

COLLABORATION

A HEALTHY LANDSCAPE FOREVER REQUIRES COLLABORATION

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KAWARTHA LAND TRUST

As the Land Stewardship Manager with Kawartha Land Trust (KLT), I've had the privilege of working with landowners who have spent a lifetime caring for their woodlots and rural acreages. When a landowner is working with the Land Trust, they are typically interested in seeing the investment that they have made in stewarding their land made permanent. Do you want to know that your land will not be lost to development? Do you care that a future owner does not take a heavy hand in management and not respect the care you have shown to nature on their property? If yes, working with a Land Trust may be something to explore.

Anyone that has marked a stand for harvest or planted a tree knows that management of the natural environment yields rewards that unfold over a long-time frame. It is no surprise that forest managers understand the importance in investing in permanent protection of land. The long term is considered in everything a wise woodlot owner does. For these landowners, with the future of their land in mind, there is a strong case to be made about working with a land trust. Something I often say to landowners is that "the land trust does not do conservation, we just make your conservation permanent".

Land Trusts are charitable organizations that own land, or own a right to land called a conservation easement agreement (CEA). Typically Ontario Land Trusts own land for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The Ontario Farm Land Trust and the Bruce Trail Conservancy notably stretch this mission to include other values.

In the U.S where the land trust movement is 40 years older than in Canada, protection of working land (farms and forests) as well as recreational access and greenspace have become a dominant role of Land Trusts.

There are 56 million acres protected by Land Trusts in the U.S., double the acreage of all the contiguous American national parks (Source: Land Trust Alliance). While comparatively in our infancy in Canada, the American experience shows what collaboration with private landowners has achieved when organizations with strong governance, financial and community structure work with landowners and other environmental organizations.

Landowners can work with land trusts in two ways: 1) Registration of a conservation easement agreement and 2) donation of land to be managed in perpetuity to protect its natural or working values. A third way is also emerging as land trusts collaborate with other organizations such as the OWA

A conservation easement agreement (CEA) permanently and legally attaches on the title restrictions against destruction of the forests, wetlands, or fields on a property. The property can be transferred but the restrictions remain forever. The land trust is responsible for monitoring the property every year to ensure that the restrictions have not been broken, and to enforce violations with legal action or restoration. Restrictions are legally agreed on that are relevant to the land, and to the landowner engaged. For example, woodlot owners that want to allow harvest of trees in a thoughtful and sustainable manner can restrict forestry that isn't done following an approved Managed Forest Plan. Such a restriction protects the property future owners high grading, over harvesting and disregarding natural heritage features, but allows wood to be harvested sustainably by any future owner. Other broad restrictions against development or aggregate extraction can be placed where appropriate, on all or a portion of the property. Some areas can



The author leading a guided walk at the property celebration of Ayotte's Point Woods in 2018.

be left completely unrestricted. Would you want to ensure the permanent protection of your property, especially in areas where development is on the horizon? Unlike government policy, Conservation Easement Agreements are applied based on your deep knowledge of your property, in collaboration with you applying restrictions that balance protection of nature with the livability (or ability to work on) the property.

Donating property to a land trust is another option for landowners who want the legacy of their stewardship to be maintained for future generations. Imagine your land protected in 100 years, what will the land surrounding your property look like? Land Trusts can accept land and manage it according to the intention of the donors as long as the management vision aligns with the Land Trusts objects of incorporation. Many Land Trusts bring the capacity of expert staff and volunteer ecologists, foresters, and planners as well as the passion of volunteers for boots on the ground work.



Any landowner knows that land ownership isn't free and requires hard work and commitment. Land Trusts only accept the donation of land or the responsibility of a CEA if they can ensure long term financial capacity to care for the land, through the maintenance of an endowment or stewardship fund. Land Trusts work hard to ensure ownership in the long term through solid governance structures, and mechanisms for protection of donated land in a worst-case scenario.

Fortunately the federal government recognizes the value that landowners make to Canada when they entrust land or a CEA to Land Trust. The Ecological gift program (managed by Environment Canada in Collaboration with the Canada Revenue Agency) was created to give additional income tax benefits to these landowners. When the property is donated its value is appraised, and the Land Trust issues a tax receipt for this value. When a CEA is registered, it typically is viewed as a negative impact to the lands value because it restricts certain uses. An appraisal is done considering the value of the land before the CEA and after it was registered. A tax receipt is issued for the appraised loss in value. In Canada 1,632 land owners have donated land through this program, seeing their properties protected forever and received the income tax benefits.

Some Land Trusts are realizing that to support their vision of a thriving natural environment they must move beyond the



Fleetwood Creek property, 2019.

tools of ownership and CEAs. After all, Land trusts should not own every property, but every property contributes to landscape health. Some Land Trust are learning ways to support landowners in stewardship of their property. Last year the OWA and KLT collaborated to pilot a plantation thinning project in a part of our shared geography. Woodland cover is exceptionally high in this area and KLT is working to both permanently protect the forests in the area, and improve the overall quality of all forests. Many small plantations however cannot be thinned because it's difficult to attract a logger to small areas. Collectively however landowners could create healthier and more productive plantations if they are thinned. KLT brought our expertise in local landowner contact, management of local landscape information and GIS capacity and the OWA

brought their knowledge of plantations, management of the contracts and forestry and industry connections willing to go out on a limb to support the concept. We have created a pilot forest cooperative, and are excited to see plantations being managed through this program. This is one example of a stewardship problem on the landscape that requires collaboration between landowners and organizations to find meaningful solutions.

The work Land Trusts are taking on partnering with landowners shows a commitment to a vision of healthy landscapes in which they work. This vision is compelling to many supporters of land trust, who support these charities with donations covering much of their operating revenue, and fundraising to protect new properties. Whether you're a landowner or a donor to an environmental charity many people envision the importance a healthy landscape for our future. The Land Trust can be a place around which to organize and actualize this vision. As a result of its merger with the Eastern Ontario Model Forest, the OWA will also realize charitable status; a move that will no doubt move us closer to that shared vision. The OWA's charitable status gives you - the woodlot owner - an opportunity to consider how you and your land want to contribute to the vision we all have share of a permanently healthy landscape, where forests are well managed and protected for future generations.



Vincent Woods property, 2017.

