



UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

MASTER OF NONPROFIT ADMINISTRATION

Improving the Land Trust Model's Impact on Environmental Conservation in Northern California

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Class #: NPA 622

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Instructor: Dr. Richard Gregory Johnson III

OVERVIEW / INTRODUCTION

- This project came about due to my longstanding passion for the outdoors. As we look for new and innovative ways to fight climate change and habitat loss, the longstanding institution of a land trusts can play a pivotal role.
- My future career goals are to work at a land trust and within the environmental conservation space. I hope to spend as much time outdoors as possible and spread the same passion for open space that inspired this research.

OBJECTIVES AND VALUES



Research Question: How can the land trust model have a greater impact on the environmental conservation movement in Northern California?



Objectives:

- To better understand how land trusts can make a greater impact on environmental conservation in Northern California.
- To create a model for land trusts to become leaders in the conservation space.



Values:

- Stewardship – Embracing a new brand of stewardship that promotes education, accessibility, and conservation principles.
- Awareness – Improving on the current model requires a frank look at the history of lands that are protected via land trust.

METHODS AND APPROACHES

Methods Used:

- **Semi-Structured Interviews**

- Utilized six standardized questions that helped guide the conversation and ground it back to the original research question.
- Included seven Zoom interviews along with follow up conversations through email over the course of a month.

- **Exploratory Case Study**

- An exploratory case study examined the seven organizations and how their current model could be improved to impact environmental conservation in relation to their current model.

- **Literature Review**

- Utilized several lenses after conducting interviews. Reflected on what themes were consistently brought up and what may be important moving forward.

DATA ANALYSIS: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- Conducted seven expert interviews with individuals land trusts around California. Since one individual asked to remain anonymous, all organizations and expert names will also remain anonymous.

DATA ANALYSIS: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Themes from the interviews:

Forever

Unique to the land trust model, contracts binding them to land in perpetuity requires the organization to exercise a high level of forethought.

Nimble

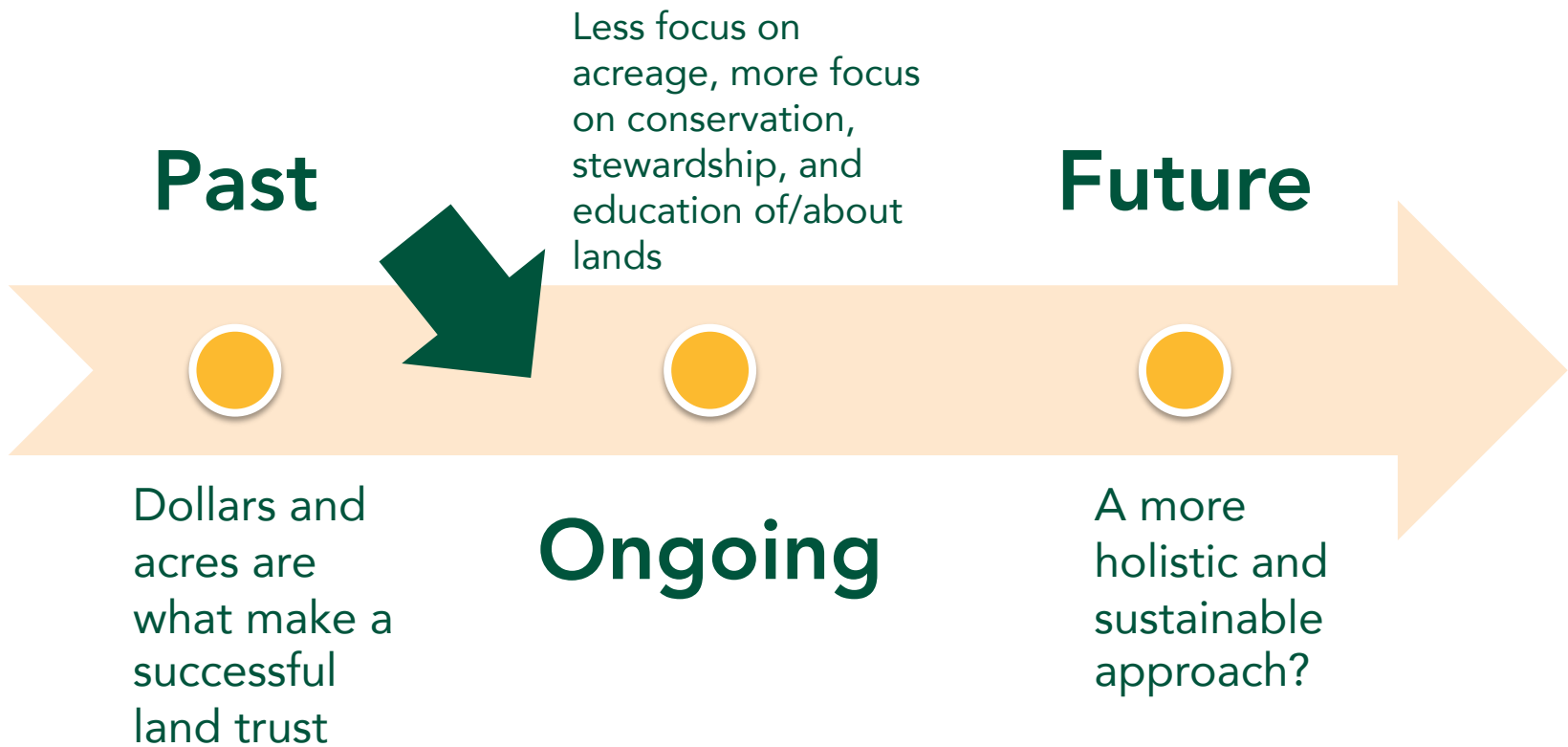
Operating separately from the government, land trusts can move through the bureaucratic hurdles faster than a governmental entity.

Education

As land trusts move away from the mindset of solely dollars and acres, they have begun to integrate more education programming.

DATA ANALYSIS: CASE STUDY

Took an exploratory case study approach to learn more about what can make the land trust model more sustainable in the future.



DATA ANALYSIS: LITERATURE REVIEW AND LEFTOVERS

Themes in the Literature:

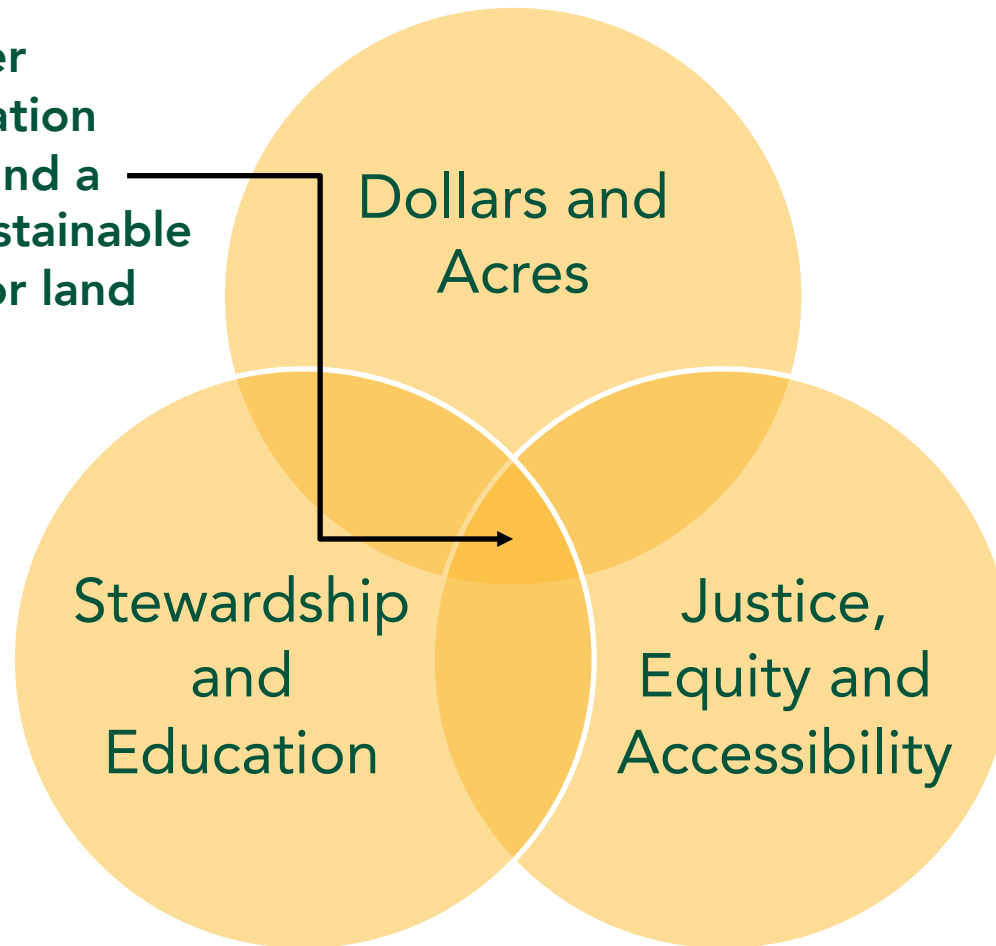
- Land protected, but for who?
- Introducing DEIB priorities into the land trust model
- Accessibility and usage
- Conservation and habitat protection

Missing Pieces:

- Inherent bias within the land trust system
- Unsustainable donor base
- Solutions to bridge the gap between land trusts and other entities

IMPLICATIONS: A MORE HOLISTIC MODEL

A greater conservation impact and a more sustainable future for land trusts



IMPLICATIONS

Dollars and Acres

In order to conduct any education and programming, a focus on fundraising and acreage protected will continue to be an important part of the model.

As land trusts protect more and more land, the need for stewardship and education about the importance of these spaces will increase.

Stewardship and Education

Justice, Equity and Accessibility

Developing in recent years, the land trust model is being viewed through a lens of justice, equity and accessibility. Without work in this area, the land trust sector will continue to become more unsustainable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Dollars and Acres:

- Examine creating a “triage” system where at-risk areas are targeted for easements and protection instead of relying solely on private owner donations.
- Partner with other land trusts working in the same space or similar mission to increase reach and awareness.

2. Stewardship and Education:

- Meet the needs of the community; i.e. wildfire mitigation/controlled burns, migration path protection, working land stipulations, etc.
- Create education material for lands protected by the land trust. Regardless of use or mission, climate change and habitat loss are affecting every open space in California.

3. Justice, Equity and Accessibility

- Partner with local communities and indigenous populations and work to address historical injustice on the land. Look at repatriation of lands to indigenous communities and increasing access to historically underrepresented populations through community partnerships.
- Start with the organization; focus on DEIB education and interviewing/hiring diverse candidates to begin the process of equity from within.

REFERENCES

Beckman, C. M., Wheaton, M., Sawe, N., & Ardoin, N. M. (2023). **Incorporating justice, equity, and access priorities into land trusts' conservation efforts.** *Biological Conservation*, 279.

Land Trust Alliance, landtrustalliance.org/.

Rissman, A. R., Morris, A. W., Kalinin, A., Kohl, P. A., Parker, D. P., & Selles, O. (2019). **Private organizations, public data: Land trust choices about mapping conservation easements.** *Land Use Policy*, 89.

Roach, M. (2014). **Local Land Trusts: A Comparative Analysis in Search of an Improved Template for Land Trusts.** *William & Mary Environmental Law & Policy Review*, 38(3), 767–794.

Veronesi, M., Algoed, L., & Hernández Torrales, M. E. (2022). **Community-led development and collective land tenure for environmental justice: the case of the Caño Martín Peña community land trust, Puerto Rico.** *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, 14(1), 388–397.



SUMMARY

The land trust model must continue its transition from dollars and acres but more importantly, it needs to ensure it is taking an active role in various diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Examples that were highlighted from organizations in Northern California include the rematriation of land to native tribes and providing opportunities for under-resourced communities to utilize the open spaces protected by the trusts. Without a bigger tent of supporters, funders, and users, land trusts will unsustainably grow into the role of educator and steward without the support to truly impact environmental conservation. The greatest way to impact environmental conservation and climate change is to mobilize the greatest number of people from a diverse range of backgrounds.

PURPOSE

For years, the land trust sector of California and much of the United States has operated with a dollars and acres mentality that has prioritized fundraising as a result of acreage protected. Within California, nearly 5.8 million acres of land have been protected by 132 land trusts throughout the state.

To meet the increasing challenge of habitat loss, climate change and further impact environmental conservation, land trusts must continue to adapt. This work looks to provide a better model for land trusts as they move forward and grow to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

RESEARCH

How can the land trust model have a greater impact on the environmental conservation movement in Northern California?

METHODS

Exploratory Case Study

An exploratory case study examined the seven organizations and how their current model could be improved to impact environmental conservation in relation to their current model.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Utilized six standardized questions that helped guide the conversation and ground it back to the original research question.

Literature Review

Utilized several lenses after conducting interviews. Reflected on what themes were consistently brought up and what may be important moving forward.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Themes from the interviews with seven land trusts across Northern California:

Forever

Unique to the land trust model, contracts binding them to land in perpetuity requires the organization to exercise a high level of forethought.

Education

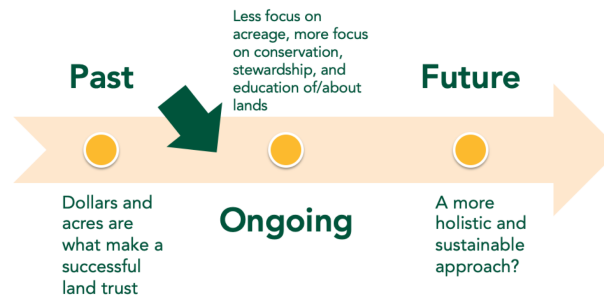
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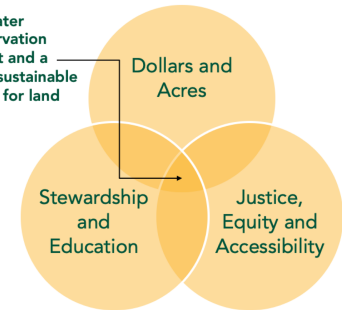
Access

The ideas around access are changing for land trusts around the state. Organizations previously not concerned with accessibility are now realizing its importance.



RESULTS

A greater conservation impact and a more sustainable future for land trusts



RECOMMENDATIONS

Dollars and Acres:

- Examine creating a "triage" system where at-risk areas are targeted for easements and protection instead of relying on private owner donations.

Stewardship and Education:

- Meet the needs of the community; i.e. wildfire mitigation/controlled burns, migration path protection, working land stipulations, etc.

Justice, Equity, and Accessibility:

- Partner with local communities and indigenous populations and work to address historical injustice on the land. Look at rematriation of lands to indigenous communities and increasing access to historically underrepresented populations through community partnerships.

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4/7
organizations
interviewed fell
around here

Past

Less focus on acreage,
more focus on
conservation,
stewardship, and
education of/about
lands

3/7 organizations
interviewed fell
around here

Future

Dollars and
acres are what
make a
successful land
trust

Present

A more holistic
and sustainable
approach?

**A greater
conservation
impact and a more
sustainable future
for land trusts**

