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Happy New Year from the ILCN team!

2017 is officially here, and it is shaping up to be an exciting one for the ILCN.

We will soon be launching our 2017 webinar series, as well as a working group focused on exploring conservation practices and financing for working lands. We are also hard at work planning the next international congress of the ILCN, which will be held in Chile in early 2018. Watch your inboxes for more details on these events and opportunities.

We also hope you will be inspired by the stories, below, of how grassroots efforts are having enormous impact around the world. We look forward to sharing **your** stories this year and continuing to learn from one another and to work together to advance private land conservation and stewardship.

In these uncertain times, we are heartened to be working with so many passionate, creative, and determined partners around the world. Our New Year's resolution is to work tirelessly with you all to make this year a great one for conservation!

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Highlights from the ILCN

We are excited to share stories from ILCN members. If you have a successful conservation initiative, story, event, or webinar to share, then please contact us at ILCN@lincolninst.edu.

Creating North America's First Transboundary Ramsar Site

Many people around the world have heard of Niagara Falls, and through the efforts of the Western New York Land Conservancy (the Land Conservancy) and others, the Niagara River, which flows over those famous falls, may soon also enjoy international distinction.

Several years ago, the Land Conservancy helped initiate a bi-national effort to designate the Niagara River Corridor a Ramsar Site. If designated, the River, a strait that connects Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, would be the first transboundary Ramsar Site in North America.



(Photo: Niagara Falls National Heritage Area)

The [Ramsar Convention](#) is an international treaty that promotes the sustainable use of the world's wetlands. Ramsar is also voluntary, non-regulatory, and does not impose new restrictions on land use or development. Instead, it celebrates the importance of the site, can attract outside funding for projects, and encourages better management of natural resources.

Home to 700 species of plants, 300 bird species, 100 fish species, thousands of years of indigenous history, and some of the densest cities and most productive farmlands along the Great Lakes, the Niagara River is an ecological and cultural treasure. Unfortunately, it also has a history of overexploitation that has left the River polluted and has caused some communities to turn their back on the River. Thanks to efforts on both sides of the border, the River is making a recovery, and a Ramsar designation could help to celebrate this success.

The proposed Niagara River Corridor Ramsar Site would include both the River itself and the protected greenspaces along its shores. The Ramsar Steering Committee, which includes representatives from both the U.S. and Canada, is in the process of gathering endorsements from the all public and private landowners within the proposed Ramsar site, elected officials, and relevant government agencies. Once complete, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service will submit nominations to the Ramsar Convention (which is administered nationally in each individual country).

From a land trust perspective, conservation happens because someone, or some community, wants to protect a resource that he/she loves. The Land Conservancy hopes that a Ramsar designation will remind communities of the River's importance, as well as inspire them to explore their local waterfront parks and the River's many recreational resources.

The Land Conservancy and the rest of the Steering Committee are also hopeful that changing the way communities think about the Niagara River and its waterfront may spur conservation opportunities in the future. Then, when those opportunities arise, a Ramsar designation may make the projects more competitive on a national and international stage. Finally, a transboundary designation would enhance collaborative natural resource management and protection between the U.S. and Canada, allowing for a truly landscape scale conservation impact.

The team will be seeking endorsements for the nomination this spring and summer in hopes of an early 2018 designation.

For more information, visit the initiative's [website](#) or contact Jajeen Rose-Burney, Deputy Executive Director of the Western New York Conservancy and American Co-Chair of the Ramsar Steering Committee at jajeen.rose@wnylc.org.



(Photo: Niagara Falls National Heritage Area)

Protecting the Rio Bitá

In Colombia, a novel public-private initiative is working to develop a model to conserve an entire river system, while allowing for sustainable production by local residents along its banks.

The Rio Bitá, contained entirely within the department of Vichada, Colombia, is a meandering 423 km-long, nearly pristine river way, with more than 5,000 tributaries. There are no cities, towns, factories, mines, or petroleum installations along its course; therefore, the area remains home to amazing biodiversity, including aquatic mammals, like pink dolphins and giant river otters, a variety of fish, terrestrial mammals, birds and reptiles that live in the watershed's gallery forests and savannas. As one of the few remaining undeveloped river ways in the world, there is tremendous opportunity to conserve this important area.



(Photo: Dexter B. Dombro)

In April 2014, 10 organizations and institutions, including several NGOs, the Governor of Vichada, the Colombian navy, and others, signed a declaration creating the Rio Bitá Protected River Project. The concept of a protected river is not to stop all human activity, but rather to ensure that all activities are sustainable and are done with conservation and the protection of biodiversity in mind.

Each of the signatories brings their own resources and expertise to the project, including [Corporación Ambiental La Pedregoza](#) (La Pedregoza), an NGO that is co-leading efforts to work with some 1,200 landowners along the river. Since the signing, La Pedregoza has worked with local communities and landowners to implement sustainable practices, ecoagriculture, natural silviculture and forestry in their day to day operations. The project includes restoring degraded areas with native trees, establishing new natural reserves, and signing conservation agreements.



Explaining Conservation Agreement to local landowner. (Photo: Veronica Miranda)

As one of 11 civil society *Articulating Organizations* for Colombia's national parks system, La Pedregoza is able to help the private sector register new protected areas. In Colombia, private landowners with title to their land may register their properties as civil society Natural Reserves in the unique national protected areas registry (the "RUNAP"). La Pedregoza then assists landowners and communities in documenting that reserve's flora and fauna and preparing a

management plan. However, due to years of conflict, not all landowners currently have legal title to their land. Those residents are still able to sign temporary, renewable conservation agreements with NGOs regarding the management of their land. La Pedregoza is also pioneering the use of such agreements with forestry corporations along the Rio Bitá.

In addition to working with private landowners, La Pedregoza manages the [Reserva Natural La Pedregoza](#), a 1,200 ha private protected area with seven km of river frontage, which serves as an anchor along the Rio Bitá. Next to the Reserve, La Pedregoza also runs a [large reforestation project](#), serving as a model for sustainable forestry in the region and a laboratory for developing natural silviculture practices.

In the coming years, partners hope to continue to raise awareness about the Rio Bitá, obtain voluntary commitments and support from landowners and corporations along its banks, and develop a model of cooperation that may be used along rivers worldwide.

For more information on this initiative, please contact Dexter Dombro, Executive Director of the La Pedregoza Environmental Corporation, at dexter@pedregoza.org.

New European Solidarity Corps to Support Natura 2000

The ILCN was pleased to welcome Angelo Salsi, Head of the LIFE Unit at the European Commission, as a speaker at this fall's *Workshop on Cross-border Collaboration for Private Land Conservation* and at the Land Trust Alliance Rally.

As part of his trip to the United States, the ILCN facilitated an opportunity for Mr. Salsi to visit the [Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation](#), where he learned about the [Americorps program](#), through which young adults may serve with organizations for a year. Americorps provides the funding necessary for an organization to bring on an Americorps member to work in one of six key areas, one of which is [environmental stewardship](#). Such a program is a win-win – providing much needed capacity to environmental organizations and providing meaningful service experiences to young Americans.



**EUROPEAN
SOLIDARITY
CORPS**

Mr. Salsi has since returned to the European Commission and helped to launch the [European Solidarity Corps](#), which will allow young people to volunteer with organizations across Europe. The information collected during his visit in Iowa served as valuable input for developing a core pillar of this initiative - a volunteer program for the European Union network of protected areas, known as [Natura 2000](#), with the direct support of the LIFE program.

Mr. Salsi's remarks at Rally focused on the impact of exchanging knowledge around the world (his speech can be viewed [here](#)), and the ILCN looks forward to supporting more opportunities for cross-cultural learning this year.

There is currently an open call for proposals for a LIFE Preparatory Project for the European Solidarity Corps. The proposal is aimed at selecting 5-7 small organisations, or smaller number of big organisations, in Europe which will deploy volunteers for in-country volunteering in environment protection activities, mainly targeted to Natura 2000 sites and species protected by the Birds and Habitats Directive. More information on the project is available [here](#).

Steering Committee Spotlight

Peter Stein

With decades of experience working in the nonprofit and private sectors, Peter Stein is a master of working across sectors to advance conservation.

With a firm belief that the most durable way to protect land is to work directly with landowners, Peter graduated in the first class of Environmental Planning majors at the University of California Santa Cruz. Despite the intent to continue on to graduate school, Peter was recruited to be a founding member of the [Trust for Public Land](#) (TPL) in 1975 and later opened the organization's New York office. After 15 years with TPL, he moved to the private sector. He has spent the last 26 years at [The Lyme Timber Company](#), where he serves as Managing Director, providing leadership in the development and structuring of conservation-oriented forestland and rural land purchases and dispositions.



In recognition of his outstanding leadership, innovation and creativity in land conservation, Peter was awarded the Kingsbury Browne Conservation Leadership Award from the Land Trust Alliance, and a corresponding Fellowship at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, in 2012. After a career of primarily domestic conservation work, this fellowship offered Peter the opportunity to explore international efforts. Peter's [final paper](#) and [lecture](#) focused on a global snapshot of private land conservation. He believes that the land trust model's hybrid approach to conservation is a powerful one, and that practitioners around the world have a lot to learn from one another. With a long career in the U.S., he particularly sees the potential for the evolving U.S. land trust movement to learn from models in Europe and Oceania, for example, where land trusts play a slightly different role than what has been traditional in the U.S.

Peter participated in the early discussions about the creation of the ILCN and has since been a founding member of its Steering Committee. He hopes that the ILCN can become the go-to resource for technical information that would improve and accelerate private land conservation around the globe. The ILCN is uniquely positioned to serve as a knowledge connector, sharing information through a range of venues and mechanisms. In the coming months, Peter will contribute his expertise to the ILCN as a leader of a new workgroup focused on conservation techniques and financing for working lands.

Upcoming Events:

2017 Natural Capital Symposium

March 20-23, 2017, Stanford, California, USA

The 2017 Natural Capital Symposium, taking place at Stanford University from March 20-23, 2017, is a major convening of leaders advancing the science and practice of incorporating nature's value into decisions. Hosts are coordinating with international and domestic groups focusing on natural capital approaches, to ensure that the growing community of practice around natural capital approaches continues to engage, learn, and adapt. Interactive sessions throughout the symposium will focus around five central themes: Sustainable Development Planning; Securing Freshwater; Fostering Resilient Coastal Communities; Developing Sustainable Cities; and Creating Standards for the Private Sector. Learn more about the Natural Capital Project [here](#), and about the symposium [here](#).



Green Infrastructure: Nature-based Solutions for Sustainable and Resilient Cities

April 4-7, 2017, Orvieto, Italy

The main objective of the conference is to show how a trans-disciplinary approach to urban planning, based on green infrastructure as nature-based solutions, will enable the maximization of Ecosystem Services, making future cities more resilient and sustainable. The conference will bring together urban foresters, landscape architects, arborists, plant physiologists, ecologists, economists, epidemiologists, sociologists, students, urban planners and managers and enable different communities, such as researchers and

academics, practitioners, policy makers, administrators, and the private sector, to exchange knowledge and insights. More information is available [here](#).

The Conservation Finance Bootcamp

June 12-16, 2017, Durham, North Carolina, USA

Now in its eleventh year, this intensive week-long course aims to help professionals utilize innovative and effective financing strategies for land and resource conservation, restoration, and stewardship. The course will offer in-depth information on trends and opportunities in public funding, private investment capital, bridge financing and loans, gifts and grants, income from the land, and monetized ecosystem services. There will be a strong emphasis on practical, hands-on tools and lessons from relevant case studies. Attendees will have an opportunity to consult with conservation finance experts on projects or problems from their work. More information is available [here](#).

See more on the ILCN's [Calendar of Events](#).

Please take our survey

We are currently compiling a survey of organizations around the world that are engaged in the conservation of private land.

If you have not yet completed our survey and feel that your organization's work is in line with the mission of the ILCN, then we invite you to [please take our brief survey](#) and to share it with relevant partners.



Many thanks to our content contributors: Jajeen Rose-Burney (Deputy Executive Director, Western New York Conservancy), Dexter Dombro (Executive Director, La Pedregosa Environmental Corporation), Angelo Salsi (Head of the LIFE Unit, European Commission), and Peter Stein (Managing Director, The Lyme Timber Company).

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The mission of the International Land Conservation Network is to connect organizations and people around the world that are accelerating voluntary private and civic sector action that protects and stewards land and water resources.

Learn more at landconservationnetwork.org.



The ILCN in a project of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.



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