RCO Baseline Inventory Requirements

Completing a baseline inventory allows you to record and characterize the environmental aspects of the property at the time of easement acquisition. An inventory provides the basis for future easement monitoring and, if necessary, enforcement. It is particularly important in court in the event of an easement violation. A baseline inventory also is required by the Internal Revenue Service for any tax-deductible easement gifts.

*RCO requires that the baseline inventory be completed on all properties with a conservation easement.* If the baseline inventory is not filed as an attachment to the conservation easement, it must be referenced in the conservation easement as to its existence and whereabouts. In determining where the original baseline inventory will reside, you may want to consider who will hold the easement and who may be undertaking future compliance monitoring and enforcement activities. RCO must be provided with a copy of the baseline inventory.

Baseline data should characterize and document the condition of property features protected or affected by the easement terms. The baseline inventory should be descriptive and include maps, plans, photographs (aerials or ground), and narratives. Documentation methodology should be objective and reproducible so that future monitoring can be repeated in a comparable manner. Include ecological, biological, geological, land-use, and other property features. The level of detail for each category may vary depending on physical land features and the specific terms of the easements. Generally, the more restrictive the terms of the easements, the more detailed the documentation should be.

**Using your own format.** If you choose to use your own format, the baseline inventory must include the following:

1. U.S. Geological Survey quad map (1:24,000, 7.5”), showing property lines and other contiguous or nearby protected areas, and a parcel map or county assessors map showing property boundaries.
2. A map of the area drawn to scale showing all existing human-made improvements or incursions (such as roads, buildings, fences, or structures), vegetation and wildlife (species locations, breeding and roosting areas, and migration routes), land-use history (including present uses and recent past disturbances), and distinct natural features (such as large trees and riparian areas).
3. A narrative description of the property protected by the conservation easement (at or near the time of easement purchase). Include habitat values, unique and existing land features, natural resources (include vegetation, fish, and other wildlife), water quality and quantity, and historic and current land uses.
4. Photographs (black and white) taken at permanent photograph point locations on the property that adequately depict the conservation easement area and natural resources to be protected. The photographs should document the condition of the resource at or near the time of easement purchase. Include aerial photographs with property boundaries indicated (if possible).

The Land Trust Alliance also has resources about baseline inventories, monitoring, and stewardship of easements that may be helpful: [www.landtrustalliance.org/](http://www.landtrustalliance.org/).