



Frequently Asked Questions About Conservation Burial Grounds



Photo courtesy of Ramsey Creek Preserve, Westminster, SC

Q. Why do conservation burial cemeteries choose to partner with land trust entities?

A. Regardless of the size or scope of either the land trust or the conservation burial ground, partnership is essential to ensuring adherence to best conservation practices and being able to offer the highest quality of service to bereaved families. The partnership is mutual in attracting donors who value the benefits of natural burial and choose to use their dollars to leave a lasting, environmentally responsible conservation legacy.

Q. What differentiates conservation burial cemeteries from other green burial cemeteries?

A. The primary characteristics of a conservation burial ground include minimal burial density within the cemetery, management of the land with defined conservation goals, and operation on protected land affiliated in some way with a land trust or other conservation entity.

Q. What is a deed restriction?

A. Deed restrictions are private agreements listed in the deed that restrict the use of the land.

Q. What is a conservation easement?

A. The [Land Trust Alliance](#), the national leader in policy, standards, education and training for the land trust community, defines a conservation easement as "*a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values.*"

Q. How do land trusts work with cemeteries?

A. Most land trusts are not involved with the actual day-to-day operations of a cemetery, which may be operated as a for-profit or nonprofit enterprise. The level of involvement is determined by the initial agreement and may entail something as simple as annual monitoring or as elaborate as managing the property with the exception of the cemetery business itself. Land trusts are easement holders or, in some cases, owners of conservation cemeteries. As easement holders, land trusts annually monitor the conservation values of the property and are not involved in management decision-making. Some land trusts are owners and operators of conservation burial grounds, where they provide conservation management and property oversight. The land trust to cemetery relationship provides opportunities to increase public awareness of conservation needs plus an avenue for donor connection to the land in a meaningful way.

Q. What land trust entities are likely potential partners for conservation burial cemeteries?

A. Land trust entities with the interest and capacity to partner with and support conservation burial projects come in many forms, from local conservation groups to state and regional land trusts to national chapters of prominent organizations, such as [The Nature Conservancy](#). Some local government partners also participate in conservation burial as conservation easement holders and monitors.

Q. What is the difference between the names — a conservation cemetery, a preserve, and a burial ground?

A. These name choices are personal preferences of the owners. Some stewards prefer not to encourage the perception that natural burials are anything like lawn cemeteries. Some burial grounds are located on, in, or near nature preserves, so it makes sense to incorporate the concept in the name.

Q. What is the ideal recommended number of graves per acre?

A. Burial density—the size, depth, ratio, and distance of burial plots from each other in an acre of cemetery—is determined by several factors that make a realistic estimate difficult, chief among them the naturally occurring terrain, including soil composition which in turn affects water run-off, root involvement, slope, and other impediments. The Conservation Burial Alliance recommends burial density no greater than 300/acre, although most have a much lower burial density. A traditional cemetery buries between 1000 - 1200 burials/acre.

Q. What is restoration and why is it important to conservation cemeteries?

A. Ecological restoration of potential burial grounds and their natural landscape and habitat is undertaken for various reasons, including making it safe for humans, wildlife, and plant communities. Recovery from natural disasters, man-made destruction, deforestation, and pollution is essential to

returning the landscape and its inhabitants, flora and fauna, to health and natural balance to maximize the value of the land being conserved.

Q. What is an Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM)?

A. An IPM is a plan developed by a cemetery that seeks to prevent, monitor, and attempt to control nuisance animals and insects without the use of toxic pesticides to the extent that it is feasible.

Q. Where can I get help with creating a natural resources inventory for my property?

A. Many university natural resources and environmental studies departments assist groups in finding students being trained in preparing natural resource inventories as part of their undergraduate or graduate studies. Often an inventory can be completed in a semester for a small fee or at no cost. You can also call your county extension agent or state environmental protection agency office for referrals. Land trust and government partners may have advice for developing an inventory and conservation goals for a property.

Q. What methods are acceptable for ridding my property of invasive species?

A. Three methods are available for removing invasive plants—mechanical, chemical and biological. Before attempting to rid your property of invasives, be aware that permits may be required and a broader knowledge base may be helpful in making your efforts successful. Check with your local extension agency and local land trust partner for comprehensive information applicable to your region.