

Conservation Easements 101

What is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It allows the landowner to continue to own and use the land, to sell it, or pass it on to heirs. It does not necessarily grant public access.

How Does it Work?

By donating a conservation easement, a landowner gives up some of the rights associated with their land, while retaining others. For example, you might give up the right to build a subdivision, but retain the right to grow timber or live on the land yourself. All future owners will be bound by the terms you set forth.

Why Should I Conserve My Land?

People use conservation easements because they love their land and want to protect it from inappropriate development, while keeping their private ownership of the property. Easements can also result in tax savings for the owner.

What are the Benefits for My Family?

If the easement is donated to an IRS-qualified charity, such as the Land Trust, the landowner can be eligible for an income tax deduction. In both Georgia and South Carolina, the landowner may also be eligible for state tax credits and/or lower property taxes within their municipality. Additionally, a conservation easement can make a critical difference in an heirs' ability to inherit the land intact. By restricting the land's development potential, the easement lowers its market value, which in turn can lower the estate tax.

Are They Flexible?

Conservation easements offer great flexibility. An easement on property containing rare wildlife habitat might prohibit development, while one on a farm might allow farming or timbering and additional agricultural structures, and an easement on a private estate might allow for the construction of one or two additional home sites for heirs, but restrict large-scale development or alteration of the natural landscape.

Where Do I Start?

Explore the conservation values you want to protect on your property and discuss what you wish to accomplish and what development rights you may want to retain with a Land Trust representative. Always remember to consult with other family members and your own attorney or financial advisor as well.

Your Local Land Trust

The Central Savannah River Land Trust is nationally accredited conservation organization operating throughout the Central Savannah River Area, in both Georgia and South Carolina. The CSRLT partners with local landowners to achieve their conservation and estate-planning goals while preserving our natural landscape forever.