

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Canadian Land Trusts Unite

Corner Brook, Newfoundland. For over a decade Canadian land trust and conservancy organizations have operated more or less independently of each other. That changed this week with the launch of a new association aimed at linking and strengthening these groups from sea to sea.

The Canadian Land Trust Alliance (CLTA)• Alliance des organismes de conservation du Canada (ADOCC) was recently announced at the *Valuing Nature Conference* in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Spokesperson and CLTA Chair Jim Smith of Alberta said in his remarks to the delegates that “voluntary private land conservation is important to Canadian communities. This organization was developed in response to that need.”

Land trusts work within their communities to protect private lands with important ecological, heritage, cultural, recreational and agricultural values. They are a fast-growing part of the non-profit sector. From a few dozen in 2000, there are now over 125 land trusts and conservancies across Canada. Some have paid staff; others are run entirely by volunteers. Typically land trusts draw support from members in the communities that benefit from their projects.

The new Alliance has four objectives: to be a united voice for land trusts; to promote and maintain public support for the work of land trusts; to be a clearing house for information among land trusts and the public, and to train staff, board members and volunteers. The Alliance will have representatives on its board from two national groups, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, as well as regional representation from Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies and British Columbia.

Smith said a key initiative of the CLTA•ADOCC will be working with member organizations to adopt a set of standards and practices. “These tools are designed to ensure that interests in lands committed to conservation by our citizens for the benefit of those who follow us will be handled with a high level of technical, ethical and governance capability.” Smith said CLTA•ADOCC on behalf of its members will be proactive in creating confidence by all Canadians in land trusts by encouraging adoption of these standards and practices. “We want our partners to know that their investments will be secure—our members will be encouraged to adopt these S&Ps for the benefit of all.”

Founding board members have worked closely with Environment Canada as the group has organized and incorporated. He thanked Environment Canada for its support, encouragement and counsel, and went on to acknowledge the Government of Canada for its recognition of the work being done by land trusts in Canadian communities. “The tangible recognition I refer to is the very important decision to remove capital gains tax from gifts of Ecologically Sensitive lands donated by private citizens to qualified land trust organizations. This will substantially reduce the burden of making a land or conservation easement gift.”

Critical start-up work was done by the Ontario Land Trust Alliance which, along with the Rideau Waterway Land Trust, was a driving force behind the formation of CLTA•ADOCC. Smith acknowledged the contributions of these groups, other provincial land trust alliances, and steering committee members in his remarks.

The group has hired as its first Executive Director, Mr. David Walker of Smiths Falls Ontario who brings valuable entrepreneurial experience from the private sector as well as from the land trust community.

CLTA•ADOCC will also help member trusts with a self-assessment process to identify areas for improvement and will organize a regular conference of land trust professionals and volunteers. Smith said the organization will encourage policy and legislation supportive of land trusts and their work.

Land trusts employ a variety of instruments to achieve their goals, including purchasing land and conservation easements, accepting donations of land and conservation easements, and utilizing leases as well as using other types of conservation agreements. Much of this protected land is open for public enjoyment.

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