A Landowner’s Guide to Conservation Easements
“It meant a lot to me to safeguard a piece of Montana — to honor the family that went before me and to preserve it for our family’s future generations.”

-- Nikki Fink, Fink Ranch
What is a conservation easement?

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that protects natural resources from unwanted development and fragmentation.

Land under easement remains private property. You retain ownership, and can continue to live on the land and use it for farming, ranching, forestry, recreation, education, or other activities that sustain its resources. You can sell your property or pass it on to your heirs; the conservation easement transfers with it, protecting the land forever.

GVLT can work with you to create an easement that meets your financial and conservation goals. Conservation easements can be established to protect any or all of these resources:

- Working Farms & Ranches
- Wildlife Habitat & Corridors
- Rivers & Creeks
- Open Space & Scenic Values
- Public Access & Recreation

Once you create an easement with GVLT, we remain your ongoing partner, providing advice, resources, and support, and ensuring that your vision for the land is carried out – even if the property changes ownership.

LAND UNDER EASEMENT…

- Remains private property
- Continues to be managed by owners
- Can be partially developed
- Does not require public access
- Is visited annually by GVLT staff
- Is protected in perpetuity

“The sandhill cranes come in. The moose and deer are here. The elk come right through this property to get from place to place.”

– John Hanes, Hanes Property

HANES PROPERTY – 246 acres of key winter range for deer and elk protected
How is an Easement Established?

Our experienced staff can guide you through the process, which typically takes four to twelve months to complete, and includes discussing your vision and goals, visiting the property to help you develop a plan that will protect the values most important to you and your family, and researching potential funding sources.

Grants or other funding may be available to help offset the transactional costs of establishing an easement. These costs include due diligence, easement drafting, and appraising the easement’s value. You will need the advice of your own attorney and accountant, as GVLT cannot provide legal or tax advice.

Finally, we request a donation from each landowner to our Stewardship Fund — a separately-held fund that is used only for monitoring and defending easements. This ensures that we have the resources to uphold our stewardship duties for generations.

How Does a Landowner Benefit?

A conservation easement can permanently protect your land’s agricultural uses, conservation values, habitat, and other resources. An easement can also provide substantial financial benefits, such as:

FEDERAL INCOME TAX BENEFITS If you donate your easement to a qualifying organization like GVLT (and meet other requirements) its value can be considered a charitable gift and can provide federal income tax deductions.

CASH COMPENSATION For certain projects, GVLT can apply for funding to pay you for a portion of your conservation easement’s fair market value.

ESTATE PLANNING By limiting future development, conservation easements typically reduce your property’s fair market value, which can help with estate planning.

PARTNERSHIP GVLT can provide you with up-to-date resource management information and access to funding for resource restoration and habitat enhancements.

LEEP FARMS – 848 acres of prime soil conserved for future farmers in Amsterdam/Churchill
Why partner with GVLT?

GVLT is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has been in operation for more than 25 years. We have worked with city, county, and federal agencies and with hundreds of local individuals, families, and businesses.

We know and love this part of Montana, and understand the economic and environmental challenges it faces. We are headquartered in Bozeman, and have a full-time staff dedicated to serving our easement partners and furthering conservation in the Montana region of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

In 2008, we became one of the first accredited land trusts in the nation. The accreditation seal recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national standards for excellence.

“How could I ever face my resident moose when I depart this world if I hadn’t done everything I could to safeguard my land for the wildlife?”

-- Gertrude Baker, Bozeman Pass Wildlife Corridor
EASEMENT PROFILES:

FLIKKEMA RANCH

The Amsterdam-Churchill region of the Gallatin Valley is home to some of the best agricultural soils in Montana. In 2013, Maynard and Eileen Flikkema came to GVLT when they wanted to protect part of the farm their family homesteaded more than 100 years ago. The 640-acre Flikkema easement protects prime agricultural soils and exceptional wildlife habitat, and was created with funding from Gallatin County Open Space Bond and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Together with a dozen other conservation easements in the Amsterdam-Churchill area, this easement helps to preserve an important part of Montana’s agricultural legacy.

BOZEMAN PASS WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

In 1990, Gertrude Baker donated GVLT’s very first conservation easement and started a movement in the neighborhood. Today, the Baker easement connects to three GVLT easements on both sides of I-90, giving bears, moose, and other wildlife room to migrate between the Bridger and Gallatin Mountains. Working with GVLT and other partners, Gertrude’s neighbors, the Schmidt family, created a 1,240-acre easement and sold an additional 800 acres to the Gallatin National Forest, ensuring trail access to priceless public land. All told, GVLT has helped 14 Bozeman Pass families protect more than 4,000 acres around one of the most important wildlife corridors in the region.

LEGACY RANCH

The Legacy Ranch sits on the banks of the Yellowstone River in the Paradise Valley, a stone’s throw from Yellowstone National Park. In 2009, the owners donated a conservation easement on their 590-acre property, ensuring the perpetual protection of productive agricultural soils, riparian habitat, and unparalleled views from the river and highway. The family was so pleased with the outcome that they later placed an additional 3,800 acres into GVLT’s easement program.
“The staff at Gallatin Valley Land Trust worked closely with us to draft an easement that allows us to live on and use the land as we intended, while protecting its unique resources.”

– Elyse End, East Gallatin River