

The Nature Conservancy employs conservation methods tailored to meet local needs. These include buying land, collaborating with other organizations, facilitating public-private partnerships and land exchanges and establishing conservation easements. We also work with landowners on ways to manage their property – for example, via science-based techniques such as controlled burning and invasive species control – that are both ecologically sustainable and economically viable.

Conservation Easements – How They Work

In many settings – such as prairie landscapes that have historically 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 an area’s economic base.

A conservation easement is one of the most powerful tools available for the permanent preservation of private lands. The easement is a voluntary contract between the landowner and the holder of the easement to preserve the land in perpetuity from incompatible development, such as low density housing development and energy 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 retains full control of the agricultural use of the land for traditional purposes such as ranching. The easement is legally binding, whether the property 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 value of these special easements as a conservation tool, they 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 keep the land in agricultural production.
- By removing the land’s development potential, property values and estate taxes may be lowered for current owners and future heirs.
- If a landowner donates or “bargain sells” the conservation easement (requiring that the easement be conveyed “exclusively for conservation purposes” and in perpetuity), he or she may qualify for a federal charitable income tax deduction under IRS section 170(h).
- Landowners gain the satisfaction of helping maintain the unfragmented nature of important landscapes such as the Flint Hills and providing protection for ecologically significant habitat.

For More Information

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