

Guilford Conservation Fund

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1. Purpose

Guilford residents place a high value on the rural character and natural resources of the town, confirming those values in public meetings and forums when Guilford's future is discussed. The purpose of the Guilford Conservation Fund is to provide funding, in whole or in part, for significant conservation opportunities serving the public good. A dedicated Conservation Fund represents long term public investment in conservation of valued resources and supports many of the goals and actions in the Natural Resources section of the Guilford Town Plan. It can provide flexibility and timely support for efforts that conserve high priority areas identified in Guilford's 2023 Natural Resources Inventory and align with regional and statewide efforts including H.126, A Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act.

This document provides background information about the Guilford Conservation Fund, criteria for eligible projects, details regarding the application and selection process, and guidelines for fund management, funding sources and expenditures.

2. Authority

The Conservation Fund is a dedicated account established and approved by the Town of Guilford in 2023 in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 4505 (Powers and duties of conservation commissions). The Conservation Fund exists to receive money, grants, or private gifts, including land, property, or rights/easements, from any source as stipulated in the above referenced statute.

In 2023 the Guilford Conservation Commission learned that reserves from the publicly-funded Sweet Pond Fund would not be accessed by the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation for improvements to the dam at Sweet Pond State Park, their original intention. The Agency of Natural Resources gave Guilford approval to direct those funds to other uses for the benefit of the town. The Conservation Commission saw this as an opportunity to establish a town Conservation Fund, something they had discussed over several years. The Select Board approved the Conservation Commission's request to set up the fund and transfer the money from Sweet Pond Fund as seed money.

3. Fund Uses

The fund can be used in several different ways, including the ones below. This list is not exclusive, as there can be many flexible ways to conserve land.

- To provide local matching funds to secure private, state, or federal grants for conservation projects
- To purchase land or conservation easements in Guilford-only projects, in cooperation with Guilford landowners and/or nonprofit organizations
- For technical assistance (including but not limited to legal work, surveying, appraisals, stewardship costs, etc) to landowners who want to place conservation easements on their land
- To conduct educational and public outreach programs to promote conservation in Guilford, including the production and distribution of conservation-related information and materials

4. Fund Sources

- The Fund may receive appropriations from the Town of Guilford on recommendation from the Conservation Commission to the Select Board
- The Fund may accept voluntary gifts of cash or securities, bequests, or pledges which may be tax deductible as a charitable contribution under section 170(c) (1) of the IRS fund
- The Fund may accept gifts of land, development rights or conservation easements
- The Guilford Conservation Commission may hold fundraising events to support the Conservation Fund

5. Projects Eligible for Funding

Guidelines for use of the Conservation Fund and procedures for reviewing any proposed expenditures have been developed in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 4505.

5.1 Criteria: Land conservation projects must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for funding. If a land conservation project is lacking in any or all of these, it will not be considered for funding.

1. Project must benefit public interest over private interest.
2. Property must have clearly documented title and ownership.
3. Property must be free of irreparable environmental hazards or impairments.
4. Property or project must be within the Town of Guilford boundaries.
5. Project includes a financially-sound long-term management plan

Examples of projects that will be considered include:

1. Projects that conform to the Guilford Town Plan, are identified as high priority in Guilford's Natural Resources Inventory, and which yield a clear benefit to the Town of Guilford.
2. Projects adjacent to existing public land or other conserved lands.
3. Projects that conserve agricultural lands and forests.
4. Projects that protect or conserve lands supporting habitats for rare, threatened, or endangered animal or plant species, exemplary natural communities and /or significant wildlife habitat including established wildlife corridors
5. Projects that protect watersheds and water resources.
6. Projects that support existing or potential educational or recreational use.
7. Projects that conserve outstanding scenic views.
8. Projects of historic or cultural value to Guilford

5.2 Factors for Land Conservation

Criteria: This set of criteria will give a useful indication if a property qualifies for support through the Conservation Fund. No project is expected to meet all criteria, and no single criterion is intended to exclude a proposal from qualifying. In general, priority will be given for conserving areas identified as High Priority in Guilford's Natural Resources Inventory.

Agricultural Lands

- Significant agricultural land with demonstrated productivity
- Agricultural soils in compliance with Required Agricultural Practice (RAP) regulations
- Lands with potential for being economically viable for agriculture or part of a farm unit

Forests

- Forest land that is part of a larger parcel which includes agricultural land being considered for conservation funding
- Forest land which can support a significant volume of mature timber, has productive forest soil, and good access for timber harvesting done in a sustainable manner
- Significant or unique forest resource, such as the potential to achieve Old Growth Forest characteristics

Natural areas and critical wildlife habitat

- Land that supports vital ecological or conservation functions and biodiversity values
- Land that maintains unfragmented forests blocks and wildlife corridors
- Land that supports rare, threatened or endangered natural communities, plants, wildlife

Water Resources

- Areas of wetlands, rivers, flood plains, streams, riparian areas, vernal pools
- Areas that support aquifer recharge, wellhead areas
- Lands necessary for wildlife diversity, ecological functions and protection of drinking water supplies

Recreation and Cultural/Historical significance

- Land with access to scenic trails, including skiing, hiking, horseback riding and other recreational uses that preserve the integrity of natural habitats and communities
- Area with access to fishing and hunting
- Areas with access to water-based recreation, including swimming, skating, boating
- Areas that protect an artifact or area of established historic or cultural significance to Guilford

5.3. Favorable Considerations. There are several considerations that may favorably affect the Town's interest in a project.

- The project will help to meet a strategic planning or land use goal identified in the Guilford Town Plan and yield a benefit to the Town of Guilford.
- The project likely will attract funding from other organizations and sources.
- The project involves a meaningful donation/contribution to the Town.
- The project land provides an outstanding natural, scenic, cultural or historic resource

5.4. Unfavorable Considerations. A project may meet the selection criteria favoring funding and still may not be accepted if one or more of the following considerations apply.

- The property is found to be irreparably contaminated, or the cost of clean-up is deemed too high.
- There is reason to believe that the project would be unusually difficult to initiate, manage, enforce and/or sustain over the long-term.
- Adjacent properties are being, or are likely to be, developed in a manner that would significantly diminish the conservation value of the proposed project property.
- The applicant or landowner insists on provisions that the Conservation Commission believes would seriously diminish the property's primary conservation value.
- The project is not large enough to make a significant conservation impact.

6. Review Process for Funding Decisions

Before funds can be disbursed from the Conservation Fund, the Guilford Conservation Commission and the Guilford Select Board will follow procedures to make sure that each project meets the Town's established criteria and that interested citizens have an opportunity to comment on the proposal (unless the Select Board determines that emergency or confidential action is required.)

1. Landowners, local organizations, Guilford citizens or other towns may approach the Conservation Commission for assistance with a conservation project. This may involve attending a Conservation Commission meeting or submitting a written application.
2. The Conservation Commission may meet informally with the submitting person or group to discuss the project and explain the criteria for review.
3. The landowner or group will submit a written application using the Application form.
4. The proposed project is placed on the agenda for a regular Conservation Commission meeting (or a Special Meeting if timing is critical).
5. The Conservation Commission will formally review the application in accordance with the criteria at a regular or specially warned public meeting. The review may be continued to gather additional information and public input on the proposal. The Commission will, where reasonable, work with the applicant and others to provide technical assistance in refining the proposal, and where appropriate, assist in obtaining financing from the State or other sources.
6. If the project meets the priorities and criteria, the Conservation Commission will make its written recommendations to the Select Board and if requested by the Select Board, present the proposal for comment at a public forum to explain its recommendations.
7. A landowner or group whose proposal is denied may also request consideration of that request by the Select Board.
8. No person having a direct interest in the project under review may participate in the decision of the Conservation Commission or the Select Board.

Guilford Conservation Fund Application Cover Sheet

Application Submission Date: _____ Receipt Date (for Town purposes only):

Applicant: Contact Information

Name: _____
Phone: _____ Street: _____
_____ P.O. Box: _____
Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
_____ Email: _____

Landowner: Contact Information (if different from applicant and is applicable)

Name: _____
Phone: _____ Street: _____
_____ P.O. Box: _____
Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
_____ Email: _____

Property: Location and Value Information (Please identify the property on the Town tax parcel map)

Parcel Number _____ Acres _____ Assessed Value _____ Assessment Date _____
_____ Description: _____

Project Funding: Amount Requested from Conservation Special Fund:

_____ Other Funding _____
Sources: _____ In-Kind _____
Sources: _____

Schedule Information: Project Completion/Closing Date desired:

Signature(s): _____

Completed application should be sent to:

Town Administrator
Attention: Guilford Conservation Commission
236 School Road
Guilford, Vermont 05301

Guilford Conservation Fund

Application: Project Description

Please describe your proposal and its advantages to the Town of Guilford by following the outline below. Address each of the following points separately, by number. Please limit each answer to one-half page, if possible.

1. Property/Project Description

Describe the property or scope of project.

2. Project Significance

Address all relevant guidelines in the “Projects Eligible for Funding” section. Also address all relevant criteria from the same document under the “Factors for Land Conservation.” No single criterion is intended to exclude a proposal from consideration. Please address how the project would benefit the Town of Guilford and its residents.

3. Project Schedule

Give a timetable for closing dates and/or completion of the project. Attach relevant documents such as draft conservation agreements, cost estimates, appraisals, and/or a purchase and sale agreement if one exists.

4. Project Partners

What matching contributions are included in or envisioned for the project? What is the value of any local in-kind services or other resources involved? What restrictions, if any, will partners place on use or management of the property?

5. Project Documentation Checklist

Provide copies of the following unless not applicable:

___ Deed including Description of Liens, Easements or other Restrictions, if any

___ Site plan

___ Photographs including Satellite Photo with Property Boundaries, Property Survey Map, if available

___ Comments from neighbors, if available

___ Tax Map (Vermont Parcel Viewer-Vermont Center for Geographic Information)

___ Tax Bill

____ Lister's Card

____ VT Current Use Plan (UVA)

____ Land Management or Conservation Plans

____ Permits and/or Approvals (State and Town)

6. Financial information

Please include an itemized budget. Is the allocation requested in one lump sum or multiple payments over time? How will accounting and fiscal records be maintained in accord with generally established accounting procedures, or other accounting procedures that may be established by the Town of Guilford and/or other project partners? Also include confirmation that within four months of completion of the project you will submit complete documentation of the costs covered by the Fund.

7. Long-term Plans

Is there a long-term plan for the project to ensure its continued conservation value? If so, summarize the plan and the anticipated maintenance costs associated with the project.

Conservation Fund Application Project Attributes

Project: _____ Applicant/Landowner: _____

Information, if applicable or known by applicant, to be filled out by applicant. Please include supporting documentation when available.

Agricultural Lands	Farmlands that are environmentally and economically viable, situated on primary (prime and statewide importance) agricultural soils and that are in compliance with Required Agricultural Practice (RAP) regulations, as published by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets and in force at the time of application.	Total Project Acreage: _____ Tillable (acres): _____ Open Meadow (acres): _____ Scrub Land or Reverting to Woodland (acres): _____ Date Last Farmed: _____
Forests	Forestlands that have been identified as forest blocks of ecological importance in the Guilford Natural Resources Inventory or in the Vermont Agency of Natural Resource databases (ex. VT Natural Resources Atlas, and VT Biofinder).	Woodland (acres): _____ Mixed (acres): _____ Hardwood (acres): _____ Softwood (acres): _____ Date Last Harvested: _____
Wildlife and Plant Habitats	Habitats for rare, threatened, or species; exemplary natural communities; and/or endangered animal or plant significant wildlife habitat including established wildlife corridors.	Rare Species: _____ Threatened Species: _____ Endangered Species: _____ Type of Wildlife Corridor: _____

Water Resources	Wetlands, rivers, flood plains, streams, riparian areas, vegetated buffer zones, vernal pools, ponds, aquifer recharge areas, wellhead areas, and other lands necessary for wildlife diversity, ecological functions and the protection of drinking water supplies.	Wetland Type: _____ Wetland (acres): _____ Wetland Function: _____ Other Water Resource Type: _____
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<p>Recreation</p>	<p>Lands that are suitable for or have an existing trail system for enjoying nature with minimal impact to natural resources. Properties that do or could provide public access to recreational resources, support access to natural areas or have public natural resource education possibilities.</p>	<p>Existing Trails (miles): _____</p> <p>Potential Trails (miles): _____</p> <p>Potential for On-site Parking (# of spaces): _____</p>
<p>Historic or Cultural Resources</p>	<p>Places or artifacts of significant cultural or historical value to Guilford.</p>	<p>Location of resource _____</p> <p>Nature of cultural or historical importance _____</p> <p>Potential for on-site parking (# of spaces): _____</p>