

2019 MARYLAND LAND TRUST INTERVIEWS



Maryland Environmental Trust periodically surveys Maryland's local land trust community with a 5 year census – the “Land Trust Needs Assessment Survey.” Census responses are used to take pulse of Maryland's local land trusts, assess needs and identify challenges. Also, the survey is an opportunity for MET to re-evaluate its Assistance Program to ensure its external services to land trust partners are relevant, timely and align with MET's internal priorities.

Three land trust censuses have been conducted by MET; one in 2009, another in 2014 and the third in 2019. In 2019, the survey process was revised and split into two parts, a census and a series of partner interviews. The census looked at the makeup, capacity and programming of our land trust partners. (See the 2019 Maryland Land Trust Census Summary for additional details.) The interviews allowed for deeper discussion on the challenges, priorities and needs of Maryland's land trust community. The following summary focuses on the partner interviews.

MET conducted 16 partner interviews representing a subset of Maryland's non-profit land trusts. The interview group consisted of more active land trust partners. Of the 16 land trusts, 14 co-hold easements with Maryland Environmental Trust. The groups interviewed represent 17 counties and Baltimore City (one land trust works throughout the state of Maryland).

The interview group consisted of 4 all-volunteer land trusts and 12 land trusts with a range of staff. Each land trust was asked the same eight questions during the interview.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. To help us understand how you are approaching the next year, what is your top priority for 2019?
2. Do you expect to add new lands to your conservation portfolio over the next year? If so, how did you identify those areas?
3. What about financing for new easements or acquisitions, what is the number one issue you face going forward? Have you been able to take advantage of some of the other assistance available through DNR, and, if so, do you have a piece of feedback to share?
4. When you think about ongoing stewardship, what keeps you up at night?
5. There has been a lot of discussion around community-based conservation, and the idea of expanding our audiences, and making conservation more relevant to more people... what do you think is most needed here?

6. When you think about the future of your land trust as an organization.... what do you see as the biggest opportunity? The biggest threat? Do you think those hold true when thinking of the land trust community across Maryland, or would you flag something else?
 7. Describe your relationship with MET.... is there a particular service or program from MET that has been of especially high value to you? Anything where we've missed the mark? What about the opportunity to connect and collaborate with other land trusts and actors in the state, how does that factor in, if at all?
 8. Is there anything that you want to add to what we've discussed, or perhaps something we've covered that you want to highlight as especially important?
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

All 16 land trusts surveyed identified one or more of the following priority activities - with land protection, stewardship, funding and capacity building topping the list.

- **Land protection projects**

All but three land trusts plan to complete a conservation project in 2019. A few hope to expand land protection and restoration efforts, a few are aggressive. All are pursuing State or Federal funding opportunities that would allow them to grow their activities. The one is seeking to accelerate its acquisition and protection outcomes dramatically in the next year. For all, generating capital and operating for land protection activities goes hand in glove with this activity.

- **Expanding funding and support**

All land trusts emphasize the need to expand funding, with a focus on public funding for land acquisition projects. Expanding the geographies and opportunities for collaboration with programs such as DNR's Rural Legacy, DOD's REPI and ACUB, Chesapeake Bay Trust, and local and state compensatory mitigation strategies are priorities. Administrative overhead fees associated with the projects are the lifeblood for many local land trusts for current and future operations. The unpredictable nature of funding makes it difficult for land trusts to plan and be more strategic.

Land trusts are looking for innovative ways and partnerships to provide additional support to cover operational costs. A few noted that there needs to be a shift in thinking about nonprofit funding - look at what entities are doing and the value-added to communities vs. what they are spending on operational costs.

- **Organizational capacity and succession planning**

Succession for the Executive Director, staff and board members is another top priority for every land trust. Regardless of the financial health of the land trust, all recognize the need for the next wave of leadership with the right skill set. Many land trusts are exploring options to expand their (paid) staff and are "limping along" without appropriate resources.

A majority are interested in exploring opportunities for shared resources with other land trusts, including the possibility of consolidation of some functions and/or outright mergers. There is a broad sentiment that land trusts need to engage the next generation of conservation leaders to endure and become more relevant. A few land trusts inquired how to build capacity and engage

new leaders without additional resources? There is high interest in developing succession planning at the staff and board level (with or without the resources to do so).

- **Engaging community**

The vast majority of interviewed land trusts see that engaging community is a high priority, there is a wide diversity of opinion on what constitutes meaningful engagement. Land trusts that are doing “deep” community work have developed significant partnerships with landowners and partners outside of their immediate sphere to advance broad community objectives. These include school districts, businesses, social justice groups, health organizations and local governments.

Land trusts that are worrying about where the next dollar is coming from tend to focus on more immediate concerns of engagement – such as providing messaging to donors and local community groups about why their activities are essential. Roughly a third of the land trusts cannot pursue a comprehensive engagement program, though they would like to, because of limited staff, resources, or both.

- **Land use**

Several land trusts are wading into local land use issues and working with their County and municipal governments to advance innovative new partnerships. Some are having better success at this than others. County leadership change is something many land trusts are adjusting to.

- **Stewardship**

All land trusts are dealing with multiple land stewardship challenges and mentioned the need for more capacity. The lack of capacity is a major stewardship challenge – particularly because stewardship matters are often pushed to make room for “shiny” projects.

A few land trusts are exploring partnerships with colleges, corps members, volunteers, etc. to meet their program or monitoring goals. Most understood the need for a strategic plan to make sure all programs are properly managed. However, several partners also noted that if you can’t take care of the land that is “under protection” then what good is it to protect more land.

Bottom line – land trusts are still dealing with capacity issues – how to meet existing goals and continue to grow when they are already at or under resourced. This remains true for accredited land trusts as well as others.

LAND ACQUISITION

13 of 16 land trusts interviewed say they planned to make at least one land acquisition in 2019. There is a reasonably balanced mix between land trusts focused on one or two signature projects they hope to finish in 2019, and land trusts with multiple active projects they are readying to close. More funding for purchased easements and fee acquisitions was mentioned by all of the interviewees. Donated easements are *not* a priority for local land trusts.

Three land trusts aren't sure if they can make any new acquisitions due to the financial and human capacity constraint.

PARTNER QUOTES

- *Yes, we expect a big year. We have lots of active projects in the pipeline.*
- *Our mission is to preserve land. Everything else is commentary.*
- *Can't go back to the tax credits (donated) easements. Purchased easements are the future.*
- *No. Unless someone provides us funding to do so. We are very constrained from a capacity standpoint.*

How do you identify those areas?

While there is a broad spectrum of ways that land trusts identify and pursue new protection projects, most local land trusts are both opportunistic and programmatic. Generally, the land trusts with more resources and staff are being more selective about their priorities, using existing or custom GIS tools to focus on the property that is going to score high for natural and cultural resources. Several land trusts depend on programmatic funding and therefore try to pursue projects in areas that these programs cover. The administrative support purchased conservation easements provide is often critical. Smaller land trusts (i.e., one staff or all volunteer) are more opportunistic and rely on their members to attract easement projects by word of mouth and informal networking.

A few land trusts have developed or plan to develop their own GIS-based planning tools because they have found DNR's MERLIN, The Nature Conservancy programs, or Chesapeake Conservancy tools do not address their local priorities as well.

Strategic	Programmatic	Opportunistic
Use GIS-based tools	Rural Legacy	Word of mouth
Community input is part of planning	Mitigation	Outreach events
Large landscape conservation	Department of Defense	Obituaries
Specific conservation values		Cocktail parties
		Real estate referrals

PARTNER QUOTES

- *We market ourselves and what we aim to do, and people come to us through referrals. We use selection criteria to go from there. It's all about relationships.*
- *Through the assistance of multiple grants, our land trust developed a GIS-based selection tool to guide our conservation planning. Right now, we now use the tool to say yes or no to projects that are brought to us. Our next step is to integrate the tool into our strategic conservation plan to target lands we want to acquire.*
- *For purchased easements, we are looking for the gleams in the developers' eyes. The holes in the doughnuts. For donated easements, it's far less targeted.*
- *Really is demand-based. We have a spider web of folks who come to our land trust with properties and we evaluate accordingly. There is no formal methodology for project selection.*

- *Historically, it has been word of mouth and very reactive. Has allowed for some pet projects that were not necessarily the most important or strategic. Recently, we used a grant to develop a priority map and selection criteria for our county. We are using this to be more disciplined on selection. Also allows us to be more proactive about the lands we want to acquire.*

FINANCING PROJECTS

Perhaps more important than capital funding, most local land trusts say consistent funding for staffing, operating costs and walking around money to cover the upfront and ancillary costs of doing a land deal is the number one challenge for local land trusts. Having this will allow land trusts to take better advantage of state programs, be more strategic, and position them to do more fundraising. There is also concern that public capital for land acquisition is less predictable and harder to come by, for political and economic reasons. Most of the land trusts surveyed agreed that donated easements were not a primary focus as landowners are less motivated by the tax benefits, and it is difficult to secure the administrative and long-term stewardship funds for these types of projects.

A few land trusts are being highly entrepreneurial and innovative about funding. Some are facilitating the deployment of mitigation funds for land protection, restoration, and long-term stewardship purposes. There are good examples of this in rural regions.

PARTNER QUOTES

- *Any money we get – cash for preservation – comes from Rural Legacy. Period. End of story. If administrative fees from Rural Legacy could be increased then maybe we could increase our capacity.*
- *We need more staff capacity so we can be more strategic in responding to what our community wants to protect.*
- *The unpredictable nature of funding makes it difficult to plan. We have limited capacity so outreach efforts and other programs are based on amount of funding our land trust expects to receive.*
- *We are severely underfunded. It's hard to find funding in the community we serve.*
- *It's time to expand Rural Legacy areas to other areas that need protection and concentrate work there.*
- *Public funding can be too bureaucratic. Funding is limited and it takes a while to wait in line.*
- *Raising support to maintain and offset insurance programming and stewardship costs is a challenge.*

Feedback on Other Assistance from DNR

Most land trusts do engage with DNR in some way. Generally, DNR's science, data, and prioritization efforts are highly valued. Some do not see DNR as always operating in the best interests of the local community. Overall, there seem to be a few areas for DNR to focus on concerning local land trusts.

Programming	Project Pace/ Project Timeline	Education	Data/ Maps	Stewardship
Rural Legacy is the lifeblood of many local land trusts. Land trusts are interested in expanding partnerships with DNR that would help their bottom line, increase administrative funding and support additional staff.	DNR moves slowly. With additional up-front risk capital, a local land trust could step in and help secure priority sites before they are lost.	There is a hunger to learn more about stateside and local side POS funding and understand how those resources could be developed for community priorities in different parts of the state.	Some land trusts find DNR's data as helpful. Others see it cumbersome and difficult to use.	Some land trusts are dissatisfied by DNR's lack of attention to matters related to the stewardship of lands that are jointly protected under the Rural Legacy Program.

PARTNER QUOTES

- *DNR is not an affective partner in addressing Rural Legacy stewardship issues.*
- *Good partnership on state land acquisition – symbiotic and helps achieve our mission to protect priority lands. However, for technical support we look to FWS more than DNR.*
- *We have problems with data we have received, where we cannot use it. We have gone ahead and created our own data and tools.*
- *The only assistance we received from DNR is related to POS or Rural Legacy. We do not have a good relationship with DNR on monitoring.*
- *DNR has been a good partner – and the county is helpful too.*
- *Is there assistance? DNR is not a friend to many in this area.*
- *DNR has not been helpful in terms of funding, but has been very helpful for expertise – very helpful on explaining existing GIS and mapping tools. Christine Conn and Wildlife and Heritage are very helpful in terms of data.*

STEWARDSHIP

Universally, all local and regional land trusts view long term stewardship as a significant issue that must be dealt with. Not everyone sees it is a high enough priority for funders, agencies, counties, and others. Consequently, it is pushed to the bottom of the list of priorities. The expression “whistling past the graveyard” is the sentiment we acknowledged in each discussion.

Land trusts are grappling with limited capacity and the continued push to do more with less. For example, land trusts struggle with limited capacity (both in staff and funding) to simultaneously achieve minimum easement compliance while expanding services to better help landowners and their community.

Many noted the need for succession planning for staff – what happens when so-and-so retires? Who will handle stewardship? What is the process to hire and train a replacement while maintaining the continuity of care? All land trusts are limited in their capacity to “lift all boats.”

What keeps you up at night when you think about long term stewardship?

- Aging volunteers
- Staff retirement/ succession planning
- Changing ownership and title changes
- The IRS and lawsuits
- Having the necessary local relationships
- No endowment/ dedicated funds for stewardship
- Old, poorly drafted easements
- Unpredictable stewardship issues like climate, flooding, and invasive species

PARTNER QUOTES

- *If we can't take care of the land under protection, then what good is it to protect the land?*
- *For our fee lands, we are not actively stewarding. Many are remote, and we resist providing public access because that invites more problems. For easements, we get to about half. Non-compliance worries me.*
- *Volunteers monitoring easements are not as thorough as they need to be. Nothing may come of this today or tomorrow, but in 20 years, something will happen and it will be because of something that happened (or did not happen) today.*
- *We are working with limited capacity to simultaneously achieve minimum compliance while expanding services for how we can help landowners.*
- *County easements are not getting monitored and dumping is a significant problem. The county does not want to deal with it because it is politically risky. This is a breach of public trust and a significant problem here. The county would instead focus on more sign-ups than deal with stewardship and monitoring because of the intense development pressure.*
- *The IRS concerns us! — also, successor landowners, title changes and lawsuits.*
- *We don't have a structured endowment. We don't require stewardship funding because not all donors can afford it.*
- *We need succession planning for staff. Staff retirement, hiring/training replacements and the need for continuity of care are important.*
- *Stewardship component has been a lower priority because there are urgent fires (i.e., illegal wedding barn) that require attention and are a distraction from ongoing stewardship needs.*
- *Stewardship is just a grind.*

Beyond the monitoring visits:

- *It's more than just monitoring* — People hear stewardship and they think monitoring program, but it's more than that. It's maintaining relationships. Its education, engagement and sometimes defense with each successor landowner.
- *Successor landowners* — Not everyone knows that the land they just bought comes with an easement. How do you handle conversation after that?

- *Records* — It's maintaining records into perpetuity – what does that look like? Decades of essential documents and monitoring reports and photographs (and storage of these items). These essential documents include multiple types of media ranging from slides to JPEGs; paper reports to PDF's. What are today's document management standards?
- *Going one step above* — Enhanced stewardship and restoration projects on protected lands
- *Growing the budget* — Raising stewardship funds to support programming as we grow – into perpetuity.
- *New tools and technology* — Training staff and volunteers on how to use new tools and learn new technology that is available to them at either no, low or some cost to a non-profit.

Other thoughts on Stewardship:

- Get land trusts boards to participate in monitoring with an emphasis on establishing strong relationships with landowners.
- Avoid the trap of moral superiority – sometimes we overreach when we call out land management activities that are not fatal to the easement. For example, old stored farm equipment or organic vs. non-organic farming methods.
- Create opportunities to recognize and celebrate landowners and their commitment to stewardship.

COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION

Almost everyone that was interviewed embraced some concept of community conservation and acknowledged its importance to the land trust sector's long-term viability – though not all were familiar with the term. Universally, everyone appreciates that the future viability of the land trust movement is tied to doing a better job connecting people to the land we conserve. A few land trusts on the innovative edge see it as more profound than that. They view community conservation as land conservation work wholly integrated into local communities.

What does the term community-based conservation mean to you?

- Help people understand why land protection impacts them
- Provide more access to public lands, parks, open space, and green space
- We are the antidote to the overly stressed, overdeveloped world we live in
- All about education and meeting people where they are
- Safe places for people to experience nature

For some it raises challenges....

- With private land and easements, it's difficult to convey the benefits without public access
- Some supporters and members resist focusing on it because it feels like mission drift
- Programmatically, it takes funding and support to take on additional programming – many land trusts do not have that capacity.

Some suggested it is about thinking “big picture” and working at a larger scale, across boundaries - both geographic and cultural barriers. One land trust leader suggested that it “requires a whole community's mindset and, consequently, partners outside of our traditional sector.” Many of the

interviewees emphasized the need for new ways of talking about the work of land trusts – a common language – with simple points that will resonate with external constituents about community conservation.

PARTNER QUOTES

- Don't call it community conservation – it's too difficult to explain to people.
- The easiest way to get the public to acknowledge our community and know we exist is to show them our product. If no one knows that we exist, do we continue to survive?
- We mean well, but we tend to take over – there's not much integration going on here. Community conservation 101 is listening and engaging first. We are trying to get to community conservation 401... and we're just not there. I am not suggesting that we're not genuine, it only takes a long time and requires a cultural change for our organization.
- It's hard to find the funding and people to work with on these projects because it takes a LONG time.
- It's hard to handle public access on our lands without the stewardship personnel. It just makes it worse. We used to do community walks, but it was time-consuming. We just don't have the capacity at this time to bite that off. Our Board sees the choice of the acquisition first as paramount. There is value in getting stuff done.
- We can only do so much “relevance” stuff.
- If going to conserve land then we should help people understand what is being done to protect the land and how it applicable to them. It's an education issue.
- From a fundraising standpoint, we do need to be more present and visible. But we don't have an explicit community conservation strategy, it's just too hard for a small land trust.
- Its different things to different people.

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE OF YOUR LAND TRUST AS AN ORGANIZATION...

What do you see as the most significant opportunity?

Overall, land trusts agreed that the most significant opportunity for future success is:

- Preparing for the next generation of conservation leaders. This includes succession planning; grooming existing staff and creating pipelines within their organization for new and permanent staff positions.
- “Strength in numbers” - Mergers and greater collaboration between land trust partners. Several land trusts identified this opportunity as a real prospect to increase their capacity. However, they also noted an internal debate on this topic.
- Relationship building and innovative partnerships- land trusts are actively seeking local and innovative partners who are doing great work and have capacity to help them achieve their goals.

Beyond the top three, land trusts also noted opportunities in:

- Using stories to help spread the work about land trusts. Through successful planning, land trusts aim to recruit board members and connect to new supporters in their community

- Enhanced stewardship programs. Land trusts are interested in exploring restoration projects on protected lands as an opportunity to raise additional funding to cover staff and operational funds.
- Expansion of Rural Legacy areas.
- Having a more prominent voice in Annapolis.
- Becoming a one-stop shop for information for landowners and handholding to get them to get through the land conservation process. To become a more significant resource within the County and providing services the County cannot adequately provide.
- Working with developers.
- Redevelopment of suburban places

What do you see as the biggest threat?

Top answers include:

- Instability and inconsistent funding. What if we lose purchase easement funding?
- Land trusts without staff noted the need to professionalize. Land trust with staff flagged the need for succession planning strategies for staff. Regardless of capacity land trusts recognize the immediate need to creating pathways for new or existing staff to enter into leadership positions; create a pipeline for permanent staff; and engage the next generation of land stewards.
- Establishing the right board and board culture. This includes engaging new board members (with the right skillsets); succession planning and keeping the board refreshed; and creating a fundraising culture.
- What is land conservation goes out of fashion? Smartphones and screens that don't care about open space.
- Membership base.
- Need for government to be forward thinking and deal with livability questions.
- Land use planning for solar and other renewables; transmission lines; sea level rise; salt inundation, etc.
- Orphan easements.

Do you think those hold true when thinking of the land trust community across Maryland, or would you flag something else?

Opinions were roughly 50-50 between yes and no.

PARTNER QUOTES

No

- *Our area is unique because land is owned by the municipality. How we think about land is different from everyone else.*
- *We probably have different struggles because we are often doing easement and preservation work exclusively, while others are doing community education.*
- *There are just a few dominant land trusts, and then the rest of us who are just trying to survive.*

Yes

- *With regards to merging? Yes, it's inevitable. The land trust business model is maturing as any other business sector matures – some will fall out, and some will merge – just like any other business.*
- *Just look at the other land trusts in Maryland. They are blissfully unaware of how fragile they are.*
- *Yes, there is a general lack of support. Nationally folks seem to be dealing with relevance and trying to be nimble in messaging to be relevant in people's thoughts.*

Other

- *I am not going to pine over other land trusts right now.*
- *Opportunities are unlimited.... But are limited by money*

Common Issue

Most land trusts do not have consistent or sufficient funding (and staff) and with slow growing industry standards that require more work; the land trust community needs more capacity.

Where opportunities and threats overlap:

- Growing operational funding and staffing, Land trust community is aging and need to engage next generation of stewards.
- Lack of continuity/ permanence/ stability
- Continuity of staff and board working in the community
- Endowments for long term stewardship
- Relevance, big picture and value shift. Engaging (and growing) new collective base of community support.
- Climate, planning and land use

RELATIONSHIP WITH MET

All land trust highlighted the importance of their partnership with MET. High value is placed on staff assistance and access to materials, trainings and policy information. The technical expertise of staff is especially valuable and land trust continually noted the value of MET being just a phone call away. MET is seen as a “comrade-in-arms” and an enormous asset.

Valuable services and programs that MET offers:

- Technical expertise and dependability
- Access to materials, trainings, and policies information
- Staff assistance for land deals and technical advice on easement language
- The go-to with questions and concerns regarding stewardship matters
- Conference and Roundtables
- Funding opportunities through the Land Trust Capacity, Excellence and Stewardship Grants
- Training at director and staff level (hand holding is helpful)
- Information sharing on things we all need to know – like the basics
- Tools and staff assistance on mechanics of easements and stewardship
- New stewardship tools (LOCATE and monitoring app)

PARTNER QUOTES

- Steady Freddy partnership. Being able to call MET... and have someone pick up the phone. The availability of staff to assist is really important.
- HIGH VALUE – accessing a body of knowledge, especially stewardship counseling. Using MET's easement model and getting the benefit of prevailing opinion on specific legal matters associated with stewardship.
- The Conference, Roundtables and being able to access materials and policies from MET. Being able to contact Jon Chapman regarding stewardship programming and issues – his knowledge and technical expertise is invaluable.
- The knowledge and integrity of the staff. Technical advice and collective activities are an enormous asset.
- Information sharing and networking opportunities are considerable and helps us fulfill our mission and make our lives easier. MET has been playing matchmaker – and that has been great!
- Hollmann Grants are a game changer for us. We rely on the (Hollmann) grants far more than we wish we had to.
- Very excited about new stewardship tools and technology. Appreciate the research MET has done to get programs up and running and are looking forward to using the tools.
- Solid creditable and robust conservation easement program. Ann Carlson and the availability of staff to assist with land conservation projects.
- Information, resources and trainings that MET makes available to Maryland's land trust community. Opportunity is not available in other outlets (beside Rally).
- Land Trust Assistance Program over the years has been invaluable.
- Website is a great resource (particularly MET's model easement and policies that are available). Also have other useful resources and contact lists to direct me where to go to find resources.
- May not be the demand for these types of things anymore – “the basics.” It's not the shiny new thing. It's like cleaning your gutters. You don't want to do it, but you need to. MET plays a crucial role here.

Misses from MET and what's needed

While there is unanimous support from partners that were interviewed for the services that MET does offer, they also emphasized the need for additional assistance. The majority of land trust identified a strong conservation advocate in the Legislature as essential. This leader would rally the troops when needed. Most partners recalled MET's Land Trust Grant Fund and inquired if there was a plan to restore the fund in the near future. Overall, land trusts recognized the limitless opportunities for training and support if the Land Trust Assistance Program could be expanded. However, they also recognized that MET is a state agency and has staffing, budget and other limitations.

Gaps:

- More funding for unrestricted use (earmarked specially for land trusts)
- Advocate in the legislature

- Restore the Land Trust Grant Fund
- Legal review and services
- More clarity on MET's programs goals, organizational priorities and target areas
- Certification programs for land trust professionals (baseline documentation, professional education credits, current condition reports, etc.)
- Clearinghouse
- Additional trainings and networking opportunities
- Connections to the next generation of attorneys and real estate agents who manage land deals

PARTNER QUOTES

- *Finding the money and raising the profile*
- *Funding for unrestricted use – such limited funding found elsewhere for land trust work.*
- *Nothing comes to mind and it's probably more than you can do anyhow.*
- *Land Trust Assistance Program needs to be expanded. There is a PALTA and VAULT, but no MALTA. Even if a MALTA did exist (in MET) it could not be a strong advocate. There are limitations for what MET can do.*
- *Critical role would be to advocate openly and not have to worry about retribution. Want more muscle in the legislature... someone to be able to call and say 'you're missing this opportunity.'*
- *Land Trust Grant Fund needs to be restored! Projects are slowed down and having a strike fund that can use and put back when funding comes in would be useful. If had even \$50-100,000 that would be a huge help!*
- *More support on common issues. Tools. Went to a PALTA session and was impressed with the breadth of transactional tools and support that they provide. Since MET is only a donated easement program, it's very limited in what it can offer. I would love to see common tools for Maryland. This would include access to a stable of attorneys, and other types of skills that we cannot afford to have on staff or permanent contract. For example, with the wetland property we have been trying to acquire, who do we access for advice and counsel? Or the transmissions line matter? Need someone to jump into the fray. MET has been silent on this because they aren't able to advocate. We are flying blind.*
- *Government entity which works at a snail's pace – vs. working at a Maserati pace to solve problems.*
- *It would be helpful to know MET's target areas. Not sure what MET's targeted area is – years ago it used to be scenic roads, but we've heard nothing about priorities lately.*
- *Losing MET's dedicated legal assistance is still really hard/big loss. New review process is slow and we've lost projects because of the timeline. Legal expertise is critical and the slowdown has hurt us.*
- *It would be helpful to know: MET's goals and priorities; official relationship with DNR (and resources) and how the MET Board is elected.*
- *Please clarify the role of the Foundation, its function, relation to MET and status.*
- *Emails and updates about changes to MET easement policies, IRS matters, and easement defense.*
- *Clearinghouse - route people where they need to go – like the riverkeeper groups.*

- *Developing leadership in the land trust community and expanding relationships with others – we have a lot of collective firepower, but there is no one coordinating us.*
- *Manual for staff. Would be especially useful for those who do not have the conservation background that was brought on board to help with the land trust. Where's the checklist for procedures?*
- *Would MET board members come out to landowner receptions to speak to our community, answer questions about easements and what MET is all about?*
- *Training on the work that we (land trusts) need to do. Certificate program from MET – training session at the state level to do baseline line work or a bigger land trust certification course for conservation professionals*
- *The LT community could use a statewide advocate for protected lands – to rally the troops, including to tell us to go to DC when we need to go to DC.*

About MET's convening role...

MET is not only seen as an organizer and convener, but also as partner that will keep connections going and bring new partners into the fold.

PARTNER QUOTES

- *MET is the mothership. Working with Don and the RCP process has been fantastic. MET is a resource for all of us.*
- *I really value Conference and Roundtable – and always learn something because everyone does it a little different – counties, land trust, experts. Each one processes it from a slightly different perspective. Take time to debrief and see what can use and what cannot use (in my notes)*
- *Networking at the conference is excellent. MET is a reliable partner and a hub for the conservation activities in the state (whether gathering all of us in a room... or education and training)*
- *Getting land trusts together is essential.*

Feedback on additional opportunities to connect and collaborate with other land trusts and actors in Maryland.

PARTNER QUOTES

- *Not sure how we get to the next generation of attorneys who want to pass this information onto their clients (or who may not be aware of conservation easements). Same with real estate agents.*
- *An environmental summit for the legislature and elected officials, like Chesapeake Bay Trust and League of Conservation Voters.*
- *It seems like we no longer have a relationship with bay groups, agricultural groups – like AFT in the bay community. That cross-community discussion we used to have no longer exists (and it was valuable).*
- *Host a meeting like the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership gathering, but just Maryland and JUST LAND TRUSTS – to talk about policies, priorities and future goals.*

- *Would like to see MET have some sort of seat at the table when agrotourism comes up.*
- *Easement overlays in each local government department and building relationships to make sure the proper channels are followed and people are calling who they need to talk to about building permits that are applied for.*
- *Promote more networking and connection with other land trusts in Maryland to share best practices, program ideas, the technology used, fundraising strategies, etc.*
- *More information on government relations and links to administration changes – their priorities and how the law is interrupted.*
- *We (land trusts) have such a distinctive business model... hard to collaborate with others, but I like being able to hear from others in the land trust community and access to other people's insights and expertise (and hearing about different ways to accomplish tasks).*
- *Provide a forum for discussion/debate for new topics as they arise. For example, when the needs of landowners and farmers change – farm needs to stay in production while adapting to changes in climate. The forum could be a place to figure these things out.*

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

PARTNER QUOTES

- *Transition for MET will be interesting – an opportunity too.*
- *Love the conference. Love that you bring more folks together – it's great!*
- *Trying to save this organization by hook or by crook.*
- *MET can be Braveheart and unite the clan. Through its leadership, it can set the course, and everyone will get in line.*
- *How are we (land trusts) perceived by the outside? How does MET see us?*
- *MET is doing good work. Thank you for what you do.*
- *Ann Jones has played a VITAL role in Maryland's conservation community. What will we do when she retires? If someone is truly irreplaceable then we have a problem.*
- *How do you make land trusts relevant?*
- *Need to be on top of all things that are going on at all times– and it's exhausting.*
- *There is no natural land trust leader in the State. If Chesapeake Conservancy is trying to play this leadership role, it's not clear. Could go far if we had a more dominant leader in the land conservation community.*
- *Innovation by others in other states have surpassed Maryland's programming. We need to be more creative. Maryland is not leading any longer like we used to.*
- *Don't know/hear about land trusts in western MD or even in Frederick? Do they exist?*
- *Bringing all people up to this point is hard.*
- *Connections are "enormously valuable." Don't have time to have dog in every fight.*
- *Happy about where we are – and what our land trust has become.*
- *Absent of critical central body – little guys without staff will fade out.*
- *Enormously valuable to get together to talk and work together on various things. A lot to be gained from one's peers.*
- *Good luck!*