



CASCO VILLAGE • COOKS MILLS • SOUTH CASCO • WEBBS MILLS

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To Casco Landowners,

The Town of Casco's Open Space Commission (COSC) invites all Casco citizens to think about our town's future and the value of its natural resources. Please consider some of the ways each of us can contribute to maintaining Casco's resources and rural character.

Conservation of open space can protect large or small tracts of forested land, working agricultural lands and fallow ("old") fields, and seasonal wetlands. These lands provide important habitat for a wide variety of species, support outdoor recreation opportunities, give us scenic landscapes and clean air and water, and increase community appeal. Maintaining open space also preserves local farming and forest management opportunities and leaves a legacy to enrich the lives of future generations.

Here is a summary of some strategies landowners can use for protecting open space:

- making a commitment to manage your property for conservation purposes;
- working with the Town, a forester, or biologist to identify and protect natural resources on your property, such as vernal pools, streams, deer yards or other habitat;
- placing property under Tree Growth, Farm Land or Open Space tax laws, reducing the owner's tax liability;
- placing a conservation easement on the land to keep it protected for the future, either as a donation or by selling the easement to a qualified buyer;
- selling the land to the Town, a land trust, or other conservation entity;
- through a bequest, making a charitable contribution of land to a qualified recipient; and
- working with local and regional groups to promote conservation education.

The Casco Open Space Commission members are available to talk with landowners to explore the feasibility of all these options. The Casco Open Space Plan and the Comprehensive Plan authorized the Town to protect open space values. One way we do this is educating ourselves about what strategies are possible. COSC can give you further information about the land protection mechanisms noted above.

The Commission meets at 6:30 p.m., the third Monday of each month at the Casco Community Center. All meetings are open to the public. You can also contact the Commission by calling the Town Office or writing Casco Open Space Commission, Town of Casco, 635 Meadow Road, Casco, Maine 04015.

Sincerely,

Casco Open Space Commission  
Eric Dibner, Chair

## **OPEN SPACE PROTECTION CONCEPTS**

For a given property, one or more of these strategies can help landowners protect the town of Casco's natural resources and rural character. The right strategy depends upon the needs of the property owner and the values the owner wants to see protected for the future.

**Landowner Voluntary Commitment to Manage the Property for Conservation Purposes:** The landowner simply decides to preserve open space, with or without a formal plan. The landowner who makes such a commitment can formalize it by working with a conservation entity to use best practices (for example, erosion control measures) to ensure the land's values remain intact or are improved.

**Natural Resource Features Identification and Protection:** The landowner consults with professionals such as a forester, botanist, wildlife manager, hydrologist, geologist or others from natural and physical science disciplines to identify and plan the protection of natural resources. Natural resource features might include vernal pools, springs, streams, deer yards, endangered and threatened species, unique land formations, historic forests, etc.

**Enroll in Tree Growth or Protection under Open Space Tax Law:** In these programs, the open space is preserved for the time it is in such a program, and the landowner derives a benefit through a reduced tax obligation. There may be a penalty (a disincentive) for withdrawal from a program.

**Conservation Easements:** A conservation easement is a legal document that guides future land uses.\* The property ownership stays with the original landowner, who voluntarily restricts how the land can be used, and ownership can be sold or transferred. The easement is a contract designed to protect the property's value and feature(s) by placing a limitation on future changes and/or development that can take place. Conservation easements allow land to remain in the hands of the owner, while the owner agrees to forego certain rights in the interest of protecting such things as special habitats, open fields, forests, geologic features, and scenic views. Conservation easements may be either donated or sold. An easement may result in tax benefits to the landowner if the easement, by limiting the use of the land for development, thus reduces the appraised/assessed value of the land.

**Sale of the Land:** The owner may wish to sell the property to gain an economic benefit. If the property or a portion of the property has high natural resource values, a local or regional land trust, the town or some other conservation entity may be interested in owning it and seeing its conservation values protected. While selling to a conservation group, the owner may want to retain a "life right" to live on the property in an established dwelling.

**Bequests:** As a form of charitable giving, bequests are simply leaving property in a will, as a legacy for future generations. If the property has valuable open space, the landowner would bequeath his or her interest in the land to a local or regional land trust, the town or some other conservation entity. In a situation where the land does not have open space value, the owner may choose to bequeath the property and specify that it can be sold and the proceeds invested in open space.

**Working with Open Space Protection Groups to Promote Conservation Education:** The Casco Open Space Commission encourages landowners and other citizens to become actively engaged in protecting open space resources in the town of Casco. One way individual citizens can exert influence in the community to protect and preserve open space is to support local and regional open space protection groups. This can involve memberships, donations, or active work with the group. It might simply involve maintaining awareness of local land protection/open space issues. Attending Select Board and other town meetings is important when land protection or planning issues are being addressed. The Casco Open Space Commission recommends that property owners collaborate with the Town or other conservation entities to explore the ways in which currently existing open space may be preserved for the future.

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\*Quoted, in part, from "Conservation Options; A Guide for Maine Landowners," handbook published by the Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the Land Trust Alliance, 2007

Additional Resources:

Conservation Options, A Guide for Maine Landowners  
<http://www.mltn.org/documents/mchtconoptions.pdf>

The Public Benefits of Conserved Lands  
<http://www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org/protect/public-benefits/>

All About Conservation Easements  
<http://www.nature.org/about-us/private-lands-conservation/conservation-easements/all-about-conservation-easements.xml>