

Richmond's Conservation Reserve Fund

What is the Conservation Reserve Fund?

It is a fund Richmond voters established in 2005 to enable the Town to participate in important conservation projects. It allows Richmond to work with willing property owners, non-profits and community volunteer groups to protect "important local natural, agricultural and historic resources." The fund is supported by a penny on the tax rate and must be renewed by voters every five years. In 2010 the vote was 527-271 in favor of renewal. The next vote comes on Town Meeting Day, March 3, 2015.

What kinds of resources does the fund aim to conserve?

The fund was designed to conserve natural, agricultural and historic resources that give Richmond its character and make it a desirable place to live, work and visit. Examples include working farms and forests, wildlife habitat, clean water sources, trails and recreational areas, historic sites and structures, and scenic views.

Why was the fund created?

In a growing town such as ours, conservation opportunities can arise at any time and disappear just as quickly. It's often hard if not impossible for a town to budget or respond in time to capture those opportunities. Richmond's fund enables the Conservation Commission, Selectboard and the public to review and act on conservation opportunities before they are lost. And, by doing so, it expands landowner options for directing the future of their property.

The fund also helps attract additional funds for conservation projects. Many state, federal and private sources of conservation funding require community participation in projects they will support. Voter-established funds such as ours are highly regarded as evidence of strong local support for conservation. By qualifying projects for additional funding this way, our reserve fund has brought in \$3.23 for every dollar it has paid out.

How are funding decisions made?

Proposals are made to the Conservation Commission, and the Selectboard makes the decision after considering the Conservation Commission's recommendations. Voters must approve any land acquisitions by the Town over \$20,000

How much does the fund raise and how much has been spent?

Currently it raises about \$44,000 per year. Outlays to date are \$175,424, which have generated \$567,983 in matching grants. Thus, each dollar spent has brought in \$3.23 from other sources to fund our town's conservation priorities.

How has the fund been used?

The chart on the opposite page lists the projects the fund has been used for over the last 10 years, including the additional funding it has attracted.

What does the fund cost me?

The one cent on the tax rate that goes into the fund equals \$10 for every \$100,000 of a property's assessment. For a home assessed at \$200,000 the contribution is \$20 a year. For the current fiscal year, this amounts to less than one-half percent of your total tax bill set aside for conservation.

Does conserved land raise or lower property taxes overall?

An expert on Vermont tax policy, Deborah Brighton, has researched this and shown how conserving land helps keep property taxes in check. She says, "Open space tends to require few public services. More people tend to require more public services, resulting in higher taxes."

Furthermore, all conserved land in Richmond, including the parcels the reserve fund has helped to conserve, remain on the Grand List. The owners continue paying property taxes on them while also bearing responsibility for their maintenance. Though the amount they pay may drop due to the land being conserved, in most cases landowners must also agree not to post their property so the public can use it for hiking, hunting, skiing and other activities (the main exception being some acreage used for agriculture or livestock grazing).

What kinds of new projects does the Conservation Commission foresee?

One likely conservation project in the pipeline is the restoration of the historic dam that created and protects Gillett Pond, one of Richmond's most treasured natural and recreational assets. Other applications appear to be pending, and more undoubtedly will come in, as they have throughout the fund's 10-year history. The Conservation Reserve Fund positions our town to consider these opportunities and, if they are deemed worthy, to capture them for the benefit of current and future generations, often by attracting additional funds from much larger donors.

What has the Fund been used for?

As of mid-January, 2015, 12 requests for funding have come in and eight have been approved:

Project	Resources Conserved	Project Leader	Description	Town Funding	Additional Funding Generated
Bombardier Meadow (2009)	Habitat, water quality, scenic, agriculture, recreation,	Richmond Land Trust	10-acre hayfield on Cochran Rd., with wooded banks on the Huntington and Winooski River	\$51,500	\$82,000 (Vt. Housing and Conservation Board)
Large Habitat Block Study (2009)	Habitat	Richmond Conservation Commission	Map large blocks of uplands wildlife habitat and connectivity among them	\$2,400	
Town Center Portico Renovation (2010)	Historic	Town of Richmond	Roof and other structural repairs	\$35,265	\$65,035
Richmond Hill Cemetery (2010)	Historic	Town of Richmond	Established 10' deeded path needed for access to historic cemetery	\$2,500	
Andrews Farmland (2012)	Agricultural, economic, scenic	Vt. Land Trust	187 acres of prime agricultural soils along the Winooski River	\$10,000	\$197,500
Science-to-Action Project (2013)	Habitat, water quality	Richmond Planning and Conservation Commissions	Identify public conservation priorities, and inventory/confirm key habitat locations to improve planning & zoning processes	\$3,195	\$88,525 (includes in-kind service donations)
Window restoration at Congregational Church (2014)	Historic	Richmond Congregational Church	Protected 100-year-old stained glass windows	\$6,564	\$12,423
Willis Hill (2014)	Education, recreation, water quality, scenic	Richmond Land Trust	20 acres on Rt. 2 at western entrance to village, backing up to elementary and middle schools	\$64,000	\$67,500 (Vt. Housing and Conservation Board) \$55,000 (private donors)
VYCC Land Conservation (2009)	Historic, scenic	Vt. Youth Conservation Corps	Application withdrawn	--	--
Trail Mapping (2009)	Recreation	Vt. Youth Conservation Corps	Not approved	--	--
Andrews Rivershore (2010)	Habitat, water quality, recreation	The Nature Conservancy	Application withdrawn	--	--
Round Church sprinklers (2010)	Historic	Richmond Historical Society	Application withdrawn	--	--
TOTAL SPENT & ADDITIONAL FUNDS GENERATED				\$175,424	\$567,983

Please Vote on March 3

Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at Camels Hump Middle School.

Absentee ballots available from the Town Clerk.

For more about the Fund and how it is used, please see: <http://tinyurl.com/RichmondCRF>