

**Your Land.
Your Impact.
Forever.**

**Conservation Protection Options with
The Nature Conservancy**

Protect What You Love— For Today and Tomorrow

Land protection means placing voluntary, legal safeguards on your property to limit development and preserve its natural, agricultural or cultural value. Whether you own farmland, woodland, prairie or a mix of landscapes, protection ensures your land remains productive and ecologically healthy for generations to come. By conserving your land today, you help maintain Iowa's heritage, protect wildlife habitat and secure clean water and resilient soils for the future.

There are practical, long-term conservation options to help you achieve your goals. Below, you'll find several pathways designed to support your vision and keep your land protected for generations. These are among the most common approaches, but they're not the only ones. For details on these and other options, please contact your local land protection specialist.



Gifts of Land

Conservation Properties

A donation of land can secure your legacy while providing significant financial advantages. Many of The Nature Conservancy's preserves began with generous gifts of ecologically significant land, which are permanently protected to conserve wildlife habitat, clean water and Iowa's natural heritage. Giving your land to TNC, or another qualified conservation organization, is one of the simplest and most impactful ways to protect it. No financing or lengthy negotiations are required; you only need approval from the organization and a deed prepared by your attorney. A gift relieves you of management responsibilities and property taxes and may offer meaningful income tax benefits. See Tax Considerations below for details.

Non-Conservation Properties/Trade Lands

Even if your property doesn't have high conservation value, it can still make a difference. TNC accepts gifts of real estate—homes, farms, commercial buildings, vacant land—called trade lands. These properties are not permanently protected as nature preserves; instead, they are sold, often with conservation restrictions, and proceeds fund protection of priority habitats. Trade lands can be donated outright, through a will, or via a retained life estate, and may also fund charitable trusts. Gifts of trade lands receive the same tax benefits as gifts of conservation land.

Gifts by Will

Leaving land to TNC in your will ensures your property supports conservation for future generations, either as a protected natural area or through a trade land gift. Contact us before including land in your will so we can help craft language that honors your wishes and achieves desired estate tax results.

Retained Life Estate

If you wish to donate property but continue using it during your or a loved one's lifetime (or for a set number of years), a retained life estate may be the right option. This arrangement allows you to transfer ownership to TNC while retaining the right to live on or use the property. You remain responsible for upkeep, taxes and insurance during this period. For tax purposes, the deduction is based on the value of the remainder interest given to TNC, as determined by IRS actuarial tables. This option is available for qualified conservation property or for your personal residence or farm.

Sales of Land

To ensure fairness in all transactions, comply with IRS regulations, and maintain Land Trust Alliance accreditation, TNC cannot purchase land for more than its appraised fair market value (FMV).

Bargain Sale

In a bargain sale, your property is purchased for less than fair market value. If TNC purchases your property for less than fair market value, you can claim a charitable deduction for income tax purposes for the difference between the bargain sale price and the fair market value. This difference must be documented by a qualified, independent appraisal. The deduction can be used to offset realized capital gain from the sale portion. When combined with other savings, including the broker's commission, the landowner may achieve nearly the same after-tax financial return while providing a significant gift to TNC.

Like-Kind/1031 Exchanges

Under a special provision of the Internal Revenue Code, called Section 1031, landowners may exchange real property for other "like-kind" real property without having to recognize capital gain on the transaction. These transactions often involve either two or three different landowners. These exchanges allow a landowner to continue to own valuable real estate but transfer the original property to TNC.

Sale at Fair Market Value

A sale at fair market value is the sale of property for the price a knowledgeable buyer will pay for the land from a willing seller. TNC or both parties are responsible for contracting for a qualified, independent appraisal of the property to be sold to determine this value. If your land is purchased by TNC for its fair market value, and it has appreciated in value since you acquired it, you will be liable for income tax on the capital gain.

Opposite page, top to bottom: Red-headed woodpecker © Jacob Pitzenberger; Farmer with cover crops © Fauna Creative This page, top to bottom: River meandering through agriculture field © Brandon Walls; Prairie flowers © Chris Helzer/TNC



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Protection while Keeping Ownership

You don't have to sell or donate your property to safeguard its future. Options exist that allow you to keep ownership while ensuring your land's natural or agricultural values are protected for generations. These tools are flexible and can be customized to fit your goals.

Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that permanently limits certain uses of your land to protect its natural or agricultural values. It is recorded with the deed and applies to all future owners, ensuring conservation goals endure even if ownership changes.

You keep ownership and can continue compatible uses like farming or ranching, but some rights, such as development or resource extraction, are restricted. Easements can be donated, sold at a bargain price, or sold at fair market value based on the appraised value of the rights conveyed.

A conservation easement does not transfer ownership, and it does not give the public permission to enter your land without your consent. You retain the land and any rights not restricted by the agreement.

Tax Considerations

Federal and state tax laws encourage donations of land and conservation easements to qualified conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy. These gifts may provide significant income tax deductions and estate tax benefits, helping reduce financial burdens for you and your heirs. Tax benefits vary based on property type, value and donation structure. In many cases, deductions can be carried forward for several years, and Iowa offers an additional Charitable Conservation Contribution Tax Credit for qualifying donations.

This discussion of the tax considerations is necessarily general in nature and should not be considered a complete discussion on this topic. Tax matters, as well as all aspects of a donation of real estate, should be discussed with your own independent financial advisor. Tax information presented is current through 2024.



Conservation Options Quick Guide

Land Conservation Option	Description	Results	Income Tax Benefits*	Estate Tax Benefits*
Donation of conservation property	Land is donated to TNC	Land permanently protected and managed for ecological resources†	Y	Y
Donation of non-conservation property (Trade Lands)	Land is donated to TNC	Land is sold to a 3rd party with or without conservation protections OR Land is retained and revenue is used to fund conservation work	Y	Y
Gifts by Will	Land is donated to TNC at death.	Land permanently protected and managed for ecological resources† OR Land is sold to a 3rd party with or without conservation protections‡	N	Y
Retained Life Estate	Land is donated to TNC, but owner (or others designated) continues to live on or use land, until pre-determined time.	Land permanently protected and managed for ecological resources† OR Land is sold to a 3rd party with or without conservation protections‡	Y	Y
Bargain Sale	Land is sold to TNC for a price below fair market value.	Land permanently protected and managed for ecological resources†	Y	Y
Like-Kind/1031 Exchanges	Land is sold to TNC via a Bargain Sale or Sale at Fair Market Value. Original owner uses proceeds of sale to purchase other land.	Land permanently protected and managed for ecological resources† AND Landowner does not recognize capital gain on transaction.	Y	N
Sale at Fair Market Value	Land is sold to TNC at Fair Market Value supported by independent appraisal.	Land permanently protected and managed for ecological resources†	N	N
Conservation Easement	Legal agreement between a landowner and TNC permanently limiting a property's uses.	Land's conservation values conserved by TNC. Owner continues to own, use and live on land.	Y	Y

* In most cases. The amounts of income tax and estate tax reduction depend on several factors.

† For property best kept in private ownership, the land trust may place a conservation easement on the property to conserve it and sell it to an appropriate buyer. For non-conservation property donated to generate income for the land trust, the land trust will sell the property. Cash from the sale in either case will be used to support the land trust's conservation programs.

‡ Result dependent upon whether land is a conservation property or trade land.



The Nature
Conservancy 

To learn more contact:

The Nature Conservancy in Iowa

505 5th Ave, Suite 630

Des Moines, IA 50309

515-244-5044 • iowa@tnc.org