

# **GEORGIA CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

## **CONSERVATION RESERVE FUND (CRF) Policy and Procedures Guidelines**

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the reserve fund is to conserve the land and waters within the Town of Georgia for agricultural, forest, wildlife, scenic, recreational, or natural area use pursuant to 24 VSA ~2804.

### **ADMINISTRATION**

The Georgia Conservation Commission will evaluate requests and make written recommendations to the Select Board for eligible applicants. Ultimate responsibility for the disposition of monies from the fund will rest with the Georgia Select Board.

Proposals for use of the fund shall be submitted on the “Request for Funds” form to the Georgia Conservation Commission through its chair or through the Town Clerk’s office.

Organizations and agencies such as but not limited to the Vermont Land Trust, Lake Champlain Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Regional Planning Commission, the UVM Extension Service, and the Franklin County Conservation District often are available for technical and financial assistance.

### **USE OF THE FUND**

Uses of the fund may include but are not limited to the purchase or assistance in acquiring a right of first refusal, options to purchase, long term leases, conservation restrictions (development rights), and land in fee. The fund may be used in a number of different ways and is not restricted to the following examples.

- For technical assistance including site work, appraisals, legal assistance, and land surveys to landowners who want to permanently protect natural, scenic, or recreational resources important to the Town of Georgia. Funds used for these purposes shall be reimbursable to the fund if conservation is not achieved.
- To provide local matching funds as required for leveraging of private, state or federal grants for significant conservation projects. For example, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Freeman Foundation, or the Federal Farms for the Future Program.
- To purchase resource lands or conservation easements in a Georgia-only project, in cooperation with Georgia landowners and/or nonprofit organizations.

There are many creative and flexible ways to protect critical resource lands and waters through various conservation projects. The Select Board and Conservation Commission will take advantage of new opportunities as they arise.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

Any Georgia landowner or his/her representative is eligible to submit an application. Funds may be granted to proposals, which meet the purpose and guidelines described in this document.

## **REVIEW PROCESS FOR FUNDING DECISION**

- Landowners may approach the Conservation Commission for assistance with conservation plans. Likewise, the GCC may take the initiative and establish contact with the landowner.
- The Conservation Commission will review all requests for use of the fund to make sure they meet the guidelines. Recommendation will be contingent on funding availability.
- If a project meets the guidelines, the Commission will make a recommendation to the Select Board regarding the project.
- The Select Board will then make a final decision regarding the project or if needed, ask for more information, or decline the use of Conservation Funds for the project.
- If the GCC disapproves of the project, the landowner can appeal to the Select Board who can override the GCC recommendation.

## **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

- Projects that conserve agricultural lands
- Projects that conserve productive forest lands
- Projects that conform to the town plan
- Projects adjacent to existing town land or public lands or other conserved lands
- Projects that protect watersheds and water resources
- Projects that protect or conserve lands supporting threatened or endangered natural communities, plants or wildlife habitats.
- Projects with existing or potential educational use
- Projects with historic, scenic, and recreational use or access

## **BENEFITS**

Use of the Fund must result in at least one of the following benefits to the Town of Georgia:

- Protection of agricultural land that will help ensure the continuing viability of farms and agricultural enterprises in the town.
- Protection of the town's rural character and scenic open space.
- Provision of public outdoor recreation for the residents of the town.
- Preservation of natural habitats for plants and animals.
- Prevention of excessive increases in public service costs.