



THE STATE OF CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION-LED STEWARDSHIP IN ILLINOIS

Prepared by:



With Support from:



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I. Executive Summary

Traditionally, land stewardship, defined as *the practice of providing long-term maintenance, including the overhead and administration needed, to ensure high-quality land is conserved in perpetuity*, has fallen on state, municipal, or federal government agencies. Of the over 1 million acres of land conserved in Illinois, approximately 50,000 acres are owned by non-governmental conservation groups. Traditionally, nonprofit conservation organizations protected land, restored it, and then transferred it to government entities for long-term ownership. While this “protect, restore, transfer” model is still prominent within the conservation community, budgetary stress at the municipal, county and state level has undermined this model’s viability or feasibility. Because conservation organizations cannot assume they will be able to transfer land back to governmental agencies, such organizations are exploring strategies that would allow them to steward those lands in perpetuity.

This presents an opportunity for the land trust community to re-think the current model and develop innovative sustainable approaches to support land protection in the state. Yet, there is a dearth of state level data regarding the unmet stewardship need conservation organizations face or tools that offer strategies for improvements.

The project team, comprised of Delta Institute, Natural Land Institute (NLI), Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF), Openlands, and Illinois Environmental Council (IEC), collaborated on an 18 month research project to understand and map out the current conditions of conservation organization-based stewardship in Illinois. The team’s approach utilized interviews and surveys from conservation organizations throughout the state. Analysis was organized into five main categories; stewardship capacity, partnerships, funding and financing, policy, and behavioral and organizational dynamics. The key findings from the study included:

- Organizational size impacts distribution of stewardship labor among different positions revealing bottlenecks in growing capacity and inefficiencies in utilizing existing expertise and resources. Regardless of size, however, volunteers play a critical role in implementing land stewardship.
- There are opportunities to develop innovative funding strategies that remain untapped. Technical as well as cultural barriers need to be addressed to move them forward.
- Majority of partnerships, even though informal in nature, have staying power and bring value to organizations by providing shared resources and knowledge. However, access to and participation in such partnerships is uneven depending on geography and capacity constraints.
- An apparent gap in partnerships is related to working with decision makers and advocacy organizations to build support for policies that protect land.
- Ecological, financial, and social resilience is a top priority for conservation organizations when it comes to long-term success. There is a need to cultivate the next generation of stewards that represents the community and is enabled to address current and future threats associated with climate change.

Conservation organizations shared bold and hopeful visions for the future of stewardship in Illinois. While shedding light on challenges and barriers for effective land stewardship, the interviewees want

to see a systematic strategy for improvements through partnerships and increased investment. They hope the impact of such efforts will result in protecting lands that is respectful of the cultural heritages of all people, and ultimately, meet the demands of stewarding Illinois' unique and diverse landscapes.

This report sheds light on how conservation organizations are carrying out land stewardship today, where they see major challenges and growth potential, and some best practices among this peer group. The intent of this study is to inform the Illinois conservation community, and engage community leaders, politicians, volunteers, funders and other stakeholders on the substantial environmental challenge the conservation community faces in protecting land in Illinois.

II. Background and Introduction

Conservation professionals work in a resource constrained environment. Barriers to accelerating the scale and quality of land protection include needing additional staff, skills and expertise, time, and money, amongst others. Despite that, conservation organizations and more specifically land trusts defined as organizations dedicated to the long-term protection of natural areas, have a long history of overcoming these challenges. The project team, comprised of land trusts, researchers, and policy advocates, began investigating how conservation organizations might leverage available funding and financing opportunities to support their work while understanding that conservation organizations are uniquely positioned to own and steward their land in perpetuity.

In previous work, the project team first investigated a number of conservation finance and funding approaches directed at addressing long-term land stewardship needs, which are defined as the regular long-term maintenance that conservation organizations should prepare for when they acquire land. Stewardship is often the hardest activity for these non-profits to fund. Acquisition and initial restoration often have more readily available funders due to the desire of individuals to protect the natural environment from perceived immediate threats such as development pressure.

This resource limitation has been exacerbated in recent years as the Illinois State government and a large percentage of municipalities continue to struggle financially. In the past, many conservation organizations looked to state and local agencies as the long-term managers of protected parcels, conveying or selling them to government entities with the assumption that they would be well maintained. While still a potential option, with their own constraints, public agencies are less likely to take on additional parcels aware of their own, existing stewardship burden. Therefore, the project team postulated that if conservation organizations continue to acquire and restore land, they should also prepare for the increasing likelihood that they will be the long-term managers.

In a previously released report called *Preparing for Long-Term Stewardship: A Dual Approach* (<http://bit.ly/dualapproach>), the team proposed different approaches for land stewardship in Illinois. The report presented financing opportunities and laid out one potential funding concept. This concept utilized a combination of stewardship cooperatives and working lands cooperatives to create a long-term management scenario as seen in Figure 1.

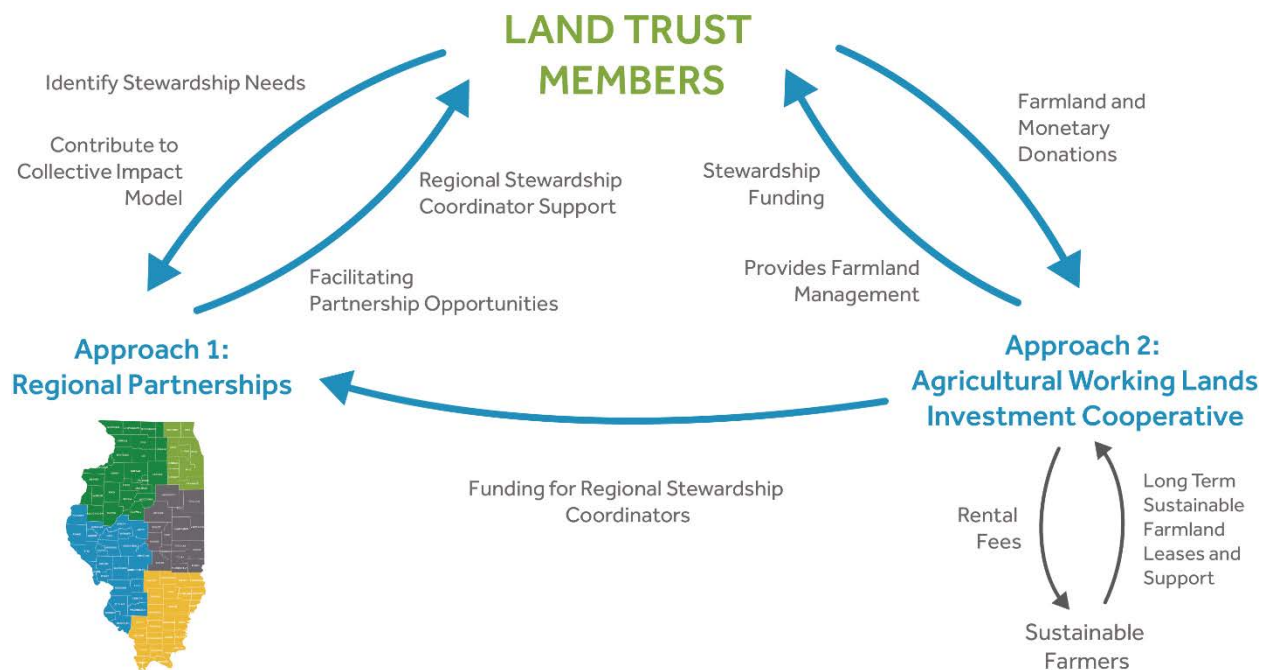


Figure 1: Dual Approach Framework Concept Diagram

Moving forward required a deeper understanding of conservation organizations’ current capacity as well as challenges associated with stewardship, which this report examines. The project team also conducted a pilot project focused on establishing a working lands investment initiative. The results of the pilot project are documented in a separate case-study. These findings will help inform not only the Illinois conservation community, but also community leaders, politicians, volunteers, funders and other stakeholders on the substantial environmental challenge the conservation community faces in protecting and maintaining land in perpetuity.

This report briefly describes findings related to five critical issue areas: stewardship capacity, partnerships, funding and financing, policy, and behavioral and organizational dynamics. The appendices include the Land Trust Survey, Interview Guide, Coding Thematic Categories, description of the methodology utilized in data collection and analysis, as well as additional supporting information used in the study.

Of the approximately 45 land conservation organizations in the state, we collected written surveys from 24 organizations and conducted 31 organizational interviews. This accounted for 94% of acres documented in I-View, a database of protected lands in Illinois (<http://prairiestateconservation.org/i-view/>). Of those, 2,650 acres were agricultural lands, 236 acres were recreational, and 110 acres were used for buildings and structures, while the remaining 41,144 acres were natural habitat, with a detailed breakdown of habitat types shown in Figure 2.

The survey responses from the 24 organizations (23 state or local and 1 national) were categorized as small, medium, or large land trusts based on the acreage of land under management. Responses were received from 10 small (up to 500 acres), 9 medium (501 to 2000 acres), and 5 large (over 2001 acres) organizations. The survey data was cross-analyzed with data from over 60 hours of interviews from 31 local and statewide conservation organizations.

Natural Land Type	Acres	Number of Organizations
Forest	14,449	22
Wetlands	8,904	21
Prairie	7,942	21
Lake, Ponds, Streams	5,201	15
Savanna	3,265	17
Tillable	1,684	10
Other Natural Habitat	807	8
Other Agricultural Land	608	5
Eurasian Grassland	575	5
Trail Corridors	198	8
Hayfield	110	5
Buildings and Structures	110	9
Parkland (mowed areas)	30	3
Other Recreational Land	8	2

Figure 2: Description of Acres Assessed by Project.

To view all data from this section in an interactive visualization, please visit [this link](#).

III. Stewardship Capacity

Based on survey responses, the research identified that while 75 percent of all the land protected in Illinois was transferred to a state or local agency, only 16 percent of those transfers have taken place in the last 10 years, suggesting there is an apparent shift in who stewards the land in the long-term. The first section of the study focused on stewardship capacity - the ability, resources, and time to fully manage over 40,000 acres of land across a variety of habitats as shown in Figure 2. The study also looked at roles different staff play in stewardship planning and implementation in an effort to identify best practices as well as inefficiencies in how current capacity is deployed. Most organizations interviewed expressed a desire to improve their stewardship capacity through additional staff, volunteers, or both. Only 2 of the 31 organizations interviewed indicated that they were able to meet their stewardship targets. The analysis within this section clearly indicated limitations associated with the current capacity on a state level for the conservation organizations. The section examined those doing the work, the cost of these activities, and the opportunities for growing stewardship capacity. The data clearly indicated that there are multiple ways to accomplish this work. The results show the breadth of approaches among land trusts to implement stewardship and highlights opportunities for leveraging resources and improving efficiencies.

Who is Stewarding Our Protected Lands?

These organizations accomplish stewardship activities through a diversity of efforts from a variety of different staff positions. Over half of the organizations are seeking to have, or already have at least one full time staff dedicated to stewardship. They see this as a reliable way to both get on-the-ground work done and also manage a larger pool of volunteers and contractors who are critical to stewardship implementation. Volunteers and contractors were the two most frequently reported positions involved in stewardship implementation within the survey. Figure 3 summarizes the results of the organizational capacity as indicated by survey responses.

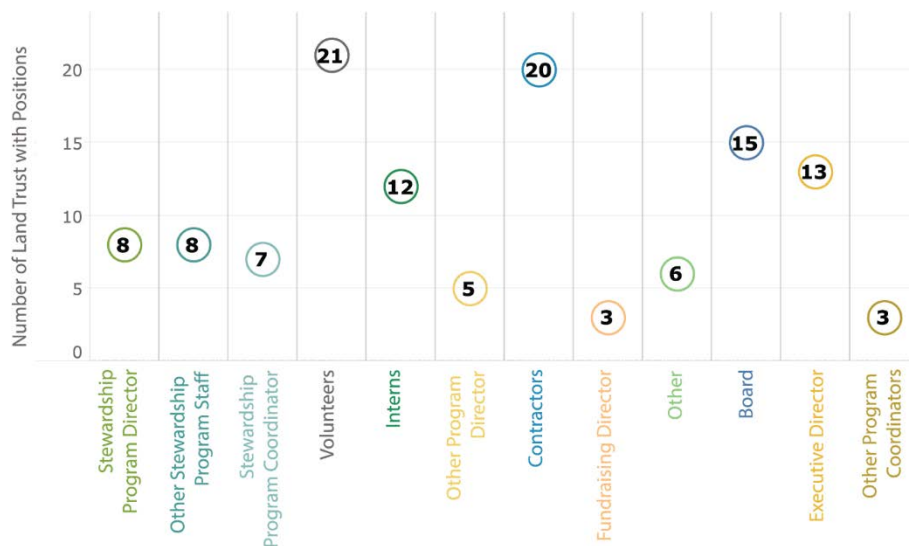


Figure 3: Staff positions involved in stewardship activities. The position types are listed at the bottom on the chart with numbers indicating how many organizations reported having such a position involved in some kind of stewardship activity.

In terms of hours dedicated to stewardship activities, stewardship program staff along with volunteers, on average, spend the most hours involved in stewardship work, yet only less than half of organizations report having a dedicated stewardship-focused position. This reveals a gap and area for growing capacity with organizations. Figure 4 shows how many hours per year, average and median, each position type is involved in stewardship. The hours are reported as totals per organization not per individual (e.g. most organizations have multiple volunteers or board members).

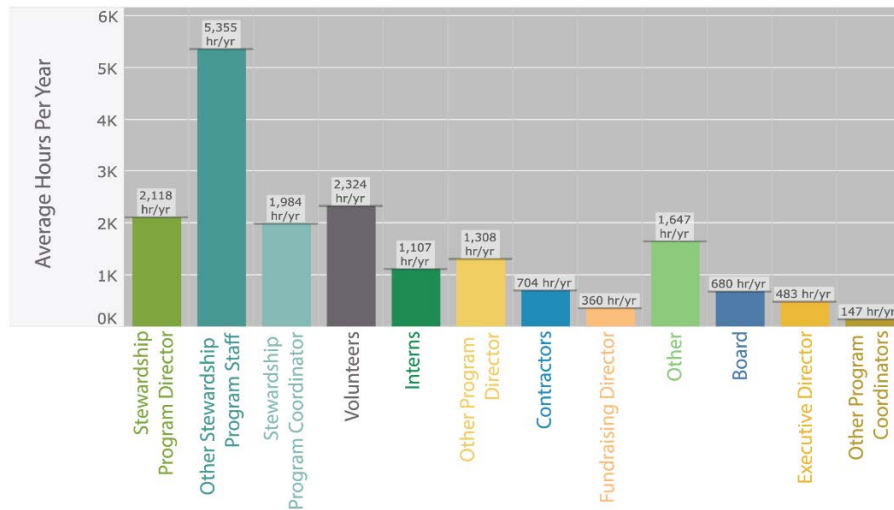


Figure 4A: Stewardship average hours for different position types.

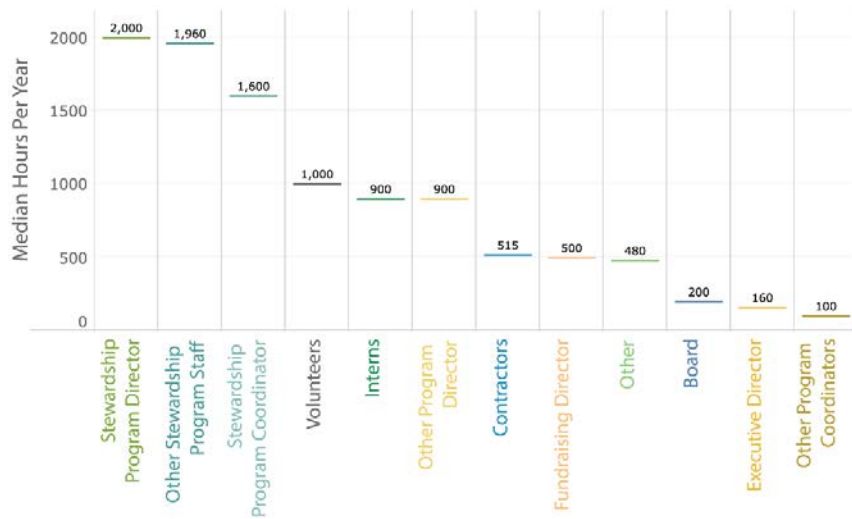


Figure 4B: Stewardship median hours for different position types.

The distribution of position types and hours spent on stewardship also varied based on organizational size (Figure 5). Large land trusts reported a greater percentage of the stewardship work being conducted by full-time mid-level staffers, specifically utilizing stewardship directors, coordinators, or other program directors. Mid-sized land trusts have a more evenly divided workload among volunteers and program staff. Smaller organization reported a heavier reliance on volunteers for stewardship work on the ground. Data suggests that small land trusts do not typically support a junior level stewardship position such as a coordinator. Even with these variations, across size categories, organizations reported approximately 1 full time equivalent (FTE) of hours contributed by volunteers.

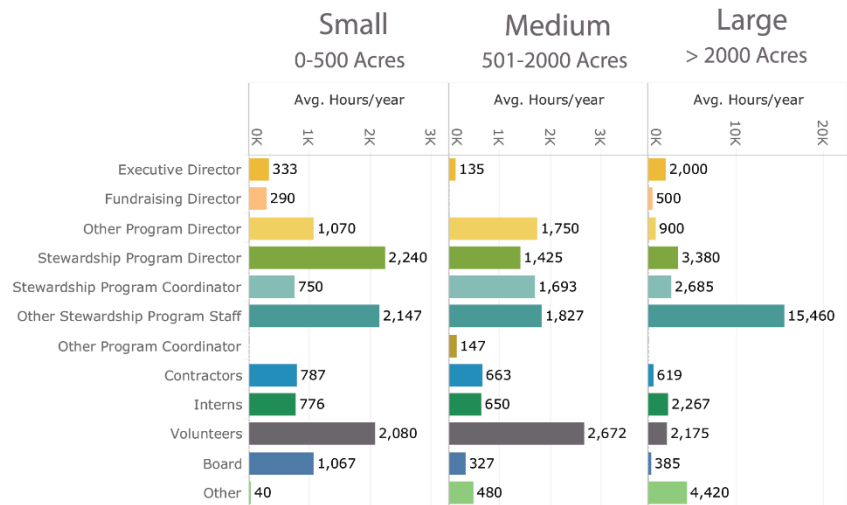


Figure 5: Stewardship hours for different position types based on organization size.

Through a survey, each organization was asked to report each applicable position's main stewardship activities. Those results are summarized in Figure 6.

	Priority Setting	Fundraising	Developing Management Plans	Implementing Stewardship Activities	Coordinating Contractors & Stewardship Staff	Coordinating Volunteers
Board	13	13	10	14	9	12
Contractors	-	-	5	19	1	1
Executive Directors	13	13	9	6	7	6
Fundraising Director	1	3	-	-	-	1
Interns	-	-	1	11	1	1
Other	1	1	2	5	2	3
Other Program Coordinators	-	1	2	3	2	2
Other Program Director	4	3	3	3	4	4
Other Stewardship Program Staff	-	-	4	8	1	3
Stewardship Program Coordinator	3	1	6	7	6	6
Stewardship Program Director	8	3	8	8	8	7
Volunteers	1	3	3	17	2	7

Figure 6: Stewardship activities based on position type, with the number representing how many organizations report that particular position being involved in a particular activity.

While some position types assume distinct roles related to stewardship (e.g. priority setting, fundraising, implementation, etc.), others seem to be participating in a variety, if not all activities on a regular basis. This analysis showed that Executive Directors and Boards often play a key role in on-the-ground stewardship. Board and Executive Directors were most likely to be involved in on-the-ground stewardship at smaller organizations; however, interviewees acknowledged or suggested that fundraising and strategy development should be higher in priority.

Notably, contractors are primarily used for implementing stewardship activities with a secondary role in developing management plans. When asked about this, organizations cited the need for highly-skilled and specialized work as the primary reason for hiring contractors. Herbicide application was a commonly referenced activity for which a contractor was hired due to the limited number of onsite staff or volunteers with herbicide applicator licenses. One interesting finding was that many organizations mentioned the requirements of grant programs as the reason for hiring contractors when they would have otherwise kept the work in-house.

The Role of Governing Boards in Stewardship

Survey results suggest that board members are involved in a wide array of operational and programmatic activities that exceed fiduciary and governance roles. On average, board members contribute 680 hours per year, with a median of 200 hours per year toward stewardship (Figure 4). The involvement of the board is heavily dependent on the size and maturity of the organization with small conservation organizations documenting about three times more hours than boards at mid-sized or large organizations (Figure 5). This finding suggests that as organizations grow, they find greater efficiencies in implementing stewardship activities utilizing other means or it may be representative of a highly engaged “working board” that is needed to keep organizations viable.

With this information, it is important to consider the question “what is the best use of a board’s limited time.” Based upon our interviews, conservation practitioners emphasized the importance of the board in fundraising and priority setting as opposed to implementation. Based upon this, it may make sense to work directly with boards and staff within the organization to re-prioritize board members’ time where possible to such governance focused roles.

The Importance of Volunteers

Organizations, on average, achieve more than 2,020 hours of stewardship support from volunteers, which equates to an additional full-time employee. This volunteer effort is critical to the success of conservation organizations and has long been a component of land management work. Further capacity analysis suggests that across the organizations, there is currently a one-to-one ratio, on average, of volunteer hours to staff hours engaged in stewardship activities (Figure 7). This means that 50 percent of all stewardship hours in the state of Illinois on these acres are conducted by volunteers. The data also shows that on average, for approximately every 16 volunteers working with conservation organizations, there is one staff member.

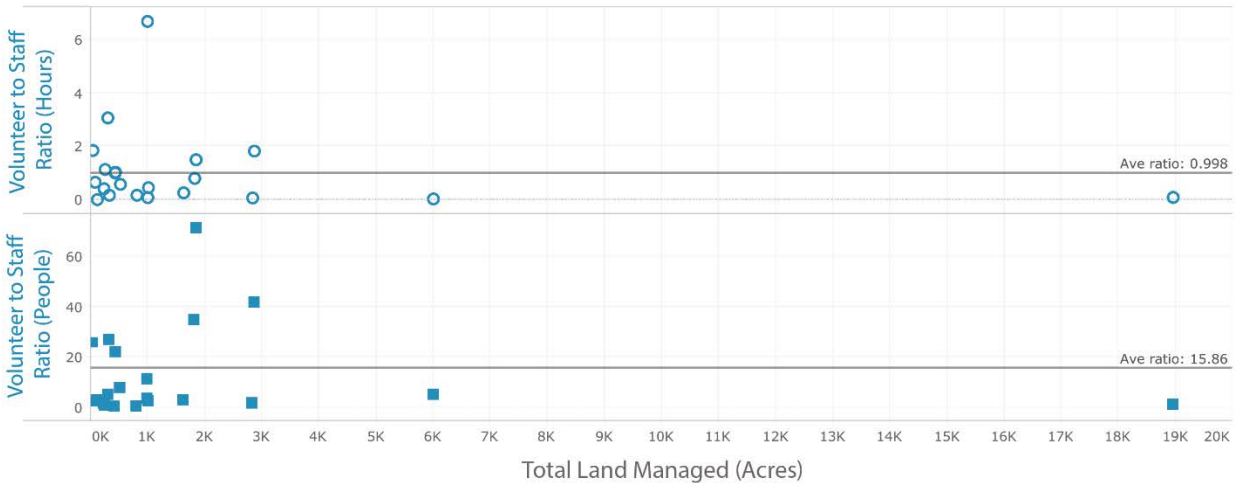


Figure 7. Each symbol represents organization’s volunteer to staff ratio as a function of acres of land managed, in terms of hours (top panel, circles), and number of people (bottom panel, squares). Average volunteer to staff ratios are also indicated on the graphs.

In determining the volunteer to staff capacity ratios, all staff time is summed together (not weighted by position type). It provides an organization-wide metric for volunteer contribution to stewardship capacity. There is no observed correlation between volunteer to staff capacity ratio and quantity of managed land though data (Figure 5) indicates organization size does impact how labor is distributed among different positions. The results suggest a potential trade-off between volunteer strategies employed by organizations. High hour ratio suggests that there is deep engagement with individual volunteers who contribute many hours to the organization. On the other hand, high people count ratios suggest effective recruitment of volunteers as the ratio indicates that many individuals get involved with the organization.

Further analysis would be needed to determine what factors significantly influence volunteer engagement. Interviews suggest that volunteer program structure may depend on organization’s size, location, habitat type in need of stewardship and others. Many organizations leverage existing relationships and infrastructure and combine multiple engagement strategies to cultivate a strong volunteer corps.

As one of the highlights in the volunteer discussions during the interviews, organizations identified community champions as key components for robust volunteer programs. These highly engaged, active volunteers, whether they serve on the board or not, can help organize work days, bring out other volunteers, recruit new volunteers, serve as site stewards, and track hours. In the interviews, respondents mentioned the value of these highly committed volunteers in training other volunteers with emerging skill development (e.g. school groups or other social clubs). By identifying these strong leaders and nurturing them, organizations are able to increase their stewardship capacity.

On the other hand, interviews revealed that engaging volunteers is a perennial challenge and all organizations would benefit from bringing in additional capacity through their volunteer programs, focusing on cultivating the next generation of conservationists. Based on the responses, successful strategies for volunteer engagement included:

- **To increase knowledge:** Periodically holding skill-based trainings for groups of volunteers to enhance overall capacity.
- **To increase numbers:** Connecting directly with “affiliate organizations” to share volunteer opportunities and to collaborate where possible.
- **To build partnerships:** Be clear about identifying the mutual benefits for participants.
- **To keep them:** Make sure you are checking in, being attentive, and creating fun and engaging activities in addition to manual labor.

Interview Quote

“Feed them and email them and thank them and give them swag.”

Labor Costs

It is important to consider the cost of the stewardship work currently, including the in-kind contributions made by volunteers and others. We projected these costs by assigning an estimated hourly rate to each position type. The hourly rates used in the analysis can be found in Appendix D. Combining all paid stewardship capacity positions suggests a cost of \$50/acre in labor costs and 2.2 hours/acre of staff time. Board and volunteers contribute approximately \$7.25/acre in in-kind value to organizations. In addition, we find that the cost of labor for stewardship program directors is \$9.2/acre.

Data suggests that as land trusts acquire more land, the investment into mid-level stewardship positions is key as they spend the most time implementing stewardship and that’s where most capacity is expanded as more acres need to be managed. When looking at labor costs by size of organization (Figure 8), we found that large land trusts outspend all others by a factor of about 3.5 times. Large land trusts spend about \$765,000 on stewardship labor, whereas medium and small labor costs are approximately \$215,000 annually. Results indicate that medium-sized land trusts are managing more acres than small land trusts while expending the same amount in labor costs. This may indicate that medium-size land trusts are utilizing resources more efficiently or it could indicate a lag in stewardship capacity as organizations acquire more land. Based upon our interviews, we believe the latter is likely, as small-

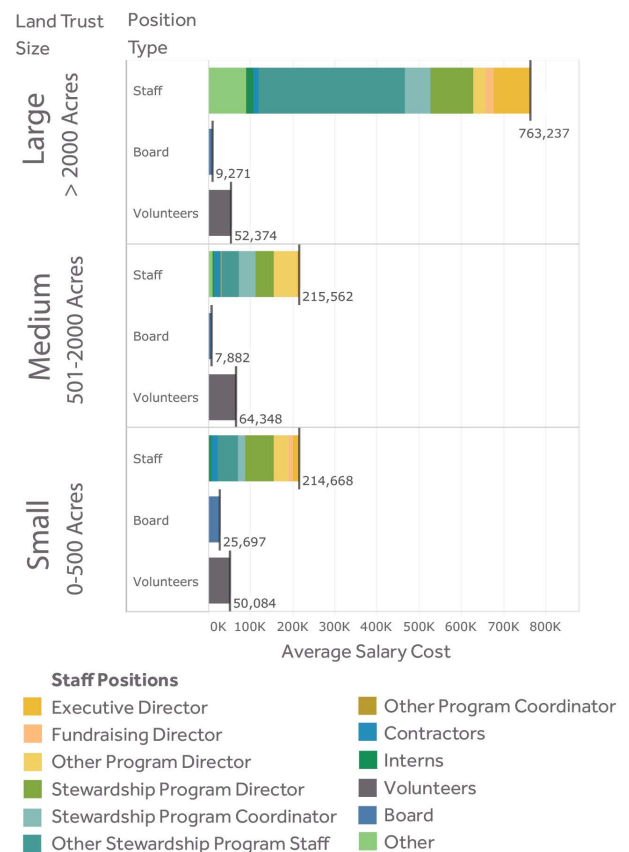


Figure 8: Annual labor costs for staff and in-kind labor contribution from board and volunteers for stewardship activities based on organization size.

and medium- size organizations indicated that limited funding hindered their ability to bring on additional stewardship staff capacity.

To view all data from this section in an interactive visualization, please visit [this link](#)

Management Activities

We assessed stewardship capacity further, in order to assess more specifically where the reported stewardship capacity needs lie in relation to actual implementation of the stewardship activities and whether they are being implemented at the desired level. The survey asked how frequently a set of most common management activities are implemented for habitats that the organization owns and manages. The management activities and associated frequency of implementation are summarized in Figure 9. Specific stewardship activities and the frequency they are implemented by organizations by habitat type are shown in Figure 10 and Figure 11.

Activity	Implementation Frequency Reported	Recommended Practice
Site monitoring	Annual	Annual
Invasive control	Annual	Annual
Controlled burns	Every 1-3 years	Every 3-5 years
Update management plan	Every 2-6 years	Every 3-5 years
Vegetation management	3-4 years for forest/lake and ponds 2-3 years for prairie/savanna/wetland/grassland/trails	5-10 years for forests 3-5 years for prairie/wetlands
Grazing	Rarely occurs, annual when applicable	Annual
Nuisance wildlife control	Rarely occurs, annual when applicable	Annual until population is at the desired level
Hunting	Annual, when applicable	

Figure 9: Frequency of stewardship activities, typical reported and recommended.

To view data from this section in an interactive visualization, please visit this [link](#)

Activities	Average Management Frequency
Supplies Maintenance	Annually
Supplies Replacement	Every 2-3 Years
Equipment Maintenance	Every 2-3 Years
Public Infrastructure Maintenance	Every 2-3 Years
Equipment Replacement	Every 4-5 Years
Public Infrastructure Replacement	Every 6-10 Years

Figure 10: General management activities and reported frequency of implementation.

Activities	Forest	Prairie	Savanna	Wetlands	Lakes, Streams, Ponds	Tillable	Trails & Corridors
Updating Management Plans	Every 4-5 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Never/ NA
Site Monitoring	Every 2-3 Years	Every 2-3 Years	Every 2-3 Years	Every 2-3 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 4-5 Years
Invasive Species Control	Every 2-3 Years	Every 2-3 Years	Every 2-3 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Never/ NA	Every 6-10 Years
Nuisance Wildlife Control	Every 6-10 Years	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Every 6-10 Years	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Never/ NA
Prescribed Fire	Every 4-5 Years	Every 2-3 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Never/ NA
Grazing	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Never/ NA
Hunting	Every 6-10 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Never/ NA	Never/ NA	Never/ NA
Vegetation Management	Every 6-10 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 4-5 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Every 6-10 Years	Never/ NA	Never/ NA

Figure 11: Management Frequency of Specific Activities

IV. Partnerships

Respondents were asked to share information about impactful partnerships within the last 10 years of their organization. They emphasized the importance of both formal and informal relationships in getting work done on the ground. These partnerships are seen as ways to consolidate finite resources, leverage funding and implement programs that would not otherwise be achievable. The many cited benefits of partnerships are increased access to money, volunteers, trainings, specialized expertise, and supplies. A good example of this is the way in which many organizations throughout the state have informal partnerships with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and receive herbicide and other supplies in exchange for management of nature preserves throughout the state.

Interview Quote

"I guess a part of the question you would want to ask according to your 50 land trust is, do they sort of work in their universe, or do they have a sort of broader area of concern about what's going on elsewhere in the geography that they care about. And I think you'll find that a good number of them are probably both interested in what they own and what they can control, but also in the broader landscape. And, I find that interesting because I think it's also essential. It creates a fabric of organizations who care about the land as opposed to all these isolated activities."

Partnership Structure and Duration

Figure 12 shows the number of partnerships in the last 10 years reported by the survey and types of organizations that the partner represents. The majority of the partnerships reported in the survey, 65 out of the 96, are informal as shown in Figure 12. The majority of those are with volunteer groups, while partnerships with local/state government, service cooperatives, and other land trusts make

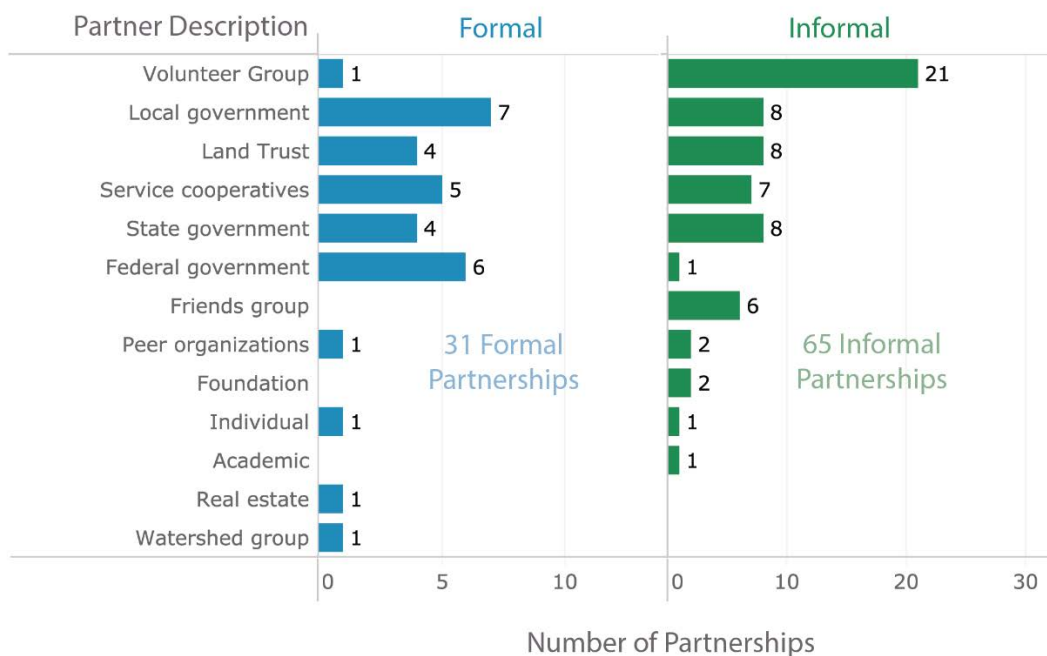


Figure 12: Formal and informal partnerships, by partner organization type.

up the next more frequently reported informal partnerships. On the other hand, partnerships with federal government, while also occurs at similar level, tends to be formal in nature. When asked why many organizations engaged in more informal partnerships, interviewees often cited personal connections between organizations as well as the additional administrative steps needed for formal partnerships. Partners expressed the need of formal partnerships to attract a wider set of partners, including government partners, and the way in which formal partnerships were more effective in holding groups accountable to each other.

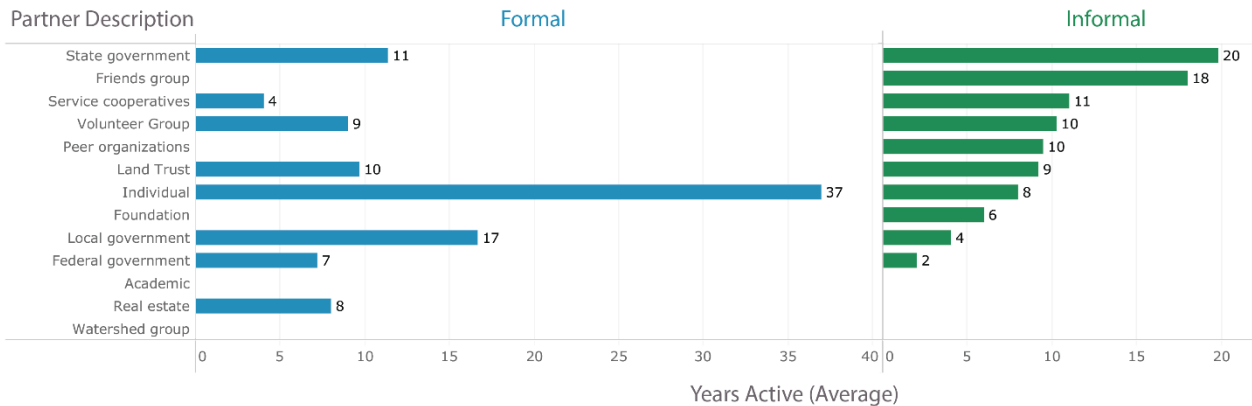


Figure 13: Partnership length (in years) reported, by partner organization type.

Figure 13 demonstrates that the conservation community has long utilized partnership models and that they build enduring relationships. When discussing this long history of partnerships, organizations mentioned the need to leverage other organizational skills, reach new constituents, and creatively fundraise.

Partnership Activities

From the data reported by participants and presented in Figure 14, we see trends about the types of activities that are most common with key partner types. Out of 203 total activities reported, 129 were conducted as part of informal partnerships, reinforcing the finding that informal partnerships dominate in this sector. Volunteer groups primarily share volunteers, while also sometimes sharing data and equipment. Among public sector partnerships, whereas state agencies lean more toward data and equipment sharing, local governments are often partners for joint management activities and sharing of volunteers; though local/state agencies participate in all activities to some degree. Land trusts also partner with service cooperatives on a variety of activities, with data/equipment/volunteer sharing being slightly more prevalent than grant writing or joint management.

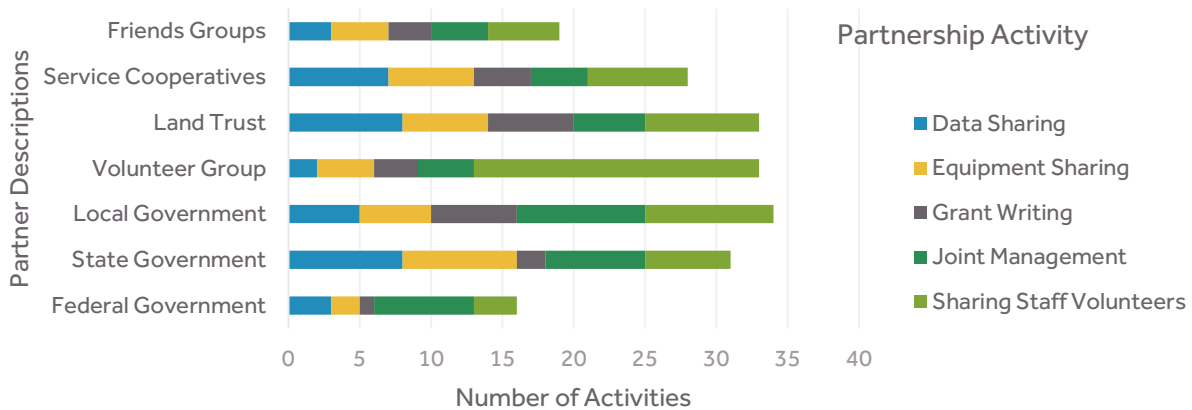


Figure 14: Partnership Activities

Further analysis shows that 15 partnerships involved 4 or 5 activities between partners, 44 partnerships involved 2-3 activities, while 35 partnerships involved 1 activity. This correlates well with comments made by interviewees who stressed the importance of a shared goal. By having a narrowly defined goal, partnerships might be more likely to endure as expectations are more likely to be well defined.

Measuring Connectivity

In addition to characterizing the types of partnerships and activities undertaken by the partner organizations, we examined the structure of the network of which conservation organizations are members. Understanding the structure of the network can inform how the network functions - whether particular organizations may act as conveners or bottlenecks in diffusing information, if there are sub-groups within the network, and what strategies can be helpful in leveraging network connections to improve conservation outcomes in Illinois. Understanding connections between partners and how to leverage partner resources is critical in increasing stewardship capacity across the state.

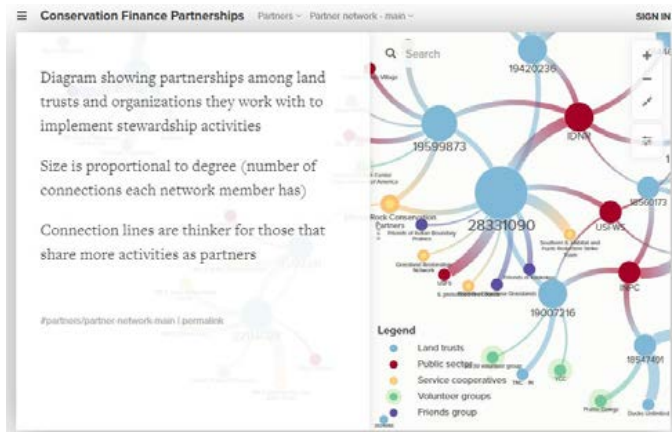


Figure 15: A snapshot of an interactive map showing the conservation partner network. To view and explore further, please visit [this link](#).

Utilizing the web-based network analysis tool Kumu, our research team looked at the partnership network of conservation organizations focusing on three basic network analysis metrics: degree (the number of connections each network member has), closeness (the distance each network member is from all other members), and “betweenness” (how many times a network member lies on

the shortest path between two other members). Figure 15 shows a snapshot of the network diagram and associated analysis that can be explored in more detail within the interactive Kumu map.

Looking at network degree, i.e. the number of connections each organization has, we can identify top local hubs within the network. These include: Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), ParkLands Foundation, Grand Prairie Friends, Friends of the Kankakee, The Wetlands Initiative, Franklin Creek Conservation Association, Barrington Area Conservation Trust, JDCF, Lake Forest Open Lands Association, and The Nature Conservancy. These organizations were often mentioned during interviews as key active participants and models of community builders in the state. While many within the state express concern around partnering with IDNR, the network map suggests that IDNR remains one of the key connectors within the conservation community in the state. Though these organizations have a large number of connections locally, they are aren't necessarily well connected to the wider network.

Another useful measure in understanding the network is closeness, which measures the distance between each member to all other members. In general, organizations with high closeness can spread information to the rest of the network most easily and usually have high visibility into what is happening across the network. The top ten nodes within this network are ParkLands Foundation, CLIFFTOP, Grand Prairie Friends, and Friends of the Kankakee, The Wetlands Initiative, Franklin Creek Conservation Association, the Nature Conservancy, IDNR, United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS), and Middle Rock Conservation Partners.

Betweenness measures how many times a network member is located on the shortest path between two other partners. In general, organizations with high betweenness have more control over the flow of information and act as key bridges within the network. They can also be potential single points of failure, i.e. bottlenecks. The top ten brokers in the network are Grand Prairie Friends, Friends of the Kankakee, The Wetlands Initiative, Franklin Creek Conservation Association, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, Natural Land Institute, IDNR, Middle Rock Conservation Partners, and the Illinois Nature Preserve Commission.

Several entities appear to have substantial representation in the network of conservation organizations when evaluating network metrics, and are acting as local hubs and connectors between partners. These tend to be state agencies or large organizations. The network diagram also shows that there are numerous organizations that have almost no connections to these players or to other conservation organizations. This suggests that future interventions to leverage partnerships and collaborations should ensure that outreach targets organizations that have not played an active role in the wider network and have fewer resources accessible to them.

The segmentation of the network is further demonstrated by the network community analysis showing 11 communities (groups of organizations that are more likely to interact with each other more often than interacting with others) with at least 3 members. The data also suggested that 3

land trusts are not closely interacting with any other members of the network as the algorithm didn't link them to any communities.

The preliminary network analysis is based upon survey responses, i.e. self-reported data. As such, we expect that gaps remain in our understanding of the network structure and its connection to enabling implementation of land stewardship among conservation organizations in Illinois. While we will continue to refine analysis and our understanding of the conservation network, the data suggests that potential for building stewardship capacity is not uniform across the state. Strategies for collaboration need to ensure that they reach beyond conservation organizations that are already major players in the network.

Partnership Pitfalls

The most commonly discussed partnership issue elucidated during the interviews was misalignment of the vision and goals between partners. Partnerships require a great deal of trust and it is necessary for mutual commitment to be agreed upon and consistent. Some organizations felt that it was just easier and more straightforward to work alone. They had engaged in partnerships that ended up requiring more administrative work than providing benefit to their organizations and as such were less likely to engage in additional partnerships.

Another cited issue with partnerships was contracting and shared service agreements, especially in partnerships that included multiple types of organizations such as state, local, and nonprofit organizations. Organizations often have set, established processes and a large partnership might not be something they are used to.

Proposal writing and associated budgets were often referenced as a barrier to more partnerships taking place. There is the potential for disagreements around how requested funds would be used, what organizational compensation will look like, and how different organizations value different type of work. Some partnerships, especially more formal ones, might exist because of a specific funding source. When funding is not renewed, partnerships often struggle to continue. Conservation 2000 (C2000), a program which was designed to take a holistic, long-term approach to protecting and managing natural resources in Illinois, is a well-known example in Illinois about how partnerships can fall apart without funding.

V. Funding

Conservation organizations who were interviewed primarily fell into two categories, those with dedicated stewardship budgets and those who utilized general operating funds for stewardship on an as needed basis.

Those organizations that had dedicated stewardship funds have found more success in fundraising for stewardship, often by requiring that all acquisitions include funds for stewardship or through financing arrangements such as revenue from hunting rights or mitigation funding. This commitment to long-term management at times can hamper additional protection but guarantees the organizations' long-term viability. Yet, it remains challenging to budget and plan for capital expenses associated with stewardship such as new vehicles or other large equipment.

Those without dedicated stewardship funds represented about three quarters of those interviewed. This group found it challenging to plan ahead. Often they were smaller organizations with limited staff and fundraising opportunities. Given limited reach, there is often a struggle to raise money for the stewardship activities.

Interview Quote

"I get asked 'How much more land are you going to buy?' And my answer is 'as much as we can afford to maintain.'"

Current Funding

Land trusts and other conservation organizations in Illinois use a variety of funding sources to support their stewardship activities. Survey respondents commonly mentioned traditional sources of stewardship funding such as foundation grants. There were also a number of more innovative collaborative funding sources reported such as wetlands mitigation banking or revenue from working lands leases. A summary of the reported funding sources is shown in Figure 16.

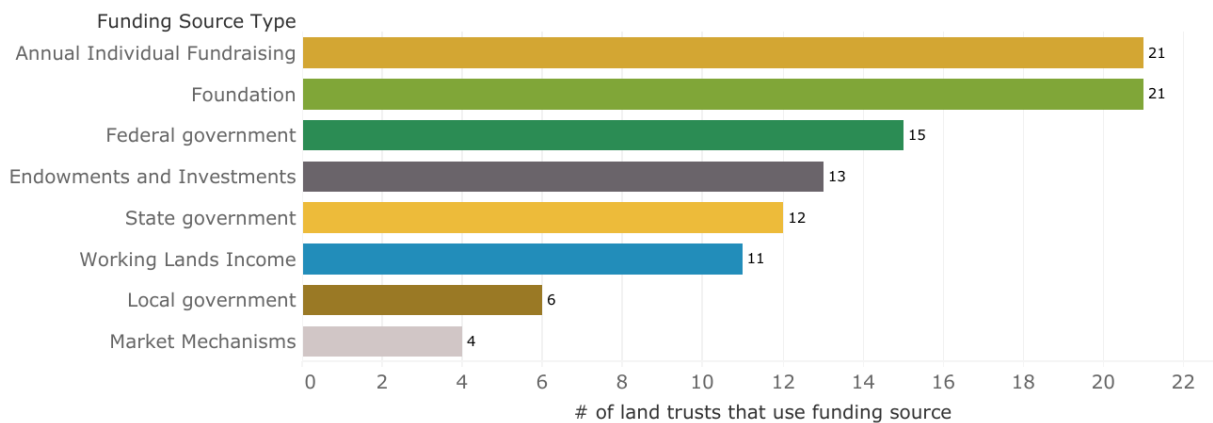


Figure 16: Funding sources utilized by land trusts, by type.

As identified above, land trust professionals wear many hats from day-to-day and are expected to not only conduct stewardship activities, but also build financial capacity for the organization. Many organizations are underequipped to devote the time and resources in identifying and soliciting individual donors as donor engagement and cultivation is a career and skillset all on its own.

A growing trend in giving throughout the country suggests that while the average age of donors increases, the younger generations are giving less. For example, one organization in the state recently surveyed their donors and found that their major donors contributing over \$2,500 are 70 years or older and are frequent volunteers for the organization. With this in mind, the conservation community has a challenge ahead as it attempts to engage the next generation of donors.

Connecting the stewardship work to personal experiences is key when it comes to donor cultivation. Donors tend to give to organizations when there is a personal or emotional connection tied to the mission. Donors think of their connection to land stewardship, and how their donations leave a lasting legacy.

According to interviewees, donors also often cite education as a primary interest. A number of organizations reported that directly connecting educational opportunities with stewardship work raised the profile of stewardship, a model that might be replicable by other conservation organizations in Illinois. Further, stewardship of donors helps staff learn more about the organization and the work being done, while allowing them the chance to get a firsthand look at the impact their gift is having.

Foundation Giving

21 of the 24 organizations surveyed reported utilizing foundation funding for stewardship. Interviewees identified capacity constraints that are creating a system where smaller organizations are prevented from receiving grant funding, primarily from foundations, because they cannot prepare “professional” applications. One organization interviewed suggested a different process for smaller organizations that included additional support for grant applicants to navigate the grant application process.

A synthesis of the interview discussions suggests that organizations with strong administration are better positioned to take on the administrative burden of putting together a grant application, as the requirements can consume staff time that might otherwise be spent on implementation of stewardship activities.

To counteract some of these constraints, organizations need to make the case to the funding agencies and foundations that administrative costs should be included when budgeting for stewardship. To that end, many organizations have begun tracking costs associated with stewardship activities that go beyond planning and implementation and potentially including those as overhead requirements within their larger stewardship budget.

Government Programs

Conservation organizations rely on leveraging Federal and State programs to assist with organizational and stewardship activities, and are a vital source of funding for land and natural resource conservation improvements. Over 50 percent of organizations reported applying for or receiving government funds for mission-related activities. Below is a snapshot of Federal and State programs that organizations leveraged.

Of the federal programs, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs were most commonly used (12), followed by United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) (5). Others

included the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, US Forest Service, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the North American Wetland Conservation Act small grants program. State programs included C2000, Coastal Management, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency 319 Grants Program, Nature Preserves Commission, State Wildlife Grants, Recreational Access, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources programs.

Endowments and Investments

When preparing for the long-term, endowments remain one of the most consistent and safe choices for funding land stewardship. Approximately 60 percent of surveyed organizations reported having an endowment. Figure 17 shows the number of land trusts with endowments and how they are used.

While the majority of board-provided endowment funds were used for general operating expenses, the majority of donor-provided endowment funds were for site specific projects—likely at the behest of the donor. In the interviews, the respondents typically mentioned drawing four percent from their endowments each year with a strong desire to grow them when possible. Organizations varied on how these funds were managed, however. Some utilize a paid financial advisor, others utilize a board committee if the expertise is there, while still others have partnerships with community foundations who manage the funds. Interview results suggest that there is a knowledge gap among organizational directors regarding the benefits and risks of various endowment management approaches. This may be an opportunity among the conservation community for shared learning, either through PSCC or an alternative forum.

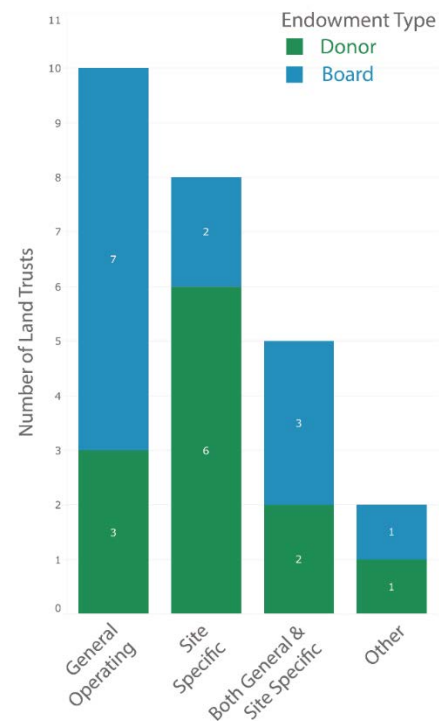


Figure 17: Endowments used by land trusts to fund conservation, by type.

Market Mechanisms

In addition to leveraging government grants and endowments, conservation organizations also utilize market mechanisms to finance conservation. The two most commonly utilized market mechanisms include real estate sales and mitigation funds.

Real estate sales are most often deployed as a stewardship funding strategy where limited development is allowed in exchange for a much larger effort to protect adjacent natural areas. The agreement usually includes long-term fees associated with the management of the natural areas. This funding strategy has been particularly effective in areas of significant land development pressure, such as in the counties surrounding and within the Chicago metropolitan area. Organizations who champion this strategy emphasize how it allows conservation organizations to protect their most important natural habitat while forcing developers to build conservation into their business plan.

Mitigation banking has garnered increasing attention in Illinois in recent years with a number of projects. This mechanism applies when a regulated entity needing to offset environmental damage resulting from their activities. If their properties meet the criteria needed to mitigate the damage, land trusts can participate in the transaction. When considering mitigation projects, practitioners reflected that such projects can be complex and require a particular skill set to implement. On the other hand, some respondents expressed concern about mitigation banking as a financing mechanism due to mission misalignment.

With both of these mechanisms, practitioners mentioned the need for outside help and expertise, whether it be an accountant, private banker, or market expert. These advisors can be critical to ensuring the success of market based approaches.

While other market based financing strategies for stewardship exist (e.g. ecosystem service markets), conservation practitioners interviewed did not mention existing efforts or a strong desire to pursue them for funding stewardship activities.

Working Lands

Within our survey, farmland leases were the primary source of revenue for working lands, with 11 respondents reporting that they receive working lands income. In Illinois, these working lands are primarily agricultural leases. In some cases, organizations do this temporarily while they raise restoration funds, while others have determined that they will keep the farmland in working production as the income it generates is useful to the organization in more impactful ways. This presents an opportunity to explore how working lands can be utilized to finance conservation of natural lands, while ensuring that farmland is managed with a conservation focus.

The largest concern among organizations was related to acquisition of farmland. Yet, as farmers retire, land will be changing hands in the coming decade. Conservation organizations may be able to position themselves as partners with farmers in protecting natural resources. The conservation community along with this project team is currently building infrastructure to enable land trusts to utilize working lands income as a financing strategy for stewardship. A pilot project led by the Natural Land Institute focused on establishing a working lands investment initiative and the results of the pilot project are documented in a separate case-study.

VI. Policy

Conservation organizations throughout the state expressed a desire to engage more deeply and effectively with policy makers to ensure that natural land protection is prioritized and funded. Some organizations, with the help of PSCC and IEC have already begun policy engagement. In some parts of the state, organizations expressed that they feel like they have no common ground with their legislators and are looking for guidance on how to successfully engage their representatives in conservation policy efforts. Others expressed concerns with “lobbying” and wanted to ensure that their activities would not impact their 501c3 organizational status.

Engaging Policymakers

Ultimately, as it pertains to policy, organizations were looking for ways to first start the conversation around the important work they do and the way in which state and local funders might be able to support those conservation efforts.

According to survey responses, conservation organizations are most active in local issues where there is a direct connection to their missions. Issues related to zoning, funding for local parks and forest districts, stormwater management, and land restoration and stewardship partnerships were mentioned in the interviews as common local policy issues.

Organizations are excited about recent Illinois policy developments, and the implications for future conservation efforts. They see the Natural Areas Stewardship Act as the first step in a return of conservation as a priority for IDNR. Others expressed a desire to strengthen state legislator relationships so that if a budget impasse takes place again, the conservation community has the necessary advocates needed to protect the dedicated funds that exist. Organizations were most excited about the possibility of the State acquiring property in the future. While this is not guaranteed, it does provide the return of another statewide strategy to support long-term management.

Taxes

Practitioners were asked about their enrollment in the following programs that provide tax incentives for protected land management:

- **Exemption from property taxes under ILCS 200/15-65:** Property is exempt when used for charitable or public-benefit purposes, and not leased or otherwise used for profit.
- **Taxed as an Illinois Nature Preserve:** Qualifying lands can be dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve. This agreement may result in financial benefits to the landowner, primarily in the form of a charitable contribution deduction on federal income taxes and a local property tax reduction. The biggest benefit to the landowner is the assurance that their land will be permanently and legally preserved while still allowing them to enjoy it now and pass it on to their heirs (Property which are dedicated as Illinois Nature Preserves have their real estate taxes set at \$1 per acre per year).
- **Taxed as a conservation easement or as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve:** Land and Water Reserve Program properties that are permanently registered may qualify for reduced tax

benefits in the form of a local property tax reduction and possibly a charitable contribution deduction on federal income taxes.

- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP):** Land enrolled in CRP receives a rental payment. This typically applies to agricultural land that's taken out of production for habitat.
- **Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Conservation Stewardship Program:** Landowners who have at least five acres of unimproved land and are willing to commit to developing and implementing a habitat management plan for their property may enroll in the program in exchange for reduced valuation of property taxes.
- **Illinois Forestry Development Act:** With the passage of the FDA, the Property Tax Code (35 ILCS 200/10-150) was amended to provide a tax incentive for the Illinois timber grower. The amendment to the Property Tax Code states that eligible land being managed under an approved forestry management plan shall be considered as "other farmland". The land shall be valued at 1/6 of its equalized assessed value based on cropland and is subject to the reduced tax assessment.

20 out of 24 respondents report utilizing the property exemption under the ILCS 200/15-65 though there are concerns about political backlash for not paying property taxes. Through the interview discussions, however, we found that the vast majority of organizations have not had any local issues related to property tax removal. While it is good practice to work with local decision makers in order to ensure that backlash will not happen, we strongly encourage pursuing this option where possible.

10 land trusts report that they have properties that are taxed as Illinois Nature Preserves, while 9 land trusts have properties that are taxed as easements or Illinois Land and Water Reserves. The reasons for not utilizing these programs are primarily that the land is tax exempt or not applicable in some other way.

7 land trusts have land in CRP, while 5 have land enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Similarly, the main reasons why this program is not used by others is due to their tax exempt status or other applicability limitations. 3 organizations reported not being familiar with the CSP program while 2 stated that the financial benefit is not significant enough to justify the effort for enrollment in CSP.

Only 2 organizations reported being enrolled in the Forestry Development Act Program. The main reasons for such low enrollment were: not knowing about it, tax exempt status, and misalignment with organizational priorities related to timber harvesting.

VII. Behavioral and Organizational Dynamics

The nature of conservation work is changing. There are implications to the way in which organizations plan and prepare for stewardship. Successful management of natural resources requires strong collaboration with stakeholders and partners across all levels (federal, state and NGOs) and a potential realignment of priorities and strategies that will enable organizations to have the needed resources to protect and steward natural resources, especially in the face of changing

political and ecological landscapes. This section captures some of those dynamics and the way in which conservation organizations think about the future of the work.

An Internal Culture Shift

During the conducted interviews, many organizations mentioned internal cultural shifts profoundly impacting the way they are planning and implementing stewardship activities. With the breakdown of the traditional model of turning over restored land for long-term management to public agencies, land trusts need new strategies to finance and implement stewardship of the lands they own and manage. Such cultural shifts need to occur internally among staff, organizational leadership, and boards, and be reflected in organizational policies and principles.

*Interview
Quote*
*"We would not take
the property if we
didn't have the
resources to
steward it."*

The way in which organizations are starting to shift their land acquisition policies is a testament to this growing change. Traditionally, conservation organizations were in the business of land protection. They would acquire as much land as they could and figure out how to restore and manage it later. According to interview responses, this model is changing. It was reported that conservation groups are asking donors to commit to providing a stewardship endowment to support the management of the land that being donated. These organizations are identifying resources and putting the plans in place to manage the property before acquiring it, and they are thinking through the long-term financial implications of climate change and other outside factors.

One example that demonstrates shifts in financing approaches is demonstrated by Natural Land Institute and their working lands initiative. The Natural Land Institute staff has been able to work with their board, who was primarily a traditional land trust-oriented board, to create organizational infrastructure that allows the organization to maintain farmland as a revenue source and integrate habitat and soil improvements into lease agreements with their tenant farmers. This change is also resulting in a renewed focus on stewarding already protected lands. Organizations have changed by-laws, created policies, modified how they monitor operational cost and begun more thoroughly tracking volunteer in-kind contributions to better understand the capacity needed to manage their lands.

Prioritization and Vision

Organizational approach to prioritizing and long-term vision with relation to stewardship and organizational growth varies significantly from one organization to another. However, stakeholders and partners agree that the care and stewardship of natural lands is the upmost priority. There was a great deal of discussion regarding the future visions at the organizational level and for the conservation community as a whole. Several organizations felt that they focus on the day-to-day operations and have limited ability to plan for the long-term. Other organizations think about their work in a more integrated manner. They see themselves more focused on watershed scale work, invasive species management, and connectivity for the community. They see opportunities to create more ecological and socially resilient communities. In doing so, they hope to create more resilient conservation organizations that could weather government funding deficits through community support. How each organization envisions the future of conservation and their role in

conservation and stewardship of natural lands impacts the caliber of capacity building strategies and financing approaches they select to help achieve their goals.

VIII. Conclusion: The Future for Stewardship in Illinois

Illinois has a rich diversity of habitats and landscapes and conservation organizations committed to preserving them. Understanding key challenges that these organizations face allows the stakeholders to better identify needed tools and strategies to overcome the barriers to protect Illinois' natural resources. The study results presented in this report focus on stewardship, i.e. long-term management, of the land and captures a wide range of perspectives representing the majority of organizations working to preserve natural areas in Illinois, both in terms of geographic location as well as habitat types. We collected quantitative data through the survey. We also interviewed the stakeholders to be able to understand and interpret data trends observed in the survey. Key findings from the study are outlined below:

Stewardship Capacity

1. Volunteers represent 50 percent of all stewardship hours reported by conservation organizations annually.
2. Contractors play a prominent role in stewardship implementation because they provide skilled labor and equipment at discrete points in time, whereas staff conduct priority setting, planning, and day-to-day implementation of stewardship.
3. In smaller organizations, Executive Directors and Boards are highly engaged in stewardship activities including on-the-ground implementation. In larger organizations or as organizations grow, the Executive Director and Boards have more time to focus on priority setting and fundraising.
4. Conservation organizations seem not to grow their capacity to acquire and manage additional land. Specifically, organizations that manage under 2,000 acres a year typically stay under 2,000 acres due to constraints in capital and labor. Annual labor costs for small (0-500 acres) and mid-size (500-2,000 acres) organizations are relatively consistent at approximately \$215,000, with labor cost increasing to \$760,000 for large (over 2,000 acres) organizations.

Partnerships

1. A majority of reported partnerships were considered informal, with practitioners emphasizing the importance of individual over institutional relationships in maintaining these.
2. Whether informal or formal, partnerships within the conservation community have staying power with average years for specific types of partnerships between conservation groups of 15 years.

Funding and Financing

1. Organizations throughout the state continue to utilize a diverse set of funding strategies, but most frequently reported reliance on foundation and individual giving. Non-traditional funding strategies such as environmental markets and working lands funding systems are gaining more traction and were of high interest in the conservation community.
2. Working lands and market-based funding approaches continue to grow in popularity and usage; however, conservation organizations raised concerns about the financial barriers to entry they would need to overcome to scale to achieve viable projects.

3. The team identified that organizations need to better understand investment management specifically as it pertains to endowments, a commonly utilized stewardship funding method.

Policy

1. Overwhelmingly, conservation organizations have a strong desire to better engage with policy makers, but are looking for more clear and consistent direction and advice on the legislative process.
2. Conservation organizations perceive a risk of community backlash associated with removing a protected parcel from the property tax rolls; however, our analysis found risk of such an occurrence is minimal. Most organizations have protected properties without community pushback.

Behavioral and Organizational Dynamics

1. There appears to be an internal cultural shift within conservation organization boards and leadership as they confront the need to diversify funding strategies and prepare for the long-term. This cultural shift is creating opportunities for greater experimentation and innovation throughout the State.
2. Organizations are taking a more holistic approach, integrating community engagement, watershed planning, and historical context into their stewardship work.

The study also revealed a vision for the future of stewardship in Illinois among stakeholders in the conservation community. Conservation organizations hope to see themselves and their peers building upon solid learnings and practices, expanding our reach throughout the State in a more intentional and holistic manner, and building new collaborations and support. Furthermore, there is a strong need to cultivate the next generation of land stewards, both volunteers and professionals. Finally, the findings made clear that we need to manage protected lands in a way that is respectful of the cultural heritages of all people and meet the demands of our human and ecological communities, while stewarding our unique, diverse Illinois landscape in a resilient manner.

Appendix A: Land Trust Survey

Introduction and Consent

The following survey being administered by Delta Institute, Natural Land Institute, Openlands, Illinois Environmental Council and Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation is part of a research project to identify stewardship needs, defined as long-term management of land, for our state natural areas and protected lands in Illinois, and to explore new ways for conservation land trusts across the state to increase funding those needs. As part of this, we are seeking information from Illinois land trusts regarding their stewardship activities and the resources committed to caring for your natural and protected lands as well as the challenges that you face.

We plan to collect data in the following ways as part of this project:

- This 90 minute survey as outlined above;
- A recorded in-person interview (2 hours);
- Any clarification and post interview follow-up as appropriate.

Completing this survey indicates your consent as a participant in this study in so far as your responses will be analyzed. Participating in this study is voluntary, and all data collected will be kept confidential. We will protect your confidentiality in all publications and written reports, by sharing aggregate data only. Aggregated data results will be available and shared in summer 2018. Delta Institute is responsible for administering the survey, collecting the data, and post-collection data analysis.

Email Address

Your Current Land Holdings

For each category below, how many acres of land does your land trust currently actively and consistently managing? Leave blank if not applicable.

	Total (acres)
Fee Simple (owned by your land trust)	
Fee Simple (owned by others)	
Conservation Easement (held by your land trust)	
Investment Land (purchased with investment as the primary purpose over conservation)	
Other	

For fee simple land that your organization holds, please break out the total acreage by land type below. If exact numbers are not available, please provide an estimate. If a property could be categorized as more than one land type, choose one land type that best fits that property; leave blank if not applicable.

	Acres
Forest	
Savanna	
Prairie	
Wetlands	
Lake, Ponds, and Streams	

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

BASIC INFO

DATE: _____

LOCATION: _____

START TIME: _____ END TIME: _____

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

INTERVIEWEES (NAME AND TITLE): _____

INTERVIEWERS: _____

BEFORE WE START GUIDANCE

- Thank You!
- Why and How?
 - We embarked on this long-term study of stewardship with the goal of increasing the sustainable health of our Illinois Ecosystems.
 - Stewardship is a difficult thing to fund and execution can be complex.
 - When we completed phase one looking at different funding mechanisms that could support stewardship and developed the Dual Approach framework, we heard the feedback of the community that there was more research needed
 - This second phase is divided into a few efforts, this being the first one, to investigate your needs, and the needs of the broader conservation community in depth, and the opportunities that may exist to leverage our collective force to increase impact. From this work, we will develop a detailed study that will look at stewardship at a statewide level.
 - We will use that information as the foundation for the creation of a set of tools that could be immediately utilized by practitioners to better take advantage of existing and new stewardship funding mechanisms while continuing to investigate and develop the dual approach concept.
- Defining Stewardship
 - For the purposes of our work, we have defined stewardship as:

- “The year-to-year management of properties owned in fee or held in conservation easement.”
 - We are not collecting information related to land or easement acquisition or short-term ecological restoration/re-creation of natural habitat. Stewardship costs may include things like organizational indirect costs and other incidentals.
- Reminders
 - This is a collaborative, statewide effort:
 - We have signed an MOU with PSCC and are working with the Vital Lands Illinois Network to ensure that the land trust community is involved
 - This is envisioned to be an ongoing dialogue. Working together and producing something that is beneficial to the group
 - Our intent isn’t to galvanize any existing funding sources, or to call out any specific organizations. Everything will be presented as state level aggregated data.
 - Data and information collected from individual organizations will be kept confidential. The final report will present the results of this research project in aggregate.
 - Data Sharing and confidentiality
 - All final reports and state level aggregated findings will be shared with everyone involved and through VLI and PSCC
 - The data will only be released with the expressed permission of the organization and will otherwise be aggregated statewide
 - When answering questions
 - try to think about where you currently are with your stewardship funding and capacity, as well as what your ideal would be
 - If you need more time, that is okay and we can always follow up.

Questions

Category: Stewardship capacity	
Section Goal: Identify and Quantify Stewardship Needs and Related Staff Roles	
Target Information	Questions
Tracking of Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you for filling out the tables sent detailing your acreage information. Can you share a little more about how you currently track acres, parcels and habitat types? (Tech, staff, systems, etc.)
Stewardship Roles and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the survey, we asked you about who at your organization is primarily responsible for stewardship activities. Can you explain the rationale, pros/cons, or other factors that have created that structure? • Is your board actively engaged in fundraising for stewardship activities and donor cultivation for increasing stewardship? Describe their activities.

Volunteer Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much do you rely on volunteers for stewardship and how do you track it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How many hours per year do your volunteers devote to stewardship activities? • How do you manage your volunteers? • How do you value your volunteers? (\$\$\$?) • How much do you project using volunteers in the future?
Current land management activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you currently have a budget specifically for stewardship activities? • Are you able to implement stewardship activities at the desired level? Why or why not? • When you filled out the management table in the survey, were there other stewardship activities that were missing?
Other Resources for Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are other types of resources do you use to implement stewardship? Cars, equipment, other? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you own your equipment? Rent? Share? ○ Are there other resources you wish you had to better implement stewardship activities?
Equipment Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your land trust currently have enough equipment to adequately steward your fee properties? • Does your land trust factor in your equipment needs and capacity when considering new fee property acquisitions? • Is limited equipment capacity a barrier to your land trust acquiring more fee lands in the future? Why or why not?
Additional Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What resources (besides staff time) do you still need to implement stewardship activities, but currently don't have?
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there additional skills, expertise, certifications or knowledge you would hope your staff would have in the future as it relates to stewarding your properties.
Contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your land trust use contractors to implement routine stewardship activities on fee lands (not including short-term ecological restoration/re-creation projects)? • If yes, do you feel that the contractors in your service region currently have the expertise, knowledge, skills, and certifications needed to adequately steward your fee properties? If no, why not?
LTA Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has your land trust formally adopted the 2017 Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices? • Is your land trust accredited by the Land Trust Alliance? If no, why not?
Other barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you see as the barriers to enhancing or expanding your current stewardship activities?

Category: Partnerships	
Section Goal: Assess extent of partnerships and how they create value	
Target Information	Questions
Current Partnership Establishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the information you provided in the survey, how do you initiate, and structure your partnerships, and how do they influence your work? Are the partners you work with part of formal partnership agreements, or are they informal and ad hoc?
Past Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did past partnerships evolve, turn out, and end?
Government Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which bodies of government do you interact with most frequently/ which are your best relationships?
Views on Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are your current partnerships functioning and what value do you gain? What are any issues you see with your existing or past partnerships that could be better? If you are not currently part of a stewardship partnership, would you want to join one if given the opportunity? Why or why not?
Contributions to Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you tend to contribute to partnerships? What resources do you bring and what do you gain?

Category: Funding Sources & Revenue	
Section Goal: Identify current funding sources and how they are utilized	
Target Information	Questions
\$\$\$ for Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you currently have a budget for stewardship? Do you currently have a budget/fund for future fee land or easement purchases? Do you currently have a budget/fund for the stewardship of future fee land and easement acquisitions?

Funding Stewardship Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What external stewardship funding sources do you currently use (i.e. grants, state, federal, private, endowment, etc.)?
Grants and the decision making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of grants have you used in the past for stewardship? Capacity, program, project, operating? • How do you decide what grants to pursue?
Annual Individual Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have an annual fundraising plan with targets by organizational area? • Does your fundraising include fundraising for land management and long term stewardship?
State and Local involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much have you relied on state or local funding for stewardship-related activities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What sources? (NAAF, OLT, OSLAD, capital funding) ○ Have you worked with private landowners to access any state funding for stewardship? (CREP or CRP, others) ○ How much have you relied on state and local agencies to be the long-term owner of fee properties that were originally protected by your land trust?
Federal Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much have you relied on federal funding for stewardship-related activities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What sources? ○ Have you worked with private landowners to access any federal conservation funding for stewardship? ○ Was this a pass-through grant that was ultimately paid to your land trust by the state?
Endowments and Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you share more about your funds as mentioned in the Survey? • What is the typical annual distribution percentage from your endowments and what portion of that is used for stewardship? • Do you participate in traditional investment portfolios, or do you also participate in impact investing portfolios? • Do you have an external fund manager, or does your organization do that internally? • Do you find your endowment distribution to be sufficient? • Would you be willing to share information about your 2017 investment income?
Interest in Working Lands Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your land trust currently owns working lands, do you intend to keep any working land in production in perpetuity? • Were these working lands purchased, donated, or a mixture of both? • How much do you generate from your working lands annually? • Would your organization be interested in acquiring farmland with the intention of continuing agricultural practices in perpetuity as a way to generate revenue for the organization?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a working lands revenue model is of interest, what are current barriers or challenges? • Would you like to know more about such a model?
Market Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your organization's opinion of generating revenue from your currently owned land through mitigation banking credits, sale of products, ecosystem services, or other?
Financial Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you share with us your last fiscal year financial audit summary if available?

Category: Policy Related	
Section Goal: Looking at Policy-related Impacts to Stewardship and Land Trust Engagement with Policy Makers	
Target Information	Questions
Policy barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any state or local policies that have been a barrier to your stewardship work?
Financial tax incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the way your property is taxed impact your work?
Local support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your county or municipality offer any incentives or other policies to support your work that are not available in every local jurisdiction?
Policy structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the structures that allow permanent conservation of land such as conservation easements, nature preserve designation, or other designations that protect open space. Is there anything that can be done to improve these land protection structures to support stewardship?
Engagement with Policy Makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the staff or board of your organization actively create relationships with your local and state legislators? • If so, what do you see as the benefits? If not, what are the barriers? • What would be most helpful to you for facilitating your organizations strength in this area?

Category: Future Focused	
Section Goal: Characterize capacities and attitudes of board and staff for stewardship	
Target Information	Questions
Prioritization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you prioritize stewardship needs and activities? • Who sets your priorities and how?
Changes in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you see your stewardship needs changing over time?
Stewardship as part of larger land protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does stewardship capacity of your organization, or partner's, factor into your land protection decisions?
The Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you hope to see for the future of stewardship in our state?

Appendix C: Coding Thematic Categories

Tier 1 codes

A. Stewardship	B. Partnerships	C. Funding	D. Policy	E. Behavioral
Tracking	Government	Budget	Internal	Public Perception
Roles	Peer Organizations	Grants	Local	Prioritization
Volunteers	Businesses	State	State	Changes
Activities	Past Partnerships	Federal	Federal	Vision
Equipment	Views	Donors	Taxes	Acquisition
Staffing	Contributions	Endowment	Structures	Internal Culture
Contractors	Models	Investments	Elected Officials	
Lta	Benefits	Funding model		
Skills	Downsides	Local		
Board		Working lands		
Current status		Fee for service		
Burns		Mitigation		
		Private lands		
		Unrestricted		

Tier 2 codes

A. Stewardship	B. Partnerships	C. Funding	D. Policy	E. Behavioral
A1. Tracking of land	B1. Current partnership establishment	C1. \$\$\$ for stewardship	D1. Policy barriers	E1. Prioritization
A2. Stewardship roles and skills	B2. Past partnership	C2. Funding stewardship activities	D2. Financial tax incentives	E2. Changes in the future
A3. Volunteer time	B3. Government relationships	C3. Grants and the decision making process	D3. Local support	E3. Stewardship as part of larger land protection
A4. Current land management activities	B4. Views on partnership	C4. Annual individual fundraising	D4. Policy structures	E4. The future
A5. Other resources for stewardship	B5. Contributions to partnership	C5. State and local involvement	D5. Engagement with policy makers	
A6. Equipment barriers		C6. Federal involvement		
A7. Additional resources		C7. Endowments and investments		
A8. Staffing		C8. Interest in working lands model		
A9. Contractors				
A10. LTA association				
A11. Other barriers				

Appendix D: Labor hourly rates used in analysis

Position	Hourly rate	Based on
Board	24.08	Illinois Department of Human Services, volunteer rates (http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=19735)
Contractors	20	Bureau of Labor Statistics, Wage Estimates Illinois, May 2018 (https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_il.htm); Pesticide Handlers, Sprayers, and Applicators, Vegetation used as proxy, rounded up
Executive Director	43.35	2017 Land Trust Salaries and Benefits Survey (lta.org/salarysurvey); average salary, Midwest
Fundraising Director	38.44	2017 Land Trust Salaries and Benefits Survey (lta.org/salarysurvey); average salary, senior fundraising staff
Interns	8.25	Illinois minimum wage (https://www.minimum-wage.org/illinois)
Stewardship Program Coordinator	22.51	2017 Land Trust Salaries and Benefits Survey (lta.org/salarysurvey); average salary, mid-level land stewardship staff
Stewardship Program Director	29.77	2017 Land Trust Salaries and Benefits Survey (lta.org/salarysurvey); average salary, senior level land stewardship staff
Volunteers	24.08	Illinois Department of Human Services, volunteer rates (http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=19735)
Other Program Director	32.05	2017 Land Trust Salaries and Benefits Survey (lta.org/salarysurvey); average salary, senior communications staff
Other Program Coordinator	25.61	2017 Land Trust Salaries and Benefits Survey (lta.org/salarysurvey); average salary, mid-level land protection staff
Other Stewardship Program Staff	22.51	2017 Land Trust Salaries and Benefits Survey (lta.org/salarysurvey); average salary, mid-level land stewardship staff
Other	20	

Appendix E: Methodology

This study specifically addresses natural areas managed by non-profit conservation organizations despite the fact that in Illinois protected natural areas can also be managed by public agencies or private landowners. We specifically examined the management activities of nonprofit conservation organizations on land they have purchased directly, known as fee-simple land. This study does not include land that is under conservation easements owned by these organizations. We focused on the current status of fee-simple land under management and identified existing strengths as well as barriers this constituency associated with an increasingly significant role in long-term management.

The team sought to assess how the 46,714 acres of land protected by land trusts or conservation nonprofits through fee-simple ownership is currently being stewarded and identify best practices, gaps, and opportunities.¹ Stewardship was examined through five major topic areas: 1) stewardship capacity, 2) partnerships, 3) funding and financing, 4) policy, and 5) behavioral and organizational dynamics.

The project team began by working with the Prairie State Conservation Coalition (PSCC) to develop an engagement strategy that included in-person interviews and survey work, coupled with desktop research. The team designed the survey to cover quantitative information while interviews were conducted to focus on qualitative information to shed light on motivations and justifications for particular decisions and actions reported in the survey.

Surveys were distributed digitally via the online platform, QuestionPro. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix A. Survey data was then organized utilizing Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel. Data were summarized and visualized using the software platforms Tableau and Kumu. The interviews were conducted with one researcher from Delta Institute and at least one land trust representative from the project team. These interviews followed the same five-part format as previously discussed. The Interview Guide can be found in Appendix B. Interviews were transcribed and coded using a key of categories and thematic key words. A list of these key words can be found in Appendix C.

All survey data and interview data is anonymous within this report and the conclusions are drawn at the state level. The analysis was coupled with internet-based research on both the individual organizations and the broader field. With this research approach we were able to get a deep understanding of the conservation organizations in Illinois and the current state of land stewardship.

¹ According to the I-View database (<http://www.prairiestateconservation.org/pfcc/iview/>), of the over one million acres of currently protected land, 46,714 acres of fee simple land is protected by land trusts or conservation nonprofits.