

Conservation Restriction Management Plan Guidelines



Introduction

Many Conservation Restrictions (CRs) held by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) ask that landowners develop Management Plans to guide certain activities on their land. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a framework for these plans. A CR Management Plan (Plan) is a document that describes what the landowner wants to accomplish on their property and how their goals and objectives will be reached, consistent with the purposes and terms of the CR. It includes the long-term vision for the property and specific actions that the landowner would like to take to achieve that vision for the time horizon of that Plan, and should be designed to guide future activities in a way that ensures the continued protection of the conservation values of a particular property.

Some key objectives for landowners to consider when developing a CR Management Plan are to:

- Determine long-term goals to preserve and/or improve the conservation values for the property.
- Describe and assess current conditions of the property particularly as they relate to the conservation and recreational values of the CR.
- Identify current management practices and capabilities.
- Develop specific, implementable management recommendations to address the highest priority needs.

It is important to note that the landowner is not obligated to complete/implement the actions proposed in the Plan. Once the Plan is approved, the landowner may carry out the proposed actions but is not required to do so. Rather, the development and approval of a management plan ensures that when a landowner is ready/able to move forward with their vision for the property, there is a clear path available to achieve that vision, consistent with the purposes and terms of the CR.

Management Plan Contents

While each Plan is tailored to a specific property and CR, typically they include the following sections:

1. *Introduction:* General description of property, ownership, location, current & historical land use.
2. *Primary Goals:* A concise statement explaining the big-picture goal(s) or vision for the property and/or the Plan.
3. *Resource Inventory & Assessment:*
 - a. Inventory and assessment of the biological and environmental resources (Physical Features, Water Resources, Climate Change, Rare Species, Vegetation, Wildlife, etc.) and description of any related issues and challenges (exotic species, erosion, over-grazing, contamination, trespassing, etc.). Include information on related land management plans such as a forestry plan or an NRCS agricultural plan.

- b. Inventory and assessment of the cultural resources on the property (Archaeological Resources, Landmarks, etc.) and description of any related issues and challenges.
- c. Inventory and assessment of the recreational and infrastructure resources (Buildings & Structures, Trails, Parking Areas, Roadways, etc.) and description of any related issues and challenges (erosion, unauthorized motorized vehicle use, trash, flooding, access limitations, trespass use, etc.) If applicable, locations of these features should be marked on an attached site plan.

For each resource section, a general description should be provided. Resource inventories and assessments can reference other publications or works in which resource inventories or assessments have been completed.

- 4. *Land Management Goals and Objectives*: Description of the general land management goals and objectives for the property. Goals may include:
 - a. Preservation of specific ecological communities and any features or species of special concern.
 - b. Protection of and/or improvements to water bodies/land on the property.
 - c. Site enhancement and/or restoration plans.
 - d. Expansion of recreational opportunities.
- 5. *Management Activity Implementation and Timing*: Description of ongoing and planned land management activities to meet goals and objectives, including actions to address any issues noted in previous sections and a timetable of when management activities will be implemented. Include any anticipated ongoing maintenance activities and identify the organization(s) or individuals involved. Some examples include:
 - a. If there are buildings on the property, describe plans for demolition or future use.
 - b. If recreational resources are present, describe any proposed improvements and recreational development including trails, parking areas, access roads, interpretive displays, boardwalks, bridges etc.
 - c. If unauthorized motor vehicle use is a challenge, describe plans for installing gates, boulders, signage, etc.

Any proposed management activities that would alter the existing property conditions should be marked on an attached conceptual future site plan. For some management activities, referencing a DCR (or other agency or organization) Best Management Practices document may be helpful. For example, the mowing of meadows could follow the DCR Grassland Management guidelines (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/grassland-management/download>).

- 6. *Maps and Data*: Include the following maps:
 - a. Locus to show the property in context of surrounding landscapes and features.
 - b. Site Plan to show existing developments and structures, boundaries, roads, overhead power lines, etc.
 - c. Conceptual future site plan (if applicable)

DCR Review Process

As the CR holder, DCR has a set procedure for how management plans are reviewed as they relate to CR purposes, conservation values, prohibited activities and reserved rights. The landowner drafts the plan and submits it to a DCR CR Stewardship Program staff member who reviews it with other DCR staff. CR Stewardship staff provides feedback/input on the draft plan at which point they may have questions or request additional information. They will later issue a form or letter to the landowner granting or withholding DCR's approval of the management plan.

Since the CR landowner is the manager of the land, the intention of the review process is mainly to ensure that no activities unintentionally run contrary to the provisions of the CR. CR Stewardship staff review management plans to ensure this intention is met while still aiming to provide the landowner with as much flexibility in the management plan as they need to manage their property. Staff can also provide management advice when asked.

The ideal relationship between a CR holder and landowner is collaborative. If there is an aspect of a management plan that appears problematic, CR Stewardship staff will suggest ways to address the concerns while enabling the landowner to accomplish their goals. For example, if a landowner is planning to build a trail on a section of the property with steep slopes where there has been a history of erosion, staff may suggest that they consider including some water bars to reduce the erosion. If the landowner finds it useful, staff may refer them to additional resources, such as DCR's Trails Guidelines and Best Practices Manual. Staff may also suggest that the landowner use switchbacks as a cheaper option and then let the landowner choose whether water bars or switchbacks make more sense. The landowner may also propose another, better option that is mutually acceptable.

Please let CR Stewardship staff know if you have any questions as you develop your management plan and they will be happy to assist.