



Stewardship Sourcebook for Gallatin Valley Land Trust Private Land Partners

What is private land stewardship?

Private land stewardship encompasses the responsible planning and management of your lands natural resources. As a steward of the land you are ensuring the protection of the natural resource values your property provides, as well as simultaneously promoting long-term sustainable use of these resources.



Photo: Tim Crawford

• Background

Mission: The **Gallatin Valley Land Trust** (GVLТ) connects people, communities, and open lands through conservation of working farms and ranches, healthy rivers, and wildlife habitat, and the creation of trails in Montana headwaters of the Missouri and Upper Yellowstone Rivers. GVLТ promotes the sustainable use and long-term viability of the natural resources on your conservation easement parcel. The following links are available so that you can explore natural resource management information that will help you to steward and protect your property's inherent conservation values in perpetuity.

- Land trusts, like GVLТ, work with private landowners to maintain working farms and ranches, protect water quality, protect wildlife habitat, preserve open lands and retain the values that make Montana such an attractive place to live, work and recreate. Land trusts negotiate voluntary agreements with landowners that limit commercial development and residential subdivision of the property. In essence, land trusts acquire, and then retire, development rights of the property. Conservation easements have potential federal estate tax and federal income tax benefits for landowners. Many land trusts work with local, county and federal programs that provide public funding for land conservation.

--The enumerated conservation values of your property can be reviewed within the Recitals section of the Deed of Conservation Easement. The following state and federal policies make it possible to establish a conservation easement on your private property,

- [Montana Open Space Act](#) (MCA 76-6-101)
- Federal Enabling Policy (Public Law 96-541, [26 U.S.C 170 \(h\)](#))
- The conservation values of your conserved property include a combination of the following:
 - Relatively Natural Wildlife Habitat
 - Scenic Open Space; including Farm and Forest Lands
 - Recreational and Educational opportunities
- [Land Trust Alliance](#) (LTA): GVLТ is nationally accredited through LTA, which certifies that land trust members throughout the nation utilize best practices associated with land conservation.
- [Land Trust Accreditation Commission](#): GVLТ is an accredited land trust through LTA Commission. Accreditation is awarded to land conservation organizations that meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust, and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.
- [Montana Association of Land Trusts](#) (MALT): GVLТ is a member of MALT, which helps to coordinate association membership to achieve legislative, administrative, communications and policy goals.

Reserved Rights and Approvals: Each voluntary conservation easement is unique and presents varying permitted and prohibited uses of the land and its resources. The Gallatin Valley Land Trust is concerned with property uses and how they relate to the conservation values that were outlined in the Deed of Conservation Easement and Baseline Document Report (BDR) for your property. GVLT only involves itself in private land ownership rights that adversely affect the conservation values of your property. Transparency is beneficial between the landowner and GVLT regarding the use of property and potential changes. If changes are being planned for your property, contact GVLT to explore whether written approval is required of the proposed changes.

Amendments: Because conservation easements are voluntary agreements between landowners and GVLT, the success of the partnership depends upon the confidence of these owners that the Land Trust will ensure the integrity of the easement in perpetuity. This confidence would be seriously eroded if the Land Trust were to allow indiscriminate modification of our conservation easements. Furthermore, amendments to conservation easements can raise serious problems with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. An easement donor who has claimed a charitable deduction for the donation of an easement may lose that deduction if the easement is amended improperly. For these reasons and others, it is the policy of the Gallatin Valley Land Trust to hold and enforce our conservation easements as written. No amendments to conservation easements will be granted which could jeopardize GVLT's tax-exempt status, or which could cause the easement to fall out of compliance with applicable federal, state or local laws, regulations or ordinances.

- **Large Landscape Conservation**

Large landscape conservation entails the cooperation and collaboration of a multitude of entities to ensure the continued protection of ecologically, economically and culturally valuable lands. This approach to conservation allows for local and regional organizations to meet desired goals while simultaneously ensuring beneficial results to large-scale ecosystem services and functions. Being a good neighbor includes working with your neighbors and respecting different management styles. Montana residents have always valued working rural landscapes that protect and provide economic returns and scenic views that are emblematically "Montana". Montana's heritage is directly linked to the hard work and dedication of farmers and ranchers across the state.

In placing a conservation easement on your land you are directly linked to the effort of preserving large landscapes. Here in the Gallatin Valley, preservation of lands like yours correlates directly to the broader missions and goals of large landscape conservation by organizations and agencies like the [Gallatin County Open Space Program](#), [The Nature Conservancy](#) of Montana, [American Farmland Trust](#), the [Blackfoot Challenge](#), [Heart of the Rockies Initiative](#), [Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks](#), and the [United States Forest Service](#).

For more information on this topic take a look at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy's report: [Large Landscape Conservation: A Strategic Framework for Policy and Action](#)

- **Management Plans**

A Resource Management Plan (RMP) is a detailed framework for managing the diverse natural resources that are on your land. When you establish a RMP you are setting a trajectory to meet management goals and objectives that you have in mind for your land now and into the future. A well-developed RMP also allows you to observe improvements in resource condition as well as react to fluctuations in climate, weather, or other factors that cannot be controlled. Sound stewardship of the resources on your property has the potential to stabilize your expenditures and returns for the management activities required to attain your goals for the property. Some resource management activities on your property might require a RMP based on specific language in your deed of conservation easement.

[Conservation Stewardship Program](#), Montana NRCS - The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that offers payments to producers who maintain a high level of conservation on their agricultural land and who agree to adopt higher levels of stewardship.

Contact: [Jeanne LaSorte](#), Program Specialist, Phone: 406-587-6849

[Montana Forest Stewardship Program](#), MT DNRC Forestry Division – The Montana Forest Stewardship Program provides family forest landowners with a learning experience that allows them to make informed decisions about

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the management and conservation of their forestlands. This stewardship program also includes an educational program that is sponsored by [MSU Extension Forestry](#).

Please contact GVLТ Stewardship staff for guidance and agency information in developing a RMP for your specific needs; Contact: peter@gvlt.org