

COMMUNITY TOOLS: Land Conservation To Protect Wildlife

The goal of **land conservation** is to permanently protect natural or cultural resources. Together with protecting wildlife habitat, conservation lands also provide scenic, recreational and educational areas and preserve community rural character.



Land conservation includes outright ownership (see "fee acquisition," below) and conservation easements. With a [conservation plan](#) for wildlife habitats in place, you are ready to start work on some specific conservation projects. Habitat protection is often one of the primary reasons many landowners conserve land. Using the priority areas for wildlife habitat protection identified in your conservation plan, you can start to identify land ownership within those areas. Now is the time to start conversations with those landowners to gauge their level of interest in voluntarily conserving their land for wildlife habitat. Use the step-by-step guide below with your community to strategically protect land for wildlife. Different types of land conservation include:

- **Voluntary conservation easements** is among the most common land conservation techniques. A conservation easement is a legally binding agreement between a landowner and a conservation organization that limits certain uses of the land in perpetuity. Landowners can donate or sell conservation easements to towns, some government agencies or conservation groups. With a conservation easement, the landowner still owns the land and can continue to use it for activities such as forestry and farming. However no subdivision, commercial development or mining are permitted (the development rights for the land are extinguished). The conservation organization holding the easement is responsible for monitoring the property annually to ensure the terms of the easement are followed.
- **Fee acquisition** is when the landowner sells or donates full ownership of their land to a conservation organization.
- **Other options** that are generally less effective and less widely used include deed restrictions and covenants.

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STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE	
How to Protect Wildlife Habitats Through Voluntary Land Conservation	
STEP 1: Use your conservation plan as your guide for action	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to your Wildlife Conservation Plan, and review the priority areas identified along with your town's tax map. Identify key parcels that may build on existing conservation lands or provide opportunities for connections/travel routes between conserved parcels and critical wildlife habitats. • See Conservation Planning for Wildlife for planning guidance 	
STEP 2: Reach out to landowners of key properties that include areas you identified as critical habitats	

- If there are landowners who have previously expressed interest in land conservation options, now is a good time to contact them.
- Consider holding a Land Conservation Options and Estate Planning workshop to inform landowners in your community. Most land trusts, land conservation organizations, and others (such as [UNH Cooperative Extension](#)) offer these workshops.
- Send a letter and information packet to landowners in prioritized areas. The information packet could include information on [cost-share programs](#) and [Habitat Stewardship brochures](#) for the habitats occurring on each landowner's parcel. Use the cover letter to invite landowners to an educational event. [Download a fact sheet on cost-share programs.](#)

STEP 3: When approached by interested landowners, learn as much as possible about the actual habitats and their condition on the properties

- Maps are a guide, but only observation of the land can tell us its actual condition
- Ask knowledgeable community members or conservation professionals to walk the land with the landowner to learn more

STEP 4: Establish conservation measures that will adequately protect the identified habitats and meet the landowner's needs

If habitat protection is a primary reason for conserving land, you may want to consider how the use and management of conservation land can be best done in support of that goal. Considerations might include:

- Stating the habitat protection purpose in a conservation easement or other deed
- Identifying and protecting rare species, natural communities and landscape features from adverse impact from future land uses such as recreation, logging and agriculture. In conservation easements, include restrictions sufficient to protect the features and values at stake
- Including information in the conservation easement deed's purposes section about specific features to be protected in order to conserve wildlife habitat. The baseline documentation for a conservation easement can contain more detail such as documenting the location, abundance, condition and threats to these features
- Looking for opportunities to manage conserved land to maintain or restore habitats such as early successional and old growth forest areas. [See Managing and Restoring Habitat](#)
- Informing landowners about [land conservation resources](#) such as publications, organizations, or people who can help them
- Researching local and regional land trusts' conservation plans to find out what habitat conservation priorities are a part of their policies and how this may relate to your priorities. If your priorities align with regional priorities, there may be opportunities for collaboration with land trusts, and potentially technical and financial support. [Click here for a list of NH land trusts.](#)

STEP 5: Inform landowners about land conservation and land management options that sustain habitats and species

- Seek advice from [UNH Cooperative Extension Foresters](#) and the [Taking Action for Wildlife Team](#) about forest and habitat management approaches and financial incentive programs for landowners.

STEP 6: Refer landowners to free information sources such as UNH Cooperative Extension.

- The UNH Cooperative Extension Forestry and Wildlife Program helps citizens and landowners learn about and care for New Hampshire's wildlife and habitats. [Click here to learn more about UNH Cooperative Extension assistance for landowners and communities](#)

STEP 7: Monitor conserved lands annually to assure habitat protection goals are met

- Document monitoring of lands in writing and with photos

Learn More About Land Conservation to Protect Wildlife....

- [Resources for Land Conservation](#) - includes references, websites and publications on land protection and wildlife
- [Community Stories](#) - learn about communities who have used land conservation to protect wildlife habitat
- More information on land conservation options can be found in the book, [Conserving Your Land: Options for New Hampshire Landowners](#)