

Conservation Zoning

PURPOSE

To promote responsible use of natural resources by preserving open space and ensuring that development has minimal adverse impact.

Conservation zoning protects public open space, natural wildlife habitats, and scenic areas. It also reduces stormwater runoff and erosion. The preservation of vegetation and trees reduces the quantity of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere. By preventing development in areas that are susceptible to flooding, conservation zoning also helps adapt to the increased rainfall that will occur from climate change.

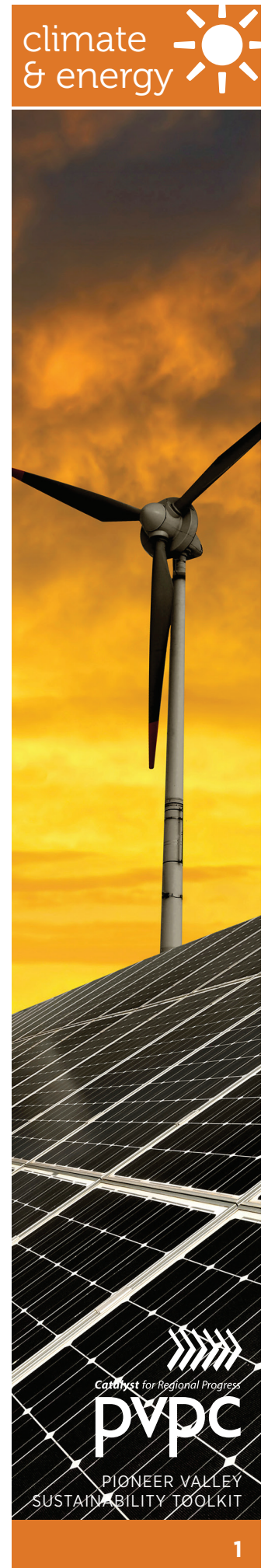
The language and methods used to regulate development through zoning ordinances, such as restrictions on density and land use, are well suited for implementing conservationist principles.

Conservation zoning is the act of restricting development completely in an area, because it is in a floodplain, there is a risk of soil erosion, or there or because they considered environmentally sensitive water table, risk of soil erosion, or fragile ecosystem. The most common conservation zoning ordinances are floodplain bylaws.

HOW IT WORKS

Similar to other zoning districts, conservation zoning focuses primarily on the density and type of permitted uses. Examples of commonly permitted uses for conservation purposes include fishing, forestry, wildlife preserves, and single family detached homes. Density requirements may be based on the floor-area ratio or total lot area coverage. For example, model zoning guidelines for Lancaster County, Pennsylvania includes a requirement that 80% of each lot be pervious. The particular details of the conservation district will be based on a community's needs and context. For example, municipalities that have a large amount of farmland may enact an agricultural zoning district. Similarly, in areas with wetlands, the zoning will have the purpose of protecting waterbodies and their associated watersheds.

The language for a conservation district can be incorporated into the zoning ordinance either as a stand-alone district or an overlay, the latter placing an additional layer of regulations on top of an existing district. For both methods, the implementation of the conservation district or zoning will be based on the municipality's standard procedures. Conservation zoning may also be incorporated into a municipality's subdivision code, in



order to reduce the environmental resources consumed by large-scale developments. Subdivision regulations can promote the use of cluster development, in which all buildings and impervious area are concentrated in one portion of a development. This allows the remaining land to be left untouched and kept as public open space or wildlife habitat.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY IMPLEMENTATION

Frederick County, Maryland

The County's zoning includes a resource conservation (RC) district, which allows for low intensity uses in areas of forests and steep terrain. The County also incorporates an agricultural district that allows the operation of farms and related light industrial uses, and a floodplain district which requires a permit for all development within it.

LINKS TO MODEL BYLAWS OR MORE INFORMATION

WHITE TOWNSHIP IN NEW JERSEY HAS A CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE:
LANCASTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA DEVELOPED MODEL CONSERVATION DISTRICT ZONING LANGUAGE, WHICH CAN BE FOUND AT:

<http://www.co.lancaster.pa.us/toolbox/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=641973>

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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