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Possible Headlines:

MALT earns national recognition for local excellence

A credit to its community – MALT officially recognized for outstanding practices

From Buffalo Creek to Clear Creek, it's impossible to travel far without admiring some lovely green sanctuary accomplished by the tireless efforts of the Mountain Area Land Trust. Last week, though, MALT accomplished something that, while far less visible, is no less important to its on-going mission to preserve the region's precious natural character.

On Aug. 29, the locally esteemed nonprofit earned the formal sanction of the nationally esteemed Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an endorsement awarded to just 180 of the nation's 1,723 land trusts since the commission was established in 2006.

Thanks more to good luck than good timing, LTAC's tribute comes just as MALT celebrates its 20th birthday, and a small delegation from its modest Evergreen North office plans to mount a Salt Lake City stage this October and – against a projected image of the trust's tour de force, the Beaver Brook Watershed – accept the commission's regards in person. And well they might. Since 1992, the Mountain Area Land Trust has labored to conserve scenic vistas, natural areas, wildlife habitats, working ranches and historic lands from Bergen Park to South Park, and many of the foothills' shiniest gems represent a steep price in donated time and labor paid by dedicated MALT volunteers.

On the surface, the LTAC's accreditation gives MALT the right to display the commission's official stamp of approval on its materials and correspondence. Deeper down, however, it testifies to the land trust's strong roots and solid core.

"We've voluntarily gone through a very rigorous 3-year process to prove the long-term health of this organization," explains MALT's executive director, Jeanne Beaudry. "This stamp tells people that everything we do is done to the highest national standards."

Fact is, when Beaudry says "rigorous" she's understating the case. With a heavy pair of 1,000-page manuals in hand, a team of LTAC researchers minutely examined every aspect of MALT's structure and operation, applying an unblinking microscope to everything from its accounting practices, to its fundraising activities, to its legal proficiency to its volunteer policies. No area escaped scrutiny, and each area was, in its turn, found to meet or exceed the commission's already high expectations.

"They went through every inch of this place," recalls Beaudry, with a wry grin. "The summary alone was almost a thousand pages long, but it confirms that we're following the best practices available in the United States."

Of course, MALT's six full- and part-time staff members and dozens of dedicated volunteers already knew that, and they didn't submit themselves to a clerical strip-search because they needed the extra work. MALT sought accreditation for the same good reason it does anything – to further its cause of protecting the mountain area's wild heritage from the bulldozer's blade.

"To the landowners who come to us for conservation easements, it's very personal," says MALT's development director, Betsy Hays. "They need to know that the big open meadows that

they love will remain big open meadows. This accreditation assures them that every easement is 100-percent correct and permanent.”

And because MALT is sustained almost entirely by public donations, the nod from LTAC also provides iron-clad assurance to those who so generously support its work.

“People need to know that we’re a good investment in the future,” Beaudry says. “Public confidence is critical to our success.”

Perhaps most importantly, MALT’s hard-won recognition promises a continuity of purpose that may well stand as its most enduring legacy. After all, with a 2,000-square-mile area of responsibility embracing most of Jefferson County and all of Clear Creek and Park counties, the nearly 20,000 ever-green acres already to its credit are only a small fraction of the mountain area’s good earth worthy of protection.

“Long after all of us are gone, MALT will still exist, and it will still be responsible for protecting the land,” Hays explains. “That’s what this accreditation is really saying.”

To learn more about the Mountain Area Land Trust, call 303-679-0949, or visit www.savetheland.org.

Stephen Knapp is a freelance writer and the author of “80439 – A User’s Guide to Evergreen.”