

Natural Burial on Conservation Land



*Image: The Forest Conservation Burial Ground, Ashland OR
Oregon Stewardship Trust*

Strengthening Ties to the Land

A informational guide for land trusts considering conservation burial projects
by Lee Webster

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Conservation Burial Goals and Commitments

The goals of conservation burial are in line with conservation goals themselves—to set aside intrinsically valuable land for nature's sake and our own and to restore land that has been subject to man's misuse to one of balance and abundance. What conservation burial brings to the movement is a means to maximize authentic engagement with nature at a profound moment in the lives of those who have experienced loss.

To say that conservation burial is simply interment in the ground without toxic chemicals, precious wooden or metal caskets, and cement vaults is both accurate and simplistic at the same time. Conservation burial, at its core, is about the creation and support of multidimensional social and ecological spaces that sustain us as they sustain the planet and all who dwell on it.

Conservation cemeteries are a vehicle for transformative experiences that include direct participation before and during a funeral, as well as ongoing opportunities for engagement through life-affirming activities such as birdwatching, hiking, weddings, baptisms, family picnic days, community educational events, research opportunities, and much more.

Those seeking to contribute to protecting land by purchasing burial rights are also eager to leave a legacy for future generations. Equally important to families with loved ones buried in protected spaces is the promise of enhanced connection of human and natural communities. Burial on a portion of the protected land permanently ties individuals and families to the land through their shared story, encouraging active conservation funding support.

Why Conservation Cemeteries Seek Land Trust Partners

Natural burial grounds wish to be in partnership with land trusts for several reasons. First, they see their mission as being in alignment with land trusts that prioritize land protection. They also expect to employ conservation best practices when managing and stewarding the land, including financial support for ongoing restoration projects and additional land acquisition.

Secondly, being designated as a cemetery is not a guarantee of “undisturbed repose”, which is one definition of the Right of Sepulchre, a foundation of the principle of perpetuity mistakenly thought to protect cemeteries forever. The reality is that cemetery contents have been moved with relative frequency throughout history, sometimes by public will and other times by eminent domain. Instruments such as easements are necessary to truly protect land that has burials occurring on it.

Finding Common Ground: Issues to Consider

Land trust entities considering responsibilities and liabilities associated with conducting burials on protected land may find opportunities and previously unconsidered benefits. Here are some questions/areas that may help foster an informed exchange of ideas and practicalities in pursuit of meaningful conservation burial partnerships.

Preliminary Interest Questions

- Would a burial project advance your land trust's mission and organizational strategies?
- Is conservation burial in alignment with your conservation values?
- What does market research show regarding interest in conservation burial, as well as commitment in your area?
- Is there a conservation burial champion within the land trust to act as point?
- Is there an identified funding champion?
- Is there a credible local information source on conservation burial?
- What assurances does the land trust need in order to incorporate burial rights in the easement?

Risk/Liability

- Scientific studies address concerns about land and water contamination.
- Operational structure, succession planning, reversionary clauses are made clear in all agreements; most states have legislation and regulations that provide the framework.

Responsibilities

- Land trusts are responsible for their commitments laid out in the easement, typically including boundary monitoring and defense, and partnering to employ conservation best practices when undertaking restoration, infrastructure builds, or other projects on the land.
- Land trusts that operate their own cemetery projects negotiate management responsibilities internally.
- Land trusts that contract with a nonprofit or cemetery company are free from management duties beyond those duties stated above.
- What other responsibilities would there be in owning and/or being involved with managing the partnerships/division of labor needed to manage the cemetery?
- What might be some opportunities for blending land management and stewardship plans with cemetery income support?
- How might overlaps/redundancies/conflicts be handled?

Conservation/Ecology

- What resource assessments are required and who will conduct/pay for the resources?
- How could a conservation burial cemetery benefit the ecology of a site?
- Is a cemetery compatible with ecological principles?

Costs and Revenue

- What is your organization's resource capacity for developing a burial project?
- Where will start-up funds for land purchase and operating expenses come from?
- What does it cost to manage a cemetery?
- What percentage of profits will the land trust earn for their stewardship endowment?
- Will the cemetery establish a conservation fund or endowment, or prioritize public donations to the land trust?
- What other opportunities might a conservation burial ground provide to land trust acquisition, stewardship, conservation programs, and/or operating funds?
- What activities will generate non-burial fee income? (e.g., timber extraction, farming, public events, educational programs, life cycle gatherings, etc.)
- How could a conservation burial ground positively impact fundraising for the land trust? Could it increase potential bequests?
- How might a conservation burial ground grow a land trust's membership base?

Land Acquisition and Management Models for Public Burial Purposes

Some states have laws that provide for burial on private property for family only and within certain setbacks from water, buildings, and state highways.¹ Some also mandate that each municipality provide burial space for its citizens, most of which prohibit burial of people from out of town. Religious cemeteries typically allow burial for congregants only, and limited burial spaces are available for members of associations that maintain their own private cemeteries. People wishing to be buried in an independent, public burial space that eschews environmentally detrimental materials and practices are currently without opportunity.

Landowners wishing to dedicate acreage for the purpose of public burial are generally not equipped to run a cemetery business. Most want assurances that the land will be protected according to conservation best practices. They understand that cemeteries are forever and often seek land trust support before committing to donate or sell land for cemetery use.

¹ CA, IN, WA, DC, Bibb County, GA; others have permitting processes. Only 17 states have setback requirements.

Larger landowners may be looking for creative revenue opportunities in order to keep the family farm or lands intact for coming generations along with entering an easement agreement with a land trust. (*Panorama Natural Burial in Earlysville, VA, is owned and operated by seven second generation brothers with diverse land interests that demonstrate sustainable conservation activity.*)

Another model begins with the acquisition of a property by a nonprofit or for-profit cemetery management company that works with a land trust partner (*e.g., Bluestem Conservation Cemetery in Cedar Grove, NC, Ramsey Creek Preserve in Westminster, SC, and many others who use this model as the standard.*)

For land trusts that have ownership of donated or purchased land not yet under easement, one option is to subcontract with a cemetery management service. Another is to form a 501c13 subsidiary nonprofit under the wing of the land trust's 501c3. (*e.g., Baldwin Hill Cemetery in Winthrop, ME.*)

Conservation burial entities may also consider negotiating a renewable perpetual lease agreement with option to purchase to be used solely and in perpetuity as a conservation burial site with large landowners and their land trust partner.

Liability Concerns for Nonprofit Cemeteries in Brief

501c13 cemetery nonprofits carry director's and officer's insurance, and general liability insurance, making the nonprofit the primary liability holder in case of a dispute. The easement agreement absolves the land trust from any action taken by the c13 that results in a liability suit. Cemeteries are tax exempt, reducing possible disputes over assessments. Some states have laws in place that protect landowners, lessees, and occupants from liability for personal injuries and property damage sustained by recreational users.



Photo courtesy of Donelle Dreese, Heritage Acres, Cincinnati, OH

Land Allotted for Burial in Protected Properties

Not all the land in any given protected parcel is used for burial purposes. Burial areas are often designated for use by phase or by type of area. For instance, a meadow burial area that is already accessible may be developed for use first, with a woodland grove opened as access trails are built. The chart below demonstrates the burial portions of protected land in some established conservation burial grounds.

Burial Ground	Acres Protected	Acres for Burial	Adjacent Protected Land
Baldwin Hill Conservation Burial Ground	90	10	
Blazing Star Sanctuary	68	8	19,000 acres Katy Prairie Preserve
Bluestem Conservation Cemetery	87	60	
Campo de Estrella Conservation	30	10	
Carolina Memorial Sanctuary	11.36	8	
Casper Creek Natural Cemetery	134	16	
Foxfield Preserve	43	27	600 acres The Wilderness Center
Heartwood Preserve	41	30	18,000 acres Starkey Wilderness Preserve
Kings Mountain Conservation Burial	55	55	
Kokosing Nature Preserve	50	23	5,497 acres Philander Chase Conservancy
Larkspur Conservation at Taylor Hollow	760	155	173 acres Taylor Hollow State Natural Area
Panorama Natural Burial Ground	837	20+	
Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery	93	30	600+ acres Prairie Creek Preserve 20,000+ acres Paynes Prairie State Park
Ramsey Creek Preserve	78	75	
Sacred Grove Preserve	360	10	
The Forest Conservation Burial	445	40	114,000 acres Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument
Unbroken Circle Community Cemetery	246	6.5	
White Eagle Memorial Preserve	1138	20	1,260 acres Bureau of Land Management

Conservation Values

Conserved land with or without burial activity is evaluated first for its intrinsic conservation values and potential for plant and wildlife species protection determined with Ecological Assessments (EiAs), Natural Resource Inventories, and Wildlife and Botanical Studies. Examples include:

Conservation Cemetery	Land Trust Partner	Active Conservation
Baldwin Hill Conservation Burial Ground	Kennebec Land Trust	• Adjacent to conserved land • Invasive plant management • Native pollinator habitat creation
Blazing Star Sanctuary	Coastal Prairie Conservancy	• Resident and migratory bird refuge • Pollinator breeding ground • Tallgrass prairie
Bluestem Conservation Cemetery	Eno River Association and Triangle Land Conservancy	• Prairie and grassland restoration • Woodland habitat restoration • Prescribed burning
Campo de Estrellas Conservation Cemetery	<i>Pending</i>	• Riparian reforestation • Wildlife habitat restoration • Bobwhite Quail and Rio Grande Turkey
Carolina Memorial Sanctuary	Conserving Carolina	• Stream and wetland restoration • Invasive plant management • Native plants reintroduction
Casper Creek Natural Cemetery	Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation	• Views of the Mississippi River • Protection of the Aiken Mound Group, Effigy Mound cultural protection effort
Foxfield Preserve	The Wilderness Center	• Prairie and grassland restoration • Woodland habitat restoration • Prescribed burning
Heartwood Preserve	Tampa Bay Conservancy	• Conservation of Longleaf Pine Flatwoods • Wildland-(sub)urban interface • Prescribed burning
Kings Mountain Conservation Burial	Upstate Forever	• Coastal plains • Forest protection
Kokosing Nature Preserve	Philander Chase Conservancy of Kenyon College	• Golf course conversion to grassland/meadow • Native plants reintroduction • University/alumni connection to land trust
Larkspur Conservation at Taylor Hollow	The Nature Conservancy	• Native plants reintroduction • Stream buffering • Wildlife habitat
Panorama Natural Burial Ground		• Active farmland • Meadow and woodland restoration
Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery	Alachua Conservation Trust	• Prairie and grassland restoration • Woodland habitat restoration • Prescribed burning

Conservation Cemetery	Land Trust Partner	• Active Conservation
Ramsey Creek Preserve	Upstate Forever	• Threatened species plant reintroduction • Stream buffering • Prescribed burning
Sacred Grove Preserve	Francis Marion National Forest, USDA Forest Service	• Longleaf pine ecosystem restoration • Saltwater intrusion prevention
The Forest Conservation Burial	Oregon Stewardship Trust	• Reforestation of Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir, Incense Cedar and Sugar Pine • Farm and wetland restoration
Unbroken Circle Community Cemetery	Green Spaces Alliance	• Texas plains prairie grass restoration • Texas ocelot habitat • Oxbow <i>resacas</i>, coastal prairies, San Bernard River watershed
White Eagle Memorial Preserve Cemetery	Sacred Earth Foundation	• Adjacency to conserved land • Woodland habitat restoration • Wildlife habitat

Conservation Best Practices for Burial Projects

When Dr. Billy Campbell first began preparing to open Ramsey Creek Preserve, he already had years of conservation experience that he then applied to the running of the burial area. In brief, the topics he covers in detail on the website www.memorialecosystems.com each have a counterpart in accepted conservation land trust principles. Conservation burial grounds are encouraged to follow best practices as set forth by their land trust partners. This is a summary of topic areas:

Conservation Burial Best Practices	
• Affordability • Availability • Botanical Baseline/Ongoing Botanical Monitoring • Care of the Grounds • Easement/Deed Restriction • Land Selection • Layout of Internal Transportation Plan • Limiting Direct and Indirect Impacts on Soil and Vegetation When Grave Siting	• Naturalness/Sensitivity/Beauty • Operations and Management • Position in Landscape • Preservation and Stewardship • Site Planning • Surveys/Other Information • Restoration/Maintenance Plan • Tips and Tasks • Visitor Management Service

Green Burial Council Standards for Conservation Level Cemeteries

The Green Burial Council (GBC) has contracted with conservation land trust experts to create standards that support their certification. It should be emphasized that certification is elective; land trust requirements supersede GBC standards. Certification may be valuable (if not necessary) for public assurance.

	Conservation Burial Ground Standards
1.	Accurately represent earned level of GBC certification in marketing materials, websites, and conversations with the public, clients, and the media.
2.	Provide clients and families with the opportunity to participate in the burial and ritual process, in keeping with state law and with these standards.
3.	Accept for burial only decedents that have not been embalmed or those embalmed only with GBC-approved, nontoxic chemicals.
4.	Prohibit the use of a vault (partial, inverted, or otherwise), a vault lid, concrete box, slab or partitioned liner in the burial plot.
5.	All burial containers, shrouds, and other associated products made only of natural, biodegradable materials.
6.	Develop a <i>Maintenance and Operations Manual</i> to be utilized by all staff members, contractors, and volunteers to implement site goals, policies, and best practices.
7.	Establish an endowment fund to ensure the long-term maintenance of the site by setting aside at least 10% of all burial plot sales.
8.	Conduct an <i>Ecological Impact Assessment</i> , starting with a property baseline document that includes existing ecological conditions and sensitive area analysis. Update periodically to assess future property/habitat conditions and plant inventory.
9.	Restrict access and burial operations within sensitive areas as identified in the <i>Ecological Impact Assessment</i> .
10.	Use operational and burial practices that have no long-term degradation of soil health, plant diversity, water quality, and ecological habitat.
11.	Limit the type and size of memorial markers so that they do not impair the ecological conditions and aesthetic of the natural cemetery landscape.
12.	Site conditions as identified in the <i>Ecological Impact Assessment</i> and sensitive areas analysis, will restrict burial density on the property; therefore, Natural and Conservation burial grounds will have limits to allowable burial density. For Natural Burial, the cemetery's average density shall not exceed 500 burials/acre. For Conservation Burial, average density shall not exceed 300 burials/acre. Burial density of sensitive areas may be transferred to less restricted areas on the property to maximum densities of Natural Burial - 600/acre, Conservation Burial - 400/acre.
13.	Establish and apply strategies that conserve, preserve, enhance, or restore the historic native or natural habitat and flora of the region.

14.	Conserve or restore a minimum of 20 acres, or 5 acres if contiguous to other protected land.*
15.	Operate in conjunction with a government agency or a nonprofit conservation organization that has legally binding responsibility for perpetual monitoring and enforcement of the easement.
16.	Guarantee preservation of the burial ground by deed restriction, conservation easement or other legally binding and irrevocable agreement that runs with the land and is enforceable in perpetuity.

Organizational Structure

Several states, particularly in New England, require every cemetery other than a private family burial ground be structured as a nonprofit. This includes municipalities, religious and ecclesiastic societies, nonprofit membership associations, and nonprofit corporations.

Six early conservation cemeteries are organized as 501c3s or are designated under religious exemption; four are 501c13s specific to cemeteries (the rest are in states that allow for-profit cemetery operation). The Internal Revenue Service now requires that every cemetery nonprofit seeking IRS tax exemption status must be formed as a 501c13. Nonprofit cemetery corporations are responsible for management of all operations and for reporting to the State and Federal government. Conservation burial grounds formed with a land trust may form their own nonprofit cemetery organization, keeping both the burial ground responsibilities and the land trust responsibilities separate while potentially benefiting from a close-knit relationship, shared office space and staff.

For-profit cemeteries follow all laws for corporate management of a cemetery business.

Strategic Teams

Nonprofit Board Members

In a nonprofit scenario, the board of directors is charged with general oversight of the conservation burial cemetery and employees. They are not allowed any payment for services or to have financial interests in the cemetery. Board members are replaced according to bylaws in perpetuity, ensuring that the cemetery will be managed into the future.

Executive Director/Operator

Most conservation burial grounds have a paid executive director (ED), who may also be known as the operator, handling the day-to-day operations of the cemetery. The ED is charged with managing digital mapping, communications systems, customer relationship management system (CRM), basic bookkeeping, public outreach, overseeing ground crews, and other duties as assigned by the Board of Directors. The ED is frequently the face of the organization,

interacting with the purchasers, families, community members, officials, land trust representatives, media, and others who come in contact with the cemetery.

Staff

Many burial grounds employ full or part-time staff responsible for general cemetery work and maintenance of facilities and the property. This may include winter grave thawing and preparation, use of light machinery, tent setup and takedown, facility/pavilion cleanup, plant nursery management, grounds planting, general maintenance, stone cleaning, and other tasks that are deemed necessary.

Volunteers

Many conservation cemeteries rely on volunteers and docents to help with trail building and maintenance, gravedigging, and program development. Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery in Gainesville, FL, has a group called the Society of the Pick and Spade, a trained, phone chain-activated crew of volunteers who hand dig every grave when needed. Bluestem Conservation Cemetery in Cedar Grove, NC, has volunteers who clear trails, reseed native grasses, prep burials, act as tour guides, and are ambassadors in the wider community.

Conservation Partners

Both staff and volunteers work closely with land trust partners to ensure consistent conservation best practices. Larkspur Conservation at Taylor Hollow in Nashville, TN, has an especially successful, interactive partnership with The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee, jointly restoring sections of the property that include four different habitats. Different from Larkspur, Bluestem Conservation Cemetery independently determines its conservation strategies and practices; the conservation partners only monitor the property on an annual basis. How much interaction and support between the land trust and the Board of Trustees is determined by written mutual agreement.

Sustainability

As required by the IRS, the 501c13 nonprofit includes a dissolution clause in the event that the board folds. Since bylaws may be designed to allow board members to be recruited and appointed at any time, there is little chance that the board itself will cease to exist as long as there is activity in the cemetery and on the grounds. Should dissolution happen, however, the usual remedy is for an existing cemetery corporation to assume responsibility. That entity is usually a municipal cemetery that is funded by taxpayer dollars plus endowments of the cemetery being dissolved. Management may also be assumed by local conservation commissions and other nature groups.

To counter that potential circumstance, contributions to an endowment fund for conservation is encouraged independent from any state required funds. This provides a fund and potential interest to cover maintenance. A responsibly managed conservation cemetery will also have employed minimal grave maintenance in the burial area(s) as agreed from the start, requiring little to no maintenance at the expense of the assuming entity.

In recent years, cemeteries across the country have reported that they are running out of room in their current cemetery locations which, filled with concrete vaults and metal caskets, are not capable of further use. When state laws mandate that each municipality provide burial space for its townspeople, local officials are having to begin looking for land that will come off the tax roll, resulting in taxpayer expense. Should an independent cemetery nonprofit dissolve and default to the town, the land received would save the town from having to purchase new cemetery space that is already all or partially tax exempt.

One other element may go a long way to ensuring perpetual sustainability of the cemetery. Purchasers of burial rights in some conservation cemeteries are given the option in their interment contract to allow reuse of the grave space after a determined amount of time. This legally viable—and historically common—practice is preferred by most every country in the world. Because the cemetery owns the soil, it can sell unlimited future burial rights that may occur in that original space once a body that has been buried without impediment to natural decomposition has become soil. Each cemetery determines the amount of time allowed.

Many European countries reuse grave spaces after 30 years or so; here in the US, some cemeteries are waiting 75 years. Others are looking at deep time—the time it takes for three or more generations to have passed out of direct memory. By employing reuse practices, there is little need for other parts of the protected land to be used for burial purposes. The established burial grounds can stay active in perpetuity. In cemeteries that offer this option, most purchasers agree that this is in keeping with their original intention of becoming part of the earth.

Endowments, Conservation Funds, Perpetual Care Funds

Endowments

Each state legislates whether or not endowments will be required, and how much must be raised and maintained to operate a cemetery.

Perpetual Care Funds

A portion of the burial rights sale price is added to the perpetual care fund for long-term maintenance of a cemetery when the right is purchased. While some states require that municipalities raise and appropriate sufficient funds for “suitable” care and maintenance of cemeteries, the state may not stipulate what funds must be raised or maintained by a nonprofit natural cemetery. Some laws are very specific about the requirement that all funds raised be used for care and maintenance of the cemetery, making it understood that money raised through the sale of burial rights will serve the perpetual care purpose.

They also may not specify what type of maintenance is required. Cemetery board trustees or selectboards make the rules. Perpetual care funds in natural burial grounds support very different care and maintenance than vault cemeteries, focusing on land management rather than lawn mowing and trimming.

Conservation Funds

Funds are raised for land trust partners in various ways and may depend on the easement agreement for specifics. Some conservation burial grounds build in an amount to the purchase price specifically dedicated to the land trust partner. For instance, Foxfield Preserve in Wilmot, OH, splits the full burial rights fee 50/50 with their land trust partner. Others require a donation to an independent conservation fund that is used for restoration or land acquisition or other projects taken up with the land trust. Some solicit donations directly to the land trust at the purchasing meeting, and follow up with solicitations at future dates, particularly anniversaries. Awareness of the land trust’s role is crucial to promotional events and fundraising drives.

Cemetery Business Revenue

Interment Rights

Revenue from direct sales of burial rights make up the majority of cemetery-specific income. It’s important to understand that in all US cemeteries, including conventional lawn vault cemeteries, the purchase is for the right to burial on cemetery property. Contrary to popular belief, purchasers do not own real estate in the cemetery; rather, the interment contract provides the purchaser with *the right to be buried*. The cemetery owns the soil. Conventional cemeteries usually issue deeds that imply ownership of real estate, but that is not legally or practically accurate. These contracts state a specific location where the burial will occur, but this does not mean the purchaser will own the property for eternity.

Interment agreements in conservation burial grounds are reservations for the right to burial on the property, not necessarily specific spaces. Preneed preferences are recorded and honored at time of need. At-need purchasers choose from available and accessible locations.

Merchandise

Some cemeteries sell merchandise as well as services. Examples of merchandise include shrouds, shrouding boards, caskets, flowers or native plantings, markers, benches, art installations, tree dedications, birdhouses, rentals of tents and chairs, use of sanctuary or meeting spaces, use of golf carts or other ambulatory aids, and other items. Revenue from sales is monitored and reported to the IRS by the cemetery.

Services and Fees

Additional services may include a funeral or memorial ceremony, assistance with preparation for burial that is not part of a licensed funeral director's purview, recording of the burial, GPS locator mapping, planting, staff support, or other activity. Opening and Closing (O/C) fees are either included in the interment rights purchased or billed separately. (*See Conservation Full Body Burial Fee in Comparison Chart below.*)

Donations

Nonprofit rules require that all funds donated to the cemetery be used for general purposes. Donors are not allowed to donate funds for their personal benefit. Donations may also be used to support land acquisition, land management and improvement as it relates to burial spaces, staff funding, organizational management systems, and other cemetery business expenses.

Perpetual Care Fees/Endowments

Cemeteries may require contributions to perpetual care or an endowment, either on their own or by state requirement. Perpetual care funds in a conservation burial ground are used for different types of maintenance than in a conventional cemetery that includes paved roads, large upright stones that need righting and cleaning, pesticide and herbicide use, and manicured lawns. Funds are instead used for trail improvements, integrative pest management, native plantings, invasives removal, and other improvements that directly impact natural burial sites.

Conservation Fund Donations

Conservation fund donations are collected at the time of purchase of the burial right (if any are required by the cemetery for the land trust that holds the easement). Some conservation burial

grounds prefer to leave the donation amount open in the agreement when rights are purchased but include the written expectation that a donation will be made directly to the land trust.

Activity Revenue

It is common practice on protected land within and/or around the burial ground itself to allow various low-impact activities, or revenue-producing businesses that further mutual land trust and burial ground interests. Careful traffic planning is built into activities in the cemetery space.

Agricultural

Farming of any kind is likely compatible on the property separate from where burials occur. In designating the natural burial area, care is taken to follow state setback requirements for known water sources, highways, and buildings, and research shows that natural burials do not negatively impact nearby water or soil. Some burial grounds propagate native plantings for use in the cemetery but also for sale to the public. Beekeeping can occur anywhere on the property, with sales of honey managed independently or through the cemetery's business location. Goats are frequently used for grazing purposes to help with invasives, and some provide goat milk for sale. Creative use of the land for agricultural purposes can create one or more additional small streams.

Recreational

Walking trails are the main means of accessing the cemetery spaces, but they are usually part of a larger network of hiking trails, especially when they are located next to an existing protected area with a public recreation thrust. Hiking, walking, even cross-country skiing, are welcome activities that may generate revenue with use fees, usually for special sporting events. As an example, Panorama Farms in Earlysville, VA, the parent company of Panorama Natural Burial, hosts the NCAA Division I cross-country teams of the University of Virginia.

Forestry and Timber Sales

Forest management is key to maintaining active conservation burial space as well as on adjacent property. Cost and revenue sharing agreements between the cemetery, landowner, and land trust enable future land management opportunities as well as demonstrate responsible forestry that creates and protects animal wildlife habitat. Income from logging may be substantial on forested tracks.

Educational Programs

Wildlife and wildflower identification programs; guided nature walks; art in nature classes; school groups studying history, geology, and plants; doing research; or nature writing courses

all bring in revenue and increase interest in what goes on throughout the conserved property. In a 2015 study by the Green Burial Council, birdwatching was the number one activity most cited in natural cemeteries, with meditation and hiking running close seconds.

Community Events

Yoga classes, concerts, family picnics – whatever brings people to the land helps connect them to nature and educates them about conservation. Before the advent of the lawn cemetery, cemeteries were where families gathered to be together and to be seen by others. Introducing activities and programs that encourage controlled community engagement result in the formation of connections to the land that can lead to greater land trust support.

Cemetery Revenue

Chart Key

2nd Right of Interment—the right to bury cremated remains in a full body burial space
Alkaline hydrolysis—cremation process that employs heat, water, and lye to dissolve tissue
At-need—purchase of burial rights at the time of the death
Cenotaph—community lists of deceased individuals
Conservation fund—donations solicited for the purpose of supporting land conservation
Cremated remains—the result of incineration or dissolving of human bones
Full body burial—intact human burial in the ground
Human composting—above ground process using natural resources to decompose bodies
Interment fee—the cost of purchasing an interment right
Interment right—the legal right to be buried on the property
Opening and closing (O/C)—the grave digging and return of the soil after burial
Partial body burial—burial in the ground of human body parts
Preneed—the purchase of burial rights before a death occurs
Reservation—purchase of burial rights usually in a specified area, if not a specific location
Service—a funeral or memorial ceremony either in a facility or at graveside

Conservation Full Body Burial Fee Comparison Chart

As the chart below indicates, there is a wide range of fees and a different model for what is included in the initial fee. There is also the issue of whether the burial ground is managed by a nonprofit board or by owner operators. Location, availability, open land scarcity, population density, and many other factors influence pricing. However, there is a concerted effort to charge what is fair value consistent with the conservation burial community's commitment to environmental and social justice, including economic access.

Cemetery & Location	Full body burial right	includes	Additional fees	Conservation land trust funding	Notes
Baldwin Hill Conservation Burial Winthrop ME	\$1,200 \$1,000 for KLT members	Burial right only	O/C \$1,050 weekdays \$1,250 Saturday \$1,750 Sunday/holidays	Owned and operated by Kennebec Land Trust	501c13 nonprofit Supervised cremation digging \$200 weekdays only
Blazing Star Sanctuary Brookshire TX	\$4,000	Burial right only	Other	Partners with Coastal Prairie Conservancy	501c3 nonprofit \$1,000 2 nd right to interment of cremated remains
Bluestem Conservation Cemetery Cedar Grove NC	\$4,000	Burial right, staff, memorial, sanctuary space use, marker, GPS, plantings, perpetual care, conservation funds	\$1,300 O/C, site prep Add'l fees: \$500 - \$1,500 weekends and holidays	Donations made annually to Eno River Association and Triangle Land Conservancy	501c3 religious nonprofit Pet burial in human's reserved spot \$500 - \$1,500
Campo de Estrellas Kovar TX	\$1,800 single \$2,00 double	Burial right only	O/C \$1,100	Pending land trust partner; current affiliation is with Tree Folks	Owner operated Not technically a conservation burial ground yet
Carolina Memorial Sanctuary Mills River NC	\$4,500 - \$5,500	O/C, burial right, service, recording, marking, stone marker	Other merchandise	Solicits donations for Conserving Carolina	501c3 religious nonprofit Pet burial \$500 - \$2,750 Pet CR \$550 Percentage of fee goes to endowment fund
Casper Creek Natural Cemetery Galena IL	\$4,260 preneed \$5,260 at-need	O/C, burial right	Stone markers, other merchandise	\$2,000+ per full body burial to the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation	501c3 nonprofit
Foxfield Conservation Wilmot OH	\$3,500 preneed \$4,000 at-need	O/C, burial right	Stone markers, other merchandise	50% goes to The Wilderness Center LT	501c13 nonprofit Offers 2 nd Right of Interment \$250
Cemetery & Location	Full body burial right	includes	Additional fees	Conservation land trust funding	Notes

Heartwood Preserve Trinity FL	\$4,271	O/C, burial right, service, use of facilities, funds perpetual care, conservation	Markers, tents and chairs, native plants	Solicits donations for the Tampa Bay Conservancy	Owner operated No pets
Kings Mountain Preserve Blacksburg SC	\$3,995	Burial right, use of sanctuary spaces, up to 6 people cabin overnight stay, stone marker, GPS, mapping	\$750 O/C	Solicits donations for Upstate Forever LT	Owner operated Pet burial \$500 - \$1,250 Pet CR \$600 Cabin and sanctuary spaces cleaning fees each \$100
Kokosing Nature Preserve Gambier OH	\$2,500 to \$3,000	Burial right only	\$250 O/C	Payments are for Philander Chase Conservancy Heritage Circle memberships	501c13 nonprofit No charge for second interment rights for 3-4 cremations in full body grave
Larkspur Conservation at Taylor Hollow Nashville TN	\$4,000	O/C, burial right, mapping, contribution to conservation fund	\$1,000 Shroud \$1,000 Stone \$300 Plantings	Conservation Fund fees go to The Nature Conservancy	501c3 nonprofit Also included: photo memory garland, snacks, water, mobility assistance, genealogy
Panorama Natural Burial Earlysville VA	\$4,000 to \$6,000 \$2,000 to \$3,000 for child under 3	Burial right only	\$1,600 O/C, service \$500 stone	Partners with VA Forestry James River Riparian Buffer, Piedmont Enviro Council, Smithsonian	Owner operated Not technically a conservation burial ground but does engage best practices
Prairie Creek Conservation Gainesville FL	\$2,000	O/C, burial right, brass marker, chairs and water for service	Stone markers, other merchandise	Solicits donations for Alachua Conservation LT	501c13 nonprofit
Ramsey Creek Preserve Westminster SC	\$3,500 to \$4,500	O/C, burial right, stone, plants, use of chapel, staff	none	Solicits donations for Upstate Forever LT	Owner operated Golf cart use
Sacred Grove Preserve St. Stephen SC	\$4,000	O/C, stone with engraved with dates, GOS mapping, golf cart use, native planting, perpetual care	Tree planting, memorial bench, commemorative planting	Located within the boundaries of Francis Marion National Forest, US Dept of Agriculture Forest Service	Owner operated Pet burial \$350 Pet cremated remains burial \$150 Located on conserved land
Cemetery & Location	Full body burial right	includes	Additional fees	Conservation land trust funding	Notes

The Forest Conservation Burial Ground Ashland OR	\$4,000 to \$6,000	Burial right only	\$500 at-need fee \$2,500 O/C, service \$600 after hours \$400 winter \$200 recording Stone, bench, tree dedication, birdhouse	Solicits donations for the Oregon Stewardship Trust	Owner operated Offers 2 nd Right of Interment \$1,000 15% Endowment Fund Pet \$275 - \$475 Pet CR \$150 - \$250
Unbroken Circle Community Cemetery San Antonio TX	\$1,899 single \$3,298 double	Burial right only	\$795 O/C \$1,245 O/C, tent and chairs \$499 marker	Solicits donations for the Green Spaces Alliance	Owner operated Stones must be placed within two months of burial
White Eagle Memorial Preserve Goldendale WA	\$4,000	Burial right only	\$700 O/C \$200 markers	Solicits donations for Sacred Earth Foundation. Ekone Ranch	501c3 nonprofit State required endowment fee \$300 Preneed discounts



Photo courtesy of Ramsey Creek Preserve, Westminster, SC

Conservation Burial Fee for Cremated Remains Comparison Chart

Cemetery & Location	Cremation burial	includes	Additional fees
Baldwin Hill Conservation Burial Winthrop ME	\$500	Burial right only	O/C \$450 weekdays \$550 Saturday \$650 Sunday/holiday
Blazing Star Sanctuary Brookshire TX	\$4,000	Burial right only	none
Bluestem Conservation Cemetery Cedar Grove NC	\$1,700	Burial right, staff, memorial, sanctuary space use, marker, GPS, plantings, perpetual care, conservation funds	\$650 O/C; \$500 weekends and holidays
Campo de Estrellas Kovar TX	\$500	No marker	Self-O/C no charge
Carolina Memorial Sanctuary Mills River NC	\$2,500 - \$2,700	O/C, burial right, service, marking, stone marker	none
Casper Creek Natural Cemetery Galena IL	\$3,190 preneed \$3,265 at-need	O/C, burial right	Stone markers, other merchandise
Foxfield Conservation Wilnot OH	\$250	O/C, burial right	none
Heartwood Preserve Trinity FL	\$1,657	O/C, burial right, service, use of facilities, funds perpetual care, conservation	none
Kings Mountain Preserve Blacksburg SC	\$1,995	O/C, burial right, use of sanctuary spaces, up to 6 people cabin overnight stay, stone marker, GPS, mapping	none
Kokosing Nature Preserve Gambier OH	\$2,500 to \$3,000 for two	Burial right only	\$150 O/C
Larkspur Conservation at Taylor Hollow Nashville TN	\$4,000	O/C, burial right, mapping, contribution to conservation fund	\$1,000 Stone \$300 Plantings
Panorama Natural Burial Earlsville VA	\$2,000 to \$3,000	Burial right only	\$800 O/C, service \$500 stone
Prairie Creek Conservation Gainesville FL	\$950	O/C, burial right	none

Cemetery & Location	Cremation burial	includes	Additional fees
Ramsey Creek Preserve Westminster SC	\$900 to \$1,600	Burial right only	none
Sacred Grove Preserve St. Stephen SC	\$1,100	O/C, stone with engraved with dates, GOS mapping, golf cart use, native planting, perpetual care	Tree planting, memorial bench, commemorative planting
The Forest Conservation Burial Ground Ashland OR	\$2,500	Burial right only	\$900 O/C, service, mixed remains \$300 after hours \$400 winter \$200 recording Cenotaph, stone, bench, tree dedication, birdhouse
Unbroken Circle Green Cemetery San Antonio TX	\$556	Burial right only	\$350 O/C \$550 O/C with tent and chairs \$499 marker
White Eagle Memorial Preserve Goldendale WA	\$980	O/C, burial right	none

Projecting Revenue Models

Determining cash flow in a cemetery relies on several variables. Let's start with some basic understandings about conservation burial, starting with the fact that time is the x-factor. We have no way of determining how much time it will take to sell burial rights of the full inventory (known as absorption rates in real estate appraising). Local marketing research, including, but not limited to, population density, existing cemetery inventory, and survey of public interest, will help ballpark expected sales. Experience has shown that there is a predictable first year sales bump when opening, dropping slightly after 1-2 years, then normalizing over subsequent years as familiarity and trust grow.

Carrying Capacity

Carrying capacity means the number of graves available per acre. This is also called inventory. Conventional lawn cemeteries maximize space by burying in tight rows, sometimes two or more deep in 4' x 10' spaces, averaging between 1200 and 1500 interments per acre. The average recommended carrying capacity in a conservation-level cemetery is between 300 and 400 interments per acre, in 3 to 4' x 8' to 10' x 20' spaces.

Lowered density provides optimum nutrient uptake for plants and trees, minimizes soil disturbance, and allows for meaningful restoration projects within the burial space. Topography, proximity to water, roads, and buildings, geological features, soil makeup, and

access also factor in when estimating usable acreage. Even then, unseen obstacles may be present underground that are not possible to predict, so operators tend to estimate inventory and space use conservatively.

Preneed and At-Need Pricing Variables

Most cemeteries charge less for advanced interment right reservations than for purchases made at the time of death, figuring they will be making up that difference by investing the money over time. There is no way to predict how many of each type of purchase will be made in any given period, or how long it will take to sell the full inventory of any given acre, especially if the cemetery offers different locations at different prices. The previous charts demonstrate the spread in pricing in several cemeteries, sometimes thousands of dollars difference between one area and another. It is also important to note that some of the cemeteries listed on the chart have formulated pricing for reasons pointed out at the top of the chart.

Cremation Burial in Conservation Cemeteries

Some, but not all, conservation burial grounds accept flame and alkaline hydrolysis cremated remains of burial as a courtesy to families. Several cremated remains may be placed in the space reserved for one full body. Many cemeteries require all cremation burials be placed in a dedicated area to avoid deposits of unchanging calcium phosphate and sodium amidst full body decomposition. Cremation gardens minimize concentration of cremated material and offer memorialization on community cenotaphs (listings of names in stone or other medium). How cremated remains burial is monetized varies depending on how the remains are treated. Cubic yards of unfinished human compost in the form of wood chips, the result of the cremation process legally known as natural organic reduction, are not accepted in conservation cemeteries for burial.

Price Ranges

The average price for a conservation level burial space for one person falls between \$4,000 and \$6,000, with a couple of outliers below \$2,000. As seen in the comparison chart, these figures may or may not include necessary items, such as opening and closing of the grave, or digital recording.

Public Perception

Other less tangible yet crucial factors will weigh heavily on projected sales as well. How well the cemetery entity educates the public will significantly affect public acceptance and awareness, as will the perceived level of operational professionalism. Public outreach and the development of reciprocal relationships with other key partners are top priorities for cemetery personnel.

Revenue Projection Models

The following projections are based on full cemetery capacity that could take years to realize.

Interments per Acre	Price Point	Per 1 Acre Parcel	Per 10 Acre Parcel	Per 20 Acre Parcel
400	@ \$4,000	\$1,600,000	\$16,000,000	\$32,000,000
400	@ \$3,000	\$1,200,000	\$12,000,000	\$24,000,000
400	@ \$2,000	\$ 800,000	\$ 8,000,000	\$16,000,000
400	@ \$1,000	\$ 400,000	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 8,000,000
300	@ \$4,000	\$1,200,000	\$12,000,000	\$24,000,000
300	@ \$3,000	\$ 900,000	\$ 9,000,000	\$18,000,000
300	@ \$2,000	\$ 600,000	\$ 6,000,000	\$12,000,000
300	@ \$1,000	\$ 300,000	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 6,000,000

Operational Costs

Because every burial ground finds its own way of dealing with issues involved with start up and running of the cemetery, the following is only a list of needs that may or may not be required.

Costs will vary depending on region and should be taken into account when determining business feasibility. \$250K+ is recommended as a ballpark starting pool, minus land purchase.

Limited estimates of pricing included in this checklist are only estimates and are subject to change. When italicized, pricing is considered firm as of the time of this writing. Where left blank, pricing is too varied to estimate.

Research into local costs is recommended, as is shopping around, especially for items that are new to the market, such as digital mapping software and bookkeeping platforms.

- Annual IRS 990 filing *\$0 if done without professional help*
- Bookkeeping software \$20 to \$60 a month
- Burial tools and equipment \$30,000
- Digital mapping software \$20+/- a month
- Employee salaries
- Employee SOP handbook legal review \$400-600+/-
- Gates \$150 - \$200
- Golf carts \$5,000 to \$15,000
- Grounds equipment

- Land acquisition
- 1024 501c13 Nonprofit application \$600.00
- State Business registration
- Surveys and assessments
- Legal fees
- Insurance
- Marketing materials (startup) \$1,000 to \$5,000
- Office equipment \$8,000 to \$12,000
- Permits
- Trail maps design plus printing costs
- Visitor guidebooks copywriting, design plus printing costs
- Waivers
- Wheeled conveyance \$4,500
- Infrastructure builds
 - Office
 - Meeting spaces, pavilions, sanctuaries, chapels
 - ADA approved walkways
 - Benches \$400 to \$4,000
 - Bridges
 - Drainage
 - Fire control access/egress
 - Parking
 - Potable water access
 - Restroom facilities
 - Signage (funeral in progress, business sign, interpretive signage, directional signs)
 - Storage shed \$1,000 to \$5,000
 - Tents and chairs
 - Trails
 - Visitor Center

Land Trust Partnerships

Land trusts around the country hold easements on properties that include cemetery activities. Here is a small online sampling from land trust websites.

Upstate Forever Land Trust protects Ramsey Creek Preserve and Memorial Ecosystems in Westminster, South Carolina, the First Conservation Burial Ground in the World

<https://www.upstateforever.org/blog/land-conservation/businesses-thriving-on-conservation-properties>



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RAMSEY CREEK PRESERVE: MEMORIAL ECOSYSTEMS
OCONEE COUNTY | 75 ACRES

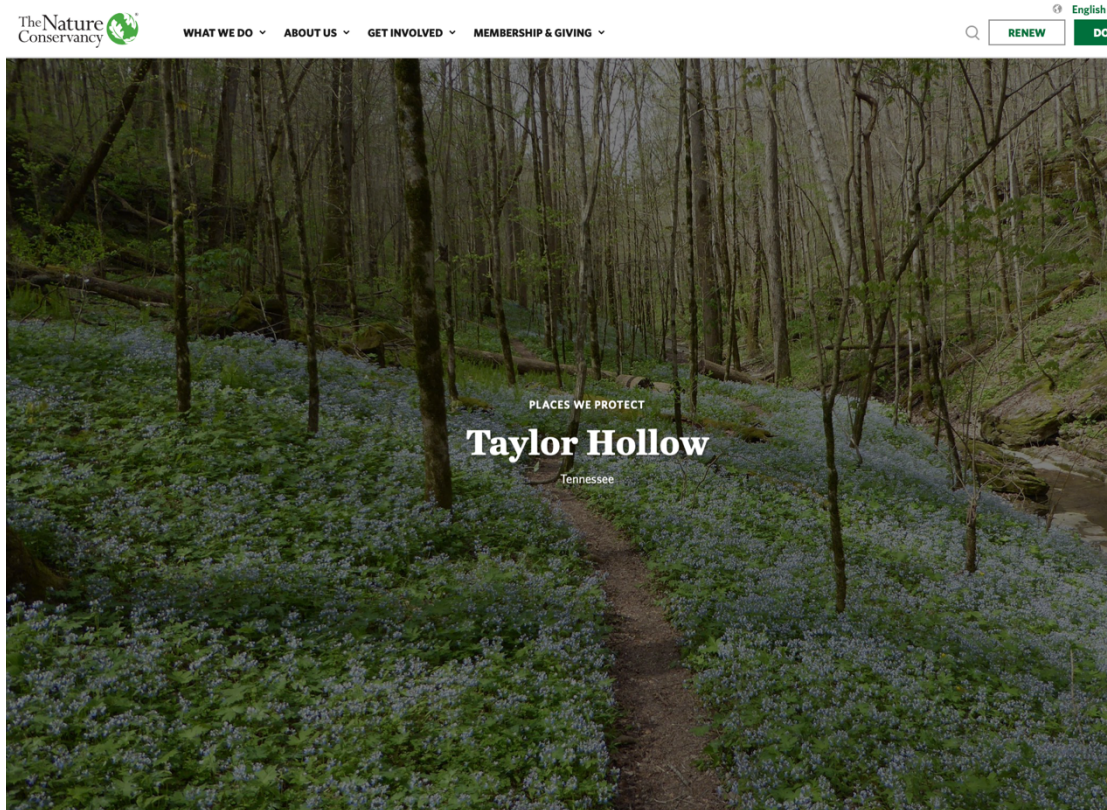
Billy and Kimberley Campbell opened their natural burial business — Memorial Ecosystems, Inc.— at Ramsey Creek Preserve in 1998, and they’ve been serving the Upstate region ever since. Their business model thrives off the notion that they are literally and figuratively connecting people to the landscape.

Whether it’s a land trust or a family trying to save their farm, natural burials — the Campbells prefer that term over “green” burials — are an economically and environmentally viable way for land to produce income without selling it to developers. As Kimberley explains, “we need as many tools in the conservation toolbox as we can get, and this gives the land a purpose.”

Billy and Kimberley have used their property to develop many of the standards and techniques for natural burial, ranging from how to preserve the body without embalming to which native plants to incorporate into the landscape.

The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee protects Larkspur Conservation Burial outside Nashville, Tennessee

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/taylor-hollow/>



The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee. Located on the northeastern edge of the Highland Rim, it contains one of the last undisturbed remnants of an historic, and once magnificent, mesophytic (moderately moist) forest system of Middle Tennessee. The land enclosed by the nature preserve was once a pasture field, and an old barn still stands on the site.

An ecological gem, Taylor Hollow is shaped by a deeply cut valley and steep slopes that are divided by a tranquil spring-fed stream. This setting features four major habitats that support aquatic and cave-dwelling creatures, and hundreds of plant species, including state-endangered Blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia verna*) and Ozark Least Trillium (*Trillium pusillum* var. *ozarkanum*) and state threatened Michigan Lily (*Lilium michiganense*) and Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*).

Alachua Land Trust of Florida protects Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery in Gainesville, Florida

<https://www.alachuaconservationtrust.org/prairie-creek-preserve-guide>



Prairie Creek Preserve

SUMMARY

Size: 606 acres

Years conserved: 2005 to 2015

Partner organizations: Florida Communities Trust, Alachua County Forever, and Paynes Prairie State Park

ABOUT THE PRESERVE

Prairie Creek Preserve and the surrounding 1,150 acres were purchased by ACT from 2005 to 2015. Over 500 acres were then added to Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, while another 96 acres were added to Alachua County Forever's Conservation Lands Program. The remainder comprises Prairie Creek Preserve, a 606-acre nature preserve that includes [Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery](#), a natural burial ground that also conserves land.

Prairie Creek drains Newnans Lake, one of the largest lakes in north Florida, towards Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park and Orange Lake. The upland areas of the preserve are made up of flatwoods, mesic and hydric hammocks, and wetlands that include cypress swamps, depression marshes, and blackwater streams. The basin provides a corridor along an important flyway through this part of the state – annual bird surveys always find large and diverse populations of migrating and local birds. Wildlife seen recently include: bald eagle, swallow-tailed kite, red-headed woodpecker, northern bobwhite, wild turkey, gopher tortoise, American alligator, golden mouse, river otter, and Florida black bear. There is also great floral diversity within the preserve's boundary, with aquatic plants such as blue-flag iris, water lilies, lotus, pickerel weed and lizard's tail in showy blossom in the spring.

Prairie Creek Preserve has a well-maintained trail network that winds through a wide variety of habitat types. Areas that were previously in planted pine are in the process of being restored with longleaf pine and wiregrass, and you may also notice signs of prescribed fire within these areas.

The Sacred Earth Foundation protects White Eagle Memorial Preserve in Goldendale, Washington

<https://www.ekone.org/sacred-earth-foundation>



Our Mission

More commonly known by the place-name Ekone Ranch, Sacred Earth Foundation (SEF) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization **with a mission** to activate children and adults to love the earth deeply and wisely, through stewardship of the Rock Creek watershed, authentic community experience, and place-based education.

SEF protects and actively stewards 1,200+ acres in the upper Rock Creek watershed, an important tributary of the Columbia River. We also share the land with hundreds of visitors each year, through Ekone Summer Camps, White Eagle Memorial Preserve conservation burial ground, school field trips, retreats, workshops, and gatherings for adults, families, and children.

STEWARDSHIP

We prioritize healthy ecosystems in all of the workings of the organization. We...

- Maintain and restore the integrity and health of the upper Rock Creek watershed
- Promote healthy habitats for native plants and animals.
- Encourage healthy forest growth through active management for diversity and resilience.
- Manage invasive species, always seeking a balanced and healthy ecosystem.
- Protect our air, waters and soils through careful management practices and ongoing learning and improvement.

Coastal Prairie Conservancy protects Blazing Star Sanctuary in the Katy Prairie Preserve in Brookshire, Texas

<https://www.coastalprairieconservancy.org/blazingstar>



WHAT WE DO

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Blazing Star Prairie & Sanctuary



Constructed wetland on the Blazing Star Prairie with adjacent cover crop rows. Image courtesy of Don Pine.

Blazing Star Prairie

Home to Texas' First Certified Conservation Cemetery

Within this preserve, [Blazing Star Sanctuary](#) is a protected 7.5-acre natural burial ground. The sanctuary is Texas' first-ever [certified conservation cemetery](#). Designed as an eco-friendly alternative to conventional cemeteries, the sanctuary prioritizes sustainability by restoring habitat and avoiding chemicals, vaults, concrete markers, and embalming. This unique space aligns with the Coastal Prairie Conservancy's commitment to land preservation while offering a place of quiet reflection and connection to nature.

For more information about Nature's Burial, visit naturesburial.org.

If you would like to view an online map of our sanctuary, visit [here](#).

Kennebec Land Trust protects Baldwin Hill Cemetery in Winthrop, Maine

<https://www.tkl.org/klt-conservation-burial-ground>



Kennebec Land Trust



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[Property Map](#) [Property List](#) [Guidelines And Policies](#) [Baldwin Hill Conservation Cemetery](#)

[Norris Island Camping](#) [Eco-Cabins At Wakefield Wildlife Sanctuary](#) [Hutchinson Canoe Rack Rental](#)



The Baldwin Hill Conservation Cemetery seeks to provide ecologically sound burial for people of all traditions and to serve as a model of green burial practices in Maine and beyond.

The 10-acre cemetery is [located in Fayette](#), Maine, adjacent to The Kennebec Land Trust's 80-acre Baldwin Hill Conservation Area. The cemetery intends to be a place where people can mark the end of a life in a meaningful way while surrounded by the beauty of the natural world. The cemetery opened for operations July 1, 2021.

Philander Chase Conservancy protects Kokosing Nature Preserve at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio

<https://www.kenyon.edu/philander-chase-conservancy/>



Green Burial

The Kokosing Nature Preserve is a conservation burial ground located in the picturesque countryside of Gambier, Ohio. A project of the Philander Chase Conservancy, Kenyon College's land trust, the Preserve offers a natural burial option on twenty-three acres of restored prairie and woodlands.

Green burial is a growing trend but harkens back to a centuries-old tradition. In a green burial, the deceased are not embalmed and caskets are not placed inside underground metal or concrete vaults. Rather, the deceased are placed in shrouds or biodegradable caskets, typically made of wood or other natural materials. Graves can be marked by natural, engraved stones that lie flat and are typically fewer than three inches above the ground.

Triangle Land Conservancy and Eno River Association protect Bluestem Conservation Cemetery in North Carolina's Piedmont Triangle

<https://www.enoriver.org/conservation-groups-permanently-protect-first-conservation-cemetery-in-central-north-carolina/>



Explore Protect Learn

Conservation groups permanently protect first conservation cemetery in central North Carolina

March 28, 2025 by Tori Velasquez



CEDAR GROVE, NC — In a unique agreement, three North Carolina-based conservation groups will permanently protect Bluestem Conservation Cemetery, the first conservation cemetery in central North Carolina and one of only 13 such cemeteries in the country. Bluestem Community has donated a conservation easement to Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC) and Eno River Association that will protect the 87-acre preserve located in Cedar Grove. TLC and Eno River Association will co-hold and monitor Bluestem's easement.

"We're excited to announce the donation of a conservation easement to two venerable land trusts, Eno River Association and Triangle Land Conservancy," said Jeff Masten and Heidi Hannapel, Bluestem Co-Directors, in a joint statement.

Upstate Forever protects Kings Mountain Conservation in South Carolina

<https://www.upstateforever.org/blog/land-conservation/businesses-thriving-on-conservation-properties>



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KINGS MOUNTAIN PRESERVE CHEROKEE COUNTY | 36 ACRES

After almost 30 years in the funeral industry, Terry Robertson knows firsthand the importance of keeping the burial process as natural as possible. “I was embalming 200-300 people a year, and it nearly killed me,” he says. In 2000, he was diagnosed with cancer likely caused by his exposure to formaldehyde in the traditional embalming process.

Terry beat the odds, but it changed him. “After that, I stayed out of prep rooms and started focusing more on serving the families,” he says. “I found I spent a lot more time outside gaining an appreciation of nature.”

Terry and his wife Amanda own [Kings Mountain Preserve](#), a green burial facility. Compared to a traditional burial — which may include disruptive and polluting elements like embalming fluid, vaults, concrete, steel, exotic hardwoods, and backhoes — a green burial has minimal impact on the environment. “It’s like your final footnote for mother nature, and a way to do it right for her,” says Terry.

Tampa Bay Conservancy protects Heartwood Preserve Conservation Cemetery in Trinity, Florida

<https://www.tampabayconservancy.org/lands-protected>



Tampa Bay Conservancy

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[Donate to Heartwood Conservation Fund](#)

Lands Protected

The TBC has worked on land protection throughout Tampa Bay, north to Citrus County and east to Polk County. Along with the





Heartwood Preserve Cemetery

On December 30, 2024 the Conservancy closed on its first donated conservation easement. It is on approximately 27 acres of the Heartwood Preserve Cemetery in Pasco County, FL. This easement guarantees that the land will be held and managed as a conservation cemetery in perpetuity. There is a \$15,000 conservation fund, \$5,000 of which goes to TBC's defense fund. There is an additional commitment for \$10,000 coming at \$5,000 over the next two years. This fund will serve to maintain the conservation easement and cover monitoring

Additional Resources

Websites

Conservation Burial Alliance <https://www.conservationalliance.org>
Green Burial Council <https://www.greenburialcouncil.org>
Ramsey Creek Preserve <https://www.memorialecosystems.com>
Natural Burial New Hampshire [Document Library] <https://www.naturalburialnh.org>
New Hampshire Funeral Resources & Education [Conservation] <https://www.nhfuneral.org>
Funerary Artisans Collective <https://www.funeraryartisanscollective.org>

Webpages

Green Burial Cemeteries in the US and Canada
<https://www.nhfuneral.org/green-burial-cemeteries-in-the-us-and-canada.html>
Reading resources <https://www.nhfuneral.org/writings.html>
Land Trust Acquisition Guide https://www.naturalburialnh.org/document_library.html

Books

Changing Landscapes by Lee Webster, *et al* [order](#)
Grave Matters by Mark Harris [order](#)
Our Last Best Act by Mallory McDuff [order](#)

Courses

Burial as a Conservation Strategy Free course for land trusts and landowners
https://www.redesigningtheend.com/courses/Burial_as_a_Conservation_Strategy
Green Burial Masterclass Paid certification course for natural cemetery operators
<https://www.redesigningtheend.com/courses/green-burial-masterclass>

Videos

Deeply Rooted — a film about conservation burial by the Conservation Burial Alliance, 2021
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8iY2INTp8w>
The Natural Burial Experience
<https://vimeo.com/769978957>
Cremation Curious
<https://vimeo.com/767868604>
The Underground Truth About Vaults
<https://vimeo.com/764619894>
Environmental Justice in the Natural Cemetery
<https://vimeo.com/812841208>
Burial as a Conservation Strategy
<https://vimeo.com/1039451360>

About the Author



As a writer, researcher, hospice volunteer, home funeral guide, conservationist, web designer, and frequent speaker on the benefits of home funerals and green burial, Lee Webster's career and volunteer service spans years in public relations and development for nonprofits, conservation groups, health agencies, private secondary schools, colleges and universities. She serves as the Executive Director of [New Hampshire Funeral Resources, Education & Advocacy](#), and President of [Natural Burial New Hampshire](#) and [White Mountain Conservation Burial](#). She is a former President and Vice Chair of Education of the [Green Burial Council](#), and was President of the [National Home Funeral Alliance](#). She is a founding member of the [National End-of-Life Doula Alliance](#), the [National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization's End-of-Life Doula Council](#), and the [Conservation Burial Alliance](#). She was also chair of the [Plymouth Conservation Commission](#), and a board member of the [New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions](#).

Lee is the author of several home funeral and green burial books, including [Changing Landscapes: Exploring the growth of ethical, compassionate, environmentally sustainable green funeral practices](#) and [The After-Death Care Advocate Handbook](#) and a contributor to [The Future of the Corpse](#), a collaborative book written with Columbia University's DeathLab. Along with co-instructor Holly Blue Hawkins, the [Green Burial Masterclass Companion](#) is now available in print. She has published articles and been interviewed or featured in pieces that can be found in various news outlets, magazines, podcasts, and blogs, including *Natural Transitions*, *American Funeral Director*, *FuneralOne*, *Funeral Business Advisor*, *Newsweek*, *PhillyVoice*, *the New Yorker*, *the New York Times*, *The New Republic*, *DeathTalk*, *EOL University*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and many others.

As an educator, she has developed several cornerstone courses for professionals and lay people seeking to learn more about green funerals and burials, including [Green Funeral Service](#), [Doulas and After-Death Care: Bridging Both Worlds](#), [Burial as a Conservation Strategy](#), and [Hospice and Home Funerals In-Service Series](#). Co-taught with Holly Blue Hawkins through [Redesigning the End](#) is the 12-week online [Green Burial Masterclass](#) that covers the technical and ethical aspects of natural burial. She also teaches [You Shall Surely Bury: Jewish and Green Cemeteries](#) with Jewish scholars Holly Blue Hawkins and David Zinner. She guest lectures and teaches frequently at colleges, universities, and life-long learning programs, including OSHER at Dartmouth College, OLLI at UNH, and Dartmouth's Aging Resource Center.

Webster is the 2024 recipient of the [Green Burial Council Leadership Award](#). The award is presented to an individual, organization, or business that has demonstrated foresight, innovation, and extraordinary commitment to the environment through sustainability and attainability in the area of human death-care practice.

She is currently working with groups to open a conservation level burial ground in New Hampshire while writing a book about natural and conservation burial.