

SAGEBRUSH STEPPE REGIONAL LAND TRUST

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE 2011 – 2013

MISSION STATEMENT

Protecting and enhancing our region's quality of life, now and for future generations, through the conservation of wildlife habitat, natural lands and working farms and ranches in Southeastern Idaho.

VISION

Conservation of southeastern Idaho's natural open spaces and working lands is vital to protecting our quality of life, and the Sagebrush Steppe Regional Land Trust will be a leader in the permanent protection of Southeastern Idaho's natural and rural environment. We envision a future in which population growth and development is matched by land conservation, thus creating and maintaining a high quality and balanced environment for future generations. We will achieve our vision by:

- **partnering with public and private landowners** to identify methods and options for protecting sensitive open spaces for the benefit of landowners, wildlife, and the public;
- **holding conservation easements** to protect prime farms and ranch lands, scenic vistas, wetlands, streams, and wildlife habitats;
- **establishing opportunities for families to retain ownership** of family lands for future generations;
- **furthering awareness of landowners** as to the income and estate tax benefits for open space protections and preservation;
- **developing fundraising activities** to enable purchase of critical and sensitive lands or easements;
- **presenting informational seminars, newsletters, and information brochures** to create public awareness of the needs for and benefits of protecting sensitive lands and open spaces for public and wildlife use; and
- **servicing as a networking conduit** between citizens, sportsmen, contractors and developers, local, state and federal agencies, farmland protection agencies, and any other groups concerned with open space conservation, fish and wildlife conservation, and conservation of wildlands and wetlands.

VALUES

GENERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

We are committed to the permanent protection of land in Southeastern Idaho and will assist and encourage landowners interested in preserving the historic use of their land, now and for future generations.

RESPECT

We value, appreciate and recognize the contributions of all people working to preserve the quality of life in Southeastern Idaho, as well as the diverse approaches and perspectives they bring.

INTEGRITY

We are dedicated to fulfilling our mission with integrity and honesty, working with others with tolerance and in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

We will be a professional, effective, and efficient organization committed to excellence and accountability.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: FINANCIAL STABILITY AND GROWTH

KEY ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP - BUDGET & FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES

GOALS:

- Ensure that fundraising plan and goals are clearly tied to annual work plans and budgets, and that ongoing fundraising supports future planned growth of the organization.
- Increase membership and annual giving to include individuals, businesses, organizations, and governmental agencies.
- Build endowment funds to support conservation, stewardship and operations.

Steps:

- Develop comprehensive fundraising plan based on annual work plan budget.
- Develop and implement diverse fundraising strategies (to supplement membership, grants and endowments).
- Cultivate relationships with local, regional, and federal governmental agencies.
- Secure appropriate endowments to meet our stewardship obligations in perpetuity.
- Develop detailed fundraising plan with assistance from fundraising consultant David Allen.
- Fundraising training workshop with Board members and staff lead by David Allen.
- Hire current database development volunteer as a consultant to coordinate 2011 annual giving campaign including major donor cultivation and membership development with available grant funds.
- Assign specific cultivation tasks to specific Board members. Annual Giving Coordinator will be working with Board members and keeping track of their communication with assigned donors.
- Seek grants to support programs and special initiatives.

OBJECTIVE: PERMANENTLY PROTECT HIGH PRIORITY LAND KEY ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP - LAND COMMITTEE

GOAL:

Use conservation priorities plan to evaluate and prioritize incoming potential projects, and to identify and pursue proactive conservation projects throughout the organization's service area.

Steps:

- Adopt conservation priorities plan (Conservation Planning Team).
 - Draft plan for eastern region (GYE) to Board for adoption August, 2011.
 - Conservation plan completed for western region (August 2012).
- Finalize and adopt Land Protection policies and procedures (Conservation Transaction Team).
- Complete new project outside PacifiCorp project area - Letter of Intent signed with at least one landowner.
- Close at least 1 PacifiCorp project/year.
- Landowner education about priority area.
 - Hold one meeting per watershed led by key landowner.
 - Share conservation plan with key partners & facilitate partnerships – Pocatello Open Space Committee, ID Fish & Game, county commissioners, FWS, NRCS, etc.
- Cooperative Partnership in Gray's Lake Area.
 - Develop cooperative strategy with TRLT and Letter of Intent for one project cooperatively w/TRLT.
- Conservation Transaction Team is functional - Meet as needed to complete policies and objectives.
- Stewardship Team is functional.
 - Assign coordinator and meet as needed to complete action objectives.
 - Finalize baselines and management plans for two fee title properties.

OBJECTIVE: BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO ACCOMPLISH CONSERVATION GOALS
KEY ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP - EXECUTIVE AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

- Develop partnership between Board, staff and volunteers focusing on the Land Trust as a team. Get committees up and running to oversee implementation of strategic plan, and teams working on specific action items and projects identified in the annual plan.
- Develop the organization's infrastructure, including a strong network of committees and advisors and volunteer support as needed to manage programs effectively.
- Prepare for accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance (LTA).
- Apply for Accreditation by YE 2013

Steps:

- Establish working committees within the organization framework (attached):
 - **Executive Committee (EC)** – has chair and meets regularly.
 - **Budget and Finance (BFC)** – has chair and meets regularly.
 - **Land Committee (LC)** – has chair and meets regularly.
 - Conservation Transaction Team - has coordinator and meets as needed to complete action objectives, reports to Land Committee Chair.
 - Recruit committee members from outlying counties.
 - Stewardship Team has coordinator, meets regularly as needed to complete action objectives, reports to Land Committee Chair.
 - **Development Committee (DC)** – has chair and meets regularly.
 - Board Development Team - has coordinator and meets as needed to complete action objectives, reports to Development Committee Chair.
 - Recruit committee members from outlying counties.
 - Fundraising Team - has coordinator, meets regularly as needed to complete action objectives, reports to Development Committee Chair.
 - Delegate major donor development and cultivation to “Major Donor” team and track progress.
 - Delegate membership development to “Membership” team and track progress.
 - Membership Goal: Increase Annual Membership 25% per year.
 - Give complimentary 6 months membership to event attendees who are not current members.
 - Expand distribution of newsletter via mail and providing copies for the public in well-trafficked locations .
 - Acquire mailing lists.
 - Identify locations for distribution in offices, businesses, etc.
 - Assess current annual membership solicitation response rates.
 - Identify key constituencies to target for solicitation.
 - Delegate events coordination to ad hoc events team and track progress.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT GOAL:

- Increase Board size, focusing on members outside of the Pocatello area. Get committees up and running, meeting regularly to take on the bulk of the work of the Board, and recruit non-Board members to serve on each committee.

Steps:

- Add at least 3 – 4 new Board members, of which at least 1 is from outside Pocatello.
 - Identify and cultivate 1-3 potential Board members from each county.
- Establish and implement Board Review process – for individual directors and the Board as a whole.
- Organizational workflow is in place and understood by all – staff, committees, board.
- Establish an Outreach Team to coordinate communications by all committees and individuals.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT GOAL:

- The organization has sufficient staff resources to carry out its work plans, and is preparing for additional staff positions through fundraising and workflow planning.

Steps:

- Identify organizational responsibilities that require professional staff.
- Develop long term staffing plans – 5- and 10-year goals.
- Hire stewardship coordinator to realign Executive Director role to focus on organizational development, fundraising, and project development.
- Add fundraising capacity to existing staff.
 - Raise \$5000 via HOTR grant in 2011.
- Identify additional funding sources.
- Annual staff evaluations for all staff.

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT GOAL:

Ensure that volunteers are adding value and their management is not a burden on staff. Develop systems to recruit, manage and recognize volunteers.

Steps:

- Identify key expertise and skills needed that might be provided by volunteers and maintain database of available people with those skills and expertise.
- Implement annual Volunteer Recognition program.
- Draft and adopt Volunteer Expectations guide.
- Finalize and adopt Volunteer Policy.

PUBLICITY DEVELOPMENT GOAL:

- Public awareness of the SSRLT is growing, as measured by memberships, event attendance, landowner contacts and other means.

Steps:

- Expand publicity efforts for existing field trips on protected properties.
- Target key constituencies in priority areas for outreach about events.
- Post-event outreach – how successful it was, photos, etc.
- Press release in every newspaper at least once a year.
 - Develop media contacts list.
 - Pursue having a regular column written by SSRLT in local papers.

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GOAL:

- Explore new partnerships, especially at priority areas

Overview of Guided Organizational Assessment

Sagebrush Steppe Regional Land Trust is a highly effective organization which has accomplished a significant amount of important conservation work in its short history. This level of accomplishment has been possible in large part because of care and planning with which the organization was founded, and because the SSRLT has undertaken strategic goal setting and action planning on a regular basis. Their ability to accomplish significant conservation work has grown with the addition of professional staff over the past few years.

Overall, we see no reason that the SSRLT should not apply for Land Trust Accreditation. They have a few areas in need of strengthening, most notably in Board engagement, but should be able to address those areas in a timely manner and be ready for Accreditation.

One key recommendation we would make, that falls outside the topics encompassed by *Standards & Practices*, is to make a concerted and ongoing effort to complete conservation projects in regions of their service area that are not part of PacifiCorp's Action Area. Once their current conservation planning and prioritization is completed, the SSRLT should be careful to assess all potential projects against their priorities in a consistent manner, so as to avoid the potential of being unduly influenced, or appearing to be unduly influenced, by PacifiCorp interests and funding. This will mean an increased emphasis on fundraising by the organization, in order to be able to take on projects outside of PacifiCorp-funded areas.

Next Steps

The BAM Team recognizes that assessments applying the criteria of *Standards and Practices* have the potential to be overwhelming, and we are concerned that when reviewing the assessment report, the Board and staff maintain perspective on the land and easements that have been protected in perpetuity due to organization efforts.

Based on the findings documented in this Assessment Report, and the results of the facilitated session, we recommend that the SSRLT address the following issues first and foremost:

Activate committees

Committees which exist on paper should become active in practice, taking on the bulk of the governance and oversight work of the organization. This will require identification of committee chairs, drafting committee charters and revising the SSRLT's by-laws to recognize committee authorities.

Finalize and adopt existing draft policies

The first task for the newly formed committees should be to review those policies which fall under their areas of authority and revise them as needed before presenting them to the full Board with a recommendation to adopt.

Create annual budgets and fundraising plans which reflect the true costs of annual work objectives

Based on the new strategic plan, SSRLT should develop annual work plans which can then be used to estimate expected annual expenses. Fundraising planning can then be done to ensure adequate income to meet those expenses.

June 14, 2011

For review & adoption:

- Organizational Structure and Work Flow Chart (Executive Committee and ED) – Complete
- Conservation Plan – eastern region (Conservation Planning Team) – For August Meeting

For presentation & discussion:

- Board Recruitment Matrix (Board Development Team) – BDT have it ready for evaluation for August Meeting
- Position Descriptions – E.D. and 2nd staff position (staff and EC)- Complete

August 9, 2011

For review & adoption:

- Final Strategic Plan for 2011-2013 (ED)
- Board Review/Evaluation Process (Executive Committee and Board Development Team)
- Overview of Land Protection Policies and procedures (Land Committee and Conservation Transaction Team)
- Volunteer Policy (staff, Stewardship Team)
- Bylaws Language re: Committee authorities (EC)
- Personnel Policy
- Stewardship Policy
- Dedicated Stewardship Fund Policy
- Overall Conservation Transaction Policy
- Board Evaluation Procedure

September 12-14, 2011

- Guided Organizational Assessment 6 month review
- Board/Staff Fundraising training session

October 11, 2011

For review and adoption

- Membership Policy (Fundraising Team)
- Project Selection and Prioritization Procedure (Land Committee/Transaction Team)
- Sound Land Transaction Procedure (Land Committee/Transaction Team)
- Step-by-Step Land Transaction Procedure (Land Committee/Transaction Team)
- Signature Authority Policy for Acquisitions (Land Committee/Transaction Team)

December 13, 2011

For review and adoption

- Public Policy Advocacy Policy (need team members)
- Financial Recordkeeping Policy (Budget and Finance Committee)
- Project Selection Criteria Worksheet (Land Committee/Transaction Team)
- Conservation Project Development Checklist (Land Committee/Transaction Team)
- Landowner Relationships Policy (Land Committee/Stewardship Team)
- Baseline Inventory and Monitoring Procedure(Land Committee/Stewardship Team)

Policy and Procedures

Administration and Human Resources (Executive Committee)

Bylaws – *Adopted, but need to be reviewed and updated by Executive Committee*

Personnel Policy – *Adopted at September 2011 meeting*

Board (Executive and Development Committees)

Board Development Policy – *Adopted*

Board Evaluation Procedure – *Adopt at October 2011 meeting*

Conflict of Interest Policy – *Adopted*

Financial (Budget and Finance Committee)

Budget Policy - *Adopted*

Handling Money Policy – *Adopted*

Internal Controls Policy – *Adopted*

Investment Policy – *Adopted*

Financial Review/Audit Policy – *Adopt at December 2011 meeting*

Development and Fundraising Policy – *Adopted*

Membership Policy – *in draft form – Adopt at October 2011 meeting*

Financial Recordkeeping Policy – *Develop and Adopt by December 2011*

Land Transaction

Overall Conservation Transaction Policy – *Adopted at August 2011 meeting*

Project Selection and Prioritization Policy – *Draft – Adopt at October 2011 meeting*

Sound Land Transaction Policy – *Draft – Adopt at October 2011 meeting*

Step-by-Step Land Transaction Procedure – *Draft – Adopt at October 2011 meeting*

Project Selection Procedure – *Draft – Adopt at December 2011 meeting*

Project Selection Criteria Worksheet – *Draft – Adopt at December 2011 meeting*

Conservation Project Development Checklist – *Draft – Adopt at December 2011 meeting*

Acquisition Valuation Policy – *Draft – Adopt by April 2012*

Signature Authority Policy for Acquisitions – *Draft – Adopt by October 2011 meeting*

Stewardship

Conservation Easement Amendment Policy – *Adopted*

Conservation Easement Enforcement Policy – *Adopted*

Landowner Relationships Policy – *Draft – Adopt by February 2012*

Record Keeping Policy – *Adopted*

Stewardship Policy – *Adopted at August 2011 meeting*

Dedicated Stewardship Fund Policy – *Adopted at August 2011 meeting*

Stewardship Record Keeping Procedure – *Adopted*

Baseline Inventory and Monitoring Procedure - *Draft – Adopt by February 2012*

Other

Public Policy Advocacy Policy – *Develop and Adopt by December 2011*

Summary of Recommended Activities from Organizational Assessment

- Annually review progress against each Strategic Plan goal, and update the Strategic Plan as needed.
- Tie annual goals and budgets more directly to the Strategic Plan goals.
- Develop and adopt public policy advocacy policy.
- Build the Board of Directors to the maximum number allowed by the By-Laws and diversify geographic representation on the Board.
- Develop and implement comprehensive system of board orientation, ongoing training and evaluation.
- Clearly identify fundraising goals for operations, projects, and endowment
- Develop fundraising plans designed to meet these objectives.
- Clearly split out a fundraising budget from the larger organizational budget, and track budget/actual for the Board Donor Relations Committee.
- Prepare a consolidated budget covering anticipated expenses for the entire organization.
- Commission a formal audit or Statement of Financial Review as soon as possible.
- Institute annual evaluation of Executive Director, based on annual work plan goals.
- As committees become active, regularly review assigned responsibilities of staff, Board, committees and volunteers to ensure nothing is being missed and that workloads are appropriate.
- Institute regular program of volunteer recruitment, training, and recognition.
- Finalize all land protection policies and present to the full Board for review and adoption.
- Revise project selection criteria and project transaction processes to be consistent with the priorities identified.
- Include more background material in project files:
 - Documentation pertaining to attorney review.
 - Board resolution authorizing project.
 - Public benefit documentation, ie. project selection criteria worksheets.
- Revise landowner letter to emphasize that SSRLT cannot provide legal advice and encourage landowners to seek independent legal and tax advice.
- Update older baseline documents to ensure their accuracy and detail matches that of latter baseline documents.

Organizational Assessment Report

Standard 1: Mission

The organization has a clear mission that serves a public interest, and all programs support that mission.

- *Mission* - SSRLT has a strong mission statement that is clear, well understood, and widely supported. The organization protects natural and working lands within a seven-county area in southeastern Idaho through the acquisition of fee land and conservation easements.
- *Strategic Plan* - SSRLT's current Strategic Plan has served the organization well for the last three years and is currently being updated. We noted that the current Strategic Plan has not necessarily been used to directly drive annual planning and budgeting even while it has clearly served as a philosophical framework for project selection and operations decisions.
- *Ethics* - We noted that for all but the brand new board members, volunteers and staff alike uniformly affirmed high organizational standards of ethics. The Board members each had an easy familiarity with LTA Standards and Practices dealing with Organizational Strength. They were aware of policies in place and conscientious of their application.

Recommendation:

- Annually review progress against each Strategic Plan goal, and update the Strategic Plan as needed. Tie annual goals and budgets more directly to the Strategic Plan goals.

Standard 2: Compliance with Laws

The land trust fulfills its legal requirements as a non-profit tax exempt organization and complies with all laws.

- Our review and assessment found that SSRLT is in full compliance with this standard.

Recommendation:

- SSRLT has not developed a policy regarding engagement in public policy advocacy. We recommend that it develop and adopt such a policy.

Standard 3: Board Accountability

The land trust board acts ethically in conducting the affairs of the organization and carries out the board's legal and financial responsibilities as required by law.

- The SSRLT Board is clear about its ethical duties to the organization, and has established a mission which has driven the work of the land trust during its brief history. The Board has established clear goals and in recent years an iterative strategic plan to guide programs and organizational growth.
- Currently the Board is smaller than ideal, and burn-out is evident. Since hiring the first Executive Director three years ago, the Board has largely left the day-to-day operations to staff, and has not transitioned board work into Board Development or other governance issues as effectively as it should. The staff has spent time drafting many policies, many of which have not been reviewed or adopted by the Board. Director recruitment has lagged until very recently, and there is no systematic program for identifying and cultivating potential future Board members.
- There is a fairly comprehensive Board Manual and a statement of commitment that is signed by every Director upon their election to the Board. New Director orientation is cursory, and evaluation of individual Directors and the Board as a whole has never been undertaken. Board member roles and responsibilities are detailed in an overly complex and lengthy document included in the manual, but this appears to be a generic template, not customized for SSRLT.
- The suite of organizational policies, in draft and adopted forms, provides very thorough and clear guidance on authorities delegated within the organization.

Recommendations:

- Move to a committee-based Board of Directors.
- Build the Board of Directors to the maximum number allowed by the By-Laws and diversify geographic representation on the Board.
- Develop and implement comprehensive system of board orientation, ongoing training and evaluation.

Standard 4: Conflicts of Interest

The land trust has policies and procedures to avoid or manage real or perceived conflicts of interest.

- SSRLT has adopted a good policy on conflicts of interest and is implementing that policy. They should continue to take steps to avoid the appearance of undue influence by their major funder, PacifiCorp.

Standard 5: Fundraising

The organization conducts fundraising activities in an ethical and responsible manner.

- *Legal and Ethical Compliance* - In our opinion, SSRLT appears to comply with all applicable solicitation laws, limits its fundraising costs appropriately, has members to whom it is accountable, and accurately represents itself in its fundraising materials.
- *Fundraising Program* - SSRLT receives mitigation funding from PacifiCorp according to a long-term agreement that runs through 2034. Funds from this agreement support land acquisition, direct stewardship and monitoring costs, stewardship and defense endowment funds, and current operating expenses. These funds dwarf funding from any other single source. Perhaps for this reason, fundraising from other sources has been seen as a set of activities disconnected to specific needs and goals.
- SSRLT does have a growing membership, from which it receives membership dues and appeal funding. Members also contribute through their attendance at a special event each year. Board members have not been particularly involved in fundraising to date, but there is a clear understanding that this represents a growth area, and Board members seem willing and ready to take on a larger responsibility.

- SSRLT has good record-keeping policies and practices in place. Donors have individual files in the cabinet and the organization has invested in a new database management program which an experienced volunteer is working to populate.

Recommendations:

- Clearly identify fundraising goals for operations, projects, and endowment (for projects outside the PacifiCorp project area). Develop fundraising plans designed to meet these objectives.
- Clearly split out a fundraising budget from the larger organizational budget, and track budget/actual for the Board Donor Relations Committee.

Standard 6: Financial and Asset Management

The organization manages its finances and assets in a responsible and accountable way.

- *Budgeting and Planning* - SSRLT currently prepares an annual plan and budget that is substantially derived from the previous year's plan and budget. As previously stated, SSRLT is currently engaged in Strategic Planning and will base future annual plans and budgets on its strategic objectives once the plan is completed.
- *Accounting* - Internal controls, financial reports, accounting procedures, account descriptions, and investment policies are all in place and well-organized, but SSRLT has never had an audit or Financial Review performed by a qualified, independent financial advisor. We recommend that it get one. The fiscal year is March-February.
- SSRLT has its accounts formally prepared by a third party bookkeeper. We did note that the financial reporting (Quickbooks) appeared to be limited to the operations accounts, and that the net profit reported on the P&L we saw was slightly different than that reported on the balance sheet for the same month. The Executive Director prepares and keeps a separate and more comprehensive spreadsheet that tracks project budgets against actual expenses.
- We have two concerns with these arrangements, both of which could be satisfied with a formal Statement of Financial Review and/or audit. The first is that the Board does not appear to ever see a single, comprehensive budget for the entire organization. It sees an operations budget, and it sees project budgets, but SSRLT does not appear to consolidate these accounts into a single report that the Board periodically reviews.
- Second, in the spreadsheet reports, some expense line items listed at \$0 were noted as "Direct Annual Monitoring Expenses – reimbursed by PacifiCorp". Whether PacifiCorp is reimbursing these expenses or paying them directly, doing so masks the true costs of doing business from the Board. We believe these costs should be listed as actual costs, that PacifiCorp's reimbursements should be listed as revenue or in-kind as appropriate, and that the Board should have a role in formally approving them.

Recommendations:

- Prepare a consolidated budget covering anticipated expenses for the entire organization, including items paid for through PacifiCorp funding and have the Board formally approve it every year. We recommend that operations continue to have its own column, separated from project expenses, and we recommend similarly splitting out expenses associated with fundraising. The columns should be presented so they add to the consolidated total.
- Commission a formal audit or Statement of Financial Review as soon as possible. Consult with the financial advisor involved specifically about the issue of accounting for PacifiCorp expenses.
- Please note that we are not concerned about the *legality* of the accounting, but more so about the Board's fore-knowledge and approval of the expenses.

Standard 7: Volunteers, Staff and Consultants

The land trust has volunteers, staff and/or consultants with appropriate skills and in sufficient numbers to carry out its programs.

- The SSRLT has had since its inception an ongoing staffing plan and vision. They currently have one and a half staff positions, and several very involved and active volunteers. They are also planning for the addition of a part-time fundraising position, either as an addition to current staff job duties or a new part-time position.

- There is no formal volunteer recruiting, training and evaluation program, but the informal processes have resulted in key volunteers with crucial skills becoming an integral part of the day to day operations of the land trust.
- Staff has written job descriptions. Evaluation of the Executive Director has not been consistently done in the past.
- SSRLT budgets for annual training and education for Board and staff and training opportunities are taken advantage of regularly. The Board is committed to continuing education for itself in order to meet its responsibilities. The SSRLT is an active member of regional coalitions, which provide another means for education and sharing lessons learned among organizations.
- The Board has either formally or by default delegated most of the operations of the SSRLT to the Executive Director, including several things which would be better done by the Board itself, such as policy development and review. The degree of communication back to the Board on progress and activities seems to fall short; during our discussion session with the Board it became clear that most Directors were not fully informed about SSRLT program activities and governance issues. Part of the development of a robust committee structure should be the creation of open and active lines of communication between Board and staff.

Recommendations:

- Institute annual evaluation of Executive Director, based on annual work plan goals.
- As committees become active, regularly review assigned responsibilities of staff, Board, committees and volunteers to ensure nothing is being missed and that workloads are appropriate.
- Institute regular program of volunteer recruitment, training and recognition, being careful that volunteer management does not become a time sink for staff.

Standard 8: Evaluating and Selecting Conservation Projects

The land trust carefully evaluates and selects its conservation projects.

- The SSRLT is in the middle of a comprehensive process of evaluating conservation needs within their seven-county service area and identifying priorities among those needs. Once this evaluation and prioritization process is complete, they will need to revise their existing project selection criteria and process to reflect those priorities.
- The availability of significant funding for projects from PacifiCorp has meant that the majority of SSRLT's existing projects are located in Franklin and Caribou Counties, where PacifiCorp has its energy production facilities. The land trust has recognized this imbalance in past strategic plans and has set a goal of completing at least one visible, significant project outside of the PacifiCorp-funded area. They have been partially successful in this – one major project has been completed in Bannock County, but the landowner has requested that it not be publicized.
- In selecting projects, SSRLT is very careful to ensure that they have sufficient funds for the transaction and for future land management and/or easement stewardship needs. They refuse projects where it is unclear where or when these funds will be found.
- All of SSRLT's policies pertaining to land protection are in draft form, not yet reviewed or adopted by the Board.
- SSRLT does not have a policy on when or how they might get involved in public policy advocacy work, though the Executive Director has been active in advocacy at the state and federal levels, working with LTA on identified legislative and agency issues.

Recommendations:

- Have the appropriate Committee(s) finalize all land protection policies and present to the full Board for review and adoption.
- Have a discussion at the Board level about SSRLT's role in public policy work and draft policy to guide that work as appropriate.
- Once conservation prioritization work is done, revise project selection criteria and project transaction processes to be consistent with the priorities identified. The revised checklist and procedure documents should be included with the relevant policies in the Board Manual.

Standard 9: Ensuring Sound Transactions

The land trust works diligently to see that every land and easement transaction is legally, ethically, and technically sound.

- A review of several project files, including the most recent projects, indicates that the land trust is doing a good job of meeting the criteria of this standard. All transactions are reviewed by qualified and independent legal counsel (although that review should be better documented in the files) and the land trust does not provide legal advice to landowners. We encourage SSRLT to revise its standard landowner letter to more clearly state that SSRLT cannot provide landowners with legal advice and to recommend they seek independent legal and tax advice.
- SSRLT's easements are well-drafted and are tailored to the individual characteristics of each project. The organization's record keeping is excellent; a fireproof safe for the retention of essential and original records is on order. That safe should be kept off site. The combination to the safe should be known by more than one person and passed on to future leaders.
- We noted some minor inconsistencies in some files and pointed those out to staff. For example, in one case the file indicated the easement was recorded before it was signed.
- Land titles are properly investigated and documented.
- Each project file needs to contain a record of the board's action when it accepted the easement. We suggest a formal board resolution be prepared for each new project, and that a copy go in the board minutes as well as the project file. The adoption of such a resolution is an occasion for the board to celebrate the success of the land trust in working to achieve its mission; this is a celebration that should not be overlooked.
- We recommend that appraisals be included in the files of essential and original documents. These files should also include IRS Forms 8283 when appropriate, fee property land inspection reports, public agency contracts, and contracts leases relative to long-term land management.
- The public benefits of SSRLT's fee projects should be better documented in the files. For some projects, it was difficult to learn the rationale for acquiring the land when reviewing the file. This issue may be resolved to a great extent once conservation prioritization is complete and project review documents and procedures are revised to reflect those priorities.
- To date, SSRLT has had a land survey done for every project, either because of requirements under the agreement with PacifiCorp or because the landowner has paid for one. They do not have a policy that requires a survey for every project, however.

Recommendations:

- Include more background material in project files:
 - Documentation pertaining to attorney review.
 - Board resolution authorizing project.
 - Public benefit documentation, ie. project selection criteria worksheets.
- Revise landowner letter to emphasize that SSRLT cannot provide legal advice and encourage landowners to seek independent legal and tax advice.

Standard 10: Tax Benefits

The land trust works diligently to see that every charitable gift of land or easement meets federal and state tax law requirements.

- Our review indicates that SSRLT meets all of the criteria of this standard.

Standard 11: Conservation Easement Stewardship

The land trust has a program of responsible stewardship of its easements.

- SSRLT has a unique situation in that its long-term agreement with PacifiCorp assures that there will be a very adequate endowment available to fund long-term easement monitoring and defense for projects in the so-

called “Action Area”. The land trust will need to pay attention to assuring that it has the necessary resources for projects in other parts of its service area.

- The most recent baseline documentation is well-done, although each baseline document should include a copy of the easement itself. The documentation for some of the land trust’s earlier conservation easement projects is not as well-done and should be updated. We see no requirement or benefit to recording baseline documents, and several downsides to doing so, including cost and some loss of landowner confidentiality.
- SSRLT regularly monitors its easements and maintains the monitoring records in the project files. We recommend that the policy be slightly revised to make it clear that every easement will be monitored at least once every 12 months, rather than annually, and we recommend that board members accompany staff on monitoring visits, both to educate themselves better about the land trust’s work and to help maintain positive relationships with landowners.
- The land trust has developed and the board is now reviewing draft policies on conservation easement amendment and enforcement. Both policies are thorough and well-written and should be formally adopted soon.

Recommendations:

- Update older baseline documents to ensure their accuracy and detail matches that of latter baseline documents.
- Revise easement monitoring policy and procedures to articulate that all easements will be monitored at least once every twelve months.
- Finalize and adopt policies on easement amendment and enforcement.

Standard 12: Fee Land Stewardship

The land trust has a program of responsible stewardship for the land it holds in fee for conservation purposes.

- SSRLT prepares a land management plan for each of its fee title acquisitions, and has a draft policy detailing the timeline within which those plans are to be completed and what they are to include.
- The land trust is actively engaged in management and restoration activities at several of its projects, including fee title and conservation easements. These activities are documented in the files and are undertaken only where adequate funding can be assured; for instance, we visited a stream restoration project on adjacent properties owned by and under easement held by the SSRLT which are being funded by PacifiCorp.