

Stowe Land Trust Successor Landowner Outreach Procedures

Stowe Land Trust recognizes the importance of establishing a positive relationship with successor landowners when conservation easement protected land is transferred to new ownership. It is widely reported within the land conservation movement that successor owners of conservation easement properties are more likely to violate easement agreements than are the original easement landowners. It is our belief that prompt identification, relationship building, and education of successor owners will greatly reduce the potential for violations and the need for litigation to resolve them.

The goals of these Successor Landowner Outreach Procedures are:

1. to proactively identify conservation easement properties likely to be transferred,
2. to initiate relationships with successor landowners in a timely manner, and
3. to foster a cooperative relationship with new landowners.

These procedures were developed because Stowe Land Trust recognizes the need for strategies to build effective relations with landowners to ensure the protection and enhancement of a property's conservation values. Strong partnerships between landowners and Stowe Land Trust are the foundation on which the stewardship program is built. Our belief is that owners of conserved land, feeling empowered by this relationship will be more likely to communicate questions about their easement and plans for their land.

Outreach Protocol

Monitoring Property Ownership Transfers

SLT will proactively identify the transfer of easement properties through the following procedures to be conducted by SLT staff and volunteers.

- (a) Owners are asked at every monitoring visit if they will be putting their land up for sale.
- (b) Owners are reminded in every mailing to inform SLT when they put their land on the market.
- (c) Periodic inquiries to real estate agents will be made to learn of SLT easement properties on the market.
- (d) Conditions shall be included in all conservation easements requiring owners notify SLT if property ownership will be changing.
- (e) Annual review of property transfers will be conducted to identify any easement property ownership changes.

- (f) Ownership changes shall be recorded in the stewardship files with the Landowner Tracking Sheet.

Contact with Successor Landowners

SLT's goal is to ensure timely contact is made with all new owners of easement properties. This helps prevent violations resulting from the new owner's lack of familiarity or misinterpretation of the easement, or underestimation of SLT's commitment to upholding the terms of the easement. To achieve this goal, SLT staff is responsible for implementing the following procedures in a timely manner.

- (a) Obtain a copy of new landowner's deed for SLT records.
- (b) SLT staff will make an introductory call to successor landowners and offer to review their easement and walk the property together.
- (c) Send a welcome package to the new landowner which will include the following:
- Stowe Land Trust brochure & other promotional materials including a complimentary one-year membership
 - Copy of Conservation Easement
 - Information pertaining to conservation values of property (i.e. news articles)
- (d) Schedule a visit, preferably with the volunteer steward, to provide new landowner with a copy of and to review the Baseline Documentation Report, talk about the landowner's plans for the property, and explain the easement terms and monitoring procedures.

Relationship Building with Successor Landowners

SLT will provide new landowners with resource information and stewardship opportunities to help them understand the conservation values and ongoing stewardship of their lands under easement, and to provide a foundation for building a relationship with SLT. SLT's intent is to help successor owners feel that they have purchased a very special piece of land and that SLT is there to support them as stewards of that land.

- (a) Include new landowner in mailings announcing special events and outings.
- (b) Provide recommendations for resource consultants or other assistance, including habitat improvement, property management consultants or agricultural programs.
- (c) Provide landowner with items that might add to their appreciation for the property such as an aerial photo or orthophoto of their property and newspaper clippings from the time when the land was conserved.
- (d) Maintain periodic contact with successor landowner to obtain feedback about how the easement is working for them, including any plans for the property which might prompt an approval or amendment request.