

## INTRODUCTION

This project originally began in recognition that conservation easements, “a legal agreement a property owner makes to restrict the type and amount of development that may take place on his or her property”,<sup>4</sup> are increasingly being used as a tool for the conservation of open space, not only within the Conservation Zone of the Connecticut River as defined by the Connecticut River Gateway Commission, but also within the nine towns of the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency (CRERPA). It was also recognized that there has been no formal inventory or stewarding program of conservation easements held on the part of any of the municipalities. CRERPA and Gateway feel that in order for conservation easements to work as a tool for open space conservation, responsibility needs to be taken for long term management of easements.

The first step is to create a complete and accurate inventory of all existing conservation easements. For the purposes of this project, only the existing conservation easements contained within the boundary of the Gateway will be inventoried and mapped. Conservation easements held by The State of Connecticut, local land trusts, The Nature Conservancy and the municipalities are included. However, over time the project will continue and include an inventory and mapping of all the conservation easements of all nine towns of the CRERPA. It is hoped the database designed for this project will become a standard for all the municipalities and conservation organizations of the region and beyond to use in the inventory and stewardship of their easements. Data content and its ability to be shared are key issues.

The next step is to design a system that would allow for the continual adding of easements as they are acquired, and allow for the continual upkeep of the existing database.

The seven handouts, designed to be short and to the point, contained in this packet address important aspects of a successful conservation easement program. They include helpful instructions about negotiating easements, conducting a baseline study and guidelines for the keeping of important records. The importance of periodic maintenance inspections, providing programs for your easement donors, learning of ownership changes and important principles of easement enforcement are explained.

The Gateway and CRERPA would like to acknowledge that this project was conducted as part of a grant provided by the Long Island Sound Fund administered by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, through the sale of Long Island Sound license plates and contributions.

---