Recordkeeping for Conservation Easement Stewardship

PENNSYLVANIA
LAND TRUST
ASSOCIATION

Organizing essential documents in a secure, accessible system is a fundamental part of conservation easement stewardship. This guide describes the systems of 14 land trusts.

Introduction

A key element of effective conservation easement stewardship is the development of systems for organizing, storing, and accessing the documents, reports, correspondence, and other materials related to each easement.

Different land trusts use different systems, depending on organizational size, resources, and other factors. Though the details can vary, all systems contain some of the same basic elements. Large organizations might have a full-time records manager; smaller land trusts usually don't have this luxury.

This guide outlines key components of stewardship recordkeeping and summarizes common approaches. In the final section, 14 land trusts describe their recordkeeping methods in their own words.

Key Features of Recordkeeping Systems

Recordkeeping systems should:

- Allow present and future staff and board members to easily access essential documents and information
- Ensure that critical documents will be preserved in perpetuity
- Protect private information
- Use storage space efficiently
- Aid the land trust in the case of litigation
- Comply with any applicable legal requirements

Standards and Practices

Land Trust Standards and Practices (9.G.) states that land trusts should:

1. Adopt a written records policy that governs how and when organization and transaction records are created, collected, retained, and destroyed.

2. Keep originals of all documents essential to the defense of each real property transaction in a secure manner and protected from change or loss.

3. Create and keep copies of these documents in a manner such that both originals and copies are not destroyed in a single calamity.

Practices 1, 2, and 3 are indicator practices for [land trust accreditation](). Additionally, Practice 1 is a prerequisite for [Terrafirma]() insurance enrollment.

Important Documents

Stewardship recordkeeping includes (but is not limited to) the following documents:

General
- Written stewardship policies and procedures

For Each Easement
- Donation or purchase agreements
- Grants of conservation easement and amendments
- Baseline documentation reports and updates
- Photos, maps, and surveys
- Easement closing documents
- Critical correspondence including landowner requests for interpretation, approval, and waiver and land trust responses
- Resource management plans and records of land trust decisions
- Monitoring workbooks, plans, and reports

For Collection of Easements
- Master list of all easements (including details such as amendments, violations/resolutions, and landowner contact information)
- Easement monitoring assignments and status

Paper or Digital?

Most land trusts keep a combination of digital and paper documents. Some use external hard drives, but, increasingly, organizations use the cloud to back up digital documents. Cloud-based backup systems used by land trusts include:

- [Backupify]()
- [Crash Plan]()
- [Dropbox]()
- [Egnyte]()
- [Google Drive]()
- [Norton]()

To comply with *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, organizations store original paper documents in secure storage facilities with fire protection and humidity control or in fireproof safes (either on or offsite).

Project Files

Folder Organization

Most land trusts create a digital file for each easement they hold; some also create a paper file. The file contains copies of all the necessary documents related to that easement. (As described in the previous section, original paper documents are stored in a secure, disaster-proof location.) The documents are often sorted into subfolders such as *Stewardship* and *Baseline Documentation*.

Project Labels

There are different ways to label easement projects. Often, land trusts use the last name of the original easement grantor and/or a set of numbers (for example, *Stewart-1701*, where the number refers to the first project of 2017). If land ownership changes, some land trusts change the project label to reflect the new landowner's name; others continue to use the original name. If the same landowner grants multiple easements over time, numbers or years are used to distinguish the different easements.

Alternatively, some land trusts use the name of a prominent landscape feature (e.g., Baldwin Hill or Spruce Lake) to identify a property, sometimes combined with a number, year, or other identifier.

See the "Examples" section below for multiple examples of labeling systems.

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing

Most land trusts create files for in-progress acquisition projects the same way they create files for completed acquisitions. A typical method involves creating separate folders (or using separate file cabinets/drawers); once an easement acquisition is finalized, that project file moves from the pre-closing folder to the post-closing folder. In organizations where multiple staff members are working on the

same project, they might store documents separately, then combine them into a project file upon closing. Alternatively, cloud-based systems like Google Drive allow staff to access and upload documents to shared folders in real time.

Document Saving and Filing Procedures

The general saving and filing process is relatively straightforward: when a document is created or received, a staff member saves it in the appropriate digital or physical project file. Specific procedures vary based on an organization's technology, resources, and preferences.

Most land trusts create documents using Microsoft Office software, save the final version in PDF format, and print hard copies. Organizations can easily print email exchanges with landowners, and save them digitally as screenshots, text files, or by copying and pasting text into a Word document; physical letters are usually scanned and uploaded to the computer. Some land trusts document phone conversations by filling in a template, while others track these interactions in database software.

Formalized filing procedures prevent documents from being lost or misplaced. In its recordkeeping policy or office manual, an organization should describe the process for creating, uploading, saving, scanning, and/or storing documents.

Database Software

Larger land trusts often use database software to keep track of their easements, while smaller land trusts with relatively few easements might use an Excel spreadsheet. ConservationTrack, Conservation Connections, LOCATE, and Landscape are conservation-specific software programs land trusts use. Other organizations track easement projects (along with information about members, donors, etc.) in more generic database platforms like DonorPerfect, Total Community Manager, and Microsoft Access.

Monitoring Schedules

Many land trusts use a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to track easement monitoring visits. The spreadsheet generally lists each property and includes relevant information such as location, current landowners (with up-to-date contact information), date of last visit, date of next scheduled visit, and monitor name. This spreadsheet also serves as a master list of all the easements an organization holds, especially for land trusts without database software.

Examples

In this section, 14 Pennsylvania land trusts explain their stewardship recordkeeping practices, addressing the following topics:

- Document Storage and Backup
- Project Files
- Project Labels
- Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
- Monitoring Visits
- Procedures

The explanations came directly from land trust staff, often the person in charge of stewardship or the executive director. Responses have been lightly edited for clarity.

Allegheny Land Trust

Document Storage and Backup
"We do not use a database software and we use the cloud as our primary saving option. We keep paper copies of the monitoring documents; we only have 10 easements, so we have just stayed with the historical system as it is not too burdensome."

Project Files
"Each property has its own file. Within that file are subfolders for each year, which contain the documents from that year. If we need to scan and save as a PDF, we can do that and save in the appropriate file. "

Project Labels
"We have started to use the name of the property (e.g., Lookout Farm) versus the owner's name, but historically we have used the name of the original grantor. For example, the Linder Farm (given by Mr. Linder) is now owned by the Diamond family, but we still call it the Linder farm."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
"There is no difference in the way we store the files."

Monitoring Visits
"We keep track in the files online – all 10 visits are done during the months of April or May, so until we have too many, we will stick to that system. For a master list, we have a basic Excel spreadsheet."

Berks Nature

Document Storage and Backup
"We do a combination of both paper documents and electronic copies backed up on the cloud. We do not use a specific database software to do this; however, we do use DonorPerfect, which keeps track of our easement owners, etc."

Project Files
"Each easement has its own electronic folder where all of our monitoring reports, BDRs, etc. are kept. Any subsequent correspondence related to easement amendments or exercise in rights is kept in that easement's electronic file. Paper folders include maps, monitoring reports, and a copy of the grant of conservation easement."

Project Labels
"Projects are filed under the name of the original easement donor and that does not change even if the ownership changes. For example, our very first easement is *#1 – Thun*. The current owner is Leibman, but we still refer to it as the Thun easement. Sometimes we'll call it the Thun/Leibman easement."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
"We have an electronic folder titled *Current Projects/Easements* where in-progress acquisitions are filed by name. When the easement is completed, the entire file moves to a folder titled *Completed Projects/Easements*."

Monitoring Visits
"We have an Excel spreadsheet with information on all easements. Our monitoring visit letters go out each December. Our senior ecologist schedules according to geography and time. He has a report that he completes for each monitoring visit."

Procedures
"When someone has something new or related to upload to the easement file, we do it. There is no particular process."

Brandywine Conservancy

Document Storage and Backup
"Our electronic documents are saved on a server that is backed up every night. We have all of our original irreplaceable documents scanned and saved on the server in addition to original copies saved in our archive building in fireproof filing cabinets. Original copies of our monitoring reports are saved in a working file for each easement. Electronic copies are saved in our database software, Conservation Connections."

Project Files
"Each easement has its own electronic and paper stewardship file. Within the master file for each easement, there is a subfolder for each property.

- Hard copy stewardship files: Each property has two paper folders. The *Stewardship* file contains the easement, aerial photographs, maps, photos, building sketches, past monitoring reports, etc. The reports are attached to the left side of the folder with a two-prong tab and organized chronologically with newest on the top. All photos and sketches are kept in report covers. The *Correspondence* file contains all of the correspondence, organized chronologically, with the most recent on the top.

- Electronic stewardship files: Each property has an electronic folder. There are three subfolders, labeled *Correspondence*, *Photos*, and *Maps & Misc.* The *Maps & Misc.* folder contains copies of impervious sketches, deeds, aerial photographs, etc. The other folders are self-explanatory. The electronic monitoring reports are kept in the Conservation Connections database.

- Hard copy original files: Original copies of all essential documents are saved in archival storage. These include things like the original easements, amendments, thank-you letters for donation, board approval minutes, BDRs, title insurance,

Form 8283, easement maps, appraisals, etc. They are labeled with the easement name.

- Electronic original files: Electronic original files contain scanned copies of original documents, baseline documents, easements, amendments, recorded maps, subordination agreements, appraisal summaries, title commitments, legal agreements, resolutions, etc."

Project Labels

"Each easement is named after the grantor and that does not change. If the same grantor grants multiple easements, they are labeled with 1, 2, 3, etc. (e.g., *Smith 1*, *Smith 2*, *Smith 3*, etc.). We happen to have a very common surname that grants many easements. In that case, we have begun to name all of those easements numerically as well, even though it is not the same grantor. For example, John Davis, Steve Davis, Sarah Davis, Emily Davis, etc. all donate easements. They are now labeled *Davis 1*, *Davis 2*, *Davis 3*, and *Davis 4* even though they were not the same grantor.

In our electronic file system, the main folder is labeled with the name of the easement grantor and there are subfolders for each subdivided property. The subdivided folders are labeled *Easement Name (Landowner Name)*."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing

"We have separate electronic files for in-progress acquisition projects, and hard copies are kept with the staff member who is working on the project. These projects are handled by our land conservation team. When the easement is recorded, it is transferred to our stewardship team which then files things appropriately."

Monitoring Visits

"We have an Excel document for our monitoring schedule. Each of our easements is organized into a group. Each group has anywhere from one to seven easements in it, depending on their size. Each group is designed to take one day or less to monitor. They are grouped geographically so it makes sense to do them all at the same time. We also try to group easements together if they have the same landowner.

On the schedule, we can keep track of when the group was monitored the previous year, when it is

scheduled to be monitored for the current year, who is responsible for the group, the monitors for the year (we take two on every visit), and any comments about the group or special monitoring or notification comments.

We sort the schedule first by this year's monitoring date and then last year's monitoring date. That way we can easily see what is scheduled already and what should be scheduled soon. We try to schedule at least three weeks ahead so that we can get our monitoring letters out two weeks ahead.

Our database (Conservation Connections) also keeps track of what has been monitored once we file the monitoring report."

Procedures

"We store any correspondence we receive from the landowner in the *Stewardship* file. Any important correspondence is also scanned and saved in the electronic *Stewardship* file. Email correspondence is printed and saved as well. Monitoring reports are saved within the database. They are also printed and saved in the *Stewardship* file. We scan any correspondence we send to the landowner (with signature) and also make copies so the correspondence is saved in both the electronic and hard-copy *Stewardship* files. Any plans for reserved rights are saved either electronically or in the *Stewardship* file.

We have a naming system for saving electronic documents*:* YY-MM-DD Easement Name (Landowner Name and/or Lot Number) Name of Document (e.g. *2017-8-15 Smith (Davis-Lot 4) Monitoring Follow-up Letter*). This way, when we look at the electronic *Correspondence* folder, documents are sorted chronologically."

ClearWater Conservancy

Document Storage and Backup

"We store digital and hard copies of documents. Digital documents are backed up on an external hard drive and original hard copies are stored offsite. We use Total Community Manager as an organization; land conservation employs small portion of the software."

Project Files
"Each property has its own file. Standard sub-folders are established for various components associated with the grant of conservation easement and baseline documentation.

We have a few master lists: conservation easement profiles (location, size, year, protection method) and property owners' contact information (address, email, salient notes on owner interaction)."

Project Labels
"We use simply the name of the property or, as appropriate, name of the property owner."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
"There is a different area of the hard drive for *Archived* versus *In Progress* properties."

Monitoring Visits
"A monthly Excel spreadsheet for the Land Conservation and Stewardship Committee reflects the status of monitoring visits and report completion and mailing."

Procedures
"We use hard copies and some digital in the field; uploading and storing occurs mostly back in the office after the monitoring visit. We are exploring digital access and uploading to Total Community Manager from the field. Many site stewards aren't totally ready for digital recordkeeping in the file so this is still a few years away."

Delaware Highlands Conservancy

Document Storage and Backup
"We use a combination of digital and paper documents, in addition to keeping originals of critical documents in an off-site fireproof safe per LTA *Standards and Practices*. We do not use a specific land protection database software.

We save digital files on a shared central server. Files from the server are automatically backed up daily to an online data protection system which is encrypted and conforms to HIPPA regulations. At the end of each year, all files are backed up to an external hard drive, which is stored at an offsite location."

Project Files
"Each project file (digital and paper) contains the same folder hierarchy as all of the other projects:

- Correspondence
- Easement
- Grants
- Overview
- Project Settlement
- Property Info

All documents within these folders are filed in chronological order with the newest documents on top. Digital versions of final documents (including standard correspondence letters, conservation easements, and BDR documents) are labeled with the date (YY-MM-DD), followed by the property name and the appropriate document title in capital letters (e.g., *10-05-28 Baldwin Hill 2 BASELINE DOCUMENTATION REPORT*)."

Project Labels
"At closing, each property is given a unique number and name. The number includes a three-digit sequential number, the first letter of the county where the property is located, and the year of easement closing. The name usually refers to a landscape feature associated with the property (e.g., *031-W-2005 Baldwin Hill 2*). If a landowner chooses to exercise their right to subdivide and sell a portion of the protected property, the numeric portion of the unique name will then consist of an alphabetic addition (e.g., *031a-W-2005 Baldwin Hill 2a, 031b-W-2005 Baldwin Hill 2b*).

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
"Information for in-progress acquisition projects is kept in a similar fashion to post-closing projects in order to decrease workload later."

Monitoring Visits
"We use an Excel spreadsheet and Microsoft Outlook calendar. The Excel spreadsheet has multiple tabs (original donors, costs per project, landowner and funder contact information, a running list of monitoring dates, identification of properties with forest management plans and their dates, etc.), but all tabs contain the project's unique ID field in the first column."

Procedures

"Electronic documents are kept unless there is a signed hard copy, in which case the draft version of the document (typically a Word document) may be relocated to a *To Be Trash* folder and replaced by an appropriately labeled scanned version of the signed document (typically a PDF document). Our staff periodically reviews old and new files to ensure that hard copies are backed up in the applicable electronic files and that all filing systems are consistent."

Additional Insight

For more detailed information, see the Delaware Highlands Conservancy [Records Retention Procedures](#).

Farm and Natural Lands Trust of York County

Document Storage and Backup

"We back up all easement work periodically on an external hard drive (about once a week or every two weeks, depending on the amount of work completed). The original BDR hard copy is filed in a fireproof cabinet. Another copy is placed on a shelf. Everything is saved in the original Microsoft Word document as a PDF."

Project Files

"In addition to the filed BDR, a folder is kept in another file cabinet with other documents such as our inquiry form. Folders are kept in alphabetical order."

Project Labels

"We label projects by the original grantor's last name. An Excel document contains other vital information such as easement date, landowner names, contact information, acreage, parcel ID, appraisal value, township, site inspection month, etc."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing

"There are no differences in recordkeeping between pre-closing and post-closing projects."

Monitoring Visits

"Another Excel document is used to track monitoring inspection information, containing all the relevant information needed to generate a mail-merged two-page report. A portion of this document is printed out: property address, landowner name, and contact information. A notebook containing all aerial maps is taken into the field on monitoring visits. The row on the Excel document is crossed out when the visit is completed. We have a monitoring notebook on all properties in a fireproof cabinet and a working copy on a shelf."

Lancaster Farmland Trust

Document Storage and Backup

"We a do a combination of electronic and hard copy storage. Electronic files are stored locally and backed up via a third-party vendor offsite (not necessarily cloud-based and only maintains a 30-day backup). For long-term storage we use external hard drives/flash drives to back up critical documents (i.e., easement transactions) on a quarterly basis, which are then stored offsite. For database software we are currently are using Conservation Connections for our completed easement transactions, but no documents are attached in this system. We are transitioning most of this information into a geodatabase that is supported on ArcGIS; here we are attaching some documents, like the recorded easement. We're also exploring utilizing aerial monitoring so the interconnectivity of the captured video with the ability to quickly review the easement will create some efficiencies from a stewardship perspective."

Project Files

"Each property has its own folder. Within that folder are the following subfolders: *Preservation Documents*, *Recorded Documents*, *Baseline*, *Monitoring*, and *Stewardship*. All post-easement closing communications other than annual monitoring, such as landowner questions or easement compliance, are contained in the *Stewardship* folder with corresponding subfolders regarding the specific topic."

Project Labels

"We use a year-number format to identify properties, where the first four-digit number is the year and the three-digit number is the project number (for example, *2017-001*). This is where Conservation Connections and/or the geodatabase are important to identify the specific landowner and then determine the specific file number associated with that project."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
"There is really no difference in pre-closing and post-closing projects in terms of the file system. We do rename project files with the specific year they are concluded, so a project started in 2015 may have a number assigned, but if it closes in 2017 it would be assigned a different number at some point in the process."

Monitoring Visits
"Monitoring visits are tracked in a geodatabase which is connected to an Excel spreadsheet. The geodatabase is updated quarterly when we receive parcel updates from the Lancaster County GIS department. Those updates help to track properties that have changed ownership. Staff update the Excel spreadsheet when scheduling and completing visits."

Procedures
"All communications and monitoring correspondence are stored electronically within the respective project folder. Most original documents are produced in Microsoft Office with the final draft saved in a PDF. Communications on letterhead are scanned and saved as PDFs to the appropriate folder. A paper copy of the monitoring report is printed and inserted in the office's copy of the BDR for use in the field during the next monitoring visit."

Land Conservancy of Adams County

Document Storage and Backup
"We keep paper copies of all records. At the completion of a project, we create a file for permanent off-site storage, and one copy of that file that is kept in our office. Another file is used for monitoring visits, which just includes the easement, BDR, and previous monitoring reports. Because we are provided office space and IT support from the county, all our electronic files are on a county server, which the county backs up. We do not use specific database software (yet)."

Project Files
"Each property has an off-site file, a copy of that file in the office, and a file for monitoring. The first section of the file has the easement deed and BDR, the middle section has documents pertaining to the preservation process, and the last section is for communications

and matters that take place after the easement is recorded."

Project Labels
"We use year and number. For example, *2017-3* would be the third easement closed in 2017."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
"We have a separate location and system for in-progress acquisition projects. Most documents are stored electronically, but paper documents that have been generated are kept in a project file."

Monitoring Visits
"We record the date of all completed monitoring visits in an Excel file. It's not ideal. We have discussed purchasing software or subscribing to a database manager but have not chosen one yet."

Procedures
"Landowner communications by email may be printed and kept in the off-site file and backup file in the office. If we receive a phone call that we think should be documented, we have a form on the computer to fill out on that is then printed and kept in both off-site and office files. Other new documents for a project are similarly handled – one copy in the off-site file, one in the backup file in the office."

Natural Lands

Document Storage and Backup
"We keep paper copies of documents, as well as scanned electronic copies. The electronic copies are stored on our servers, as well as backed up weekly to tape and stored off-site. We are considering cloud-based storage at this time."

Project Files
"In both paper and electronic format we have a folder for each easement, and within the easement folders we may or may not have individual folders for each property and/or tax parcel, depending on ownership. For example, an easement may be divided into five tax parcels with only three owners, so we would probably have three property files within one easement file; if a parcel gets sold off and a fourth owner comes into the fold, then we add that fourth property file to the easement folder.

Our original paper files are pretty sparse—copies of recorded easement documents, maps, and BDRs. The everyday paper easement administration folders are beefier and include file folders for easement documents, correspondence, monitoring reports, maps, photos, special projects (like plan reviews), impervious coverage tallies, and violations folders (when appropriate). There is also a copy of the BDR. Within the everyday easement administration file we also include a folder for the background files, so things like Form 8283s, appraisals, Phase I assessments, proposals, and invoices are stored there as well.

The electronic files are organized into four folders: project manager (*ProjMan*), final documents (*FinalDocs*), easement administration (*EasementAdmin*), and public relations (*PR*).

ProjectMan includes all documents leading up to the recording of an easement; we like to call this the 'Gestation File.' Draft easements and BDRs are in here, as well as appraisals, Phase I assessments, maps, proposals, surveys, tax info, title work, and anything internal, including invoices.

FinalDocs ('The Birth') includes the recorded easement documents, final baseline, monitoring reports, critical correspondence, and post-recordation subdivision plans.

EasementAdmin ('Taking Care of the Baby') includes subfolders for amendments, baseline updates, correspondence, impervious coverage tallies, copies of monitoring reports, photos, and special projects (here we combine plan reviews and violations).

PR (no fancy name for this one!) is just what it says—newspaper articles or press releases we put out, as well as special pictures for advertising the accomplishment. We store these separate from other photos because they can be kept at a lower resolution and won't necessarily be dragged in as evidence, should things ever come to that."

Project Labels
"We do not have a consistent naming system, though we are developing one. In transitioning to the new database, we are developing a unique identifier naming system to combat the many also-known-as names our easement lands have. At the moment, however, our new easements are generally named based on the grantor or the current property name."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
"For pre-closing projects, project managers maintain the same files as listed above for the *ProjMan* folder, with the addition of a *Grants/Funder* folder."

Monitoring Visits
"We keep track of visits and reports completed through our FileMaker Pro database, but are transitioning to LOCATE, which is based on Salesforce."

Procedures
"All monitoring reports are done by hand, then entered into the database, effectively producing a second version of the report. A cover letter is then put together and these three documents are scanned and stored electronically. The paper versions are filed appropriately as well. Depending on the importance of the landowner communication, it is scanned or not scanned; if scanned, it is stored in the paper file. Any correspondence produced by us is scanned and, depending on its importance, may or may not be printed out for the paper file."

Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy

Document Storage and Backup
"We have paper copies of the conservation easement, letters (on letterhead) we send and receive, and other items. We also keep electronic copies of finalized and filed conservation easements and BDRs."

Project Files
"Each property has a set of files:

- Correspondence (leading up to the conservation easement)
- Correspondence (after the conservation easement is signed)
- Background/technical information
- Monitoring
- Grant of conservation easement copy
- Grant of conservation easement drafts

If there's something going on—gas lease, timber sale, anode bed, house being built—there's a file for that."

Project Labels
"The files in the office are labeled with the name of the conservation easement. Terrafirma requires a project number, so we use the year of the project and then consecutively number the projects. *2001001* is the first conservation easement completed in 2001."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing
"They are in different filing cabinets to help keep them straight. Currently, in-progress acquisition projects don't have a standardized set of files, which we plan to correct."

Monitoring Visits
"We have an Excel spreadsheet that lists the conservation easements (rows) and the calendar years (columns). This helps us verify in one place that everything is getting done. Copies of the letters sent out in advance of the visit and after the visit are kept in the *Correspondence* file and *Monitoring* file. We also use a standardized monitoring report that is completed and filed in the *Monitoring* file."

The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County

Document Storage and Backup
"We keep both paper and digital copies. Digital copies are stored on a hard drive with remote backup."

Project Files
"Each property has its own folder. The folders are organized by year."

Project Labels
"At this point we use the name of the most recent landowner; we will most likely move to a numbered system as we grow."

Monitoring Visits
"Monitoring summaries are dated and filed for each visit. We monitor some properties in the spring and some in the fall. They are categorized according to the season they are monitored. We use an Excel spreadsheet to track visits and any necessary follow-up."

Procedures
"Each document is saved to its particular landowner file as it occurs."

Tinicum Conservancy

Document Storage and Backup
"We keep paper copies in both a working file (in office file drawers) and in an off-site permanent file in combination-locked fire/flood-proof vaults. We also keep all documents scanned and on our server. We have not yet advanced to keeping docs in the cloud. Our database is built on Microsoft Access."

Project Files
"Each easement has its own paper folder in both the working and permanent files. There are several easements that have multiple landowners (such as subdivisions), which reside all in the same folder. Each easement also has its own folder on the server, where all scanned documents are kept. While there is no specific organization of the paper or electronic files within a folder, typically the documents used most often (grant of conservation easement, monitoring, and recent correspondence) are kept in the front for access."

Project Labels
"Each easement is given a number based on the order in which the easement was completed (the first easement is #1, the 10th is #10, etc.). Also, each is named by the grantor, e.g., *Diamond-112*. Sometimes an easement is referred to by the grantor/current landowner name (e.g., *Cicalese/Smith*) for clarity on those properties in second or third-generation ownership."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing Projects
"Paper files are accumulated in the working files of each staff member working on that project. Electronic files are kept on the server in a *Current Projects* folder for all to access. When the project is completed, all the paper files are combined from each of the departments and copied for both working and permanent files. The *Current Project* file is moved to the *Completed Projects* folder."

Monitoring Visits
"Because we currently use volunteer monitors, each monitor is responsible for scheduling their own visits within a given time period (we send email reminders occasionally). An Excel spreadsheet is maintained for all easements (based on the Excel sheet completed for

accreditation). It contains all relevant information for each property, including the current landowner, the assigned monitor, and dates for all previous and current monitoring. When a monitoring visit and all reporting is completed, the visit date is input into the Excel sheet (the number of months since the previous visit is automatically calculated) and also into our database. Our database is expected to be updated to take the place of this Excel sheet, but the process is not yet user-friendly or intuitive."

Procedures

"Documents that generate paperwork (monitoring, BDRs, maps, photos, easement documents, board discussions/approvals, written communications, etc.) are all scanned and saved on our server as they are generated or submitted/received. Documents are attained in electronic form as much as possible (we send and receive monitoring reports, photos, and maps via Dropbox as much as possible, although some volunteers won't use technology). Copies are made for both working and permanent files. All communications, issues, interactions, or other important information is noted in our database."

Additional Insight

"At stewardship workshops we have discussed the many differences in stewardship processes based on staff size, the use of volunteers versus staff for monitoring, the number of easement properties, and budgets for technology. We are always seeking improved methods within our constraints. Currently, the move from paper to electronic files creates a redundancy in file keeping, which is probably not a bad thing for now. Moving to the cloud may be next, but there is a lot of hesitancy over the security of that method."

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Document Storage and Backup

"All important documents are scanned onto our network, and the original files are sent off-site. Digital documents are backed up on external storage devices and taken off-site on a regular basis. Our database, ConservationTrack, is not used for document storage."

Project Files

"Each project has its own folder (hard copy and electronic). Contents are divided into *Land* (files related to acquisition) and *Stewardship* (files related to monitoring, management, etc.)."

Project Labels

"In the *Land* files, we name the properties according to the prior owner. In the *Stewardship* files, we name easements according to the prior owner, and fee properties with a public name (e.g., *Bear Run Nature Reserve*, a preserve comprised of properties purchased from various owners). There are several exceptions to this rule."

Monitoring Visits

"We use ConservationTrack to track monitoring visits."

Procedures

"Documents are scanned/saved as they become available."

Wildlands Conservancy

Document Storage and Backup

"We store our stewardship recordkeeping documents in two hard file systems: a master file and a working file. We also store them on a server hard drive (with two off-site backups, one on each coast of the United States) and on the cloud-based Landscape software."

Project Files

"Each property has its own folder with the following subfolders: *Appraisals*, *Baseline Documents*, *Conservation History/Communications*, *Defense*, and *Monitoring Records*."

Project Labels

"Our naming system is related to the owner's last name at time of conveyance and year of conveyance. For example, Edith Stevens has given two easements, one in 1999 and one in 2014, named *Stevens 1999* and *Stevens 2014*. If more than two properties are conveyed in the same year by the same owner, they are further identified by lot number (i.e., *Keystone 1998 lot 3*)."

Pre-Closing vs. Post-Closing

"Pre-closing easement documents are stored in our land protection department's server and on Landscape. They don't receive the multiple hard copy records until they are held by the trust."

Monitoring Visits

"Landscape allows us to track monitoring visits. It automatically shows which easements still need to be monitored that year, and allows us to track which monitoring visits are scheduled and completed. Our master list of held land/easements is maintained in an Excel file but can also be accessed through Landscape (though it is not as graphically organized in that format).

Landscape also allows us to record monitoring visit data in the field and synch live to the cloud, geotag our photos, and will soon provide track logs. This is our first year using Landscape exclusively for monitoring purposes, but we had great field test success last season."

Procedures

"New documents are stored in all of the above locations when received. Monitoring reports are reviewed by our property stewardship director before being uploaded to all locations. Landscape allows us to keep close track of communications by displaying who the staff was, who the outside contact was, what was discussed, the mode of communication, and the date/time. At present only critical defense communications are stored in Landscape but we are transitioning to more frequent use of that feature."

Resources at ConservationTools.org

To find experts and other resources, see the right column of the on-line edition at http://conservationtools.org/guides/154

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Submit Comments

Help improve the next edition of this guide. Email your suggestions to the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association at aloza@conserveland.org. Thank you.