

How Utah Open Lands Has Protected Over 64,000 Acres

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In this month's blog post, we are excited to feature an interview with Wendy Fisher— executive director of Utah Open Lands. Utah Open Lands is an accredited land trust conservation nonprofit that has been preserving, protecting and stewarding open space since 1990 in order to maintain Utah's natural heritage and quality of life for present and future generations. Their vision is to create a conservation conscious public that respects the delicate balance of heritage, biodiversity, restoration and resources of the land. In this month's blog, we asked Wendy to share more about Utah Open Lands, how they operate, and how we can support their goals:

Before we dive in too deeply, can you tell us what a conservation easement is?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement entered into voluntarily between a landowner and Utah Open Lands in order to protect the open land values of the land forever. At the heart of a conservation easement is the intention to safeguard the land for its conservation value. The terms of a conservation easement are negotiated between the landowner and Utah Open Lands to ensure protection of the land in its open conservation state while allowing for continued landowner uses.



How might a Utah landowner start the process of conserving their land from development - who could they reach out to and what incentives might they receive?

A landowner in Utah interested in conserving their land has various resources they can turn to from the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, to a land trust like Utah Open Lands. The very first step in the process of conserving their land from development is to talk with their family and begin a process of envisioning what they want to ensure remains undeveloped. Reaching out to a land trust, like Utah Open Lands, a landowner can learn about various planning tools and funding sources to help them protect their land. The process takes time, especially when seeking funding for a conservation easement, so landowners need to have patience in the process to protect their land.

How does Utah Open Lands help ensure the health of Utah's natural ecosystems?

Utah Open Lands has 36 years of experience in land conservation. This experience includes numerous land management techniques and studies that have demonstrated how to improve and enhance the conservation values found on the lands we protect. From restoration to aspen forest health, Utah Open Lands has developed monitoring protocols and ground-proofed land management techniques that ensure the health of the lands we conserve. We always say that the conservation easement is just the beginning, the ongoing stewardship of these landscapes is critical to the health of the natural ecosystems we preserve.

What are some ways communities can get involved with Utah Open Lands projects?

Fundamentally, communities can make open space a priority. By letting elected leaders know that open space protection is important to the community, the opportunity for Utah Open Lands to protect treasured landscapes increases. From volunteer activities, like weed pulls, to

donating to a specific land saving campaign, community members can get involved in protecting the lands they love through Utah Open Lands.

What are some of the biggest projects that Utah Open Lands has done?

Utah Open Lands spearheaded one of the largest open space fundraising campaigns when we protected the 1300 acre Bonanza Flat Conservation Area. We have land protection projects that range from a 14,000 acre ranch to a 3 acre natural area in the heart of Sugarhouse. We consider our biggest projects to be those that have created the biggest precedent. Protecting the Galena Soo'nkahni Preserve along the Jordan River, working with eight Utah Tribes on these ancestral lands, was definitely one of the biggest projects for Utah Open Lands.

How can Utahns best support Utah Open Lands?

Letting your community leaders know that open space is important to you as a Utahn is probably one of the best supports for Utah Open Lands. Our open land in our communities will not be protected by accident-it has to be a deliberate act of conservation. In order for Utah to sustain protecting its open lands, every Utahn has to let leaders know that they expect open space protection and want their leaders to support it. Also if you become a member of Utah Open Lands it adds to the collective voice calling for land protection in the state.

What's coming up for Utah Open Lands in the next year?

Utah Open Lands is currently working on our Heartland of the Heber Valley campaign to protect land in Wasatch County that encompasses tremendous water, soil and working land values. We are also working on recreational open space projects in Grand County and Salt Lake County. Land conservation takes time and Utah Open Lands is laying a foundation this next year for land management practices and new regional conservation partnerships that we see as being key conservation strategies for the future.

To learn more about Utah Open Lands, visit their website [here](#).