

Gustavus Natural Lands Lease Project Last updated: 2024-1030

Please Note: *This proposal concerns 235 acres of privately-owned lands, commonly referred to as the Golf Course, Gustavus Beach uplands, and the Gustavus Meadows, and is outside the nearby lands currently held in title by The Nature Conservancy (Gustavus Forelands).*

I Project Summary

Title: Gustavus Natural Lands Lease Project

Total Amount Requested: \$25,000

Total Cost of Project: \$30,000 (20% match from private funds)

Pursuant to City of Gustavus Resolution CY24-12 Establishing a Conservation Lands Committee, this project seeks to secure continuing public recreation and wildlife habitation on lands currently held privately by the DeBoer family.

A five-year lease of the property will allow the City, landowners, and project partners time to investigate, pursue, and obtain funding for an (up to) five-year temporary conservation easement (CE), while preserving the land's natural character for future conservation plans with the City and landowner(s). It will also provide protection from near term development or sale. The temporary CE, sometimes referred to as a lease in this request, will be held by the Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT) for the benefit of the community of Gustavus.

Once temporary protection is established, a plan can be developed to bring the property under permanent conservation status, should all parties agree, and sufficient funding is obtained.

This request will provide funding for the initial two years of the five-year temporary conservation easement. Additional years of lease payments (if needed) will be requested and/or negotiated after the first two-year period, and contingent on funding availability from various sources.

II Project Organization

This Endowment Fund Grant request originates from the City of Gustavus Conservation Lands Advisory Committee, chaired by Michael Taylor, and will be brought to the full City Council at the November 4, 2024 work meeting. If the grant request is approved at the November 11, 2024 General Meeting, it will move into the normal procedure of review and evaluation by the City's Endowment Fund Work Group.

The principal partner in the project is the Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT) of Juneau, directed by Margaret Custer. The organization has worked to permanently conserve over 3,700 acres of wetlands, recreation lands, wildlife habitats, open space, and subsistence lands throughout Southeast Alaska's communities since 1995 and brings considerable expertise and funding acumen to the project.

III Project Description

Why a land conservation project?

Due to the vision and foresight of Morgan DeBoer initially establishing the Gustavus Golf Course open space and to the extraordinary generosity of the DeBoer family, citizens and visitors alike have enjoyed access to and happy usage of these private lands for many years of low impact recreational activities. But there is no guarantee this arrangement will persist into the future.

Also, a land conservation project is congruent with Gustavus community values as evidenced by the first line of the Gustavus Vision Statement, which is read-aloud at every formal public meeting of the City Government: "We envision a distinctive community: That prospers while and by protecting its natural resources".

Furthermore, of the 183 respondents to the Sentenium Community-wide Survey of 2017, the **principal** reasons for appreciating the Gustavus community included: Scenic Beauty 86.9%, Outdoor Recreational Opportunity 80.9%, Coexistence with Wildlife 80.6%, Quiet 77.5%, and

a Pristine Environment 75.4%. This shows an exceptional community commitment to conservation values and the natural environment.

Why this particular acreage for conservation consideration?

Suitability: Exceptional qualification for high value public recreation and wildlife habitat lands to be preserved

Sustainability: Historic recreational uses of the land without interference or disruption

Accessibility: Existing public uses by all age groups and across all demographics of the Gustavus population, from babes to seniors, and by locals and visitors alike

Opportunity: Connection to an expert (and enthusiastic) partner for a conservation project with the Southeast Alaska Land Trust

Availability: Land owners are currently amenable to such a project concept

IV Project Goals and Objectives

Milestones for the 2024 Endowment Fund Grant for the Conservation Lands Advisory Committee (CLAC) to initiate a lease to the DeBoer property and work toward obtaining a permanent conservation easement (CE) include:

2024-Nov CLAC report to Council, Council EFG Work Group session

2024-Dec EFG Awards announced 12/09, Project start-up work 12/10

2025-Jan Draft lease agreement with landowners, attorney review

2025-Feb initiate lease agreement, and implement

2025-Mar 1st Quarter CLAC report to Council, 1st \$10 K lease payment

2025-Apr Begin 5-year temporary CE plan with landowners

2025-May plan summer work

2025-June 2nd quarterly CLAC report to Council

2025-July – October Develop Plan to apply for 5-year temporary CE

2025-Dec 2nd \$10K lease payment, final 2024 Endowment Fund Grant report to Council

2026-Jan-July Develop plan to apply for permanent CE

V. Budget

2 Land lease payments @\$9,400 per year	18,800
Site protection project start-up costs (including 20% private match of \$5,000)	11,200
Project Total	\$30,000

Land Lease Budget detail

The annual lease payment amount is calculated based on an analysis of natural resource protection value from a recent comparable project conducted by Southeast Alaska Land Trust of \$30-\$40 per acre per year. This total assumes a 235-acre interest encumbered at \$40 per acre.

Start-up costs include:

Attorney review fees, title research, project siting work, completion of a Baseline Documentation Report (BDR) for monitoring and stewardship, grant and land administration, monitoring & enforcement costs, grant filing costs. Most or all of the BDR can be reused in the establishment of a permanent conservation easement on the property at a later date. A reliable and complete survey is required for all SEALT conservation projects, but as this lease is meant to establish temporary protections while a permanent CE is scoped, negotiated, and secured, SEALT may defer those additional start-up costs to year 3. Property signs will be installed at customary access points to indicate public access and allowed uses consistent with the CE; this is likely to cost more than what is proposed below, but SEALT will support the overage. An estimate for the first two years of these costs as the terms of a CE are negotiated, is:

18,800	2 X \$9,400 lease payments
2,310	Legal review
3,000	Baseline Documentation Report
1,000	Title work, GIS, and project planning
4,000	Monitoring, stewardship, and enforcement
<u>890</u>	Contribution towards property access/use signs
\$30,000	

Deliverables:

A two- to five-year hold on any development on the leased lands,
A scoping document for the project,
A Baseline Documentation Report,
A temporary Conservation Easement (lease agreement), and
Recommendations and/or a plan developed in partnership with the City
for funding and securing a permanent Conservation Easement.

The City Conservation Lands Advisory Committee, chaired by Michael Taylor, will report quarterly to the City Council of Gustavus. Project Contact and Liaison is Susan Warner, Committee and Council member.