



## **FEE LAND STEWARDSHIP POLICY**

### **Preamble**

Before acquiring property in fee, North Branch Land Trust (“NBLT” or “Land Trust”) will determine if the property meets the standards outlined in the *Criteria for Acceptance of Fee Simple Title or Donations of Land Policy*. NBLT acknowledges that accepting land or property in fee carries the implied commitment of its organizational reputation and public credibility. NBLT therefore will commit necessary staff time, annual operating expenses, and at times capital expenses to each property it owns in fee.

### **Introduction**

The Land Trust intends that its *Fee Land Stewardship Policy* conforms to all requirements of law, the Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices, and all other NBLT policies. The purpose of this document is to memorialize the Land Trust’s practices for fee land stewardship.

The management philosophy and stewardship of NBLT fee-owned property will be guided by two principles: 1) what is ecologically appropriate and 2) what is feasible given the human and financial resources available. Management implies an explicit plan to maintain or move toward a particular desired ecosystem that will serve to promote regional biodiversity. It is the mission of the Land Trust to work in partnership with landowners and their communities to conserve the scenic, natural and working landscapes that sustain us. This will be the goal of our fee land stewardship program.

### **Financing Considerations**

Before the Board of Directors approves acquisition of a property, NBLT’s Land Committee and staff will calculate the stewardship and enforcement costs of the property and the endowment necessary to provide for these costs as per the *Fee Stewardship and Enforcement Costs Template*. The Land Trust will determine if it has the funds available to steward the property or will develop a plan to raise these funds prior to board approval according to the *Criteria for Acceptance of Fee Simple Title or Donations of Land Policy*.

In conjunction with board approval of the project, a board resolution is required committing the land trust to implementation of the funding plan and to dedicating funds raised via the plan to stewardship and enforcement of fee holdings.

### **Management Plans**

At the time of acquisition and periodically thereafter, each fee-owned property will be inventoried and assessed as to its most appropriate use or value, a management plan written, and then the property managed accordingly. The inventory will identify the fee-owned property’s natural communities and natural features, noting in particular uncommon species that NBLT wishes to protect. Management plans may take many forms, ranging from the “let nature take its course” non-interference form, to active intervention. When possible, our management practices should be non-intrusive, and should mimic natural processes that have been suspended or altered by human activity. Management plans will be reviewed annually and revised as needed, based on changed conditions on the fee-owned property or in the surrounding environment. This review

must propose a budget for the property for the next fiscal year as part of the annual budgeting process. Reports on each property will be presented to the board after each calendar year. All fee-owned properties will be actively monitored to prevent misuse, to observe the natural succession, and to evaluate our active management efforts.

Donors' wishes regarding management of a fee-owned property will be considered and incorporated into the management plan as fully as possible without compromising NBLT's basic objectives. The Land Trust will delegate management of each property it holds in fee to an existing committee or appoint a new committee, depending on the complexity of the property and the goals established by the board.

### **Management Practices**

One cannot specify all practices that might be appropriate in the future. In lieu of such a comprehensive statement, the following active management practices have been used or may be used in the future to promote wildlife diversity, habitat enhancement, wetland protection, stability, and protection of scenic attributes:

- Removing exotics by hand pulling small plants and cutting or chemically treating shrubs and trees in some circumstances.
- Controlled burning (if possible) to maintain certain vegetation types, such as prairie plantings to augment (as appropriate) species that may appear naturally in a particular habitat.
- Constructing deer fencing for forest management objectives and species protection
- Encouraging native species proliferation through best wildlife habitat improvement practices.
- Allowing hunting or trapping or fishing as a management tool in extraordinary circumstances to control destructive wildlife.
- Establishing and maintaining parking, trails, boardwalks, and boat access for public use where appropriate and if economically feasible.
- Monitoring indices of habitat quality, e.g., water quality, and species diversity.
- Preparing and periodically updating species lists and descriptive brochures for the fee-owned properties where appropriate.
- When appropriate, the designated management committee will be informing donors and other stakeholders (e.g., members, neighbors, local officials) about projects on the fee-owned property and encouraging their participation in them.

### **Public Use of Fee-owned Properties**

The Land Committee or designated management committee recommends to the Board of Directors the level of public use of each fee-owned property, taking into account the donor's wishes. Some fee-owned properties will not be open to the public because of access difficulties, rare and endangered species, or fragile communities. At other fee-owned properties, public use will be encouraged as long as such usage does not adversely affect the integrity of the ecological system. In general, there are some public uses that will not be allowed on any fee-owned property: recreational motorized vehicles, unrestricted camping/campfires, dumping, collecting of anything except with specific permission by NBLT. Specifically, all activities permitted at a particular site will be listed in the management plan for the property.

### **Signs and Parking**

**Boundary signs:** Each fee-owned property will have its boundary marked with small NBLT signs along with flagged or painted boundary stakes/ pins, witness markers, and line trees. We will make this activity a high priority because encroachment from adjoining private property owners and misuse of any natural communities, features, or species is more likely to occur if boundaries are not located and marked.

**Informational signs:** Signs indicating permitted land use activities may be placed on fee lands when such public disclosure is appropriate.

**Entrance signs:** For those fee-owned properties where we wish to encourage broad public use, a large entrance sign will be put in place. The design of the sign must conform to the standards set by NBLT.

**Parking:** Parking areas may be provided at the fee-owned properties most suitable for public use and be constructed in the most economically and ecologically friendly manner.