



# Community Forest Training Program: Project Implementation

March 3, 2026

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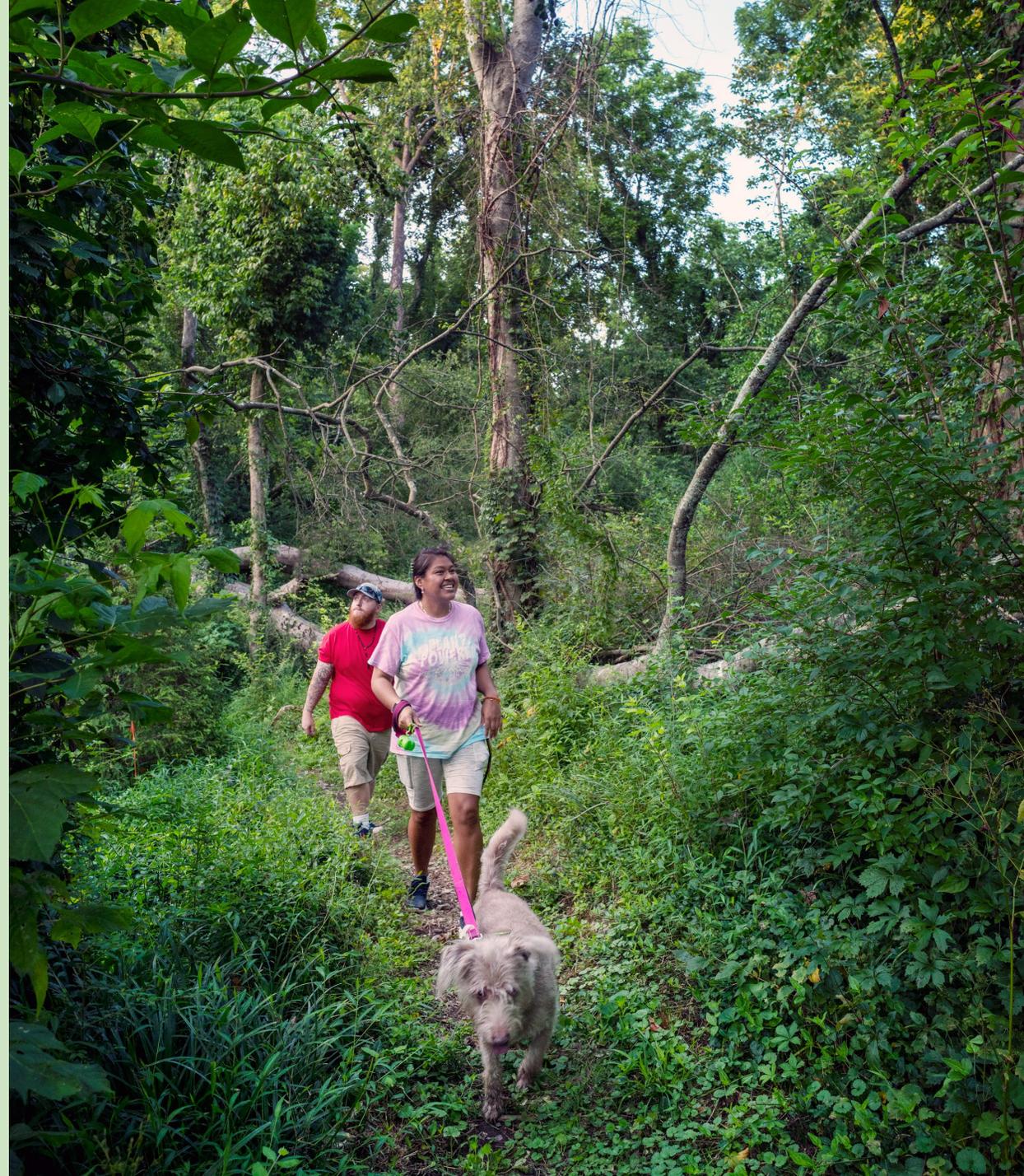
# Welcome!

**Warm-Up Exercise:** In the chat, share **one question** you still have about Community Forests that you would like to have answered today.



# Agenda

- Series Recap
- Presentation: Expectations for Land Acquisition
- Open Q&A
- Meet & Greet Your TPL Rep
- Series Survey
- Next Steps



# Community Forest Training Program: Series Overview

**5-month, virtual workshop series** designed to provide land managers with the **strategies, skills, and resources** needed to create and sustain community forests.

## Session Dates:

- November 4: Principles of Community Forests
- December 2: Ownership, Governance, and Funding
- January 6: Community Engagement and Visioning
- February 3: Management and Stewardship
- March 3: Project Implementation 



# Community Forest Training Program: Series Recap

## Principles & Benefits

Defined by:

- Community **ownership**
- Community participation in **management**
- **Benefits** flow back to community
- Permanent **protection**

**Benefits** include:

- Economic vitality
- Community resilience
- Conservation & preservation
- Access & recreation
- Envi. education

## Ownership, Governance, & Funding

Find the **structure** that works in your **context**:

- Municipal ownership
- County ownership
- Nonprofit ownership
- Tribal ownership

Community must lead **decision-making**.

Diversify **funding stacks**:

- Federal & regional
- State & local
- Private
- Revenue generation

## Community Engagement & Visioning

Broad, diverse public input and a **shared community vision** are critical.

Be ready to **manage conflict** when, not if, it arises.

Develop **clear, consistent messaging** about the benefits and values.

**Get outside** and have fun!

## Management & Stewardship

Community engagement **doesn't stop** after the parcel is protected.

A **forest management plan** is crucial for achieving the shared vision.

Lean on **local experts**, e.g., consultants, elected officials, community members, etc.

**Stewardship** is active and ongoing.



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# Community Forests: Expectations for Land Acquisition

**J.T. Horn**  
Senior Director,  
National Trails Initiative



# Pick a Property

## Proactive

- Conservation or open space plan
- Economic strategy (e.g. mountain bike trails as economic development)
- Watershed protection plan
- Local landmark – waterfall, cliff, mountain
- Quiet outreach to landowners – “if you are ever going to sell, please talk to us...”

## Reactive

- For sale sign goes up and everyone panics
- Trying to negotiate a conservation purchase while bidding against developers



# Clear Statement of Community Benefits

- Trails & recreation
- Timber income
- Hunting and fishing
- Economics/jobs
- Ecological values
- Equitable access to outdoors
- Clean water

Elevator pitch – why you should conserve this property!



# Pick a Good Name

- Marketing matters!
- Landowner names are not usually good choices
- Naming rights can be tied to a donor or to honor a beloved individual from the community
- Place names or historic names work well (“Mink Brook Community Forest”)
- Town names (e.g. “Hanover Town Forest”) can be confusing if the town owns multiple properties.
- It’s going to be on maps for the next century, pick carefully!



# Role of a Land Trust Partner

- Negotiate business terms with the seller
- Hold the land off the open market via a long-term contract or pre-acquiring the land
- Develop a funding plan and secure grants and donations
- Conduct real estate due diligence
- Facilitate communications w/ community stakeholders
- Hold a conservation easement (not required)
- Deal with the unexpected
- Facilitate closing
- Share success & share credit

# Landowner Situation

- Willing seller?
- Realistic value expectations? (independent appraisal)
- Realistic timing expectations? (2+ years)
- No obvious problems with the property (environmental, title, survey)
- Is the landowner crazy?



# Landowner Motivations

Tailor your pitch to the landowner's goals:

- Financially motivated?
- Leaving a legacy for their land?
- Does the landowner care about the community?
- Is the parcel part of a much bigger set of plans? (e.g. timberland investor, estate plan)

You need to solve the landowner's problem, not just the community problem!!!



# Finance and Risk

- Financial Evaluation = Risk evaluation
- Property risks – buildings & infrastructure, environmental hazards, boundary disputes
- Due diligence costs (appraisal, title, environmental, survey)
- Capital fundraising for the land purchase price (federal, state, local, private)
- Land trust costs (staff time, travel, overhead, opportunity cost)
- Philanthropy from landowner, foundations, community, partners, individuals
- Buy-and-Hold vs. 3- Year Option Contract (carrying costs – interest, taxes, insurance)
- Politics of board approvals or voter referendum



# Due Diligence & Closing

- Appraisal – establishes "fair market value." (Restricted report, USPAP report or federal "Yellow Book" report)
- Title - deed research on mineral rights, water rights, rights-of-way, etc.
- Environmental Site Assessment (hazardous materials)
- Boundary Survey (usually most expensive due diligence)
- Closing (attorney's fees, escrow, title insurance, real estate transfer tax, etc.)



# Partnerships and Fundraising

- Local government capacity constraints = non-profits act as facilitators and fundraising partners
- Land trusts have significant transaction costs (staff, due diligence, carrying costs, closing costs, legal, etc.)
- Joint fundraising with local government and land trust can be very successful
- Funding campaigns can include infrastructure (parking, trail development) or endowments
- Most projects leverage local funding at least 1:1 with outside funding.



# Workflow – Plan for 2 - 3 years





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# Series Feedback Survey

For the next few minutes, please complete the following survey to provide feedback on your participation in this cohort. Scan the QR code or click the link in the chat!

<https://forms.office.com/r/2jpF03FiWS>

Community Forest Training  
Program: Series Evaluation





Since 1972, TPL has protected 4 million acres of public land; created 5,364 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places; raised \$93 billion in public funding for parks and public lands; and connected nearly 9.4 million people to the outdoors.

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# Next Steps

- Submit your **survey** (if you haven't already)!
- Looking for **technical support** on a new or existing Community Forest project?

Interested in a **USFS Community Forest Program** grant?

## Contact us!

- Stay tuned for the slides, recordings, and more resources from this series, including **Community Forests: A Quick-Start Guide!**
- Headed to **Rally** this fall? We'll see you there!

# Thank You!