

WHAT IS A LAND TRUST?

by Cherie Schadler

Do you help to mow the grass or keep the yard clean and groomed at home? Do you help to keep your neighbor's yard clean and groomed? Have you ever helped with a neighborhood cleanup? If you are helping to maintain a "green space", you are participating in the kinds of activities a **land trust** engages in, which helps to preserve particular pieces of land for the benefit of the public.

A land trust is an organization of people that helps to preserve and protect land, or "green spaces" for the people of a community to enjoy. The land is either given to or purchased by a land trust. The green spaces are then protected permanently, which means that no land developers will ever be able to build any buildings upon it. These green spaces are kept in their natural state. A land trust might maintain a trail through a particular piece of land to help the people have a way to enjoy it, or in some cases, even create a kayak trail along the waterway that runs through the green space. However, they will not cut down trees or build playgrounds on the land.

Many times land trust properties are located right in the middle of a town. It has been proven that communities that have more trees and green spaces in them tend to have a healthier population. People gain a sense of wellness as they move around a town where there are trees and green spaces. These spaces provide cleaner air for the town, attract a variety of wildlife species, and moderate high temperatures. They add beauty to the **environment**. Think about driving through your town. Is there a particular part of town that you enjoy driving through more than another? Does that part of town have a green space?

Throughout our United States, there are more than 1,600 land trusts that have protected more than 37 million acres of "green spaces". A land trust works with local government, civic groups, volunteers, and even local industry to help provide education to students and citizens about the green spaces they are protecting. All of these activities that are provided by a land trust are paid for by individual donations, government grants, and donations from industry partnerships.

You may want to adopt a green space of your own and protect it for the enjoyment of others. Is there a green space at your school, church, or home that you would like to preserve? This may include creating a rain garden, **recycled** garden, or **xeriscape** (garden that requires little water). You can include plants that are native to your location that require very little maintenance but attract a variety of wildlife, including butterflies and hummingbirds.