



Land Conservation Strategy and Tools

Overview

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast is a regional land conservancy committed to protecting the land and water in Southwest Florida for the benefit of people and nature. Our work saves critical lands surrounding the key waterways and bays that feed the rich estuaries from the mouth of Tampa Bay, to Sarasota Bay, south to Charlotte Harbor and along the Gulf of Mexico. We are protecting the working lands and vital linkages from Duette Preserve in Manatee County to the Everglades. As the region's population grows, citizens and community leaders are recognizing the importance of conserving land along these rivers and streams as critical to protecting the water and living resources of our rural land, coastal bays and Gulf of Mexico. We working with a variety of landowners who wish to protect their land for their family, the community and our quality of life.

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast conserves lands that benefit imperiled natural communities and species. Additionally, Conservation Foundation conserves land that provides public access to unique land or land that is abundant in recreational resources. The organization recognizes the needs of citizens and visitors to experience the diverse lands that represent the array of special places in our service area. In order for us to foster an ethic of land stewardship, we will need to inform and engage citizens and decision makers throughout the region and build continued support for our land conservation endeavors.

Project selection criteria

Conservation Foundation conserves land for nature and people. We protect and preserve the environmental character and natural integrity of the unique ecosystems of southwestern Florida. We provide opportunities for people to experience nature directly.

As we protect lands in perpetuity, we must carefully evaluate each project to ascertain that it conforms to our selection criteria and can be managed appropriately. Conservation Foundation has adopted specific criteria to evaluate and identify lands that have the highest importance for conservation or public access. Conservation Foundation staff evaluates each opportunity in accordance with our conservation priorities and stewardship abilities. Projects presented to the Board for approval must meet Conservation Foundation's established priorities and conservation mission, be financially and ethically feasible, and provide a public benefit.

We use the following four criteria to evaluate potential projects:

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
1. Waterfront Location	How much and what type of shoreline does the property encompass?
a. Gulf , Bay	
b. River, Stream, Lake	
2. Imperiled Nature	How much will this project benefit imperiled natural communities and species, as listed by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)? Projects with very imperiled resources and demonstrable benefits will be ranked “high.”
a. Natural Communities	
b. Species	
3. Connectivity	
a. Functional Wildlife Corridor	How much will this project create or improve functional wildlife corridors? (as defined in Conservation Biology.)
b. Public Access Connectivity	How will public access on this project increase open space connectivity for people?
4. Public Access/Recreation	How great is the community need? Three types of need are evaluated: how underserved the community is for that resource, how unique that resource is for the community, or how broadly would the project serve the community.
a. Community Need	
i. Underserved	
ii. Unique	
iii. Broad	
b. Type of Access	
i. Water	
ii. Trail	
iii. Open Space	What quality of public access will be provided? Four access categories are evaluated.
iv. Scenic	

Stewardship of Owned Lands and Conservation Easements

For both the lands we own and the conservation easements we hold, Conservation Foundation recognizes the stewardship responsibilities upfront and ensures that the organization has sufficient resources (money, staff, and time) to fulfill its obligations. We recognize that we are taking on obligations that have perpetual responsibilities. For properties in which we choose to take on a management role, such as Bay Preserve in Osprey, Myakka Headwaters Preserve in Myakka City and Pine Island Preserve in Lee County, Conservation Foundation will ensure that the activities and improvements made are suitable to protect the conservation values of the property, provide appropriate public access, and that we have the financial resources to maintain, and in many cases restore, the property and its improvements. As part of the project selection assessment, staff will assess the financial feasibility, stewardship obligations and funding opportunities within the community to support our work.

Land Protection Tools

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast secures land only from willing landowners. To accomplish its mission, Conservation Foundation uses a variety of conservation tools customized to fit the specific opportunity and the needs of individual landowners and projects. These tools include:

1. **Full Fee Purchase:** Fee purchase is used when outright ownership is necessary or desired to protect the conservation values of the land. Fee ownership also offers the option of allowing public access to the site – a critical prong of Conservation Foundation’s mission. This tool provides the highest degree of long-term protection for open space. It is also the most expensive – particularly in the coastal areas – and therefore will be used selectively.
2. **Conservation Easements:** A conservation easement is a legal agreement between Conservation Foundation, or other qualified holder, that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. Each easement is negotiated specifically to meet the long term needs of the landowner, the mission of Conservation Foundation, and protect the resources on the property. Such restrictions may prohibit future subdivision, limit the number, type and location of buildings, while allowing ranching, hunting, and recreational uses to continue. It allows the owners of the land to continue to own and manage it subject to the agreed upon restrictions. Conservation Foundation is responsible for working with current and future owners to ensure that the terms of the conservation easement are enforced in perpetuity.
3. **Bargain Sale:** As population increases and land prices continue to rise in the Gulf Region, acquisition has become more expensive. To reduce these costs, landowners may sell their land to Conservation Foundation for less than fair market value and donate the remaining value to Conservation Foundation. This strategy reduces the amount of money we must raise to pay for the property and also may provide a tax advantages to the seller.
4. **Donation:** Community-minded landowners can donate undeveloped land for habitat protection or as community open space. In considering donations of land, the Conservation Foundation considers benefit to the community, our selection criteria, and the long-term management opportunities and costs. This approach is one of the most cost-effective methods for conserving land. In addition, donation of land may offer tax benefits for the donor.
5. **Partnership Transactions:** Given the expense and complexity of many lands worthy of protection, partnerships and multiple conservation tools are usually required to conserve the land and ensure its appropriate stewardship. With its strong credibility and relationships with landowners and public agencies throughout the service area, Conservation Foundation has successfully facilitated the protection of critical properties by bringing together willing landowners, public agencies and a variety of funding to accomplish its land protection goals.
6. **Conservation Buyers:** Where appropriate, Conservation Foundation will work with landowners of conserved land to find the “next generation” owner that will care for the land in accordance with the terms of a conservation easement.
7. **Planning Partnerships:** Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, its staff and volunteer leaders, will share our knowledge and expertise in local and regional planning efforts that incorporate land conservation and public parks and build the support for land protection and funding efforts.
8. **Trade Lands:** Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast may also accept the donation of real estate that does not have significant conservation value with the intention of selling the property and using the proceeds to support our conservation mission. The acceptance of these “trade lands” will be based upon the marketability of the property and the temporary ownership costs.