

## **The Couchiching Conservancy's Record-keeping Policy**

May 2008

### **Introduction**

This record-keeping policy establishes a framework for record keeping at The Couchiching Conservancy. It incorporates the requirements of the Canadian Land Trust Alliance (CLTA) Standards and Practices (Sections 2D, 6B, 9G, and Land Transactions sections 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12).

The purpose of this policy is to ensure proper risk management, to meet the legal requirements set out by CLTA and to preserve historic documentation to permit the continued success of The Couchiching Conservancy. This goal will be achieved by regulating the maintenance, retention and disposal of records produced by and provided to The Couchiching Conservancy. This policy will also ensure that the Conservancy's records are not destroyed prematurely and are kept available for evidentiary purposes, and will avoid potential administrative or legal problems.

The key requirements of this policy include:

- Identifying significant records and creating and keeping proper and adequate records of The Couchiching Conservancy's business activities to ensure sufficient evidence of its performance of those functions;
- Retaining and disposing of records in accordance with approved retention and disposal schedules;
- Supporting record-keeping programs with clear policies and procedures.

This policy should be reviewed at least every 5 years to ensure that the policies stated below are current and still meet the requirements of The Couchiching Conservancy. The Couchiching Conservancy will continue to investigate updated methods for document management and will implement these as they are necessary.

### **1.0 Policy Statement**

1.1 The Couchiching Conservancy's record-keeping program will support current best practice standards and will include clear and complete records.

1.2 All Couchiching Conservancy staff, board members and contract workers are required to comply with administrative requirements to create, manage and protect records, and to make them accessible.

1.3 Any document created or received by an employee, board member or contract staff belongs to The Couchiching Conservancy and not the individual.

1.4 This policy applies to all aspects of The Couchiching Conservancy's activities and incorporates hard copy and electronic records.

1.5 This policy outlines the management of all secured documents to ensure that they will not succumb to fire, flooding, mould, deterioration or tampering.

## **2.0 Access to Records**

2.1 Conservancy staff may access records depending on the relevance of the records to the performance of their responsibilities, privacy considerations, and other specific considerations where confidentiality may restrict the access to records. Authorization to access these records may be granted by the Executive Director.

2.2 Staff is not permitted to give access to Conservancy records to unauthorized persons or agencies, especially when relating to species at risk or other element occurrences and personnel files.

2.3 The Couchiching Conservancy must disclose records to authorized agencies for processes such as audits. Request for confidential documents must be made in writing.

2.4 Conservancy records must remain available and accessible when needed for administrative requirements, daily work-related tasks or accountability requirements.

## **3.0 Retention, Storage and Disposal of Records**

3.1 The Conservancy's irreplaceable documents will be stored in a fireproof box on site. These documents will also be scanned and transferred into an Adobe or similar document management system. These digital files will be kept on the Executive Director's computer and a back-up file will be stored on an external hard drive. Additional details, including record type and duration are identified in section 4.0 Types of Documents.

3.2 The office computers will be linked together on a system network. This will enable each computer access to a single external hard-drive. At the end of each week, each staff member working on a computer will store their documents on the external hard-drive. The external hard-drives will rotate weekly and one will always be kept off-site, at the residence of the Executive Director or with the office accountant or with a full-time employee. Each staff member is responsible for backing up their computer(s) on a weekly basis.

- 3.3 The external hard-drives will be burned onto a compact disk, or the most current technology available on a yearly basis, so that files can be managed in a year-to-year fashion. The external hard-drive will be purged either after 5 years or depending on space availability on the drive.
- 3.4 All staff will be responsible for the management of their day-to-day lower priority files.
- 3.5 All documents which are relevant to land acquisition must be kept on file and in a secure location *until* a) the property has been transferred, or b) the property has been sold. These documents include surveys, Deeds, Conservation Easement Agreements, etc.
- 3.6 Documents related to easements must be kept for the duration of the easement, and must be accessible for the yearly monitoring reports and updates to the property. Easement records must identify any changes in landowner or land uses.
- 3.7 Contract information will be kept for the duration of the contract, and an additional 5 years.
- 3.8 Records such as tax-related information will be kept for the duration specified for each government agency (7 years) or grant donor (variable).
- 3.9 Records with no value may be destroyed or recycled at any time. These records only need to be retained for a very limited period of time and include announcements of social events, leaflets, flyers, and copies or extracts of documents sent only for reference.
- 3.10 Where the official version of a record is verified as already being maintained in the Conservancy's record-keeping system a copy may be destroyed at any time.
- 3.11 All digital photographs will be transferred to the external hard-drive.
- 3.12 Storage of all paper documents should occur on acid free, pH neutral photo paper with long lasting colour ink.
- 3.13 Destruction of any files will be done by shredding and recycling of the documents in question.
- 3.14 The Couchiching Conservancy will also make a point of requesting digital copies of documents such as for appraisals and surveys whenever possible.
- 3.15 Each property owned or managed by The Couchiching Conservancy will have a checklist which will identify that each of the records required for property management is available. This checklist will also include the location of the document if not in the property folder.

#### **4.0 Types of Documents**

All types of documents foreseen to be managed by The Couchiching Conservancy are listed below. The management of each group of documents has been outlined, as well as the length of time each group should be kept. A table identifying the management of each record can be found in Appendix B.

##### **Organizational Records**

The following organizational records shall be scanned, if necessary, and saved onto an external hard-drive. The working files will be stored in an easy to access manner, such as within the office files.

- Incorporation documents
- By-laws
- Board records and minutes
- Policies and procedures
- Insurance documents
- Charitable status documentation
- Personnel Records
- Correspondence (including significant email)
- Information regarding volunteers
- History
- Canada Revenue Agency's Charitable Information Return

##### **Financial Records**

The working files of these documents (until end of fiscal year) will be maintained in a secure location on-site. Until financial records have been stored in Quickbooks or a similar digital storage system, the files should be stored in a secure location. Once an electronic copy exists, the paper copy can be accessibly and securely stored on-site until the year's end. After the year-end, the documents will be stored on-site and will be kept for 7 years.

- Membership records (history, solicitations, pledges, donations, relationships)
- Accounting records
- Annual reports
- Audits
- Bills\*
- Check stubs\*
- Donation records\*
- Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) rulings, letters\*

\*This type of document is the only document that does not have an immediate digital file and must be managed more carefully than others in this list until a digital copy has been made.

All documents being destroyed which contain sensitive information such as account records or membership information must be shredded and recycled to ensure the privacy and safety of this information.

### **Land Transaction Records**

The following land transaction records shall be stored in a fireproof box. The paper copies will be stored securely on-site once the document has been scanned. These documents will only be destroyed if the property is no longer part of The Couchiching Conservancy's portfolio.

- Deeds
- Conservation Easements\*
- Contracts\*
- Closing papers
- Title policies
- Leases
- Appraisals
- Ecological Gifts documentation
- Environmental audits
- Site inspections
- Significant letters and correspondence

\*This type of document is the only document that does not have an immediate digital file and must be managed more carefully than others in this list until a digital copy has been made.

## **Stewardship Records**

The following stewardship records shall be scanned where necessary (documents with signatures) and stored on an external hard-drive. The working copies of these documents will be stored in an easily accessible location within the office.

- Baseline Documentation Reports\*
- Monitoring Reports\*
- Management Plans
- Biological Inventories
- Violations\*
- Amendments\*
- Surveys
- Splits and changes in ownership
- Correspondence with landowners
- Digital photograph records

\*This type of document is the only document that does not have an immediate digital file and must be managed more carefully than others in this list until a digital copy has been made.

The following stewardship records shall be secured safely on-site.

- Signs
- Maps

## Definitions

**Back-up:** term used for securing computer documents and information onto a separate file, drive or unit (Compact Disk, Universal Serial Bus).

**Digital records:** any record that has been saved in a digital format. This may include scanned copies of Easement Agreements, Baseline Documentation Reports, digital photographs or email. It is important that the software on which the digital records are saved (cd, disk) be kept compatible with current technology.

**External hard-drive:** device which stores digitally encoded data and is designed for large storage capacity. The external hard-drive has now been created to be a small portable unit which can easily be removed from the site and stored in a safe location. All documents which are being saved on an external hard-drive should be updated with any computer changes of the organization.

**Irreplaceable documents:** type of document that cannot be or is difficult to replace. This may include, but is not limited to, documents such as personnel records, CRA letters and rulings, Conservation Easement Agreements, and other documents that require landowner signature and consent, such as Baseline Documentation Reports and Conservation Easement Amendments.

**Record:** a record is defined as recorded information in any form, including data in computer systems, created or received and maintained by an organization or person in the transaction of business, and kept as evidence of, and support for, the organization's business activities and the good conduct of its affairs.

**Working file:** a project file that is used daily by The Couchiching Conservancy staff. These documents should be easily available to staff members. (i.e. active leases, maps or site evaluations)

## References

Financial Accounting Standards Board FASB. No date. Statements—Full Text, Summaries, and Status. <http://72.3.243.42/st/test.shtml> Viewed online 11/07.

The Land Trust Standards and Practices Guide Book. A companion to the Land Trust Alliance's (U.S.) Standards and Practices. 2004. [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org)

O'Donnell, Mary Kay, Karen Cooper. What Makes a Good Recordkeeping Policy- Canadian Land Trust Alliance Conference. 2007.



**Appendix A**

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Scanned</b>	<b>External Hard-drive</b>	<b>Secure location</b>	<b>Quickbooks/ similar file storage system</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Organizational Records</b>					
Incorporation documents	✓	✓			Perpetuity
By-laws	✓	✓			Perpetuity
Board records and minutes	✓	✓			Perpetuity
Policies and procedures	✓	✓			Perpetuity
Insurance documents	✓	✓			Perpetuity
Charitable status documentation	✓	✓			Perpetuity
Personnel Records	✓	✓			Perpetuity
Correspondence (including significant email)	✓	✓			Perpetuity
Information regarding volunteers	✓	✓			Perpetuity
History	✓	✓			Perpetuity
Canada Revenue Agency's Charitable Information Return	✓	✓			Perpetuity
<b>Financial Records</b>					
Membership records (history, solicitations, pledges, donations, relationships)			✓**	✓	7 years
Accounting records			✓**	✓	7 years
Annual reports			✓**	✓	7 years
Audits			✓**	✓	7 years
Bills*			✓**	✓	7 years
Check stubs*			✓**	✓	7 years
Donation records*			✓**	✓	7 years
Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) rulings, letters*			✓**	✓	7 years

<b>Organizational Records</b>	<b>Scanned</b>	<b>External Hard-drive</b>	<b>Secure location</b>	<b>Quickbooks/ similar file storage system</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Land Transaction Records</b>					
Deeds	✓				Until transfer
Conservation Easements*	✓				Until transfer
Contracts*	✓				Until transfer
Closing papers	✓				Until transfer
Title policies	✓				Until transfer
Leases	✓				Until transfer
Appraisals	✓				Until transfer
Ecological Gifts documentation	✓				Until transfer
Environmental audits	✓				Until transfer
Site inspections	✓				Until transfer
Significant letter and correspondence	✓				Until transfer
<b>Stewardship Records</b>					
Baseline Documentation Reports*	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Monitoring Reports*	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Management Plans	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Biological Inventories	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Violations*	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Amendments*	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Surveys	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Splits and changes in ownership	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Correspondence with landowners	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
Digital photograph records	✓	✓	✓		Until transfer
<b>Other</b>					
Signs			✓		
Maps			✓		

\*This type of document is the only document that does not have an immediate digital file and must be managed more carefully than others in this list until a digital copy has been made.

\*\* Until end of fiscal year

Approved by Board May 26, 2008  
The Couchiching Conservancy