

## **COSTS RELATED TO LAND CONSERVATION**

The costs related to fulfilling the vision of land conservation in Alberta are significant. It is estimated that the costs incurred by a land trust to undertake a donated conservation easement (CE) are on average \$25,000/easement. The costs to the landowner include legal and accounting advice if they choose to seek this.

### **Land Purchase Costs**

Where the ecological value of the landscape is at particularly high risk, and the landowner is unwilling or unable to donate the land or a conservation easement, Land Trusts may attempt to purchase the land outright, or at the very least place a conservation easement on the land. As land at risk is generally located where land use pressures are particularly high, this means the value of the land is also high, thereby increasing the purchase price.

### **Land Appraisal and Travel**

Land Trusts commission the assistance of accredited land appraisers to help them determine the fair market value of the land and, in some instances, the value of the ecological aspects of the land. In most cases, staff from a Land Trust will visit the property before requesting a formal land appraisal from an accredited land appraiser. As Land Trust offices are centrally located, and their land interests may be spread across the province, there are often significant travel costs associated with land purchases or conservation easements. On average the accredited land appraisal costs \$5,000 for a quarter section.

### **Monitoring**

A land trust that holds a CE is responsible for ensuring the easement conditions are being met. This can include annual visits to the land and written reports to be filed at the Land Trust office, where they must be stored. Where conditions are not being met, the Land Trust has a legal responsibility to mitigate any infractions. This may involve the courts, the cost of which is overwhelming for Land Trusts.

### **Stewardship and Endowment**

Landowners, whether private Albertans or Land Trust organizations, are responsible for the stewardship of their land. Stewardship costs include, but are not limited to, taxes, fencing, fire hazard mitigation, signage and liability insurance. In addition, land trusts are now setting aside endowment funds to help with the long term maintenance of properties. The endowment provides funds for species and vegetation inventories, regular monitoring and communication with landowners who have a conservation easement (CE) on their land. For example, the Nature Conservancy of Canada requires that 15% of the conservation easement value be raised prior to the completion and registration of a CE.

### **Court Challenges**

By holding conservation easements, Land Trusts are expected to deal with infringements on the terms within the easements. For example, if the easement indicates no roads will be built, the landowner must not build any roads. If the landowner does build a road the Land Trust becomes responsible for mitigating the action. Currently 2 CEs are in court in Alberta and the land trust is responsible for raising the funds to pay for this legal action. To try to offset this potential, land trusts are asking for a portion of the stewardship and/or endowment fund to help cover any future legal costs.

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