

A guide for government agencies and conservation organisations about the potential tax benefits and tax liabilities of gifts of land or an interest in the land, where the gift is made for the protection of ecologically significant spaces or environmentally significant features. A guide to the laws, regulations and policies governing tax issues when a landowner donates private land or grants a conservation covenant. Also available at [www.wcel.org](http://www.wcel.org)

### **Stewardship Options: A Guide for Private Landowners in British Columbia**

Penn, B. 1996. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, British Columbia.

A publication for private landowners who want to protect and maintain wildlife habitat on their property. Part of the Stewardship series of publications. Available on-line at [www.stewardshipcentre.bc.ca/sc\\_bc/stew\\_series/bc\\_stewseries.asp](http://www.stewardshipcentre.bc.ca/sc_bc/stew_series/bc_stewseries.asp)

Conservation contacts for land trusts and other conservation organisations can be found through:

Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia, <http://landtrustalliance.bc.ca>  
Connecting for Conservation, [www.conservationconnection.bc.ca/](http://www.conservationconnection.bc.ca/)

### **4.7 Landowner Actions**

Many individual property owners are interested in protecting natural values on their land. This applies to people who put a hummingbird feeder on their apartment balcony or plant flowers to attract butterflies to backyards, as well as to large lot landowners who protect whole wetlands or forest areas on their property.

The sum of these individual actions can do a great deal to protect the biodiversity of the Capital Region, because so many natural areas have already been lost.

Landowners who wish to conserve the natural values of their property have several options:

- Retain ownership, and manage the land themselves (see 4.7.1: Landowner Stewardship and Naturescaping);
- Retain ownership, but involve others in the conservation and maintenance of the area. This may involve an informal agreement (see 4.7.2.1: Short-term Stewardship Agreements) or a more formal legal option (see 4.7.2.2: Conservation Covenants); or

- Transfer ownership of all or part of the property to a government or conservation organisation (see section 4.6.1.2: Donations above).

#### **4.7.1 Landowner Stewardship and Naturescaping**

Stewardship of land is simply using it and maintaining it in a way that does not diminish the natural features of the property. The concept of land stewardship does not exclude the development of land or economic benefits, but seeks to incorporate a variety of land uses with sound ecological practices.

There are many opportunities for individual citizens, organisations and businesses to protect natural features on their private property. Even a backyard can be maintained to make an ecological contribution.

*“Restoration of wildlife habitat happens gradually, one yard at a time. Each private outdoor space is unique, each is important, and each is potentially part of a much larger network of private and public greenspace.” Naturescape British Columbia (Campbell and Pincott 1995)*

“Naturescaping” means using plant species that are native to the area, and/or species that will provide food and shelter for birds, insects, butterflies and other local wildlife. This helps to preserve biodiversity. The advantages of using native species are that they are adapted to local conditions, and once established need less watering, and little or no use of pesticides or herbicides. By reducing lawns and manicured gardens and replacing them with natural ecosystems, communities can reduce the human labour and financial costs associated with managing conventional urban landscapes.

*In North America the area dedicated to exotic lawn cover in residential properties is approximately 83,000 square kilometres. North American residential lawns receive approximately four times the pesticides and herbicides per hectare as agricultural crops do (Ingram 1999).*

The Naturescape British Columbia program provides information to landowners and homeowners on ways to protect and enhance the natural values of their property.

## 4.7.2 Short-term Stewardship Agreements

Some landowners may want outside assistance with the conservation of their land, without making a long-term commitment. There are several options.

### 4.7.2.1 Handshake Agreements

A handshake agreement is a verbal commitment between a landowner and a conservation organisation to protect or manage the land in certain ways. For example, a conservation organisation may agree to remove invasive plants from a wetland on a regular basis.

### 4.7.2.2 Management Agreements

This could include a simple written contract to manage the land in a certain way. This type of agreement is not binding on future landowners, and may include a time-limit for the agreement.

*“Mr. T. has a marsh on his ranch that both he and Muskrats Forever, a national conservation organisation protecting wetlands, are interested in conserving for wildlife habitat. Together they draw up a written agreement that states Mr. T. cannot drain the marsh for pasture or let the cattle graze by it. In return for limiting his use of the land, Muskrats Forever agrees to look after the marsh and fence it from his cattle.” (Fictional example in Penn 1996)*



B. Whittington

## 4.7.3 Leases and Licences

A landowner may enter a lease or licensing arrangement part with a conservation organisation, in return for an annual rent or licence fee.

*“Mr. and Mrs. R. inherited a large property that encompassed extensive nesting grounds of sandhill cranes... They contacted the...Sandhill Crane Foundation, and negotiated a lease that allowed the Foundation to enter and care for the property and cranes in return for an annual rent that covered the owners’ taxes.” (Ibid.)*

These voluntary agreements are usually renewable, but are not binding on future owners of the land. Voluntary agreements are a good option for a landowner who is unsure about entering a more formal, long-term conservation covenant. Just getting to the point of a verbal agreement usually entails a discussion of the valuable natural features that exist, and that education can further enhance the private stewardship that has been maintained in the past.