

The Calais Conservation Fund Guidelines

A. Introduction

Calais residents place a high value on the rural character and natural resources of the Town, and have repeatedly taken steps to protect them. We recognize the mix of agricultural lands and forestland is an important aspect of Calais as reflected in the town plan. Wildlife habitat, ponds and streams and recreational opportunities are also highly valued.

In 1989 the voters created the Calais Conservation Fund to help protect the Town's scenic landscape and natural heritage. Each year since then, the Town has added to the Fund, building an account that will be used to help purchase or permanently protect resource lands in Calais. The Fund can support local projects, or provide the critical local matching funds required to secure state, federal, or other grants for agricultural and conservation projects in Calais.

B. Funding Mechanisms – A Range of Choices

The Conservation fund is controlled by the Selectboard; any expenditure must be approved by them, and the Board may request a recommendation from the Calais Conservation Commission. Funding can be used in a number of ways:

- For technical assistance (legal work, surveying, appraisals, etc.) to Calais landowners who have entered into an agreement to conserve their land.
- To provide local matching funds as required to leverage private, state, and federal grants for significant conservation projects (for example, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund)
- To purchase resource lands or conservation easements in Calais, in cooperation with Calais landowners and/or nonprofit organizations.
- To conduct educational and public outreach programs to promote conservation in the Town, including the production and distribution of conservation-related information and materials.

This list is not exclusive. Experience with conservation projects teaches us that there are many creative and flexible ways to protect resource lands, and the Selectboard and Conservation Commission intend to take advantage of new opportunities as they arise.

C. Criteria for Use of the Calais Conservation Fund

The Conservation Commission, in consultation with the Selectboard, has adopted the standards for reviewing any proposed expenditures from the Conservation Fund. In drafting these criteria, the Commission and Selectboard focused on making sure that local Calais values are an important part of the review process.

SUMMARY OF CRITERIA FOR USE OF CALAIS CONSERVATION FUND

1. General Criteria:

- 1 Adjacent to existing town land or other permanently protected land
- 2 Existing or potential educational use by Calais schools
- 3 Of historic or scenic value to the town of Calais
- 4 Located in or adjacent to an historic district, or other area of importance to the town
- 5 Recreational use by residents of Calais
- 6 Accessibility and visibility

2. Financial criteria:

- 1 Feasible conservation plan
- 2 Maximizes use of private contributions and state and federal conservation programs
- 3 Financially-sound long-term management plan

3. Criteria for agricultural land:

- 1 Significant agricultural land
- 2 Land with demonstrated productivity
- 3 Availability to keep the land available for agricultural use
- 4 Potential for being an economically viable unit or part of a farm unit

4. Criteria for forest land:

- 1 Forest land that is part of a larger parcel which includes agricultural land being considered for conservation funding
- 2 Forest land which can support a significant volume of mature timber, has productive forest soil and good access for timber harvesting operations
- 3 Significant or unique forest resource

5. Criteria for natural areas and critical wildlife habitat:

- 1 Supporting vital ecological or conservation functions and values
- 2 Maintaining unfragmented forest blocks and corridors
- 3 Supporting rare, threatened or endangered natural communities, plants or wildlife

6. Criteria for public outdoor recreation lands:

- 1 Provides access to scenic trails, including skiing, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding and snowmobiling
- 2 Provides access for hunting and fishing
- 3 Provides access for water based recreation, including swimming, skating, and boating

D. Review Process for Funding Decisions

Before funds can be spent from the Conservation Fund, the Conservation Commission and Selectboard will follow procedures to make sure that each project meets the Town's criteria, and that interested citizens have an opportunity to comment on the proposal, unless the Selectboard determines that emergency or confidential action is required. The process is:

1. Conservation Commission members meet informally with the landowner to discuss the project, and to explain criteria for Town review.
2. The proposed project is placed on the agenda for a regular Conservation Commission meeting.
3. If the landowner chooses to proceed, a written application will be submitted to the Conservation Commission:
 - a) describing the property and identifying the significant resources involved;
 - b) explaining how the resources and proposed acquisition are consistent with the criteria for use of the Conservation Fund;
 - c) setting out a financial plan for the conservation project and long-term management of the property;
 - d) explaining how the Conservation Fund can maximize benefits to Calais through the use of private contributions, State and federal programs, and showing significant value for the cost of acquisition.
4. The Conservation Commission will review the application in accordance with established criteria at a regular or specially warned public meeting. The review may be continued to future meetings in order to gather additional information and public input on the proposal. The Commission will, where reasonable, work with the applicant and others to provide technical assistance in developing the proposal and, where appropriate, will assist in obtaining financing from the State or other sources.
5. If, based on all the information reviewed, the Commission determines that the Conservation Fund should be used for the project, the Commission will make a formal written recommendation to the Selectboard for the expenditure. If requested by the Selectboard, the Commission will meet with the Board at a properly warned public meeting to explain its recommendation. A landowner whose proposal is denied by the Commission may also request consideration of that request by the Selectboard. No expenditure from the fund will be made without a vote of the Calais Selectboard.
6. In the event that a proposed project requests more than 25% of the cost of the project or more than 50% of the total available in the fund, the Commission shall promptly notify the Selectboard, which shall hold an informational meeting to discuss the proposal.
7. No person having a direct interest in the project under review may participate in the decision of the Conservation Commission or Selectboard.

E. Spreading the Word

The Commission and the Selectboard want to make sure that all landowners in Town are

aware of the Conservation Fund and its review process.. In the past the Conservation Commission has been in contact with various landowners interested in exploring resource conservation on their properties. To make sure that the Town has the best choice of possible projects, the Commission invites any interested landowner to contact a Commission member or to write the Commission. We look forward to working with interested landowners on resource conservation projects that will protect the Town's natural heritage and scenic landscape.

F. Further Information.

The Conservation Commission has additional information on land conservation techniques, tax advantages, and funding sources. Anyone interested in additional information should contact a Conservation Commission member, Selectboard member, or the Town Clerk.

Paul Hannan, Chair
Denise Wheeler
Cy Lamberton
John Brabant
Anne Winchester

Adopted 8/29, ²⁰¹¹₂₀₀₈

Denise Wheeler
John Brabant
Cy Lamberton
Paul Hannan
Mike Horvath