

Saving Land in All its Dimensions

Picture one-dimensional land conservation. Stand in a spot with your eyes closed. Maybe it's summer in the meadow at Fuller Farm, preserved by the Barnstable Land Trust, where blue stem grasses brush against your bare knee. Or you're barefoot in damp beach sand near Barney's Joy, saved in part by the Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust. You might find yourself grubbing the warm soil in the Eddy Community Garden protected by the Brewster Conservation Trust. Think how hard these groups worked to keep these mindful experiences available.

Practice two-dimensional conservation. Hike over the Moraine Trail in Falmouth, hopping the occasional granite cobble—give thanks to The 300 Committee Land Trust for making this route. Run in the children's 50-yard dash at Dunseith Gardens of the Mattapoissett Land Trust. Stroll the old cartpaths around Island Pond under red maples in fall foliage glory, saved by the Harwich Conservation Trust. These are linear treats found throughout Southeastern Mass. on land trust properties.

Consider 3-D conservation. Climb atop Strong Island, purchased by the Chatham Conservation Foundation. Pivot to scan lands throughout Pleasant Bay preserved by Orleans and Chatham land trusts: Eelmans Point; Fox Hill; Little Sipsons Island. Ramble around the long esker near Taylor's Hill in the Great Woods, owned by the Natural Resources Trust of Mansfield. Wonder about the steep kettleholes in The Ridge, saved in part by the Sandwich Conservation Trust. From the sea bottom to hilltops, and all contours inbetween, land trusts have succeeded, leaving bookmarks in the landscape that you can return to again and again.

Okay, you are now ready to travel the fourth-dimension in open space conservation—how do we make sure that these natural emblems are preserved through time? That these experiences can be enjoyed by generations to come? How do we practice perpetuity?

The best way to preserve sacred properties entrusted to us is to build anchored land trusts and a popular base of support for conservation in our communities. Land trusts can and have winked out, even accredited ones. You must get and stay strong, which means your people and policies. Sign up more members, even though the care and feeding of them is time-intensive, don't just try to lure major donors. But figure out how to create endowment, the hardest money to raise.

Reach out to media folks, community organizations and local officials. Get them out on the land. It's your best asset, photogenic too. Recruit active board and staff members, nurturing leadership potential in both. Attract volunteers through public events, walks and talks.

Integrate your group into the community. Show up and be visible at others' events. Partner. Be transparent and ethical in all your dealings. Prove your conservation intent. Encumber your landholdings with conservation restrictions or charitable trusts. Make it impossible for the community to imagine a future without your properties, your voice, and your good works.

Revel in all four dimensions of land conservation. We are making a realm. Make it good and make it last.

Mark H. Robinson, Executive Director The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, Inc. January 31, 2015
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