

Standard 8: Evaluating and Selecting Conservation Projects

Project Intake and Selection Procedures Policy

Utah Open Lands (UOL) works to: permanently protect land in Utah by either acquiring title or being granted conservation easements; responsibly manage and monitor preserves and easements; enforce restrictions to protect natural values by assisting private landowners, government agencies and communities in the voluntary preservation of the agricultural, scenic, recreational, historic and wildlife values of open land. The following are several fundamental factors in establishing UOL's land protection policies and selection criteria:

- To identify the project's standing within UOL's list of priorities in light of UOL's mission and current strategic plan.
- To assess the financial and staff implications of the project against UOL's limited resources. Insuring that those resources are applied prudently to the projects that most significantly achieve the organization's mission.
- To accurately identify and evaluate the conservation values to be protected by the project, ensuring that protection to the best of UOL's ability.
- To be able to complete a project in the most effective and efficient manner possible, demonstrating sound land preservation techniques.
- To develop a coordinated and consistent response to the landowner(s) who have requested UOL's participation in the project.
- To ensure UOL objectively considers all land preservation projects and stays focused on the goal of protecting the conservation values of the land.
- To begin a formal record of the project

Project Selection Criteria

UOL board of Directors has an approved a "Criteria for Accepting Conservation Easements". A Project Selection Criteria Checklist form has been created for staff to ensure accepted criteria as dictated by the board that is accompanied by collected data in the Project File template on the proposed project to determine, among other things, the type of land, conservation values and public benefit of the project.

1. Utah Open Lands will actively target lands in Utah that will further the stated goals of protection and preservation of open space.
2. Utah Open Lands will select for protection only those lands that qualify under at one or more of the following IRC § 170(h) criteria:
 - a. Preservation of land areas for outdoor recreation by, or the education of, the general public;
 - b. Protection of a relatively natural habitat of fish, wildlife, or plants, or similar ecosystem;
 - c. Preservation of certain open space, including farmland and forest land, for its public scenic value or pursuant to a clearly delineated Federal, State or local government conservation policy;
 - d. Preservation of a historically important land area or certified historic structure.

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3. Conservation easements acquired by Utah Open Lands must result in a significant public benefit. In determining whether a transaction will result in a significant public benefit, the following factors shall be considered:
 - uniqueness of the property to the area;
 - intensity of land development in the vicinity of the property (both existing development and foreseeable trends of development);
 - consistency of the proposed open space use with public programs (whether federal, state or local) for conservation in the region, including programs for outdoor recreation, irrigation or water supply protection, water quality maintenance or enhancement, flood prevention and control, erosion control, shoreline protection, and protection of land areas included in, or related to, a government approved master plan or land management area;
 - consistency of the proposed open space use with existing private conservation programs in the area, as evidenced by other land protected by conservation easement or fee ownership by nonprofit conservation organizations in the close proximity to the property;
 - likelihood that development of the property would lead to or contribute to degradation of the scenic, natural or historic character of the area;
 - opportunity for the general public to use the property or to appreciate its scenic values;
 - importance of the property in preserving a local or regional landscape or resource that attracts tourism or commerce to the area;
 - likelihood that Utah Open Lands or another land conservation organization or agency will protect additional and nearby or adjacent open space lands similar to the subject property;
 - population density in the proximity of the property; or
 - consistency of the proposed open space use with a legislatively mandated program identifying particular parcels of land for future protection.
4. Property acquired must be of sufficient size that its conservation values are sustainable even if adjacent properties are developed, or it must be contiguous to other protected property such that the sum total of protected acreage shall sustain the conservation values of all of the protected properties.
5. Utah Open Lands will select only those properties that permit responsible stewardship under the guidelines established and that can be adequately protected at a reasonable cost and level of effort, taking into consideration the existing and projected available resources (e.g., funds, staff, volunteers) of the land trust.

The Board's Discretionary Role

All the proceeding notwithstanding, the Board of Directors retains discretion over acceptance, acquisition, or disposition; and will evaluate each project and proposal on its own merits after careful investigation.

Documentation

UOL's Project File Template and Criteria checklist has been designed to capture, prompt, and function as a:

- Process checklist; and
- Required landowner notifications and due diligence checklist; and
- Site visit tool (checklist and data collection); and
- Selection criteria evaluation and process tool (checklist and data collection); and
- Board deliberation and action issues and concerns tool (checklist and data collection);
- Project planning tool (checklist and data collection).

In addition to the documentation required through the Project File checklists template, UOL gathers and provides landowners with standard letters and guides that are sent (as scheduled in the File template checklists) to landowners upon their interest in working with UOL and after receiving board approval to begin the process for protection; as well as other correspondence necessary from time to time in order to impart information about all of the steps and costs, and legal

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notifications necessary to negotiating and stewarding a sound conservation easement, including the opportunity to have UOL coordinate all of the necessary due diligence for the easement. These letters can be edited to fit the individual circumstances of each project.