



LAND ACQUISITION GRANT PROGRAM

Baseline Inventory Documentation Guidance

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

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Introduction

OWEB requires land acquisition grantees to develop Baseline Inventory Documentation (a “Baseline”) for all properties in which OWEB invests grant funds. A Baseline is incorporated by reference into a conservation easement granted to OWEB by an acquisition grant recipient in exchange for funds to purchase a property in fee simple, or a conservation easement purchased from a private landowner by an acquisition grant recipient.

A Baseline records a property’s existing physical conditions, natural and human-made, at the time the conservation easement is executed. The information provides the baseline for measuring future changes in the property’s conservation values and other features. When OWEB grants funds for the purchase of a fee simple interest in property that requires significant restoration, the Baseline must also include information about the intended restored conditions (see Description of Restored Conditions, below). Refer to OWEB’s Conservation Easement Guidance for information about purchasing a conservation easement on a property that requires significant restoration. The guidance is available on the [Land Acquisition Grants](#) page on the OWEB website.

The contents of a Baseline depend on the terms of the conservation easement, the property’s features, and the conservation objectives for which OWEB has awarded funding. At a minimum, a Baseline must include the items below, to be approvable by OWEB. Additional information may need to be included in the Baseline to meet Federal Treasury requirements. Check with the Land Trust Alliance for additional details regarding baselines: <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/>.

OWEB encourages grant applicants to include the cost of preparing a Baseline in their proposed project budget if necessary to ensure that adequate resources are available to produce a document that meets OWEB’s requirements.

Minimum Baseline Requirements

Grantees may use the assistance of project partners and other parties to complete a Baseline. However, the grantee must be the author or a co-author of the Baseline, is responsible for working directly with OWEB for review and approval of the Baseline, and is required to sign the document.

The information in the Baseline must clearly differentiate the conservation easement area from the property when a conservation easement does not encumber an entire property. Where necessary for context and completeness, the Baseline should include information about both the easement area and the property, when the two differ.

I. General Contents

- Purpose of the conservation easement
- Date Baseline was prepared
- Date of Baseline site visit and photographs, if different than Baseline preparation date
- Baseline authorship and authorship qualifications
- Landowner contact information (name, address, phone numbers)
- Land manager contact information, if different than landowner

- Physical address of the property, including the county
- Directions to the property from the nearest town or major highway

II. Property Description and Data

- Acreage
- Township, Range, Section, tax lot numbers, and legal description
- Physical setting – a general description of the area surrounding the property, including adjacent land uses
- Historical ownership and use – a description of the history of the property, including past land uses such as agriculture, forest management, wildlife management, and residential
- Present land use – a description of the property’s current zoning and uses such as agriculture, forest management, wildlife management, and residential
- Appurtenances, including any access easements and water rights that benefit the property
- Encumbrances on the property’s title, with descriptions linked to document recording numbers or book and page numbers if document recording numbers were not assigned. This information may be arranged in a table if desired.
- Existing development – a description of all human modifications of the property, such as structures, roads, trails, ditches, fences, and utility lines
- Conservation values – a description of the ecological features and conditions that will be protected by the conservation easement. OWEB priority ecological systems, plant communities, and species, and acreages if applicable, must be documented and consistent with those stated in the OWEB grant application and conservation easement. The conservation values must be described in objective and specific terms, using quantitative information collected onsite (e.g., biological survey data) as appropriate for tracking changes in conditions over time.
- A description of any observed threats to the conservation values, such as invasive species, evidence of trespass, and erosion. The information should be presented in objective, specific terms, including quantitative data as appropriate for tracking changes in conditions over time.
- In this baseline guidance, an invasive plant refers to any plant, non-native or native, that may degrade the property’s conservation values. Invasive plants must be mapped as described in the Maps section below. An estimate of the abundance of each species must be provided, either as density (number of plants per area) or percent cover of each species per mapped polygon. Abundance estimates assist in detecting and responding to an increase in invasive plants.
- Survey and GPS data (e.g., invasive plant surveys, boundary data).
- If a prior assessment of the property (e.g., rangeland assessment, invasive plant survey, wetland delineation) is being relied on as Baseline information, the assessment must be:
 - Prepared no more than 18 months before the Baseline;
 - Appended to the Baseline; or at a minimum, incorporated into the Baseline by reference and a statement that the assessment will be kept together with the Baseline (see Baseline Format, below); and
 - Confirmed by a subject matter expert as accurately portraying the property’s conditions at the time of the Baseline. The subject matter expert must inspect the property at the time of the Baseline and render an opinion free of bias or conflicts of interest.

III. Photographs and **NEW: Drone Images**

- Consistent monitoring methods assist in detecting and understanding property changes and implementing timely adaptive management strategies. OWEB expects grantees to monitor properties using the same methods as in the Baseline. For example, if the Baseline includes drone images, the grantee should replicate the drone images when monitoring the property. Grantees must maintain

inhouse capacity, resources for a contractor, or the assistance of a partner organization for obtaining drone images. Non-drone aerial images (e.g., satellite and fixed wing airplane images) are not accepted.

- More information about drone images is provided below.
- Photographs of features on the property, including all of the following as applicable: houses; barns; other structures; fences; roads; utility lines; trails; areas of potential restoration or future land use change (e.g., site of allowed future kiosk construction); threats or impacts present at the time of the Baseline (e.g., an unauthorized trail used by trespassers or a dumping area); and priority ecological systems, plant communities, and other features identified as conservation values in the grant application and conservation easement.
- Photographs must be taken at a distance that is appropriate for clearly depicting the features and conditions at the photo point.
- Photographs must be accompanied by directional notations and a label that describes what the photos depict.
- Photographs must be taken in the four cardinal and four ordinal directions when documenting 360-degree conditions.
- All photographs must be accompanied by GPS coordinates and the location of the photographs must be depicted on a map (see Maps, below).
- The amount of photo documentation that is appropriate for a property depends on the size and features of the property. For example, a large property that contains extensive infrastructure and ecological variation will require more photographs than a small property that lacks infrastructure and is ecologically homogenous. Grantees should consult with the assigned OWEB reviewer regarding a plan to photograph the property's features. The goal will be to ensure agreement on the extent of photographs that is necessary for monitoring conservation easement compliance and ecological changes.
- Grantees should consult with the assigned OWEB reviewer regarding organization of the Baseline's photographs. For a large property with numerous photographs, the reviewer may request that photographs be grouped by type or by zones or areas of the property, with a map of photo points for each grouping. The goal will be to ensure that the photographs are clearly linked to photo points on a map and the scale allows the map to be easily read.
- Drone images may be included in the Baseline, subject to the following conditions:
 - Drone images alone are not adequate to capture all features of a property. Ground photographs must be used for features that can only be clearly depicted on the ground, including but not limited to structures, property boundaries such as entrances where trespassing is possible, instream habitat structures, site conditions under dense canopy cover, and any threats visible only at ground level. Drone-based photos may be appropriate for capturing conditions at the landscape scale (e.g., juniper thinning, floodplain inundation).
 - Drone images must be still images. Videos are not accepted.
 - The spatial resolution of drone images must be sufficient to clearly discern features required by this Baseline Guidance.
 - Drone images must be accompanied by a repeatable flight plan that includes GPS points. A screenshot of the flight plan with flight altitude above ground (e.g., 200 feet), photo numbers, and the direction of view of each photo must be included in the Baseline. A map of the property showing the location of each flight plan must also be provided to locate each flight plan relative to the rest of the property. Drone software must be used to document the path, angle, elevation and other important aspects of the drone flight and photography, so that images are repeatable. The grantee must have the capability to store drone images and metadata so further flights can be replicated.
 - All drone images must include captions that describe site features captured by each photo.

- The grantee's stewardship fund must include funds to obtain drone images, such as the cost of a drone contractor, or the cost of the drone, drone-related software, staff technical expertise, time required for flights and post-flight image analysis, time required for staff to complete the FAA Remote Pilot Certification process to be legally allowed to fly a drone, and the cost of providing drone images to OWEB every five years. If the stewardship calculator provided with the grant application does not include these expenses, the grantee must update the calculator to incorporate the expenses and secure additional stewardship funds to ensure adequate resources for drone images over time.
- Use of drones requires grantees follow [Federal Aviation Administration \(FAA\) Guidance on Drones](#) and comply with any state, county, local, or tribal laws and regulations related to the use of drones.
- The Baseline for conservation easement projects must include the landowner's agreement to all future drone use that is necessary to replicate drone images (see Baseline Use and Acceptance and Acknowledgement, below).
- Drone images must be provided to OWEB every five years.

IV. Maps

- General location map
- An aerial-photo-based map of the property, depicting property boundaries, easement boundaries if different than the property boundaries, and property features, including encumbrances, described in the baseline text. Multiple years of aerial photos are useful for understanding the property's history.
 - If property features or encumbrances are numerous, more than one map may be necessary for readability. Encumbrances must be labeled by document recording number, or book and page numbers if a document recording number was not assigned.
- Map(s) depicting the location of photo points
- If drone images are included in the Baseline, include a map of the property showing the location of each flight plan, to locate each flight plan in the context of the property
- Map of conservation easement zones or other easement areas with special allowances or restrictions, if applicable
- Topographical map
- Soils map
- Map depicting the location and extent (polygons) of priority ecological systems and plant communities, as determined by GPS
- Map depicting the location and extent (polygons) of invasive plants as determined by GPS

V. Baseline Use and Acceptance and Acknowledgment

The Baseline is intended to be used every year during monitoring, to compare current property conditions to those documented in the Baseline. All fee simple acquisitions and conservation easements purchased from a private landowner need to be monitored once per calendar year, using the same methodology as the Baseline.

The Baseline must include a statement of acceptance, signed by the parties to the conservation easement. The statement will also be an exhibit to the conservation easement. Refer to OWEB's conservation easement for the wording of the acceptance statement.

Include the landowner's agreement to future drone use if the Baseline includes drone images for a conservation easement project.

VI. Baseline Format

The Baseline should consist of a single PDF file, with all maps and photographs incorporated as appendices if possible. A single PDF eliminates the need to ensure that multiple Baseline files are organized and kept together as a unified document.

The Baseline PDF file should be 20 MB or less, to allow for transmission by email. It may be necessary to use the file size reduction tool in Adobe. Compressing maps and images before inserting them in the Baseline may help control the size of the document.

OWEB will only accept a Baseline consisting of more than one PDF file if photographs or drone images are too large to include in a PDF file of 20 MB or less. In such a case, the grantee must minimize the number of additional files, to enable the information to be easily accessed by OWEB during monitoring. The Baseline must contain a statement identifying and incorporating all other files by reference. An example of such a statement is:

“A total of 50 images were captured from photo points 1 through 10 on May 1, 2024. The images, which are incorporated into the Baseline by this reference, are contained in the PDF file named ‘NorthwestPreserveBaselinePhotos.PDF’ which is stored together with this signed document.”

VII. Description of Restored Conditions

OWEB requires a Baseline to include a description of the conditions to which a property being purchased will be restored (a “Description of Restored Conditions”) when the property requires significant restoration to achieve the ecological outcomes that are the basis for the OWEB award.

Following are examples of some, but not all, types of projects that require a Description of Restored Conditions:

Example 1: A property contains estuarine wetlands from which tidal flows have been blocked by a dike. The wetlands are not functioning in a manner that provides high-quality habitat for the suite of priority species typically associated with estuarine wetlands. The application states that the property is being acquired for the purpose of restoring natural tidal flows to the wetlands. The property would not be an OWEB acquisition priority if not for the applicant’s intent to restore the property to a properly functioning OWEB priority ecological system.

Example 2: A property contains former Western Oregon wet prairie that has been converted to pastures. The pastures are not functioning in a manner that provides high-quality habitat for the suite of priority species typically associated with Western Oregon wet prairie. The application states that the property is being acquired for the purpose of restoring the pastures to natural hydrologic function and native plant communities. The property would not be an OWEB acquisition priority if not for the applicant’s intent to restore the property to a properly functioning OWEB priority ecological system.

Example 3: A coastal property was once late-seral temperate rainforest, but recently has been used for industrial timber production. The industrial timber stands require thinning to place the property on the proper trajectory back to late-seral temperate rainforest. The property would not be an OWEB acquisition priority if not for the applicant’s intent to restore forest structure and conditions appropriate for returning the property to a properly functioning OWEB priority ecological system.

OWEB recognizes that Baselines are signed before or at the time of a property purchase, whereas acquisition grantees typically develop detailed restoration plans for a property only after its purchase. The Description of Restored Conditions does not need to be highly detailed, but should include best-available information, in narrative and map form, about the type, extent, and quality of ecological systems that will exist upon completion of restoration activities.

Any questions should be referred to Miriam Forney at 971-345-7023 or miriam.forney@oweb.oregon.gov.