

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of Life on Earth by protecting the land and waters they need to survive. At each biologically important site, the Conservancy employs conservation methods tailored to meet local needs. These include: buying land; helping interested landowners manage their properties; collaborating with other organizations; facilitating public-private partnerships and land exchanges; and establishing conservation easements.

Conservation Easements — How They Work

In many settings — such as prairie landscapes that historically have been used for grazing — one of the most practical and popular ways to protect habitats from development is through conservation easements, which help maintain natural landscapes while preserving the historical land use.

A conservation easement is one of the most powerful tools available for the permanent preservation of private natural lands. An easement is a voluntary contract between the landowner and the holder of the easement to preserve the land in perpetuity from incompatible development. Because the land remains in private ownership, with the remainder of the rights intact, a property protected by a conservation easement continues to provide jobs, property taxes and other economic benefits to the area. The landowner typically retains the rights to compatible agricultural uses, such as livestock grazing or appropriate row crop farming, but gives up the right to use the land in ways that would harm its ecological value. These include subdivision, residential construction and mining.

The easement is a legally-binding deed restriction that stays with the property whether it is sold in the future or passed down to heirs. Conservation easements must be held by a recognized land trust or non-profit organization (such as the Conservancy) that monitors the property to ensure that the terms of the easement are upheld. Conservation easements typically are donated, although some are sold.

Benefits for Landowners

In addition to the conservation benefits, easements also provide many benefits to landowners.

- When landowners donate or sell conservation easements to protect their lands from unwanted development beyond their lifetimes, they can retain ownership, gain meaningful income and often continue to use the land as they traditionally have.
- By removing the land's future development potential, property values and estate taxes may be lowered for current owners and future heirs.
- If a landowner donates the conservation easement, he or she may qualify for a federal charitable income tax deduction.

For More Information

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