



CONSERVATION EASEMENTS 101

A **conservation easement** is a voluntary **legal agreement** between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization or government entity that **permanently limits land use to protect its conservation values**. This tool allows landowners to **preserve their land while retaining ownership**, continuing traditional uses, and ensuring a **legacy of stewardship** for future generations. Easements are legally enforceable.

THE BASICS

OWNERSHIP

The landowner retains ownership of the property.

LAND USES

The landowner defines the allowed uses—such as commercial agricultural operations or public access—subject to existing government regulations. It is ultimately up to the landowner to determine specific uses and restrictions within those regulatory frameworks.

THE FUTURE

Property can still be sold, leased, or passed down. The easement runs with the land forever, binding future owners to the terms.

WHAT DO THEY PROTECT?

Conservation Easements can safeguard:

- Working farms and ranches; agricultural heritage
- A legacy for future generations
- Wildlife habitat
- Scenic viewsheds
- Ecological values like riparian corridors and water quality
- Recreation access (for hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, etc.)

Each easement is tailored to the unique conservation values of the land and the landowner's goals and vision.





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FUNDING A CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Some landowners **donate** conservation easements, qualifying for tax deductions for the value of the full or partial easement donation. Others may receive **payment for the development rights they forgo**, determined by a professional appraisal comparing land value before and after the easement. The value of the easement is based on the property's development value.



DOES MY PROPERTY QUALIFY?

Not every property is suitable for a conservation easement. To qualify, **a property must offer meaningful conservation value**, such as agricultural use, wildlife habitat, water resources, recreation, scenic views, or open space connectivity.

For example, a single undeveloped lot in a subdivision may not be eligible. Even if conservation values are present now, future planned development could eliminate its long-term conservation potential. Similarly, very small parcels or properties isolated by incompatible land uses may not provide enough conservation benefit on their own.

If you're unsure whether your land qualifies, we encourage you to review the information on the Summit County Lands & Natural Resources homepage and contact us with questions.

SUMMIT COUNTY'S ROLE

Summit County works with landowners and conservation partners to protect open space through land acquisitions and conservation easements, which can be funded by the 2021 Open Space Bond if specific criteria is met. Landowners can submit a Notice of Interest (NOI) found on the homepage or using the QR code on the right to have their property considered for funding.



CONTACT US:
countylands@summitcountyutah.gov

VISIT OUR HOMEPAGE:
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BENEFITS FOR LANDOWNERS

Donating a conservation easement to a qualified nonprofit, like Summit Land Conservancy or Utah Open Lands, can offer significant tax benefits—including income and estate tax reductions. In some cases, the easement’s value can match the land’s development value. More importantly, it allows landowners to protect the land they love from increasing development pressure while maintaining its rural heritage and conservation values for future generations.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

A conservation easement provides landowners and families a choice when facing accelerating development pressures which have been exceedingly forcing the sale of rural properties in Summit County. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that allows landowners to continue owning, living on, and working their land. They can also sell or pass it down, but future uses must align with the easement’s conservation goals. Easements restrict certain types of development but maintain core property rights, making land more accessible to future generations for agriculture or open space.

LANDOWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

Easements are permanent and designed to protect conservation values in perpetuity. They are not easily amended and may not be the right fit for those seeking short-term financial gain. Landowners must ensure ongoing compliance with the easement and participate in periodic monitoring by the land trust.

CONSERVATION PARTNERS

Summit County partners with accredited nonprofits that meet national standards for conservation and stewardship. These land trusts, like Summit Land Conservancy and Utah Open Lands, secure funding to monitor and enforce easements long-term, ensuring the land’s values are protected forever.



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