



Monitoring Handbook

2015

I. Monadnock Conservancy and Stewardship Overview

- A. Mission
- B. Priorities
- C. Stewardship responsibility

II. Easement Monitoring Program & Land Steward's Role

- A. Qualifications
- B. Expectations

III. Conservation Easement Monitoring Planning

- A. Scheduling and landowner contact
- B. Easement and Field Notebook review
- C. Route planning
- D. Items to bring

IV. Conducting the Visit

- A. Basic steps
- B. Documentation
- C. Photographic documentation
- D. Questions landowners might ask

V. Safety Guidelines

VI. After the Visit

I. The Monadnock Conservancy & Stewardship Overview

A. Mission

As a land trust for southwestern New Hampshire, our mission is to work with communities and landowners to conserve the natural resources, wild and working lands, rural character and scenic beauty of the Monadnock region. We care for our conservation lands, and we engage people in ways that strengthen their communities and their connections to the land.

B. Priorities

- Connect people and the land, people and their communities, and people and the Monadnock Conservancy
- Protect and steward land that contributes to ecological health, wildlife habitat, water quality, outdoor recreation, and working farms and forests
- Facilitate informed land use decision-making at the individual, landowner and community levels, targeting broader audiences beyond owners of existing conservation land
- Conserve agricultural lands, the agricultural way of life and viable local food systems
- Ensure the sustainability of the Monadnock Conservancy

C. Stewardship Responsibility

Safeguarding the natural resources and other reasons for which a property is conserved requires ongoing, diligent stewardship. As those most closely connected to the land, landowners of protected land play a key role as knowledgeable, active observers of what occurs on the property. The Conservancy staff works side-by-side with the landowners to ensure long-term protection of the land.

It is the responsibility of the Monadnock Conservancy to:

- Document the land's conservation values and natural resources in a baseline report
- Conduct annual monitoring visits
- Communicate and collaborate with landowners
- Keep accurate and up-to-date records
- Respond to landowner concerns and requests for approval, amendments and reserved rights
- Work with landowners to enforce and resolve any violations of the easement terms
- Raise and manage stewardship funds

II. Easement Monitoring Program and Land Steward's Role

A. Qualifications

Through this program, the Conservancy relies extensively on a network of volunteers to help monitor our properties. Prospective land stewards should meet the following **qualifications**:

- Familiarity with the Monadnock Conservancy and our mission
- Ability to monitor the same property once a year for at least 3 years
- Ability to travel to protected properties (must have valid driver's license if driving)
- Physical ability to walk around properties, possibly over uneven and diverse terrain

- Ability to maintain the confidentiality of landowners' private plans and intentions regarding their land
- Ability to work well with a variety of people and to exercise discretion
- Reliability, attentiveness to details, ability to orient themselves on maps and accurately record observations
- At least 18 years old

B. Expectations

The Conservancy has instituted a land steward training program through which volunteers are taught the necessary skills and our monitoring protocol. **To successfully complete the program, volunteers are asked to:**

- Complete an application
- Attend the training session and annual refresher trainings
- Read through and understand training materials
- Monitor their first property with Conservancy staff

Land stewards will serve as the Conservancy's "eyes and ears" in the field. Their key **responsibilities include:**

- Completing thorough, on-the-ground inspections and documenting with photographs and written comments any changes in the landscape or alterations to man-made features
- Cultivating positive relationships with landowners and relaying their questions or concerns to Monadnock Conservancy staff
- Posting and replacing easement boundary markers and signs
- Discussing observations with Monadnock Conservancy staff

Land stewards should not:

- Interpret easement for landowners; questions should be directed to staff
- Approve or disapprove landowner's future plans
- Accuse landowners of violating easement terms
- Attempt any mediation or enforcement action

III. **Conservation easement monitoring planning**

A. Scheduling

1. Assignments: each year, Monadnock Conservancy staff will confirm your contact information and ask approximately which month you intend to perform monitoring visit.
2. Landowner contact: in the month of your intended visit, call the landowner to ask pre-visit questions and coordinate the monitoring visit. Arrange to meet and -- if possible -- walk the land with him/her. Confirm appropriate parking spot.
3. Optional: contact another Volunteer Monitor to pair up.
4. Getting materials: arrange to pick up Field Notebooks and gear (see list below).
5. Review Field Notebook (see section B)
6. Review property directions.
7. Contact staff with any questions, concerns, or needed updates to the notebook.

The following gear is available for use: clipboard, digital camera, baseplate compass, flagging (surveyor's tape), orange field vest, first aid kit, hammer, aluminum nails, Garmin e-Trex GPS unit, and Monadnock Conservancy signs. Be sure to confirm their availability at the office at least one day before you plan to pick them up. You will be asked to sign out and return them within a week, and are responsible for their care and security. The first aid kit contains basic supplies; when you return it, please specify use of any items.

B. Field Notebook review

- Read the conservation easement deed, particularly the conservation values it protects, and the Use Limitations and Reserved Rights sections. Note where actions performed by the landowner require notifying the Monadnock Conservancy in writing (commercial timber harvests, reserved rights, etc.).
- Baseline Documentation Report and/or recent Monitoring Report(s); note concerns, management issues, and reserved rights the landowner has exercised.
- Any recent correspondence with landowner relevant to activities on easement property
- Responses to landowner surveys; note activities (timber harvest, exercise of reserved rights) that may require special attention during this site visit.
- Survey and other property maps

C. Route planning

- Include the parts of the property that make its conservation significant, and the parts explicitly mentioned in the Purposes, Use Limitations, and Reserved Rights sections of the easement. Scenic views may be monitored from a car, or open fields may be visible from a distance. Reserved Rights may mention the establishment of trails, allowed subdivision for a house lot, etc.
- Include the parts of the property where easement violations are most likely to occur (e.g. building sites, roads, stream crossings, places with public access, property boundaries). Since abutter encroachment violations do occur (timber harvesting, debris dumping), walking the boundaries is desirable, though not always practical. If public access has been granted, plan to walk the trail.
- Include features noted in previous Monitoring Report and landowner survey (e.g. part of boundary not visited for a few years)
- Consider areas to avoid (e.g. where a long barbed wire fence or dense shrubs impede access).

D. Items to Bring

- Field Notebook
- Camera with extra batteries and memory card (or film)
- Compass (and/or GPS unit, if desired)
- Pen/pencil and paper or notebook
- Field map of the easement property (found in the front of the Field Notebook, with the Monitoring Map)
- Proper attire (rain gear, boots, hunter's orange hat or vest, first aid kit, water and snacks, insect repellent, etc.)
- Cell phone to use in the event of emergencies (if reception is available)

IV. **Conducting the visit**

A. Basic steps

1. Park in out-of-the-way place or as directed by landowner.
2. Introduce yourself to the landowner or property manager and review your planned route. Ask whether there are any property features he/she'd like to show you.
3. Follow your route and document your observations (see below).
4. Replace or enhance boundary flagging and signs (if adding signs, be certain of boundary).
5. Discuss as appropriate any current/planned land uses and management, natural and human-caused changes, abutting activities, observed wildlife, landowner history with the land. *Remember that it is not your role to interpret the easement or to approve activities.*

B. Documentation

- Note features on the Monitoring Map or on a blank survey map (observed boundary monuments, debris piles, areas of timber harvest, etc).
- Take photos as appropriate and note on map the photo number, orientation, and subject – examples:
 - 1) From property's northeast corner, looking south along boundary with new development
 - 2) From property's northeast corner, looking northwest along boundary with new development
 - 3) About 200 feet from property's southwest corner, looking east at tires dumped along western boundary (Property Map) dumped tires
- Mark your route on a map, or using GPS.
- After the visit, immediately report serious concerns to Conservancy staff.
- As soon as possible after the site visit, while still fresh in your mind, complete the Monitoring Report. Include a detailed summary of your route and what you saw, heard, and learned. Note landowner questions to which staff should respond.

C. Photographic Documentation

Keeping an up-to-date, accurate photo-record of a property's condition illustrates property changes over time and is critical if the Conservancy ever needs to defend an easement in court.

Photographs may be taken with a film format or digital camera (see below for requirements for digital photos). During a site visit, only take pictures of land features or activities that have changed since previous visits, or are related to possible violations of the easement. When composing a photo, consider the following: generally, photograph the easement property rather than abutting lands; frame the subject in relation to identifiable and relatively permanent features such as stone walls; try to provide objects for scale reference (e.g. clipboard).

What to photograph:

- Evidence of soil erosion
- New boundary monuments
- New structures and improvements (e.g. shed, fence, culvert, trail)

- A collapsed building
- ATV ruts
- Major tree blowdown
- Damage done by flood or fire
- Changes to scenic views

What not to photograph:

- People or pets (as the main subject)
- Land features or activities that have not changed significantly
- Other entities or scenarios unrelated to documenting easement compliance

Digital camera requirements:

- Minimum of 6 megapixel resolution
- Set date and time are accurately

D. Questions landowners might ask

Personal visits with landowners offer them a chance to ask questions or raise concerns about the easement. If you can easily supply the answer, do so. However, as a land steward it is not your role to interpret the easement for landowners or to approve/disapprove their proposals. Find out as much as possible about their questions or what they're proposing. Tell them that a staff member will get back to them. Questions may include:

- Do I have to get the Conservancy's approval to _____?
- I'm planning on _____ – is that activity all right?
- Why haven't I gotten a break on my property taxes?
- I plan to sell my property soon. When do I need to let Conservancy know about this?

V. **Safety Guidelines**

Safety is the Monadnock Conservancy's first priority in the Easement Monitoring Program. We expect that you will follow these guidelines when you are monitoring:

- Let someone know when you are planning to spend time on the property and how long you expect to be there; check in upon your return.
- Be aware of the weather forecast and of hunting seasons.
- Carry plenty of water.
- Wear appropriate, non-restrictive clothing. This may include long pants, sturdy boots, raingear, or orange hunting vest.
- Bring a first aid kit.
- Report suspicious activity by any person to police, or of any potentially rabid animal to the local NH Fish & Game Conservation Officer.
- Perform a "tick check" after spending time on the property.

VI. **After the visit**

- Develop any film or print out digital photos (2 per page at approximately 4" x 6"). On back of film photos or next to printed digital photos, write a number to correspond with map, add the date taken and your signature, and briefly describe the subject. Provide

digital photo files to the Conservancy. Digital files should be provided at the original resolution.

- Optional: write a personal note to landowner thanking him for visiting with you, which staff will send to landowner with a follow up letter about the monitoring visit.
- Within two weeks of your site visit (or as soon as possible), arrange to return completed Monitoring Report & Map, photos/negatives or digital photo files, rest of the Field Notebook, and gear to the Monadnock Conservancy office.

Questions? Contact Stewardship Director Emily Hague:

Emily@MonadnockConservancy.org

(603) 357-0600 ext. 104

For more information and resources, visit:

<http://www.monadnockconservancy.org/support-us/volunteer.html>