

Land Preservation Terminology Guide

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Acquisition & Protection Mechanisms

Conservation Easement

A **legal agreement** between a landowner and a conservation organization or government entity that permanently limits certain types of development on the land while the owner retains title. The restrictions “run with the land,” meaning they apply to all future owners.

Agricultural Conservation Easement

A specialized conservation easement that protects farmland by preventing subdivision or non-agricultural development while allowing continued agricultural use.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)

A land preservation method in which a government or land trust purchases the right to develop land from a landowner. The landowner keeps ownership but agrees that the land will remain undeveloped.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)

A planning mechanism allowing development rights to be transferred from a protected “sending area” (farmland or open space) to a designated “receiving area” where increased development density is permitted.

Fee Simple Acquisition

The outright purchase of land by a public agency or land trust. The buyer gains full ownership and control of the property.

Donation of Land

A landowner voluntarily transfers ownership of land to a conservation organization or government entity for preservation purposes.

Bargain Sale

A transaction where land is sold to a conservation organization below market value, with the difference often treated as a charitable donation.

Life Estate

An arrangement allowing a landowner to donate land but retain the right to live on and use the property for the remainder of their lifetime.

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Land Use and Planning Terms

Open Space

Land that remains undeveloped and preserved for environmental, recreational, scenic, or agricultural purposes.

Greenbelt

A designated area of protected open land surrounding urban areas to limit urban sprawl and preserve natural landscapes.

Urban Growth Boundary

A regional planning boundary intended to contain urban development within a designated area and protect rural lands outside it.

Cluster Development

A planning strategy that groups houses on a portion of a property while preserving the remaining land as open space.

Overlay Zoning

A zoning tool that adds additional restrictions or protections over existing zoning districts to preserve certain land characteristics.

Agricultural Zoning

Zoning regulations designed to protect farmland by restricting non-agricultural development.

Conservation Subdivision

A residential development design that protects large portions of land by concentrating homes on smaller lots.

Environmental and Ecological Terms

Habitat Preservation

Protection of land areas necessary for wildlife survival, reproduction, and migration.

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Biodiversity

The variety of plant and animal species within an ecosystem. Preservation efforts often aim to protect biodiversity.

Watershed Protection

Conservation of land within a watershed to protect water quality and natural hydrologic systems.

Wetland Preservation

Protection of marshes, swamps, and wetlands that provide water filtration, flood control, and wildlife habitat.

Riparian Buffer

Vegetated areas along streams or rivers that help protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat.

Carbon Sequestration

The process by which forests and soils capture and store carbon dioxide, reducing greenhouse gases.

Legal and Regulatory Terms

Deed Restriction

A legally binding limitation written into the property deed that restricts how land can be used.

Restrictive Covenant

A condition placed on property ownership that limits certain activities or development.

Perpetuity

A legal term indicating that a conservation restriction remains in effect forever.

Stewardship

The ongoing responsibility of a conservation organization to monitor and enforce easement restrictions.

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Baseline Documentation Report

A detailed report documenting the condition of a property at the time a conservation easement is established.

Financial and Funding Terms

Appraised Value

The estimated market value of land determined by a certified appraiser.

Fair Market Value

The price a property would sell for on the open market between a willing buyer and seller.

Conservation Funding

Public or private financial resources used to purchase or protect land.

Bond Referendum

A public vote approving government borrowing to fund land preservation projects.

Grant Funding

Financial assistance provided by government agencies or foundations to support conservation efforts.

Organizations and Programs

Land Trust

A nonprofit organization that works to conserve land by acquiring property or conservation easements.

Examples include

- The Nature Conservancy
- Trust for Public Land
- Land Trust Alliance

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Stewardship Program

A program designed to monitor conserved lands and ensure conservation restrictions are maintained.

Public-Private Partnership

Collaboration between government agencies and nonprofit organizations to protect land.

Agricultural Preservation Terms

Prime Farmland

Land with soil characteristics best suited for producing crops.

Agricultural Security Area (ASA)

A designated geographic area where farming operations are protected from nuisance lawsuits and certain regulations.

Right-to-Farm Laws

State laws that protect farmers from nuisance lawsuits due to normal agricultural activities.

Farm Viability

The ability of a farm operation to remain economically sustainable.

Ecological Land Management Terms

Conservation Management Plan

A plan outlining how preserved land will be managed to maintain ecological health.

Restoration

The process of returning degraded land to a more natural or productive state.

Invasive Species Management

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Efforts to control or remove non-native species that threaten ecosystems.

Sustainable Land Management

Using land in ways that maintain environmental health while meeting human needs.

Monitoring and Compliance

Easement Monitoring

Periodic inspection of land protected by a conservation easement to ensure compliance with restrictions.

Violation

An action that breaches the conditions of a conservation easement or deed restriction.

Enforcement

Legal action taken to ensure compliance with conservation restrictions.

Public Use & Recreation Terms

Public Access Easement

A legal agreement allowing the public to access private land for recreation such as hiking or fishing.

Trail Corridor

A protected strip of land used for recreational trails.

Passive Recreation

Low-impact recreational activities such as walking, bird watching, or nature observation.

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Planning and Evaluation Terms

Land Prioritization

A process used to determine which parcels are most valuable for preservation.

Conservation Value

The ecological, scenic, agricultural, or recreational importance of a piece of land.

Resource Inventory

A survey identifying natural, cultural, and agricultural features of a property.