



**N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services**  
N.C. ADFP Trust Fund  
*Conservation Easement Monitoring Policy and Guidelines*



## **I. Purpose**

The N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation (ADFP) Trust Fund, administered by the Farmland Preservation Division of the N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, provides grants for agricultural conservation easements on family farms throughout the state of North Carolina.

The ADFP Trust Fund will “hold grantees accountable for the expenditure of State funds by performing monitoring and oversight functions,” in accordance with Administrative Code 09 NCAC 03M “Uniform Administration of State Grants” and Subsection .0400, pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143C-6-22 & 23. The ADFP Trust Fund will work with the grantee to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of the easement. Monitoring is necessary to make certain the easements are maintained while ensuring a productive relationship between the funding source (ADFP Trust Fund), grantee (counties or private nonprofit conservation organizations, according to N.C.G.S. 106-744), and landowner.

## **II. Definition of Agricultural Conservation Easements**

According to N.C.G.S. 106-744, an “agricultural conservation easement” means a negative easement in gross restricting residential, commercial, and industrial development of land for the purpose of maintaining its agricultural production capability. Agricultural conservation easements may be perpetual or term-limited in duration. The agricultural conservation easement may permit the creation of not more than three lots that meet applicable county zoning and subdivision regulations, provided it is allowed in the original recorded easement.

## **III. Involved Parties**

The ADFP Trust Fund, administered by the Commissioner of Agriculture, is the funding source for purchasing conservation easements. The ADFP Trust Fund has full-time staff administratively located in Raleigh, North Carolina. Part-time field staff members are located remotely throughout the state. The ADFP Trust Fund Document Specialist is the monitoring program manager, unless otherwise designated by the Farmland Preservation Division Director. Field staff members will conduct on-site monitoring, unless otherwise directed by the Document Specialist.

The ADFP Trust Fund Advisory Committee is administratively located within the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The Advisory Committee will advise the Commissioner on the prioritization and allocation of funds, the development of criteria for awarding funds, guidelines for monitoring easements and projects, program planning, and other areas where monies from the ADFP Trust Fund can be used to promote the growth and development of family farms in North Carolina.

Grantees are counties or private nonprofit conservation organizations. Grantees are the first point of contact for monitoring conservation easements and discussing potential violations of contracts and/or recorded easements. Grantees are required to monitor the easement at least once a year and complete annual monitoring reports for the length of the term of the easement.

Landowners will work with grantees to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of conservation easements and will be notified of site visits by the grantee.

#### **IV. ADFP Trust Fund Monitoring Roles and Responsibilities**

The ADFP Trust Fund monitoring methods include, but not limited to:

- Site visit: ADFP Trust Fund staff will make every effort to coordinate site visits with the grantee's monitoring schedule. ADFP Trust Fund staff will physically visit easement. ADFP Trust Fund staff will notify grantee and seek permission from landowner.
- In-office: ADFP Trust Fund staff will review grantee monitoring reports and verify information.

Site visit protocol for ADFP Trust Fund staff:

- Contact grantee about site visit. Site visits will be coordinated to the extent possible with the grantee's annual monitoring visit schedule.
- Review completed "Grantee Monitoring Checklist – Perpetual or Term Easement."
- Ensure landowner has been notified of site visit.
- Site visit can be conducted on foot or by vehicle.
- Compile documentation, including, but not limited to, photographs and data.
- Complete "ADFP Trust Fund Staff Monitoring Report – Perpetual or Term Easement."
- Complete "ADFP Trust Fund Staff Incident Report – Perpetual or Term Easement" if necessary.
- Site visit will occur every three (3) years, unless otherwise directed.

In-office monitoring protocol for ADFP Trust Fund staff:

- Review completed "Grantee Monitoring Checklist – Perpetual or Term Easement."
- Review the most current aerial photography data available (e.g. GIS via Multi-Hazard Threat Database (MHTD), Google Earth, etc.).
- Complete "ADFP Trust Fund Staff In-Office Monitoring Report – Perpetual or Term Easement."
- Complete "ADFP Trust Fund Staff Incident Report – Perpetual or Term Easement" if necessary.
- In-office monitoring will be completed in the years when site visits do not occur.

Incident report protocol for ADFP Trust Fund staff:

- The "ADFP Trust Fund Staff Incident Report – Perpetual or Term Easement" must be filed if a grantee reports a violation or if ADFP Trust Fund staff discovers a violation during a site visit or in-office monitoring.
- The completed "ADFP Trust Fund Staff Incident Report – Perpetual or Term Easement" will be submitted to the Program Director for review, investigation, and/or corrective action.
- If an incident report is filed, the subsequent year a site visit will occur. The monitoring schedule (site visit, in-office, in-office, site visit) will be reset each time an incident report is filed.
- The appropriate NCD&CS staff will formally notify grantee via letter of violation or potential violation.
- Thirty days from the date of notification of a violation, the grantee, with landowner cooperation, shall submit a Plan of Corrective Action to the ADFP Trust Fund Staff. The Plan of Corrective Action must be a comprehensive plan detailing the corrective action that will be taken to remedy all violations and bring the easement area back in compliance. The ADFP Trust Fund staff will work with grantee and landowner for correction.

#### **V. Grantee Monitoring Responsibilities and Expectations**

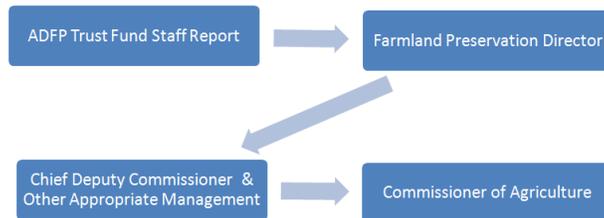
Grantees will complete and submit "Grantee Monitoring Checklist – Perpetual or Term Easement" to ADFP Trust Fund office annually on or before December 31. In January, ADFP Trust Fund staff will coordinate to the extent possible with the grantee's annual monitoring visit schedule for easements due for a site visit. Grantees are encouraged to submit tentative site visit schedule to ADFP Trust Fund office

ninety (90) days prior to first scheduled site visit. As subsequent site visits are scheduled throughout the year by the grantee, the ADFP Trust Fund office will be notified in a timely manner of site visits due for that calendar year.

Failure to file annual monitoring reports on or before December 31 of each year shall constitute a violation of the easement and the grant contract.

## VI. Additional Guidance and Reference – Dispute Resolutions

For issues in dispute, the ADFP Trust Fund Staff will report such differences to the Farmland Preservation Director. If the Farmland Preservation Director is unable to find a resolution, the Director will review with the appropriate NCDA&CS management for assistance and instruction, e.g. Office of the General Counsel, Chief Deputy Commissioner, and Commissioner of Agriculture. See chart below.



ADFP Trust Fund Staff are to follow appropriate approved ADFP Trust Fund Policies and Guidelines as directed by the ADFP Trust Fund Advisory Committee and the Commissioner of Agriculture, i.e. ADFP Trust Fund Grantee Eligibility Classification.

## VII. Monitoring Documents

The following documents will be used for the monitoring of conservation easements:

- Grantee Monitoring Checklist – Perpetual or Term Easement
- ADFP Trust Fund Staff Monitoring Report – Perpetual or Term Easement
- ADFP Trust Fund Staff In-Office Monitoring Report – Perpetual or Term Easement
- ADFP Trust Fund Staff Incident Report – Perpetual or Term Easement

## VIII. Document Filing, Retention, and Disposal

All completed reports, including maps from GIS and supplemental documentation from grantees, will be scanned for electronic storage and printed for paper files. The North Carolina State Property Office, Land Asset Maintenance database (<http://www.ncspo.com/fis/dbLandAsset.aspx>) lists all ADFP Trust Fund funded easements. Electronic copies of monitoring documents will be stored on the ADFP Trust Fund server and SharePoint page.

All monitoring documents will be filed, retained, and disposed pursuant to the ADFP Trust Fund records retention schedule.