



Our Stewardship Commitment

When landowners conserve their land with UVLT, they entrust the organization with a duty of stewardship – the responsibility to defend the terms of the easement in perpetuity. Thus, when an easement is signed and the celebrating is over, UVLT’s work is just beginning.

With dozens of new easements accepted every year, stewardship is the fastest growing part of UVLT’s work. Our Stewardship Endowment, to which funds are added each time a conservation project is completed, supports much of this work. Volunteers, under the guidance of our stewardship staff, provide crucial assistance with field work.

Baseline Documentation

Conservation easement stewardship begins with good documentation. Prior to accepting an easement, UVLT compiles a comprehensive record of the property’s condition – using maps, photographs, and written descriptions to detail natural features, buildings, and management activities. This may include notes about boundary markings; measurements and photographs of houses, barns, and sheds; lists of plant and animal species seen on the property; a copy of the current forest management plan; notes from an interview with the landowner or neighbor about historical uses of the land and buildings. Documenting the condition of the property at the time a project is completed allows UVLT staff to assess changes on the property over time and helps identify any future activities that may be in violation of the conservation easement.

Monitoring Conservation Easements

UVLT’s volunteer “Land Stewards” help us meet one of our most important obligations: making periodic visits to conserved properties

to collect and record vital data about the condition and uses of the land. UVLT staff review the Land Stewards’ reports of their visits, verifying compliance with easement provisions and determining when properties require closer inspection or other follow up. These reports also become an essential part of the stewardship record for each easement. Should a violation occur, UVLT’s effectiveness in defending an easement is strengthened by regular monitoring and good record-keeping.

Answering Landowners’ Questions

A conservation easement is a legal document of a dozen pages or more, and even the most conscientious landowner may have difficulty remembering the meaning of certain easement provisions. (Do I need to tell UVLT before I harvest timber? May I build a pond? Can my neighbor lease my hayfield? The answer depends on the specific terms of the conservation easement in question.) UVLT’s stewardship staff is available to answer questions by phone or meet with landowners to discuss planned activities on conserved land.

In addition, we strive to ensure that as conserved land changes hands, each new owner understands the terms of the conservation easement and UVLT’s stewardship responsibilities and easement monitoring program.

Defending Conservation Easements & Resolving Violations

Although most landowners embrace the conservation provisions, problems sometimes arise. UVLT staff promptly and diligently investigates any suspected easement violation, taking care to thoroughly understand both the landowner’s activities

and the restrictions contained in the conservation easement. Non-compliance may be a simple matter of landowner ignorance, or may be much more serious and difficult to remedy. UVLT prefers to resolve problems cooperatively, but is prepared to go to court if necessary to carry out its enforcement obligations. Conservation easements are only as strong as our commitment to stand behind them.

Amendments

Although conservation easements are for perpetuity, the land trust world continues to

learn as it gains experience. From time to time, UVLT must consider amending a conservation easement that contained errors or ambiguous language. Sometimes landowners want to make changes that would provide additional protection for important natural resources. For example, UVLT has amended conservation easements to add acreage, extinguish reserved house sites, increase a setback from a scenic road, or expand a buffer near a pond. UVLT amends an easement only after considerable review by both staff and board.



UPPER VALLEY
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