

Conservation easements in Oregon



Weyerhaeuser granted a permanent conservation easement to The Nature Conservancy at Gearhart Fen to protect a rare wetland and its wildlife. ©Stephen Anderson/TNC

Gearhart Fen, North Oregon Coast

PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Conserve fish and wildlife habitats
- Conserve rare plant communities
- Maintain water quality
- Preserve open space
- Sustain local economy

LANDOWNER BENEFITS

- Contribute to sustainable timber certification
- Obtain habitat management expertise from partners
- Contribute to local community goals

Weyerhaeuser (formerly Willamette Industries) donated permanent conservation easements on five properties to The Nature Conservancy to protect important fish and wildlife habitats. The 469-acre easement at Gearhart Fen protects the largest coastal wetland of its type in Oregon and creates a consulting partnership to ensure that harvest activities on adjacent forest lands are compatible with protection for this important wetland.

“As part of our commitment to sustainable forestry, Weyerhaeuser is protecting a number of sensitive habitats that should remain in their natural condition. Conservation easements are critically important to that end. Easements enable us to create permanent partnerships with others who have the scientific and organizational expertise to manage natural areas, and provide the assurance that these special habitats will be protected for future generations.”

– Greg Miller
Director of Government Relations, Weyerhaeuser

OREGON AT A GLANCE

31,000	acres in conservation easements held by non-profit organizations
91	conservation easements held by non-profits
66,000	acres of farmland lost to development, 1987-1997
57	percent of wetlands lost in the Willamette Valley
1 million	new residents anticipated in Oregon in the next 20 years

ABOUT CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Oregon's statewide land-use system, created in 1973, has successfully protected most working farms and forests from unplanned development and fragmentation. As a result, conservation easements have not been used in Oregon as often as in other states to achieve the public benefits of conserving land and water resources.

However, the passage of Ballot Measure 37 in 2004 changed Oregon's land-use system and how it is implemented. In the future, conservation easements will play a more important role for landowners who want to ensure their lands remain productive and intact.

As Oregon's population grows by a million new residents in the next 20 years, market-based incentives such as conservation easements will prove critical to meeting public needs for clean water, productive farms and forests, open space, and healthy fish and wildlife habitats.

Conservation easements are used in Oregon not only by land trusts but also by public agencies who work with private landowners to voluntarily protect important natural resources. For example, the Wetland Reserve

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A conservation easement on the McDowell Farm in Kings Valley protects this scenic property as a working farm that will never be subdivided or developed.
©Greenbelt Land Trust

McDowell Farm, Kings Valley

PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Conserve working farm
- Preserve scenic values
- Sustain local economy

LANDOWNER BENEFITS

- Protect agricultural values
- Preserve rural legacy for future generations

Edna "Eddie" McDowell granted a 39-acre conservation easement in 1996 to the Greenbelt Land Trust. She and her husband ranched and farmed in Kings Valley for over 50 years, and her goal was to protect a working farm and scenic property along the Kings Valley scenic highway for future generations.

"The land is the basic building block. Without it we have nothing."

— Edna "Eddie" McDowell



ABOUT CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

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Program of the Natural Resources Conservation Service has used easements to protect key wetlands in the Klamath Basin and elsewhere. The Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Reclamation, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and others use conservation easements to ensure that public conservation investments result in permanent public benefits.

Public benefits of conservation easements

- Protect water quality
- Conserve fish and wildlife habitat
- Preserve open space
- Preserve farmland, rangeland, timberland
- Maintain character of rural communities
- Maintain landscapes for tourism and recreation
- Stretch public conservation dollars



We use conservation easements because they are a cost-effective and highly efficient conservation tool on private lands.

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