



STEWARDSHIP FUNDING POLICY

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Natural Areas Registry

The donation of a **conservation servitude** is a major, long-term commitment for both the landowner and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries (LDWF). The landowner needs to be assured that LDWF is committed to and capable of ensuring that a cherished property will be forever protected. Conservation servitudes are an established legal tool to protect land for natural heritage values for generations to come.

When LDWF accepts a conservation servitude, the agency agrees to become partners with the landowner in order to protect and maintain the unique natural heritage values of the site. This agreement requires restriction of certain uses on the property in perpetuity. Current and all future landowners assume the legal responsibility to use the property in a manner consistent with the conservation servitude. To fulfill its responsibilities as holder of the servitude, LDWF inspects servitude properties at least once each year to be sure the natural heritage values are intact and no violations of the conservation restrictions have occurred. In addition, some conservation servitudes will have reserved rights that LDWF must review, approve, and monitor as they occur such as timber harvesting, road maintenance or other land management efforts. Unfortunately, violations do occur, and their likelihood increases as time passes and properties change hands. If a violation is discovered, LDWF must be prepared to take follow up action with the landowner to seek voluntary correction of the problem, and to defend the terms of the servitude if necessary.

Purpose of Stewardship Funding

LDWF maintains the Natural Heritage Fund to cover the costs associated with stewardship of the servitudes it holds. This fund provides the agency with the financial resources necessary to ensure that:

- Each servitude property is physically monitored at least annually.
 - Conditions of the land are documented in a written report with current maps, aerial and ground photos.
 - The monitoring report is provided to the landowner with explanation and recommendations on any compliance matters.
 - Technical experts, such as wildlife biologists or foresters within LDWF, can be utilized when necessary to confer on servitude management matters throughout the year.
 - Regular contact is maintained with the landowner and subsequent owners are fully informed of the servitude terms.
 - LDWF can take enforcement steps if necessary to be sure that use of the property is consistent with the servitude.
-

Natural Heritage Fund Donations

When considering the acceptance of a conservation servitude, LDWF suggests that landowners or other project supporters make a tax deductible gift to the Natural Heritage Fund at the time of their servitude donation or sale. The minimum cost of completing one annual site visit, written easement monitoring report, photo inventory and necessary follow-up communication with the landowner is about \$500. If a donation is not possible at the time of the transaction, landowners are asked to consider pledging a future contribution which may be donated over several years or as a bequest. The agency also recognizes that not all landowners are able to make such a contribution, and will consider accepting a servitude without a Natural Heritage Fund gift in extraordinary circumstances.

When making a gift to the Natural Heritage Fund, donors are asked to consider the following complicating factors that may suggest a higher than minimum contribution:

- multiple parcels or ownership interests, or large property size
- degree of future development permitted on or adjacent to the servitude;
- extent of active agricultural, residential or recreational uses allowed on the property; and
- high levels of public access on or near the property.

LDWF staff can help assess which, if any, of these factors may apply to your property.

There are many ways of making a tax deductible gift to the Natural Heritage Fund. Some landowners choose to make a one-time cash gift at the time the servitude is signed, and others pledge gifts over a period of years. Income derived from sale of a portion of the property not included in the servitude, or sale of commodities from the property such as timber, may be used as a donation.

Management of the Natural Heritage Fund

Responsible oversight of conservation servitudes is crucial to the success of any land protection program. When accepting conservation servitude LDWF makes a serious commitment to protect the land and its resource values in perpetuity. Contributions to the Natural Heritage Fund help us keep that commitment to you - the owner interested in voluntarily conserving your land.
