

# THE COUCHICING CONSERVANCY

## LAND STEWARDSHIP POLICY

**As approved by the Board, April 30, 2007**

*“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.” John Muir*

**This policy has been developed to guide The Couchiching Conservancy’s approach to appropriate uses and habitat management on its properties. This policy provides the principles and framework for the processes of determining management priorities and planning and implementing management actions. All capitalized terms are defined in section 5.0.**

### 1.0 CONTEXT:

The objectives of The Couchiching Conservancy are:

1. To preserve, protect, restore and improve the natural environment of the Couchiching Region.
2. To encourage and foster an understanding and awareness of the natural environment and its values in enhancing our quality of life.
3. To acquire, maintain and preserve lands or interests in lands of ecological, recreational, scientific, scenic, heritage, or open space value.
4. To promote and undertake research and data collection on the natural environment and to distribute the findings to the public.

The Conservancy is involved in management of three types of properties:

- **Conservation Lands:** properties owned outright by The Couchiching Conservancy with the intent of long-term conservation of their natural values (note: excludes properties held for short-term sale);
- **Management Agreement Lands:** properties owned by another organization or agency, and managed under agreement by the Conservancy; and
- **Conservation Easement Lands:** properties in private or municipal ownership on which the Conservancy holds a Conservation Easement.

This policy applies **ONLY** to the first category of properties.

For Management Agreement Lands, the policies of and standards of the organization who owns the property will take precedence.

For Conservation Easement lands, access is restricted to staff and volunteers of the Conservancy for monitoring purposes, property management as specified in the easement is provided by the owners or their agents, and permitted and prohibited uses are specified in the easement agreement.

## **2.0 LAND STEWARDSHIP GOALS:**

- To preserve, protect and support the integrity and biodiversity of natural ecosystems on Conservation Lands.
- To restore Conservation Lands where necessary to overcome degraded conditions.
- To provide appropriate access to Conservation Lands for public education, personal renewal, passive recreation, and **research**.
- To the extent possible, to minimize or mitigate conflict with land uses on adjacent properties.

## **3.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR LAND STEWARDSHIP:**

1. Management Activities will be based on a Property Management Plan approved by the Conservancy Board within three years of acquisition, or on an Interim Management Statement developed prior to that point.
2. Prior to or immediately after Conservation Lands are acquired, a baseline report will be prepared to identify Conservation Targets and factors relevant to future management of each property.
3. All Management Activities must ensure the long-term survival of representative natural community types and native species, especially those identified as Conservation Targets.
4. Any Property Management Plans and Activities will make use of the best and most current available science to meet the management needs of Conservation Targets.
5. Significant management activities (as determined by the Executive Director) will be approved by the Conservancy Board in the Property Management Plan or Interim Stewardship Statement prior to any undertaking.
6. Conservation Lands will generally be accessible to the public for a range of Permitted Uses, with specific uses to be determined on a case-by-case basis through the Property Management Plan.
7. Where Permitted Uses could conflict with the achievement of Conservation Goals, the protection of the ecological integrity of the property will take priority.

8. Exceptions to Generally Permitted and Generally Prohibited public uses of Conservation Lands can be considered by the Conservancy Board, provided that the proposed uses do not negatively impact the Conservation Goals or Targets for the property.
9. The Property Management Plan may authorize the use of certain tools or activities for management purposes beyond those generally permitted to visitors (e.g. ATV use, vehicular access, removal of nuisance animals, etc.)
10. Management Activities will incorporate appropriate steps to minimize safety risks to visitors and volunteers on Conservation Lands, but properties will not be actively managed for recreational use.
11. All Property Management Plans should be reviewed every *five years* to ensure that new information is incorporated and that management activities remain relevant.

#### **4.0 GENERALLY PERMITTED AND PROHIBITED PUBLIC USES**

Certain visitor activities constitute uses that are either generally permitted or generally prohibited for all properties, unless otherwise specified in a Property Management Plan.

Permitted uses shall be low intensity, non-consumptive uses compatible with the conservation of natural ecosystems and protection of native species. In cases where a property contains sensitive ecosystems or features, some or all of the Generally Permitted Uses may not be allowed. On the other hand, in certain cases with compelling circumstances, exceptions to the Generally Prohibited uses may be considered. These exceptions will be identified in the Property Management Plan.

<b>Generally Permitted</b>	<b>Generally Prohibited</b>	<b>Considered Case-by-Case</b>
Nature appreciation	Paintball	On leash dogs
Photography	Off leash dogs	Fishing
Hiking	Feeding wildlife	Geocaching
Cross country skiing	Collection of material**	Large group visits*
Snowshoeing	ATVs/off-road vehicles	Snowmobiles on trails
Birdwatching	Mountain biking	Picnicking
	Harvesting of berries or mushrooms	Erecting nest boxes or nesting platforms
	Hunting	Feeding birds
	Camping	Research
	Shelters and stands	Educational field trips*
	Trapping	Seed collection
	Swimming	Horseback riding

\* With a responsible leader

\*\* Such as picking wildflowers, removal of wood, fossils, etc.

#### **4.1.1 SITE SPECIFIC USES**

Any exceptions to the Generally Permitted and Prohibited land uses (see lists above) must be specified in the Property Management Plan. The terms and conditions of these land use exceptions shall be specified in the Property Management Plan.

The determination of public uses on a Case-by-Case basis (as listed above) for a specific property will be included in the Property Management Plan.

The property access point(s) will be appropriately signed to show general land use policies and exception(s).

#### **4.1.2 RATIONALE FOR EXCEPTIONS**

When deciding whether to approve a “Generally Prohibited” public use within a Management Plan, The Couchiching Conservancy Board will consider the recommendations of staff and the Property Management Committee, but the final decision rests with the Board. These decisions will be based on:

- the best available science and property-specific information;
- an analysis of whether the use will be consistent with the Conservation Targets identified for the property;
- consideration of any safety issues, neighbourhood or public support or opposition, property donor views if known, and history of the use on the property.

#### **4.1.3 OBTAINING SPECIAL PERMISSION**

Special permission for certain public uses may be required on an individual “one-time” basis (as specified in a Management Plan or for the continuation of historic uses in advance of a Management Plan being developed). The Conservancy Board may delegate the authority to authorize these permissions to Conservancy staff within specified conditions. Being granted special permission on one occasion *does not* grant the recipient unlimited entitlement to the privilege in the future.

### **5.0 Definition of Terms**

**Conservancy Members** –Includes all persons, Board Members, groups or organizations that hold an annual membership or life membership to The Couchiching Conservancy, including staff of the organization.

**Conservation Easement** – A legal agreement between a landowner and The Couchiching Conservancy attached to the title of the property, which binds the current owner and any subsequent owners to the terms identified in the easement.

**Conservation Goals** – Decided in the Property Management Plan, based on Conservation Targets for the property. May include restoration, restricted use, planting, removal of invasive species, etc.

**Conservation Lands** - Any land which is owned by The Couchiching Conservancy for conservation purposes.

**Conservation Targets** – The most significant elements of biodiversity where conservation action should be focused. These targets are often associated with the features that triggered acquisition of the Property.

**Management Activities** – Includes any activity approved in a Property Management Plan by the Conservancy Board for the restoration or preservation of Conservation Lands, or for the control of public uses on Conservation Lands.

**Management Agreement Lands** – Properties which are *managed* by The Couchiching Conservancy through agreement with another owner.

**Property Management Plan** – A document, created by the Stewardship Coordinator in consultation with Conservancy members and volunteers and approved by The Couchiching Conservancy Board, which identifies the Conservation Targets, action plans and significant ecological occurrences on the property.

**Public** – The Public includes all persons who do not have an annual membership to The Couchiching Conservancy, as well as Conservancy members.

**Research** – Any activity by individuals or organizations beyond Conservancy staff or volunteers, intended to generate science-based information or to test hypotheses relating to a property's features or management. Research activities must adhere to an agreement approved by the Executive Director, and copies of any resulting information will be provided to the Conservancy.