABC carried out another review of monitoring practices, *Reviewing Conservation Easements & Covenants in BC*^{ix}.

Most BC land trusts were on the coast and most of the organization's activities had to that time been focused on them, so the Seminar Series moved to Naramata in 2005 to link with land trusts and conservationists in the Okanagan.

In 2006, LTABC undertook a major community mapping project whereby islanders created artistic community maps. Those maps formed an exhibit that toured Vancouver, Victoria and Salt Spring Island and was published as *Islands in the Salish Sea - A Community Atlas*.³ The *LTABC Guide to Baseline Inventories*^x was published the same year.

Interviewing land owners, donors and land trusts for the *People Protecting Places* case studies booklet^{xi} was particularly rewarding.⁴ Production continued with the publication of *Property Assessments on Conservation Lands - A Guide for Land Owners, Land Trusts and Covenant Holders*^{xii}.

The Second Decade

In just over a decade, LTABC had provided advice to emerging land trusts and developed an impressive array of resources. In 2009, the organization extended a program of outreach to associated land use professionals. The first publication was targeted to developers - *Conservation Covenants, A Guide for Developers and Planning Departments*^{xiii}. It subsequently produced guidebooks for land use planners, land owners and covenant holders. The executive director, in collaboration with professionals in their respective fields, wrote articles for legal, planning and real estate journals, gave presentations on land trust tools to provincial legal and appraisal conferences and developed videos and brochures to publicize the growing land trust movement. Periodic revisions to update its publications continued; in 2010, LTABC revised the 2006 booklet *Property Assessments on Conservation Lands*^{xiv}.

In response to increasing concerns about climate change, LTABC published several research papers in 2008 and 2009 on carbon sequestration values of conserved land and forests. It initiated a report, *Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change through the Conservation of Nature in British Columbia*^{xv}. The idea of carbon offsets continued to gain ground in 2010, so the organization explored further, examining whether acquired and covenanted lands could be used to raise revenue through such offsets. It initially commissioned a report by forester D. Brinkman and ecologist R. Hebda, *Credible Conservation Offsets of Natural Areas in British Columbia*^{xvi}. That was followed by a summary report, *A Revenue Tool to Conserve Natural Areas, Watersheds, and Community Resilience* by B. Penn^{xvii}. A separate organization, Natural Carbon, was formed to register conservation offset projects, but land trusts were generally too small to offset enough carbon to be economical; LTABC moved on to other priorities.

In 2010, Paul McNair became the executive director. The organization began a student intern program (by 2020, some 30 students would have gained hands-on experience working for LTABC).

³ *Islands in the Salish Sea - A Community Atlas* made the top 5 BC Book awards and won 3rd for historical literature.

⁴ To reach beyond print, radio and television ads were created the next year based on those case studies.

In 2013, LTABC carried out a revision of *Greening Your Title - A Guide to Best Practices for Conservation Covenants*^{xviii} for West Coast Environmental Law. That was followed in 2015 by collaborating with Give Green Canada in revising and updating a planned giving guide, *Green Legacies – A Donor’s Guide for BC*^{xix}.

The Third Decade

In 2017, LTABC broadened its scope in anticipation of Environment & Climate Change Canada’s awarding \$20 million to community land trusts through the Natural Habitat Conservation Program. Three Alliances – Réseau de Milieux Naturels Protégés, the Ontario Land Trust Alliance and LTABC – worked collectively and cooperatively to engage with the federal program to bring capacity-building services to local and regional land trusts across Canada. The Alliances provided for increased education, communications and promotion, and adherence to the Canadian Land Trust Standards & Practices in relation to that program.

The same year, LTABC received a Canada 150 grant to boost social media presence; by 2020, there were more than 15,000 people engaged on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

In 2018-2019, partnering with UVIC and researcher K. Kalynka, the organization undertook a comprehensive overview of land trusts across Canada, providing valuable baseline research for future studies. American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts (now American Friends of Canadian Conservation) partnered with LTABC on a cross-border conservation study between 2018 and 2020. Resources were published to promote this effort and research was gathered for a future conservation program.

In 2019 the Canadian Land Trust Standards & Practices were revised and the former Canadian Land Trust Alliance, dormant for seven years, re-emerged as the Centre for Land Conservation. LTABC and four BC land trusts are on the Centre’s Advisory Board. LTABC updated its on-line standards and practices assessment tool. In 2020, the organization produced *Developing a Conservation Plan: A Basic Guide for Land Trusts*^{xx} to identify and more effectively conserve the lands that are most important to achieving a particular land trust’s mission.

In 2021, in recognition of the then-current covid-19 pandemic, the Seminar Series went on line, with eight one-hour webinars.

LTABC is now providing programs to British Columbia and Alberta and to land trusts requiring programs in the Prairies. Twenty separate guides are collected in a *Natural Legacies Toolkit*^{xxi} for landowners, land trusts, municipal governments and professionals. LTABC continues to send out a monthly newsletter, E-News, with updates on news, events and funding deadlines for the conservation community and the public.

In March 2021, LTABC launched an interactive tool for Baseline Data Reporting. On behalf of the Alliances in Ontario and Quebec, the organization coordinated a new national website that brought together resources for land trusts on a national basis.

And so the projects continue. The Seminar Series carries on, having been held annually until 2013, then after a brief hiatus, again in 2016, 2017 and 2019; in 2021, it was held on line as a series of webinars. By then, LTABC had 36 member land trusts, comprising over 95% of the land

trust community in BC. The organization also represented 15 associate organizations, including four land trusts in Alberta.

Endnotes

- ⁱ <https://us17.campaign-archive.com/?u=25cdf5f4bc131477dcf71611c&id=cf9aac3ea3>.
- ⁱⁱ <https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/landholder.pdf>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ J. Scull, 2003. *Land Trusts and Conservancies in British Columbia*. <https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/survey2003.pdf>.
- ^{iv} <https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/agriculture.pdf>.
- ^v https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/LT_Report.pdf.
- ^{vi} https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Ecogift_monitoring_%20final_report.pdf.
- ^{vii} <https://ltabc.ca/publications-a-research/land-trust-best-practices-resources-and-template-documents-2005-cd-rom/>
- ^{viii} https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Economic_ecological_values.pdf.
- ^{ix} https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Conservation_covenants_nov_4-05.pdf.
- ^x https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/LTABC_Guide_to_Baseline_Inventories_2006.pdf
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- ^{xviii} <https://www.wcel.org/publication/greening-your-title-guide-best-practices-conservation-covenant-3rd-edition>.
- ^{xix} https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/UP/Green_Legacies_2015.pdf.
- ^{xx} https://ltabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/developing-a-conservation-plan-2020_final.pdf.
- ^{xxi} <https://ltabc.ca/resources/natural-legacies-toolkit/information-land-trusts/>