



INTERNATIONAL
LAND CONSERVATION
NETWORK

NEWS FROM OUR PARTNERS

European Union landowners are ready for conservation easements and the ENPLC is responding

Carolina Halevy – ILCN Regional Representative for Europe

October 26, 2023

In the United States and across many parts of the world, conservation easements are a well-established and highly impactful tool for protecting private land. In Europe, conservationists are only beginning to explore the mechanism's potential. The LIFE+ project [Land is For Ever](#) confirmed that landowners in the European Union (EU) identified conservation easements as an intriguing conservation tool and are eager to explore its application, meaning that expanding access to the region could be catalytic for private land conservation.

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and an easement holder, restricting land-use rights on a property to ensure long-term health and biodiversity value. When the agreement is made, the restricted-use rights are transferred to an easement holder—typically a public agency or conservation organization—and recorded as part of the property title. This means that the easement stays with the property even if it is sold or inherited.

Conservation easements create a symbiotic relationship between private landowners, biodiversity, and land-conservation organizations. In the US, their versatility makes them easy for land trusts to apply across varied contexts; tied-in tax incentives make them appealing for landowners and can help dissuade development; and their connection to the land, rather than the landowner, makes them enduring and ensures natural resources are protected. In the past 40 years, more than 1,000 land trusts used easements to help landowners permanently protect over 61 million hectares in the United States, according to Renee Kivikko, vice president of education for the Land Trust Alliance.

Despite their proven utility, Europe lags behind other regions in adopting conservation easements, though not for a lack of private interest or applicability. Two recent studies, as well as cases from ELCN partners, have shown that conservation easements are a viable option within European Union legal systems.¹²

The LIFE ENPLC team is doing more than just surveying the landscape. It has waded into the water, working to implement easements on 10 sites across seven member states, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, France, Sweden, and the Czech Republic. Several of these easements have been signed and the

¹ Račinska, I., Vahtrus, S. (2018). The Use of Conservation Easements in the European Union. Report to NABU Federal Association.

² Račinska, I.; Halevy, C.; Disselhoff, T. (2021). The current and potential use of easements as a nature conservation tool in the European Union.

team has been documenting the cases in a series of reports. It also plans to present its findings in an upcoming webinar, in partnership with the ILCN.

LIFE ENPLC will release a report synthesizing its findings later this month, which will be available online. A registration link for the webinar, to be held on December 12, 2023 will be shared via email by the ILCN shortly.

Have news? Share updates from your organization or country by emailing ilcn@lincolinst.edu.