



**CONSERVATION EASEMENT  
DONATIONS  
SMALL PARCEL GUIDELINES**

The Vermont Land Trust generally requires that conservation easement donations include a minimum of 50 acres of land. The principal reason for this policy is that because the cost of easement stewardship is approximately the same for large and small parcels, VLT wants to ensure that it is maximizing public benefits when committing resources to perpetual easement stewardship. VLT operates on the assumption that substantial conservation values are present on most parcels consisting of 50 acres or more, while smaller parcels generally have few significant conservation attributes. At the same time, some small parcels do have high conservation significance. VLT will accept an easement donation on a smaller parcel, where it is convinced that the parcel in itself includes highly significant or unique public values, significantly enhances the conservation values of adjacent protected land, or avoids the occurrence of significant negative impacts on adjacent protected land, should the small parcel be developed.

**SMALL PARCEL EASEMENT DONATION CATEGORIES AND MINIMUM CRITERIA:** VLT will consider an easement donation involving fewer than 50 acres in any one of five project categories:

- 1. Community Projects:** The property fulfills both of the following two minimum criteria:
  - a. There must be clear, demonstrable enthusiasm from, and partnership with, the local community. Support can be shown in various ways, such as a written community conservation plan (where the project helps fulfill the plan), a written petition, letters of support, or official town endorsement. Selectboard approval is not required if community support is otherwise demonstrated.
  - b. The project must benefit the broad local community, rather than a narrow segment of the residents.

**In addition,** all small parcel community projects must fulfill one of the following three categories:

- a. Land that helps define a community's sense of place and heritage, such as the gateway to a village, backdrop to the town, or the site of an event of historical significance in the community.
  - b. Land where people come together for a common such as a ballfield, swimming hole, or local trail system that is connected to a village or urban center.
  - c. Land where people in the community derive a physical and spiritual connection to the natural world. There should be evidence of substantial public use of the land for this purpose, and assurance that public access will continue in the future.
- 2. Land Based Economy Projects:** The property includes at least 25 acres of prime or statewide agricultural soils, or at least 50 acres of Class I or II forest soils. In addition, the property must be in active, productive agricultural or forestry use, or such use is reasonably anticipated in the future.

3. **Multiple Conservation Goal Projects:** Minimum requirements under this category are two-fold. First, the property must fulfill two or more of the six categories described in VLT's *Conservation Easement Donation Guidelines*, a separate set of guidelines that describe the minimum requirements for parcels exceeding 50 acres. Secondly, the property must fulfill both of the following two minimum criteria:
  - a. There must be clear, demonstrable enthusiasm from the local community. Support can be shown in various ways, such as a written community conservation plan (where the project helps fulfill the plan), a written petition, letters of support or official town endorsement. Selectboard approval is not required if community support is otherwise demonstrated; and
  - b. The project must benefit the broad local community, rather than a narrow segment of the residents.
4. **Multi-parcel Projects:** Projects involving the relatively concurrent conservation (by easement or pledge) of multiple parcels, provided:
  - a. No parcel is less than 25 acres;
  - b. Collectively, the parcels include strong community and/or land-based economic attributes as described above;
  - c. The overall project has been strongly endorsed by, and directly involves the local community; and
  - d. The easements have consistent terms and can be monitored as a unit (i.e. few or no special easement clauses; preference for common management schemes).
5. **Enhancement Projects:** Parcels that provide significant protection of/or enhancement to a larger conservation project, beyond merely being adjacent to that land. The larger parcel may be a completed project or a concurrent conservation project.

**FINAL NOTE:** All projects that VLT pursues under these "Small Parcel Guidelines" must meet the following two criteria:

1. The easement document must be very simple in its terms, with few or no reserved rights beyond VLT's standard document and few or no unusual clauses. VLT's stewardship function must be uncomplicated.
2. With respect to any parcel less than 25 acres in area, either:
  - a. Commercial timber harvesting must be prohibited, or;
  - b. The parcel must be conserved as a companion to other parcels which, in aggregate, exceed 50 acres of managed forest land and the conserved parcels must be subject to a common forest management plan, common professional management and consolidated VLT plan review.