

Land Trusts in Florida: A Brief Guide to Land Trusts to Protect Land in Your Community¹

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Land Trusts Defined

A land trust is a private nonprofit organization that owns and manages land to protect its natural, economic, and cultural value. Land trusts may also educate the public about local conservation efforts.

The Role of Land Trusts in Your Community

Land trusts create a way for community members to protect land that is important to them but that is not protected through public acquisition (for example as a park or nature preserve), and thus may be vulnerable to conversion to development.

Several possible benefits to protecting land through land trusts include:

- securing access to clean water and air;
- protecting the land's historical and cultural value;
- supporting food and timber production by keeping lands in agricultural and rangeland uses; and
- providing corridors and habitat for wildlife and spaces for recreation.



Figure 1. Warm Minerals Spring Creek, protected by the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast (top) and rangelands at Adams Ranch in Fort Pierce, Florida, protected with support from the Florida Conservation Trust (bottom).

Credits: Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast 2017; Adams Ranch 2017

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Ways to Protect Land through a Land Trust

Land trusts protect land either by owning a conservation easement on all or a part of a property or by owning the land “in fee”—which means that the land trust owns the land outright. **Conservation easements** are legal agreements wherein the land enrolled in the easement must be conserved according to the terms of the agreement (Demers and Carter 2017). Land trusts uphold the terms of conservation easements by assuming the development rights of the property, either by purchasing them or being given them by the property owner. Ownership of the property remains with the individual or entity selling or donating the easement. Land trusts can acquire land or conservation easements using private donations from community members and grants from government programs or private foundations.

Finding a Land Trust to Help Protect Land

There may already be a land trust operating in your municipality or county. Land trusts operate at a range of levels, from municipal land trusts to national land trusts. To find a list of land trusts in Florida that are accredited by the Land Trust Alliance go to: http://findalandtrust.org/states/florida12/land_trusts.

Establishing a Land Trust In Your Community

Any group of people with an interest in protecting land can establish a local land trust in their community. Land trusts can range from small all-volunteer organizations to large organizations with paid staff. If you are interested in setting up a land trust, then information on land trust standards and practices can be accessed at: <http://s3.amazonaws.com/landtrustalliance.org/LandTrustStandardsandPractices.pdf>.

Reference

Demers, C., and D. R. Carter. 2017. *Conservation Easements: Options for Preserving Current Land Uses*. SS-FOR-21. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fr149>