

EAST MONTPELIER CONSERVATION FUND

Purpose:

The purpose of the Fund is to conserve East Montpelier land and waters for agricultural, forest, wildlife, scenic, recreational, or natural area use pursuant to 10 VSA Chapter 155.

When and How the Fund Will be Used:

The Fund will be used only when absolutely necessary, when other funds and means are not available or sufficient in a given situation. When the fund is used, it will be used where feasible to leverage other public and/or private funds, and when appropriate, as a revolving loan fund. It may be used to provide short term financing when conventional financing cannot be arranged quickly enough.

Uses of the Fund may include but are not limited to purchase or assistance in the purchase of rights of first refusal, options to purchase, long term leases, conservation restrictions (development rights), land through a bargain sale, and land in fee. Funds may be used for site work, appraisals, and surveys with the understanding that such funds will be reimbursable to the Fund if conservation is not achieved.

Possible participants might include owners of land and waters identified in the LESA survey, in the inventory of the East Montpelier Community Activities Committee or land otherwise identified as having significant value and benefits to the citizens of East Montpelier for agricultural, forest, wildlife, scenic, recreational, or natural area use.

Guidelines:

A primary requirement for the expenditure of monies from the Fund is that such expenditure must yield a clear benefit to the town and must result from a voluntary agreement between the Town and the owner.

The fund may be used to purchase or assist in the purchase of land and/or waters or interests in such land and/or waters that is threatened with development. To be considered for funding, agricultural land must meet the minimum standards for primary agricultural land as defined by the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) criteria. Special attention will be paid to lands and waters that are included in the inventory compiled by the East Montpelier Community Activities Committee or other subsequent studies for other open lands, and the guidelines listed below.

When determining whether the Fund should be used on a particular parcel of land or water, a number of items should be considered. Since each possible use of the Fund is different, the guidelines listed below are general and are meant to bring up general issues which would be applicable to any proposed use of the Funds. Consideration will be given to the following issues:

- Relative importance of the land for agriculture, forest, wildlife, scenic, recreational, or natural area use as compared to other uses.
- Effect of purchase and restrictions on adjacent land and other land in the area.
- Projects ability to pay for itself; includes possibility of private participation in conservation effort.
- Owner's willingness to place conservation restrictions on land
- Opportunities presented by the land to offer significant recreational or scenic benefits to East Montpelier citizens the loss of which would detract from the quality of life in East Montpelier.
- Opportunities presented to preserve important natural habitats in the community.

Administration:

Ultimate responsibility for the disposition of monies from the Fund rests with the Board of Selectmen. The Conservation Fund Advisory Committee will evaluate requests and make recommendations to the Selectmen.

Technical assistance is available from such organizations and agencies as the Vermont Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, the Extension Service, and the Soil Conservation Service.

The Town and other groups such as the Vermont Land Trust may find it mutually beneficial to work together on some projects.

Proposals for use of the Fund shall be submitted to the Board of Selectmen who shall refer all such proposals to the Conservation Fund Advisory Committee for comment and recommendations.

Benefits:

Benefits to the Town from use of the Fund will include:

- Protection of agricultural land that will help ensure the continuing viability of existing farms and agricultural enterprises in the Town.
- Support of the traditional family farm as an economically viable unit of agricultural production and provision of opportunities for young people to enter farming
- Protection of the Town's rural character and scenic open space
- Prevention of excessive increases in public service costs
- Provision of opportunities for public outdoor recreation for the people of East Montpelier
- Preservation of natural habitats for plants and animals