



## **Resilient Landscape Initiative Conservation Easement & Stewardship Standards (August 2017)**

Stewardship of Resilient Landscape Initiative grant projects must be consistent with the goals of the Initiative: maintaining the land's resilience to climate change and conserving native biodiversity and ecosystem processes.

Prior to submitting a grant proposal, applicants should review the following standards for fee land stewardship and for conservation easement (CE) terms. Grant proposals should describe how stewardship and/or CE terms will meet these standards and the goals of the Initiative.

OSI staff will work with Grantees to ensure that draft CE language and/or stewardship plans are consistent with the Initiative's goals. We understand that every CE is different and there are multiple ways to craft a CE that meet the same goals. OSI does not, therefore, require particular CE language, but we will provide examples and guidance on language. OSI staff must approve the final CE prior to distribution of grant funds. If a land stewardship plan is available before closing, OSI will review and comment on the plan.

### Land Stewardship for Fee Projects

The conservation organization or agency that will own and/or manage the land should have as a primary goal the conservation of land for biological diversity, wildlife habitat and/or other closely related conservation values. In addition, the organization or agency should have a demonstrated track record and sufficient funding to manage the land for these values.

Land stewardship should focus on protecting the property's native biological diversity, resilience characteristics and ecological processes. The land stewardship plan should define "climate resilience" as the ability of an area to adjust and adapt to climate change while maintaining species diversity and ecological function.

Management activities should:

- Minimize road building, stream crossings and other activities that may inhibit wildlife movement;
- Enhance connectivity through road closures, reforestation, and removal of invasive species;

- Recognize that native plant and animal species and composition of natural communities will shift in response to climate change;
- Prohibit mining and oil/gas extraction, except for limited removal of gravel or sand to be used on the protected property;
- Minimize or prohibit intensive recreational uses (ATV's and RV camping, for example) that can destroy micro-climates and/or impede wildlife movement;
- Retain mature, native forests and prohibit conversion of native forests to agriculture or other uses;
- Result in forests with diverse structure and composition, protect soils, minimize forest fragmentation, and generally maintain the ecological integrity specific to the site; and,
- Identify and minimize impacts to sensitive or under-protected geology or habitat types including floodplains, stream buffers and limestone areas.

#### Conservation Easement Projects:

The conservation organization or agency that will hold a CE on the project should have 1) a demonstrated track record in CE monitoring and enforcement, and 2) sufficient funds and staff to monitor and defend the CE.

To ensure consistency with the Initiative's goals, CE provisions should address all of the following:

- Purposes section should place priority on protecting the property's native biological diversity, resilience characteristics and ecological processes;
- Define "climate resilience" as the ability of the property to adjust and adapt to climate change while maintaining species diversity and ecological function;
- Management provisions that recognize that native species may move and the composition of natural communities may shift in response to climate change;
- Recitals section should enumerate the property's value to conserving aquatic and/or terrestrial biological resources and sustaining climate resilience, including the presence of any unique geology types and the land's role in providing microclimates and ensuring local and regional connectivity for wildlife;
- Restrictions and Reserved Rights sections should establish enforceable and clear standards for permanent protection of the land's native biodiversity and resilience characteristics. For example, the CE should ensure that terrestrial and aquatic wildlife movement are maintained and/or enhanced, that landforms providing micro-climates are not damaged, and that sensitive or under-protected geology or habitat types have special protections;
- If commercial forest management is allowed, the CE must ensure that forestry is conducted in a manner that protects the property's native biodiversity, soils, climate resilience characteristics and ecosystem processes:

- Forest management must be governed by a plan that specifies how forest management will be conducted to meet the CE's purposes, that is regularly updated, and that is reviewed by the CE Holder;
- Road building, stream crossings and other activities that can impair wildlife movement must be minimized;
- Impact upon sensitive or under-protected geology or habitat types must be minimized; and,
- Forest management should receive, or follow the guidelines included in, Forest Stewardship Council certification, to the extent practicable.
- Mining and oil/gas extraction on the protected property should be prohibited. The CE may include limited exceptions for removal of gravel or sand to be used on the protected property;
- Farming should be prohibited except where agricultural activities can be shown to enhance the maintenance of native biological diversity and ecosystem processes, as spelled out in the CE terms;
- Effective and practical monitoring and enforcement provisions must be included;
- A process for regular, productive communication between the easement holder and landowner must be ensured; and,
- A Baseline Documentation Report should be included that, along with the standard sections, describes the project's climate resilience characteristics.