Volunteer Monitor Training

NATURAL LAND INSTITUTE
Conserving Land in Northern Illinois
Agenda

• Natural Land Institute
• Conservation Easements
• Stewardship
• Monitoring Procedure
• Group discussion & Questions
What is a land trust?

A non-profit organization that works to conserve land for its natural, productive, recreational, historical, and scenic values.
It's going to be a housing development called Audubon Woods.
Land Trust Facts

• 47 million acres conserved across the country

• Land trusts are:
  – Growing in acreage
  – Investing more in stewardship
  – Gaining supporters
  – Professionalizing through accreditation
Prairie State Conservation Coalition

- Making Conservation Land Trusts Stronger prairiestateconservation.org
- There are more than 40 conservation land trusts in Illinois...Collectively protected more than 200,000 acres in the state.
Natural Land Institute

Our mission is to create an enduring legacy of natural land in northern Illinois for people, plants, and animals. Since 1958, the Natural Land Institute has helped to preserve and restore more than 16,000 acres of natural land in northern Illinois.
The Tool We’ve Chosen: Conservation Easements

Voluntary, legally binding land use restrictions that preserve the conservation values of the land by restricting its use and development.
Why conservation easements?

• PRIVATE LAND: 75% of Minnesota’s landscape is in private ownership.

• PUBLIC BENEFITS: Many of Illinois’ most important natural and cultural resources found on private land.

• LANDOWNER GOALS: Not all landowners willing or able to sell fee title. Not all land appropriate for public ownership.

• COST EFFECTIVENESS: Nor is there enough funding to always purchase in fee title.
Conservation easements

• Protect natural habitat, shoreline, scenic land
• Benefit the public and local communities
• Benefit private landowners
• A partnership, with mutual responsibility
Land Protection: The Process
Identify
Protect
Steward/Monitor
Protect

• Each easement is different, but often restrict:
  – Buildings and structures (what/where)
  – Industrial, commercial, agricultural use
  – Subdivision
  – Altering habitat or water bodies
  – Extracting minerals

• They often allow
  – Residential use
  – Vegetation management, with a plan
  – Exclusion of public
Identify
Land ownership is a “bundle” of property rights

- Use & Enjoyment
- Right to Privacy
- Mineral Rights
- Development Rights
- Resource Management
- Agriculture
- Sell or Transfer
- Mortgage

Land
Conservation easements divide the bundle

- Right to Privacy
- Use & Enjoyment
- Mortgage
- Rights restricted by CE
- Mineral Rights
- Development Rights
- Agriculture
- Resource Management
- Sell or Transfer

Land
Steward – in perpetuity.

- Documentation
- Relationship-building
- Monitoring
- Record keeping
- Enforcement
- Funding
Documentation

• Baseline reports
  – Snapshot in time
  – Vegetation, buildings, maps, photos
Relationship-Building

• With landowners
  – Our relationship is a partnership
  – Land Trust is most successful if landowners voluntarily comply with easement terms
  – Violations increase with 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} generation landowners
    – we must educate and cultivate

• With communities
  – Neighbors, family members, renters, farmers, the press, legislators, state and local governments
Monitoring

• Why?
  – Meet legal and professional obligations
  – Build relationships with landowners and communities
  – Discover any violations
  – Document condition of property over time

• Who?
  – ??% properties monitored by certified volunteers
  – % monitored by staff
Record Keeping

- Monitoring report forms
- Baseline updates
- Approvals and interpretations
- Violations
Enforcement

• Ideal: prevention
• Use individualized approach
• Work with landowner to voluntarily correct situation
• If necessary, the Land Trust’s board of directors sends us to court to legally enforce the easement
Volunteer Monitor Responsibilities

• Become certified and attend annual trainings
• Complete on the ground inspections
• Document any changes to the land
• Cultivate positive relationships with landowners
• Help maintain monitoring records and easement files
• Have fun!
With the help of volunteer monitors, the Land Trust can:

- Monitor 100% of protected properties annually
- Reach all areas of the state
- Invest time in landowner relationships
- Build support for conservation in your communities
- Protect more conservation values, with fewer resources, for the long-term

Thank You!
Volunteer Survey

• Goals:
  – Deepen understanding of volunteers
  – Improve day-to-day volunteer program management

• Take-Aways
  – Volunteers are generally satisfied
  – Additional events are of some interest
  – Use email
  – Add new information to training sessions
  – Increase communication between Land Trust and volunteers
Monitoring Procedure

1. Review info on property
2. Contact landowner
3. Visit the property
   - Talk with landowner
   - Walk the property
4. Complete documentation
5. Follow up
Monitoring Procedure

#1: Review materials on the protected property

**Monitoring Workbook**

- Directions
- Contact information
- Monitoring plan & map
- Past monitoring reports
- Copy of baseline report
- Copy of conservation easement
- Copies of any approvals or amendments
- Reserved Rights
Monitoring Procedure

#2: Contact the Landowner to schedule a visit

May – October

• Call ahead to schedule
• Invite the landowner to accompany you
• If unable to reach a landowner, contact Land Trust staff
Monitoring Procedure

#3: The Monitoring Visit

Materials to Bring

- Monitoring Workbook
- Pen/paper/clipboard
- Measuring tape/compass/GPS
- Camera
- Bug spray/first aid
- Water
- Cell phone
- NLI business card
- Monitoring “buddy”
Monitoring Procedure

#3: The Monitoring Visit

*Talk with the Landowner*

- Invite questions
- Find out about any land management concerns
- Give out information about NLI, especially to new landowners
- Complete the report form after the site visit
Monitoring Procedure

#3: The Monitoring Visit

Walk the Property

- Follow monitoring plan
- Check boundaries
- Generally inspect the property’s interior
- Visit any areas of special concern mentioned in past reports
- Visit any areas with special conservation features
- Check any areas with special restrictions
- Check for new buildings or construction
- Check the status of Reserved Rights
Monitoring Procedure

#3: The Monitoring Visit

*Photograph Changes*

- New buildings or structures
- New or changed natural features
- Other changes

*Remember:*
Mark Photo Locations on an aerial
Make Photo Key
1. Looking SW at new solar panel.

2. Looking west at neighbor encroachment.
Monitoring Procedure

#4: Complete the documentation

*Monitoring report form*
- Names of all monitors
- Date of monitoring visit
- Report any observations or problems

*Photographs*
- Indicate location on monitoring map
- Provide written description of photos

*Return monitoring report and photos*
- As soon as possible after monitoring visit
- Include expense reimbursement form if desired
- Sign the report
Monitoring Procedure

#5: Post-Monitoring Follow-up

*Landowner thank you*
  - Handwritten card from monitor

*Formal documentation*
  - NLI staff will provide a formal letter

*Problems/requests for information*
  - NLI staff will follow-up on any potential problems or information requests

*Feedback to monitors*
  - Contact Land Trust if you would like feedback or updates
Discussion Questions
Preserving for each of us . . .

and our children . . .

our own special sense of place.
How are we funded?

• Individuals
• Foundations
• Government grants
• Corporations
• Endowments
Contact Information

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Minnesota Land Trust did a volunteer survey and found …

![Bar chart showing reasons to volunteer]

- Make a difference: 70 respondents
- Be active outdoors: 45 respondents
- See interesting places: 40 respondents
- Learn new info/skills: 30 respondents
- Be part of a community: 25 respondents
- Socialize with new people: 20 respondents
- Make professional connections: 15 respondents
Volunteer Satisfaction

- Respondents who agree “Completely” or “Very Much” (N = 72 to 73)

- Make a difference: 80%
- Are active outdoors: 80%
- See interesting places: 80%
- Are satisfied: 80%