



Establishing Land Protection Criteria

To determine the best level of protection or the conservation options for a specific property it is always best to start with a review of the natural resources.

It's best to have criteria for acceptance of any land protection project. Consider the creation of a Natural Resource Inventory and/or Conservation Plan if you don't have them. Knowing what you have for resources helps you to understand what is most important to protect.

Criteria can assist your commission by:

- Educating landowners, new commission members, other town officials, and the general public about important natural resources in your community
- Creating better communication about your goals to the general public, landowners and other potential partners
- Letting funding entities know that you are operating in a very professional manner
- Documenting the reasons why you chose to invest in a certain project (you or other commissioners may need to defend this expenditure in the future)

These are some criteria questions that other conservation commissions have used for determining their involvement in a land protection project:

- Does this parcel fall within priority areas of a conservation plan?
- Does the parcel abut protected lands or municipal lands?
- Does the parcel include important habitat? Consider using the NH Fish and Game [Wildlife Action Plan](#) as part of your criteria.
- Is the parcel actively farmed and/or include important farm soils?
- What is the plan for management of the property in the future? Is it a managed woodlot? Is it a [Tree Farm](#)?
- Have rare plant or animal species been identified on the parcel or on an abutting parcel?
- Has another entity such as a state agency or land trust identified this as a focus area?
- Does the parcel contain an important cultural resource such as a trail or place of historic significance?
- Will public access be provided?
- Does the parcel fall within the watershed of a drinking water supply or an aquifer?

Additional questions may focus on feasibility of the project and less on the conservation values.

- Is the landowner or other entity able to provide a stewardship donation to the municipality? In the case of a conservation easement stewardship is perpetual and it can cost a tremendous amount of money; consider collecting dollars for stewardship of the property in the future.
- Is there another entity (such as a land trust) that is willing to hold this easement?
- What is the property tax consequence to the municipality?
- Is this associated with a mitigation easement? Get more information on the process from the [DES Wetland Mitigation Program](#). Landowners and developers are motivated to move these easements along quickly; often there is tremendous pressure to move these projects along quickly. These conservation easements often don't meet with a conservation commission's goals.
- Is this associated with a new development in your municipality?

Some conservation commissions, open space committees and land trusts are using a score sheet filled out by commission/committee members in order to rank projects.

If you decide to use a set of criteria for acceptance of a land protection project make sure you retain a record of the score sheets or otherwise document the reasons why you made an expenditure or accepted responsibility for the stewardship of each parcel.