

# Land Protection Policy Example

## SHEFFIELD LAND TRUST

To ensure that we build a solid legacy of protected farms and natural lands in Sheffield, the Sheffield Land Trust (SLT) will strive to be rigorous in its attention to each detail of the land conservation process, as well as courteous, clear and accessible to landowners, to the people of the town of Sheffield, to its officials, and to land conservation partners.

SLT is interested in pursuing a strategic pattern of conservation throughout the town of Sheffield based on the principles of protecting land that is ecologically, agriculturally, or scenically or recreationally significant. In its first ten years much of SLT's work has focused on the Housatonic River flood plain, the Schenob Brook Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), on June Mountain, and on agricultural lands throughout Sheffield.

When discussing a new land protection opportunity, in addition to the principles listed above, SLT will consider such questions as:

- What are the conservation values of the property (i.e. agricultural, ecological, scenic, historical, recreational - i.e. trails or hunting) and what are the benefits and risks to those values of protecting it or not protecting it?
- What are the benefits and risks to SLT of protecting or not protecting the property? Issues to consider include: financial (i.e. fundraising capacity and effect on other projects, stewardship costs), legal, community relations, public access and likelihood of success.
- What are the benefits and costs to the Town and surrounding communities?
- How does the property relate to other conserved land in a larger landscape context?
- What is the most appropriate role for SLT in this project?
- What is the best and most cost-effective method to use?

### **Protection Methods**

The appropriate protection method for each property will emerge from a broad discussion of the above issues as well as the specific circumstances of the proposed project, qualities of the land and the wishes of its current owner.

SLT's preferred methods of conservation are to act as a facilitator in a transaction leading to conservation by another group(s) and the use of conservation restrictions (CR), but the range of conservation strategies that SLT may consider is outlined below.

### **Facilitator**

In partnership with another conservation organization, state agency or the town, SLT may help a) negotiate a deal; b) develop a conservation strategy for a property; and/or c) fund a project. SLT would hold no interest in or stewardship responsibility for the property.

**Fee Ownership**

SLT acquires land through purchase, bargain sale, donation, or bequest. SLT maintains perpetual stewardship and management responsibility for this conservation property. SLT establishes a stewardship endowment in accordance with our Stewardship Endowment Policy. SLT may grant conservation restrictions on land it owns in fee to another conservation organization, agency or town.

**Temporary Fee Ownership**

SLT acquires land as described above with the intent to convey it to a public or private third party for conservation purposes. The property may be conserved by SLT prior to the transfer or by the third party after the transfer.

**Partial Interest**

SLT acquires a Conservation Restriction or other partial interest in the property. SLT maintains perpetual stewardship responsibility for ensuring compliance with the CR. Recognizing the time and expense involved, unless the property is important habitat or abuts conservation or significant agricultural lands, we should avoid parcels of less than five acres. SLT establishes a stewardship endowment in accordance with our Stewardship Endowment Policy. In its first ten years, it has seemed prudent to SLT to co-hold CRs with a larger organization (BNRC, TNC, ATC, etc.) where conservation goals overlap, so that in the event of a violation or other problem, the financial resources of both SLT and the larger organization will be available to defend the CR.

**Limited development**

This method may be used in conjunction with one of the four conservation methods listed above. SLT would sell or facilitate the sale of a portion of the property for appropriate development to help fund the conservation of the majority of the original property. In its first ten years, SLT has not done a limited development transaction.

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