UNDERSTANDING LANDOWNER PERCEPTIONS OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS IN MISSOURI'S PRIORITY LANDSCAPES

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by
MCKENNA THOMPSON
Robin Rotman, J.D., and Sonja Wilhelm Stanis, Ph.D., Thesis Co-Advisors
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the Master's Thesis entitled

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presented by McKenna Thompson,

a candidate for the degree of M.S. Natural Resources,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, is worthy of acceptance.

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Professor Robin Rotman

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Professor Sonja Wilhelm Stanis

_____

Professor Hank Stelzer

_____

Professor [Committee Member 3 Name]

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Professor [Committee Member 4 Name]

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ABSTRACT

Land conservation, particularly through conservation easements, is critical in safeguarding ecosystems, habitats, and recreational spaces on privately owned lands. As the United States aims to conserve 30% of its land by 2030, private landowners become pivotal in achieving this goal. This is particularly true in Missouri, where 93% of land is privately owned. This thesis research examines the perceptions of selected Missouri landowners who own land in areas identified by the Missouri Department of Conservation to have high conservation value but who, to date, have yet to place a conservation easement on their property. Using interviews, we gathered information from landowners about their land use practices, knowledge of conservation easements, and perspectives on conservation planning. We found various motivators and constraints perceived by landowners. Findings from the study emerged in four themes regarding prior knowledge, land protection, regulations, and finance. Many landowners expressed a lack of understanding and knowledge about conservation easements. Land protection, regulations, and finance were both motivators and constraints. These themes represent both motivations and constraints to adopting conservation easements. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, conservation organizations, and landowners seeking to promote and enhance conservation easement adoption.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A conservation easement, which is a legally binding agreement between a landowner and a conservation organization to preserve the land, can help protect these areas against rapid land use change in Missouri (Kemink et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2023b). Agreements can be established to protect biodiversity, open spaces, and historical structures on private property while still allowing opportunities for land use and recreation (Cross et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2023a). These agreements limit the landowner's development rights but allow the land to remain privately owned with the intent of conserving the property in perpetuity (Hagy et al., 2015; Kemink et al., 2020; Ristino & Jay, 2016). To understand how to best create successful conservation easement agreements, land trusts, government agencies, and other interested organizations must understand what factors discourage and motivate landowners from placing their property in a conservation easement.

Most of the land in Missouri is privately owned and is susceptible to changes in land use, such as urban development or agricultural production on natural landscapes (Brown et al., 2023b; Kamal et al., 2015). The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) has designated specific ecosystems and landscapes as “Priority Geographies” (PGs) and “Conservation Opportunity Areas” (COAs), which are areas of high potential for conserving Missouri’s most diverse habitats. MDC prioritizes these areas due to their significant conservation potential. These areas are at the forefront of conservation concerns as they contain diverse and vulnerable ecological factors; however, most of the parcels located within them are privately owned land.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) has commissioned this project through the University of Missouri School of Natural Resources in hopes of using the results to inform MDC's Land Conservation Partnership Grant and promote conservation easement adoption in Missouri. Previous research often focuses on landowners who already have conservation easements in place. This study builds upon prior work by Brown et al. (2023b), which focuses on landowners with existing conservation easements; we adapted their methodology to suit our research objectives of understanding perceptions of landowners without conservation easements. We utilized a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews which analyzed the perceptions of Missouri landowners without conservation easements (see Appendix A, B, C, and D for recruitment materials, a pre-interview screening, and the interview script).

In designing this study, we had to strike a balance between Missouri-focused research that would directly respond to the questions posed by MDC and examining broader questions evident in the academic literature. During the initial phase of the study, the School of Natural Resources team met with the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Missouri Land Trust Coalition to solicit feedback from their members in informing the interview script. Refining the selection of PGs and COAs for study areas and determining the landscape features as criteria required consideration of external entities like MDC and the Missouri Land Trust Coalition, which influenced our decision-making process. Additionally, given MDC's interest not only in conservation easements but also in broader land planning issues, we incorporated interview questions to capture a comprehensive understanding of landowner perspectives and behaviors outside of conservation easements.

The output of this research extends beyond conservation easements and contains implications beyond Missouri. Most land in Missouri is privately owned, and state government policies often influence how individuals manage their land (Daniels & Bowers, 1997; Van Dien, 2022), so the findings can apply to land planning and conservation efforts nationwide. The insights gained from this study have the potential to inform not only MDC's Land Conservation Partnership Grant but also future conservation initiatives within and beyond Missouri, contributing to broader conservation efforts nationwide.

This thesis is comprised of one manuscript, to be submitted to Society & Natural Resources, that addresses the perceptions of conservation easements held by Missouri landowners without conservation easements. This manuscript addresses the objective of understanding landowner perceptions of conservation easements. Through a qualitative assessment, we present findings that report on the attitudes, concerns, and motivations of landowners regarding conservation easements. The implications outlined in this manuscript may benefit conservation organizations, policymakers, and landowners in the future.

CHAPTER 2: LANDOWNER CONSTRAINTS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR CONSERVATION EASEMENT ADOPTION IN MISSOURI

This manuscript is to be submitted to *Society & Natural Resources* as a research article.

ABSTRACT

Land conservation, particularly through conservation easements, is critical in safeguarding ecosystems, habitats, and recreational spaces on privately owned lands. As the United States aims to conserve 30% of its land by 2030, private landowners become pivotal in achieving this goal. Conservation easements are legal agreements that permanently preserve conservation values of private property, such as by prohibiting subdivision and development. This study aims to understand landowner perceptions of conservation easements. This study focuses on landowners who own property in areas of high conservation value in Missouri who do not already have a conservation easement. Using a qualitative approach, landowners were interviewed about their current land practices, their knowledge of conservation easements, and their perspectives on these agreements. Four themes representing both motivations and constraints emerged: prior knowledge, land protection, regulations, and finance. Many landowners expressed a lack of understanding about conservation easements, and land protection served as both a motivator and constraint. Regulations were seen as a motivation for succession planning but also as a constraint due to the need to relinquish control. Financial considerations varied, with some landowners emphasizing the need for financial assistance and incentives, while others prioritized conservation over finances. The findings highlight the relationship between motivators and constraints that landowners face regarding conservation easements, yet an underlying factor was the degree of familiarity. The study

findings can inform conservation outreach strategies and enhance the effectiveness of land conservation programs.

Key Words

Conservation easements, private land conservation, private landowners, landowner perceptions, Missouri priority landscapes

INTRODUCTION

Taking action to preserve vulnerable landscapes is necessary for protecting wildlife, water, forests, and areas designated for outdoor recreation. Because roughly 60% of the land in the United States is privately owned (Nickerson et al., 2011), land conservation at the private level is necessary to protect vulnerable landscapes (Barzen, 2018; Koontz, 2010; Merenlender & Hilty, 2003). The ages of agricultural producers are rising, and a wide-scale intergenerational transfer of lands is expected to happen within the next decade (Keske et al., 2021). A way to combat mass subdivision and development of landscapes at the time of succession is through a conservation easement (Keske et al., 2021; Markowski-Linsday et al., 2016). Conservation easements are voluntary agreements between landowners and easement holders (herein referred to as “land trusts”), which act as an authoritative entity over the easement (Brown et al., 2023b; Kemink et al., 2020; Merenlender et al., 2004).

Conservation easements ensure the protection of vulnerable open spaces, habitats, and working landscapes on private lands (Brown et al., 2023a; Merenlender et al., 2004). Conservation easements are commonly used for ecological restoration or preservation of properties with valuable biodiversity, native wildlife habitats, and vulnerable species, or to create buffers and corridors between lands (Kemink et al., 2020; Pocewicz et al., 2011;

Rissman et al., 2007). These agreements can mitigate the negative influence of rapid development on vulnerable ecosystems and landscapes. Landowners may place their property in a conservation easement for a variety of reasons.

In 2021, Executive Order No. 14,008 by President Biden set a goal of conserving at least 30% of lands and waters by 2030 (Exec. Order No. 14,008, 2021). The White House has since released recommendations for achieving this commitment, stressing the importance of incentive-based private land conservation (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2021). Given the current trends of conservation easement adoption, the engagement of more landowners in private land conservation is necessary to achieve the 30% conservation goal in EO 14,008. More land can successfully be held in conservation practices such as conservation easements when private properties are targeted for open space preservation, cultural and historical protection, and outdoor recreation usage (Brown et al, 2023a; Kamal et al., 2015).

The Internal Revenue Code (I.R.C.) classifies a land trust as a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization or a governmental agency that has the jurisdiction to enforce the criteria set to meet the conservation goals identified in the conservation easement (Internal Revenue Code 170(c)(1)). When a permanent conservation easement is adopted, the legal agreement is a recorded deed that becomes part of the chain of title, protecting the land under its criteria in perpetuity (Hagy et al., 2015; McStotts, 2007).

Conservation easements are divided into two categories: short-term and perpetual easements. Short-term easements are designed to last for a specific duration, which can range from a few years up to several decades (Taff, 2004). This type of agreement is frequently used when a landowner wishes to preserve their property for a limited time or

maintain the flexibility to develop it in the future. A perpetual conservation easement is a binding legal agreement between landowners and land trusts in which a landowner surrenders certain rights to develop or use their property and transfers said rights to the land trust; However, the landowner maintains all other rights on the property that are not restricted by the easement (Kemink et al., 2020; McLaughlin, 2007; Ristino & Jay, 2016).

This study will focus on perpetual conservation easements. Perpetual conservation easements are particularly sought after for properties of ecological or cultural significance, as they provide lasting protection for the life of the property. The agreement between the landowner and the land trust or government agency is tailored to meet the needs and goals of both parties. Depending on where the parcel under easement is located, easements can result in a tax deduction or credit from the federal or state government. In some cases, there are possible tax deductions and occasionally independent incentives provided by the land trust (Chung et al., 2020; Farmer et al., 2015; Halperin, 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature delves into two main categories: Motivators for landowner participation in conservation easements and constraints for landowners' participation in conservation easements.

Motivations for Adopting a Conservation Easement

Motivations are factors that drive behavior through expected benefits (Frick, 2010). Motivations in the literature related to conservation easements fall into three categories: land protection and stewardship, succession and financial planning, and tax deductions.

Land Protection and Stewardship

The protection of vulnerable landscapes can be achieved through land conservation at the privately owned level (Brown et al., 2023a; Kamal et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2001). Some landowners may place their land in perpetual conservation easements for the regulatory benefits to protect the land and preserve it to protect ecosystems, in which a landowner will experience an expected benefit from the conservation easement (Bastian et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2023a; Horton et al., 2017). These expected benefits typically arise from a sense of moral obligation to protect the environment (Farmer et al., 2011a). Research shows that landowners who are members of environmental-related organizations are more likely to place their land in a conservation easement (Brenner et al., 2013; Welsh et al., 2018). More pro-environmental actions have been seen among landowners participating in conservation easements for non-monetary purposes rather than financial incentives (Farmer et al., 2007; Farmer et al., 2015; Knapp et al., 1997).

Place attachment to land is a leading motivator for landowners' decisions to adopt conservation easements (Cross et al., 2011; Farmer et al., 2011a; Keske et al., 2021). Landowners may feel as though they are intrinsically connected to the land, which is reason enough to adopt a conservation easement (Bastian et al., 2017; Farmer et al., 2011a; Farmer et al., 2011b). Pro-environmental land management behaviors can be linked to connectedness to nature, and conserving land permanently can play a vital role in fulfilling this responsibility (Gosling & Williams, 2010). In many traditions and religions, the natural world and its resources are considered sacred and deserving of protection, often linking spirituality and land conservation. Natural ecosystems provide both psychological and physical goods and services (Verschuuren, 2006). Living a self-

sufficient lifestyle typically involves living in harmony with the land and its resources, which can also contribute to perpetual land conservation efforts (Gosling & Williams, 2010). Brown et al. (2023b) measured Missouri landowner perceptions of conservation practices, though this study focused on landowners who had placed conservation easements on their property. A highly mentioned factor for conservation easement adoption in Missouri is the agreement's ability to provide land restrictions and protections, with landowners mentioning they did not want their property developed.

Succession Planning

Placing land in a conservation easement has been used as a form of succession planning to ensure that the land is never developed. (Brown et al. 2023b; Selinske et al., 2019; Stroman & Kreuter, 2014). These agreements can also reduce friction among heirs (Wright, 2007). Research shows that those who placed their land in a conservation easement are more satisfied with the agreement than those who inherited the easement, suggesting that a perceived benefit for the landowner is derived from the easement being placed for their heirs (Stroman & Kreuter, 2014).

Financial and Tax Incentives

Landowners may choose to participate in conservation easement holdings due to the economic benefits they may offer (Davidson et al., 2019; Van Sant et al., 2020). This can be through the donation of property toward an easement or by the landowner selling the land with the easement on it. Selling the easement land outright provides an economic benefit by receipt of the purchase price (Vercammen, 2019), while the financial benefit of donating through a conservation easement is primarily tax-driven (Horton et al., 2017). Outright sale of the easement land is more common in situations where a

landowner may not benefit from tax advantages or only benefit from placing part of their land in an easement. Protecting land with a conservation easement can be more cost-effective than a purchase of the property for conservation purposes (Brown et al., 2023a).

Some land conservationists see perpetual conservation easements as a way to make a farm profitable by shortening mortgage lengths (Paolisso et al., 2013). Because conservation easements reduce the value of the parcel, mortgages may be lessened through subordinating interests by the mortgagee (Brown, 1976; Lawley & Towe, 2014; Lomberk et al., 2017). This would protect the easement from being extinguished by foreclosure. By reducing the overall debt burden of the property, a shorter mortgage can make a farm more profitable.

Tax incentives alone may be a motivation for some landowners to adopt conservation easements. By placing land under a conservation easement to a qualified organization, landowners can receive a charitable income tax deduction for the easement's value (Lindstrom, 2012). The criteria for a federal income tax deduction are available in Section 170 of the I.R.C., and the deduction is determined by an appraisal of the property before and after a conservation easement is placed (I.R.C. § 170(f)(11). Some states also offer tax incentives, typically following the I.R.C. eligibility or a property tax liability (Halperin, 2011; Lindstrom, 2012).

According to the I.R.C., a conservation easement must be adopted solely for conservation purposes to meet the criteria for a charitable tax deduction (I.R.C. § 170(h)(1)(C)). A “conservation purpose” as defined by the I.R.C. is (i) the preservation of land for outdoor recreation or education for the general public, (ii) the protection of a “relatively natural” habitat for fish, wildlife, or plants, (iii) the preservation of open space

for the benefit of the general public, or (iv) the preservation of a historically important land area or historic structure (I.R.C. § 170(h)(4)(A)). The easement contract typically contains more specific restrictions that are tailored to the interests of both landowners and land trusts.

Constraints to Adopting Conservation Easements

Landowners interested in adopting a conservation easement may face obstacles and limitations, but it is important to distinguish between barriers and constraints. Barriers can be removed, but they may hinder or slow down the implementation process. Constraints are wider in scope and immovable but can be negotiated and adjusted to fit the circumstance (Gaspar, 2013). Constraints include negative perceptions.

Ongoing Compliance with the Easement Terms

Easement agreements contain clauses that apply in perpetuity (Brown et al., 2023a). The terms within a conservation easement agreement can have varying effects on the success of conservation easement adoption (Bastian et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2023a). Researchers in other geographies, such as New York (Brenner et al., 2013; Welsh et al., 2018), the Upper Midwest (Farmer et al. 2015), Texas (Stroman & Kreuter, 2014), Arkansas and Oklahoma (Gwaltney, 2023) and Colorado and Wyoming (Bastian et al., 2017; Cross et al., 2011; Horton et al., 2017) have investigated the dynamics between conservation easements and landowners. Brenner et al. (2013) found that individuals in New York who reside in the area of their parcel are less inclined to put their property in an easement. Farmer et al. (2015) found the opposite, in which landowners in the Upper Midwest who did not occupy the property were not as likely to place an easement but experienced less threat of development. Stroman & Kreuter (2014) state that satisfaction

among landowners with conservation easements was lower in those who possess the land as an investment, use the land for non-recreational purposes, or have fewer interactions with the land trust holding the easement. In addition, landowners might encounter difficulty obtaining permission from the land trust to modify their property (Horton et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2011; Sorice et al., 2013).

Negative Perceptions of Land Trusts and Government in Land Use Planning

A deterrent to placing land under a conservation easement is landowners' lack of trust in land trusts or other governmental entities (Enloe et al., 2017; Klenosky et al., 2015; Sharma & Kreye, 2021). According to Cross et al. (2011), landowners with higher economic dependence on the property have less confidence in land trusts to do what best protects landowner interests. Place identity is also negatively correlated with trust in a third-party organization to manage the land. Landowners less familiar with land trusts are more skeptical of their motives and role in land conservation (Klenosky et al., 2015). When it comes to decisions about their land, landowners appreciate government programs that offer assistance, but they may not approve of the government telling them what they can and cannot do with their property (Sharma & Kreye, 2021). Brown et al. (2023b) identified that land use restrictions implemented by the land trust were also considered a disincentive by landowners. Yearly inspections deter Missouri landowners, as well as the anticipated decline in property value.

According to Enloe et al. (2017), all farmers surveyed in the study expressed skepticism toward the government on conservation planning but listed the Natural Resources Conservation Service as a reliable source of information and assistance. This

may suggest a deep-seated lack of trust in the government or outside entities with the power to control the land.

Creating the Easement: Financial and Administrative Constraints

Research has shown that landowners who receive financial benefits from their land without a conservation easement are only willing to place one on their property if the financial incentives provided by the land trust outweigh the existing income (Farmer et al., 2015). Missouri landowners specifically mention a lack of a state-level tax incentive as a disincentive (Brown et al., 2023b). When a landowner places their land in a conservation easement, they must also contribute to the land trust's Stewardship and Conservation Defense endowments (Land Trust Alliance, 2017). The Stewardship endowment covers the cost of routine monitoring for the easement, such as staff time and gas mileage. The Conservation Defense endowment is a risk pool that covers legal fees for any enforcement action taken by the land trust (Brown et al., 2023a). This can deter potential landowners looking to adopt an easement, as the upfront cost may be too much out-of-pocket. The individual may also feel like they are funding the legal team that could be employed against them if they fail to comply with the rules outlined in the conservation easement agreement.

Landowners in the United States have expressed constraints with the process of placing their property under conservation easement (Brown et al., 2023a; Horton et al., 2017; Sorice et al., 2013). Initially, the paperwork and lengthy timeframe associated with completing a conservation easement agreement is a stumbling block for landowners in the process. The negotiation for common goals and stipulations between the landowner and the land trust is reported as a significant constraint (Bastian et al., 2017). Once

implemented, regular monitoring by the land trust and tax audits can be deterrents. In Missouri specifically, Brown et al. (2023b) identified that Missouri landowners are dissuaded from adopting a conservation easement because they are concerned about perpetuity. Missouri landowners lack information, such as land trust contact information, the process of legal proceedings, and where to receive professional help for conservation projects.

Need for Study

This study will shed light on the perceptions that landowners have toward conservation planning with a particular focus on conservation easements. Missouri is an understudied area with a wide range of landowner demographics, and this study will provide valuable insights into what may inhibit landowners from adopting conservation easements. Previous literature has focused on landowners who already hold a conservation easement or participate in other land conservation programs (Bastian et al., 2017; Brenner et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2023b; Farmer et al., 2015). It is important to consider the perspectives of landowners who have yet to think about conservation easements or have not known about them or landowners who have considered but have yet to complete the process. There is also limited qualitative research in this area of study. This research focuses on Missouri landowners who have not adopted conservation easements on their property and their perceptions of conservation easements as a tool for private land conservation. Specifically, we examined the perceived motivators and constraints that landowners without conservation easements perceive regarding conservation easements.

METHODS

Research Setting

This study focused on regions of conservation importance for Missouri, termed Priority Geographies (PGs) and Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). These landscapes receive focused attention from the MDC for their high conservation potential of large areas of continuous habitat and the presence of vulnerable natural resources (see Figure 1). Most of the property within these landscapes is privately owned, meaning that private landowners' involvement in the conservation of their property is integral in protecting these vulnerable landscapes.

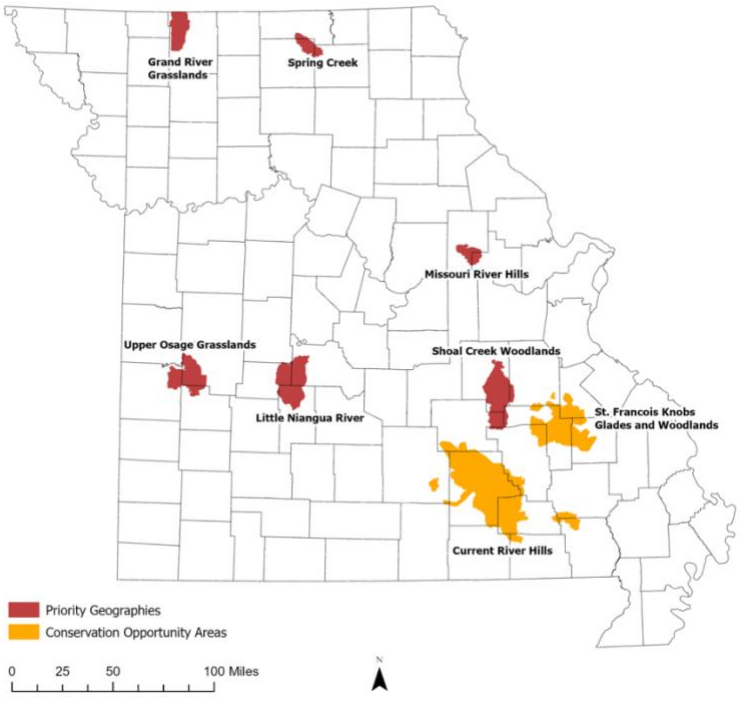

Figure 1. A map of the selected Priority Geographies and Conservation Opportunity Areas.

We selected one PG or COA from each of MDC's recognized eight regions. These selections were made based on landscape attributes, habitat types, and public input.

The criteria for choosing these study sites were established to ensure comprehensive representation across the state to reflect the conservation needs within Missouri. These geographies were selected as the study sites with the criteria outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Priority Geographies were selected for solicitation based on their associated landscapes and criteria.

Priority Geography	**Primary Landscape**	**Parcel Criteria**
Central Region: **Missouri River Hills**	Forest, Woodlands	>100 acres of forest/woodland
Northwest Region: **Grand River Grasslands**	Tallgrass prairie	Contains any remnant prairie
Southwest Region: **Little Niangua**	Forest, Woodlands, Riparian	>100 acres of forest/woodland OR ½ mile mainstem river frontage
Ozark Region: **Current River Hills**	Forest, Woodlands, Riparian	>100 acres of forest/woodland OR ½ mile mainstem river frontage
Northeast Region: **Spring Creek Gap**	Prairie, Woodlands	>50 acres of remnant prairie and/or forest/woodland/savannah
St. Louis: **Shoal Creek Woodlands**	Forest, Woodlands, Riparian	>100 acres of forest/woodland OR ½ mile mainstem river frontage
Kansas City: **Upper Osage Grasslands**	Tallgrass Prairie	Contains any remnant prairie
Southeast Region: **St. Francois Knobs Glades and Woodlands**	Forest, Woodlands	>100 acres of forest/woodland

MDC has developed a GIS database containing landowners within PGs and COAs. The research team screened for eligible parcels and contacted the owners of them. To be solicited for the study, landowners in Missouri River Hills and St. Francois Knobs Glades and Woodlands must have owned parcels of at least 100 acres of forest or woodlands; Parcels in Little Niangua, Current River Hills, and Shoal Creek Woodlands must have contained at least 100 acres of forests or woodland or 0.5 miles of mainstem river frontage; Grand River Grasslands and Upper Osage Grasslands parcels must have

contained any amount of remnant prairie; and parcels in Spring Creek Gap must have contained at least 50 acres of remnant prairie and/or 0.5 miles of mainstem river frontage.

Participant Recruitment

Landowners were recruited via postcard with project contact details and an invitation to participate. The mailing list and eligibility of landowners in each conservation area were determined by the GIS database provided by MDC, which contains specific parcel criteria. Landowners must not have an existing permanent conservation easement on their eligible property. Each PG selected varied in the total number of eligible participants. Areas with a smaller eligibility pool were solicited multiple times to accommodate a more equal distribution of responses. Upon receiving interest from landowners, they were screened for eligibility once again through a phone call. If eligible, interviews were scheduled during the screening phone call. A $25 check was offered as an incentive for participation in the interview. We interviewed 46 eligible participants.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interview script is adapted from Brown et al. (2023b) and expanded to examine the perceptions of landowners who do not yet have conservation easements. The interview began by asking what the land means to the landowner and how they use and care for the land as a way of understanding their current land practices. Then, there was an opportunity for the landowner to discuss the steps taken to ensure success in their long-term vision for the land, as well as list any resources used for conservation planning. Next, to understand landowner perceptions of conservation easements, participants were then provided a brief definition of a conservation easement,

followed by asking about their reactions to the term, if they are familiar with it, and why or why not they have ever considered an easement.

Participants were offered the option of being interviewed via Zoom or phone call. The interviews were recorded and uploaded to Rev for storage and transcription. Rev is a speech-to-text transcription service, where AI was used to transcribe the interviews. As interviews were transcribed, the corresponding transcripts were assigned random numbers for identification. Members of the research team compared transcriptions and their corresponding audio to ensure accuracy. Once each transcript was vetted for accuracy, it was uploaded to NVivo for storage and coding.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed in NVivo using an inductive thematic analysis approach. This process requires coding the data without attempting to conform it to a pre-existing coding structure (Nowell et al., 2017). Responses were to open-ended questions; therefore, thematic analysis is key in identifying the range, depth, and complexity of responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Flick, 2014; King, 2004; Riessman, 2008). Inductive coding is a ground-up approach that creates codes as the data is analyzed, allowing for themes to emerge from the data that are not preconceived (Alemu et al., 2015; Dufour & Richard, 2019). The approach involves a dual coding process that is repetitive and a constant comparative method to ensure the accuracy of the findings in reflecting the original meaning (Gooden & Grenyer, 2019; Olson et al., 2016; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Dual coders individually coded interviews and then discussed codes together to ensure consistency. If there were inconsistencies, coders discussed the instance until an agreement was reached. Data collection was stopped when we reached data saturation, meaning no new themes and topics emerged.

RESULTS

The interviews resulted in findings in four themes: prior knowledge, land protection, regulations, and finance (Table 2). Each theme contains several subthemes, some of which present both motivations and constraints for conservation easement adoption.

Table 2. Themes and their associated subthemes.

Themes	**Subthemes**
Prior Knowledge	Knowledge of Conservation Easements
	Past Experience with Conservation Organizations
	Participation in Conservation Programs
	Opinions Shared by Social Groups
Land Protection	Conservation Value of Land
	Attachment to Land
	Ensuring Future Conditions
	Guidance on Conservation Projects
Regulations	Autonomy in Decision-Making
	Restrictions on Private Property
	Access to the Private Property
	Permanence of Conservation Easements
Finance	Financial Consideration for Conservation Easements
	Financial Assistance in Conservation Easement Adoption Process
	Finances are Not a Factor

Prior Knowledge

Four subthemes emerged in Prior Knowledge: knowledge of conservation easements, past experience with conservation organizations, participation in conservation programs, and opinions shared by social groups. Participants had various degrees of knowledge about conservation easements, which influenced their perceptions of them throughout the interview.

Knowledge of conservation easements. Prior knowledge, or a lack thereof, of conservation easements was a barrier to many when it came to adopting a conservation easement. A lack of knowledge about conservation easements was heavily present in

interviews, with one landowner stating, “I wish I had known about [a conservation easement]. I’ll definitely get involved with it.” The interview script provided participants with a general definition of a conservation easement, but many participants wanted additional details on the concept. When read the definition of a conservation easement, some landowners compared it to a past fishing initiative by MDC, where The Department would stock a private landowners’ pond with fish if the public could fish the pond on the private property. A landowner who associated the two stated,

> “We had considered at one point when we got a pond having [MDC] stock it, but we heard you had to offload days to the public every year to let them fish there, so we weren’t interested in that at all.”

There was confusion on what a conservation easement agreement entails, with a landowner expressing, “I don’t understand the value and the limitations of a conservation agreement. I mean, I don’t know what they’re willing to do, what they don’t want me to do.” One landowner who was not previously aware of a conservation easement expressed their understanding of the agreement as, “You give control to the land trust, and they give control to the Conservation Department. Next thing you know, they’re tearing up your place.”

Past experience with conservation organizations. Past experience with conservation organizations mentioned in the interviews was both positive and negative. Some landowners expressed a lack of trust in conservation organizations based on a perception of disinterest from the organization, with one landowner stating that they “see ‘em once in a while, but they don’t talk to you much about what you’re doing or what you’re going to do or anything like that.” Some landowners expressed a lack of trust in

conservation organizations based on past failed initiatives by the organization or from a lack of trust in the government. On the other hand, past positive experiences with conservation organizations motivated landowners to work continuously with conservation organizations on projects on their private property. A landowner with previous experience working with conservation organizations stated that "there's been some wonderful relationships and a lot of fantastic work done over a long time." Many landowners with positive past experiences with conservation organizations expressed this as a reciprocal relationship that they will consider when making decisions on their property.

Participation in conservation programs. Almost all of the landowners interviewed have participated in some form of a conservation program, and almost every landowner interviewed mentioned ecological value as a motivator for land protection. Participation in conservation programs was largely through short-term projects with conservation agencies. These programs consisted of initiatives to enhance a feature on the property, such as assistance with controlled burns or cost-share programs to assist in timber stand improvement. A landowner who has implemented multiple programs on their property stated that "[The projects] have been really important to providing the motivation and the financial assistance that results in me doing the habitat management work". These programs were highly popular among the sample and were mostly regarded as successful.

Opinions shared by social groups. Landowners' social groups, such as friends, family, and neighbors influence how landowners make decisions regarding their property. At times, the interviews revealed different perceptions among landowners in different PGs/COAs. Landowners in some PGs often noted shared experiences with other

landowners in the same PG. For example, some landowners in the same geography expressed concerns about rapid development driven by a quickly expanding tourism industry. Some landowners who were from the same PG expressed similar views on conservation organizations, with one landowner from a largely sampled area stating, "The people that own property [in this area] do not like the conservation department, and most of them don't trust the conservation department. And I speak for most of them." When it comes to adopting a conservation easement, those who did know of them previously by word-of-mouth in their social circles often expressed hesitancy, with one landowner mentioning,

> "I know that some of my neighbors feel that the conservation [department] just wants to take land away from the landowners, and then if they want to use it, you have to pay for it and then you have to bid on it and it's a big deal."

Land Protection

Four subthemes were identified within land protection: the conservation value of the land, attachment to land, ensuring future conditions, and guidance on conservation projects.

Conservation value of the land. This subtheme encompasses the landscape features and ecosystem of the property as a motivator for conservation. A landowner stated that their motivation for taking care of their property is that "it is a beautiful prairie and I want to see it preserved." Landscape features of ecological or scenic value may be a motivator for conservation, with one landowner mentioning that they have "one small segment of Ozarks glade on my property that we have worked very hard to protect over the years."

Attachment to land. A landowner's attachment to land was a major motivator for land preservation. This emerged as a landowner's identity being attached to the property, family history on the land, and scenic value of the land. One landowner described their land as meaning "everything to me. It's my whole life." Another landowner emphasized their emotional attachment to their property by stating that the land "means a lot more than just soil and water. It came from my family."

Ensuring future conditions. Land protection as a way to ensure future conditions emerged as landowners expressed a desire for their property to stay as they wished in the future. This was mainly expressed as a desire for one's property to never be developed or subdivided. When asked about using a conservation easement to ensure future conditions, one landowner stated, "I'd have to discuss it with my boys because it's going to be theirs and they're just like me. They want it restricted from development and from people." Some landowners felt as though a conservation easement may protect their property as they wish to keep it in perpetuity, especially in cases of threats of development. Landowners with property in high tourism areas especially mentioned this as a concern as their areas rapidly develop, with one stating, "Suppose they say if you don't develop [the property], or [you must] put it into a conservation easement. I'd put it into a conservation easement in a heartbeat."

Guidance on conservation projects. Landowners expressed a need for guidance on conservation projects. Given that many landowners interviewed were not familiar with conservation easements, interest in them was expressed upon being read the definition. Many landowners were inquisitive in seeking information on conservation easements. However, they did not know who to contact for further assistance, with one landowner

stating, “If I understand more about the preservation of the property through this easement, education is what it’s all about. Knowing what’s going on and what’s going to happen.”

Regulations

Four subthemes emerged within the regulations theme: autonomy in decision-making, restrictions on private property, access to private property, and permanence of conservation easements.

Autonomy in decision-making. The theme of autonomy in decision-making encompasses the importance of a landowner making one’s own decisions for their property. Many landowners expressed a need to be the sole decision maker for their property with an undertone of knowing what is best for their property, with one landowner mentioning, “We have already protected the land for years, so I don’t know what another group of people could do that we aren’t already doing.”

Restrictions on private property. Similarly, the theme of restrictions on private property encompasses the hesitancy that some landowners feel toward restrictive regulations provided by conservation easements. One landowner mentioned that a conservation easement may “turn out to be either [something] I wouldn’t like long term, or my heirs wouldn’t like long term.” On the other hand, restrictions on private property also provide insight into the benefits of restrictive regulations on private property for future protection and structure in succession planning. A landowner mentioned using a conservation easement in succession planning as “a way to assure a legacy and that the property will always be cared for.”

Access to the private property. A constraint mentioned by many landowners is access to their private property. A common hesitancy toward a conservation easement is a concern with access to the property not previously allowed by the landowner. The word "easement" was a deterrent to landowners without prior knowledge of a conservation easement, with one landowner stating, "I don't like the word easement. To me, that would be like if I let the state come in and do stuff, then that opens the gate to me allowing it to be used as public land."

Permanence of conservation easements. The permanence of a perpetual conservation easement was a major deterrent for landowners to consider adopting one. Permanence was expressed as the sole reason for some landowners not to enter a conservation easement agreement, with many arguing that an end date would give them more peace of mind. One landowner stated that they would "prefer to enter a cost-share program before I did an easement. That's something that can have an end date."

Finance

Our findings within finance include three subthemes: Financial considerations for conservation easements, financial assistance in the conservation easement adoption process, and finances are not a factor.

Financial consideration for conservation easements. Financial considerations regarding the financial implications a conservation easement would have on the property once placed varied widely among interview participants. The effects of a conservation easement on a property's value were noted, with a landowner mentioning, "In easements not only do you lose some value in terms of the resale value of the land, but they also cost money to do." Some landowners expressed that they desired financial benefits associated

with a conservation easement, noting that adequate compensation would be necessary for consideration. One landowner stated that financial incentives would be a motivator for considering a conservation easement, stating, “If I’m going to set aside property and never be able to sell it or work the ground, getting financial incentives would pique my interest.”

Financial assistance in conservation easement adoption process. Financial assistance in the conservation easement adoption process was also a factor for landowners. Concerns about associated costs and the need for financial assistance in the conservation easement adoption process were common constraints to adopting conservation easements. The upfront cost of a conservation easement was a deterrent to many who were familiar with the startup costs, with some landowners stating that they lacked the upfront capital for such agreements. Referencing the initial payment into the Stewardship and Conservation Defense endowments, a participant stated that upfront cost assistance would be helpful to offset this cost, “I got to pay for that upfront. I don’t have ten grand laying around. If I could get help in the beginning and they could come see that it’s being done, that would be great.” Some landowners used their previous success in cost assistance in pro-environmental programs as anecdotal evidence for financial assistance as a motivator, stating, “[Cost assistance] has been really important to providing the motivation and the financial assistance that results in me doing the habitat management work.” Other landowners were unfamiliar with opportunities for financial assistance in the context of conservation easements.

Finances are not a factor. For some landowners, financial considerations were not a factor at all when considering a conservation easement. Other landowners

prioritized conservation and personal connection to the property over finances, with one landowner stating that they "don't think that there would be a sizeable amount of money that would make me make any decision on this place." In addition, many landowners mentioned that property taxes are low in Missouri, so a tax incentive is not enough to motivate them to adopt a conservation easement.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to understand landowner perceptions of conservation easements in areas of high conservation value. This information can inform conservation agencies of the differences in viewpoints among private landowners. In particular, a lack of knowledge, confusion, and misinformation about conservation easements influenced landowner perceptions of them. This uncertainty around conservation easements was present in most topics, and both motivations for and constraints toward adopting a conservation easement were affected.

Motivations for Conservation Easement Consideration

This study found some motivations for adopting a conservation easement that have been seen in recent literature, such as regulations (Brown et al., 2023b; Selinske et al., 2019; Stroman & Kreuter, 2014), land protection (Kamal et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2013a; Scott et al., 2001), and financial incentives (Davidson et al., 2019; Van Sant et al., 2020). Additionally, our findings further suggest that conservation easements serve as motivators for landowners as a succession tool (Brown et al., 2023b; Selinske et al., 2019; Stroman & Kreuter, 2014), fostering a personal connection to the property (Brenner et al., 2013; Welsh et al., 2018), and providing upfront financial assistance in conservation easement adoption (Davidson et al., 2019; Van Sant et al., 2020).

Conservation easements were mentioned as a means of offering reassurance in succession planning. Implementing a conservation easement could provide the perceived benefit of the land being protected forever, with some landowners mentioning that it would be their "legacy." A conservation easement could also be a motivator in that it can be written so that future generations cannot subdivide the land or develop it, giving landowners peace of mind that the land will stay as they had intended (Bastian et al., 2017; Selinske et al., 2019; Stroman & Kreuter, 2014).

Participants spoke of place attachment, such as family history on the property or an emotional connection to their property, as a motivator for conserving their land for the future. A personal value of land protection has also been identified as a motivator for private land conservation in previous research (Bastian et al., 2017; Horton et al., 2017). Conservation easements can provide a landowner with the expected benefit of protecting the land, which comes from a moral obligation to protect their property (Bastian et al., 2017; Horton et al., 2017).

For some landowners, economic incentives can be a main motivator for adopting a conservation easement (Davidson et al., 2019; Van Sant et al., 2020). In the conservation easement adoption process, financial assistance from the easement holder was mentioned as necessary for some landowners. Specifically, landowners mentioned assistance at the beginning of the conservation easement adoption process, before the easement is placed on the land, as a motivator. Other financial considerations were mentioned as motivators, such as money to offset the perceived losses in property value from the placement of a conservation easement.

Some landowners had participated in cost-share programs with conservation organizations in the past and had positive perceptions of both the program and the organizations. Many of these landowners mentioned their willingness to work with these organizations again on a conservation easement. Economic incentives as a main motivator are consistent with previous research (Davidson et al., 2019; Van Sant et al., 2020).

Constraints to Conservation Easement Consideration

A lack of knowledge of conservation easements was a leading constraint for landowners. Outside of a definition of a conservation easement provided throughout the interview, participants were only given supplemental information if they asked clarifying questions. The term "easement" itself was a major deterrent among landowners. The interview script asked if the landowner knew what a conservation easement was and what they thought about the term. Many landowners were not familiar with a conservation easement before their interviews. The majority of landowners associated a conservation easement with right-of-way easements, such as utility easements, which give utility companies the right to access private property for the good of the community (Mo. Rev. Stat. §523.283). When asked about what they thought a conservation easement was, many respondents assumed it allowed the public to access their property. This lack of knowledge and confusion surrounding a conservation easement can be a deterrent to adoption. Some landowners did not know which conservation organizations and resources existed in their areas or who to contact for information on conservation initiatives they wished to pursue. Understanding this gap in communication between

conservation organizations and interested landowners can be key in increasing conservation easement adoption.

Restrictive regulations caused by a conservation easement were also seen as deterrents, as seen in past literature (Miller et al., 2011; Sorice et al., 2013). From a succession standpoint, landowners expressed concern about the effects a conservation easement would have on their heirs to the property. Many expressed that they wished for their heirs to have free will to make decisions for the property, and a conservation easement would be too restrictive. Landowners also expressed an aversion to the permanence of a conservation easement. Most mentioned that something with an end date would be preferable, as the future is too uncertain to enter a perpetual contract.

Some landowners felt a conservation easement would be a hindrance because of a deep personal connection to the land. Many expressed disdain for relinquishing control to external entities. A common constraint to adopting a conservation easement was that many landowners believed that only they could make the best decisions for their property, and giving any authority of decision-making to another entity would be detrimental. This aligns with previous research that suggests that place identity is a deterrent to relinquishing control to a third-party organization (Klenosky et al., 2015).

A contributor to misinformation is the effect that a landowner's social circles have on decision-making. Outside individuals' perceptions of certain aspects of a conservation easement can heavily influence how individual landowners make decisions about their property. Some landowners had only heard of a conservation easement by word-of-mouth through their groups of people with whom they regularly interacted. This could be anecdotal of another landowner's experience with a conservation easement or a general

culture of perceptions of conservation organizations. This varied by geography, and landowners who lived within the same PG as other participants often reflected shared experiences. Some landowners mentioned a culture of mutual trust between their neighbors and different conservation organizations, and others told rumors of landowners losing all rights to their property at the hands of a conservation easement, as heard from their peers. Misconceptions of what a conservation easement does can be a byproduct of a lack of information. Many landowners did not differentiate between conservation entities and generalized government organizations, non-government organizations, and non-profit and for-profit conservation organizations as one entity, often referring to any external entity as "they/them".

Lack of trust is also apparent in landowners' personal past experiences with conservation organizations. These experiences mostly were short-term projects on their property, such as timber stand improvement and prescribed fires. The deterrent was not from the success of the project but from the perceived attitudes and willingness of the conservation entities. Some landowners felt as though the conservation organizations they were utilizing for this project did not communicate effectively, were disinterested, or did not follow through on the project goals. This is seen in previous research as a lack of trust in organizations, more specifically governmental entities (Cross et al., 2011; Enloe et al., 2017).

Some landowners mentioned losses in property value as a reason not to consider a conservation easement. The upfront cost of the startup of a conservation easement was mentioned by many as a deterrent if the landowner was aware that the process requires a sum of money. Another topic was tax incentives, with landowners who mentioned them

stating that the property taxes are so low in Missouri that a tax incentive would not make a large enough difference to consider. However, property taxes are not impacted by the placement of a conservation easement, further highlighting the lack of knowledge about the agreements. Some landowners were indifferent about the topic of finance; financial considerations were not their priority when considering a conservation easement, but they could be considered a perk. These landowners claimed that land conservation was more of a priority when considering adopting a conservation easement.

Although administrative considerations were found in the literature (Brown et al., 2023a; Horton et al., 2017; Sorice et al., 2013), they did not emerge in our findings. This may be because landowners are not familiar enough with the process to know what those would be, while past research with individuals who have conservation easements have gone through that process and, therefore, are aware. As such, it might be a challenge that only emerges once a landowner begins the process of adopting a conservation easement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this study guide recommendations for promoting conservation easement adoption with landowners who do not have existing easements. Understanding the origins of misinformation and confusion while identifying knowledge gaps can help conservation organizations provide clarity when communicating with landowners about conservation easement adoption. Developing education and outreach materials tailored to a lack of knowledge about conservation easements can aid in conservation easement adoption. Considering the importance of one's social group in decision-making, utilizing trusted community members or successful case studies of conservation easements could be beneficial in speaking to landowners without existing conservation easements

(Klenosky et al., 2015). Conservation managers can lean into the sentiment of peoples' land when developing and refining policies and outreach material related to private land conservation (Farmer et al., 2011a; Farmer et al., 2011b).

Historical perceptions that landowners have toward conservation organizations can be considered in approaching landowners. To mitigate negative perceptions from landowners, conservation organizations can prioritize timeliness on projects and ensure an open line of communication throughout the adoption process (Bastian et al., 2017). The promotion of conservation easements relies on willing landowners. Cultivating and maintaining positive relationships between conservation organizations and landowners can be essential.

Financial incentives can be created and bolstered to aid in the upfront cost of conservation adoption. Specifically, grants, tax benefits, or cost-shares that can lower the financial burden for landowners considering conservation easements could be used in the promotion of them (Horton et al., 2017). Having these resources available when approaching a landowner with limited prior experience with a conservation easement and the adoption process can be beneficial.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

While it cannot be generalized nationally, there is potential for broader applicability by informing efforts in other areas, such as areas of high ecological value with diverse landscapes or sociocultural environments. Research in other regions of the United States and other areas of ecological value may identify factors not recognized in this study (Brenner et al., 2013; Stroman & Kreuter, 2014; Gwaltney, 2023). Future research can extend its scope to encompass diverse ecological landscapes, allowing for a

more comprehensive understanding of how contextual and regional factors influence landowner perceptions and decisions regarding conservation easements. Research could implement a comparative analysis between contextual and regional factors such as parcel sizes, laws, incentives, landowner economic status, and specific property characteristics. This can identify nuanced differences in landowner attitudes toward conservation easements.

While the study focuses on landowners, research could also be conducted on the general public's knowledge of conservation easements to identify gaps in public education that can be filled. This can inform outreach and educational campaigns, ensuring a more informed and supportive public stance toward conservation initiatives. Understanding public perceptions is crucial for garnering broader support for conservation efforts.

Recognizing the historic and institutional disparities in land ownership, future studies could intentionally focus on more diverse demographics of landowners. This could include individuals from historically marginalized communities, addressing the potential bias in perceptions and constraints faced by different demographic groups. Understanding how historical inequities may influence engagement in conservation practices is essential for designing inclusive and equitable conservation strategies.

Other methodological considerations could benefit future research. Diversifying the sample could include a broader range of landowners (Brenner et al., 2013; Cross et al., 2011; Horton et al., 2017). Additionally, considering in-person interviews on landowners' properties could provide a more immersive and context-rich setting,

potentially yielding deeper insights into the intricacies of landowner decisions regarding conservation easements.

CONCLUSION

This study can contribute to the development and refinement of policies related to private land conservation, especially in areas of high ecological value. Policymakers can leverage this understanding to create incentives, streamline processes, and address constraints, fostering a more conducive environment for private landowners to participate in conservation initiatives. This information can also inform land trusts more broadly. Understanding the specific constraints that landowners face during the adoption of conservation easements allows land trusts to refine their approaches. This includes improving the structure of easements, addressing financial concerns, and enhancing communication strategies to anticipate and overcome landowner hesitations. While the focus is on Missouri, the implications extend far beyond state borders. This study's approach can be deployed in other regions facing similar constraints in private land conservation and can be transferable beyond its immediate sample for context-specific adaptation.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

This study addresses the perceptions of conservation easements held by selected landowners in Missouri PGs and COAs who do not currently have one. Through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, this study found various motivators and constraints perceived by landowners regarding conservation easements. The results can guide future landowner outreach projects in areas of conservation concern. Conservation organizations can refine their communication strategies to ensure that outreach efforts resonate with the specific needs and priorities of private landowners.

The collaboration between the University of Missouri, MDC, and the Missouri Land Trust Coalition was integral to the study design, ensuring that the results were applicable and beneficial for field use. It is important to note that the study experienced data loss from computer damage, resulting in the loss of recordings from ten interviews. While this did not materially affect the overall outcomes of the study, it does mean that the perspectives of these ten interviewees are not reflected in the findings.

The outcomes of this study hold substantial implications for both immediate and long-term strategies in private land conservation. There is a clear need for widespread education about conservation easements to dispel misconceptions and increase knowledge among landowners. Understanding landowner perceptions of conservation organizations is necessary to improve interactions and foster positive experiences. Building trust can enhance collaboration between conservation organizations and landowners. The significance of personal ties to one’s property suggests the importance of considering individual motivations and values when implementing conservation programs. This is particularly important for perpetual agreements like conservation

easements, where the long-term commitment requires careful consideration of landowners' emotional attachment and stewardship goals for the property.

This study is an example of the University of Missouri's commitment to fulfilling its land grant mission by serving the State of Missouri. It has functioned as a bridge between academia and practical application in the field, addressing information that MDC sought to inform their programming. The findings of this study can inform state and land trust activities by highlighting key factors that influence landowners' decisions regarding conservation easements. The identified constraints and motivators can guide efforts to improve communication and outreach, helping to address landowner hesitations and enhance their understanding of conservation easements. Landowners with high conservation value tracts can be targeted for conservation easements by aligning strategies with these insights. This study shows the importance of outreach and education, as a significant takeaway is the lack of knowledge about conservation easements among some large-tract landowners. These results can serve in assisting initiatives that address the specific needs and concerns of landowners to protect Missouri's natural resources.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Postcard for Participant Recruitment (Mailed)

Research Study: Missouri Landowner Interviews

A research team from the School of Natural Resources at the University of Missouri is conducting a study on landowner motivations and constraints for private land conservation.

We will be conducting interviews (via Zoom or telephone) with a limited number of Missouri landowners, and we hope you will participate to provide us with your insights. Participants will receive a $25 check for their time.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact McKenna Thompson at (573) 279-4173 or conservationstudy@missouri.edu for more information and to schedule your interview.

School of Natural Resources
University of Missouri

Appendix B
Recruitment Letter (Mailed)

Missouri Landowner Research Study: We want to hear from you

The University of Missouri School of Natural Resources is conducting a study called "Understanding Landowner Perceptions, Barriers, and Motivators for Land Conservation." The purpose of this research project is to understand the motivators and constraints that landowners face in private land conservation.

We are conducting interviews (via Zoom or telephone) with a limited number of Missouri landowners, and we hope you will participate to provide us with your insights. For your time and effort, we will be offering compensation in the amount of a $25 check. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. You will be interviewed regarding your parcel of land. Please feel free to ask for clarification on any question; there are no "wrong" answers to any question. You may skip any question you are not comfortable answering.

The interview will take approximately one hour. The information you provide will be kept confidential and only the research team will have access to it. Any reports or publications we produce from this study will not contain any identifying information about you or your property.
If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact my graduate student, McKenna Thompson, (573) 279-4173 or conservationstudy@missouri.edu for more information and to schedule your interview. You are also welcome to contact me with any questions or comments (rotmanr@missouri.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you want to talk privately about any concerns or issues related to your participation, you may contact the Research Participant Advocacy at 888-280-5002 (a free call) or email muresearchrpa@missouri.edu. The Principal Investigator for this project is me, Prof. Robin Rotman, and the IRB Reference Number is 2097341 MU.

Thank you for your consideration,

Robin M. Rotman, JD
Assistant Professor, MU School of Natural Resources

Email: rotmanr@missouri.edu
Campus phone: 573-882-5693

Appendix C
Pre-Interview Screening Phone Call Script

Thank you for contacting me regarding our study on landowner motivations and constraints for private land conservation. I just want to ask you a few questions to confirm your eligibility for the study.

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Are you the owner of the property you are calling about?
3. Are you willing to participate in an approximately 1-hour long Zoom or telephone interview?

Great – you are eligible to participate. Can we go ahead and schedule your interview?

(*Schedule date/time, ask preference for Zoom or telephone, remind of compensation)*

Also, would you be willing to have your interview audio recorded and transcribed, to enhance the accuracy of our analysis? (if not, we can proceed with the interview using a note-taker)

Thank you. If you want to talk privately about your rights or any issues related to your participation in this study, you can contact the University of Missouri Research Participant Advocacy by calling 888-280-5002 or emailing MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu.

Appendix D
Interview Script

Introduction and Consent Statement

Hello, my name is McKenna Thompson, and I am a graduate student at the University of Missouri School of Natural Resources. You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "Understanding Landowner Perceptions, Barriers, and Motivators for Land Conservation." The purpose of this research project is to understand the motivators and constraints that landowners face in private land conservation.

To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. You will be interviewed regarding your parcel of land. Please feel free to ask for clarification on any question; there are no "wrong" answers to any question. You may skip any question you are not comfortable answering. The interview will take approximately one hour.

The information you provide will be kept confidential and only the research team will have access to it. Any reports or publications we produce from this study will not contain any identifying information about you or your property.

For your time and effort, we will be offering compensation in the amount of a $25 check. If you wish to receive the compensation, at the end of the interview I will ask you for your name, street address, city, state, and zip code so that we can process your payment. If you choose to withdraw from the interview part way through, you will still receive full compensation.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you want to talk privately about any concerns or issues related to your participation, you may contact the Research Participant Advocacy at 888-280-5002 (a free call) or email muresearchrpa@missouri.edu. The Principal Investigator for this project is Prof. Robin Rotman, and the IRB Reference Number is 2097341 MU.

If you would like a copy of the consent statement that I have just read to you, please let me know and I can send it to you by email or in the mail.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

I want to ensure that your responses are recorded accurately, so do you consent me to audio record our conservation?

[If audio recording consent is given] Okay, thank you, I will now begin recording.

--Begin recording –

Confirm consent again once recording begins.

To confirm once again, have you consented to participate in this study and consented to be audio recorded for the purpose of this study?

Interview Questions (may be answered out of order and may lead to other topics)

1. Can you tell me about what your property means to you?
2. How do you use and care for your land?
3. What are your long-term goals and vision for your property, during your ownership and after you no longer own it?
4. What steps have you taken to plan for and achieve your goals and vision?
5. What resources have you used in planning for or pursuing your goals and vision?
6. Have you heard of the term "conservation easement"?
    a. If no to Q6: What's your reaction to the term?
    b. If yes to Q6: (If participant indicates they have a conservation easement on their property, it is okay to proceed with interview) Tell me what you know about them and what your impressions are?
7. I'm going to share the definition of 'conservation easement' that we are using in our study. "A conservation easement is a legal agreement voluntarily entered into between a landowner and a conservation organization which permanently limits certain uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values." For example, most conservation easements place restrictions or limitations on developing buildings or subdividing the property. Landowners maintain all other rights on their property that are not restricted by the easement.

    I'd like to ask for your perceptions related to conservation easements defined in this way.

    a. Do you know anyone with a conservation easement? If so, what are your impressions of their experience with the conservation easement?
    b. Now I'd like to talk about you. Have you ever considered placing a conservation easement on your land we have been discussing? Why or why not?

        Depending on how in-depth the response is, use these follow-ups:
        i. What, if anything, would make you more likely to consider placing a conservation easement on your property?
        ii. Are there any other factors that would lead you to consider placing a conservation easement?
        iii. Are there any types of financial incentives associated with placing a conservation easement that would make it more likely for you to consider putting one on your property?

iv. Are there any other factors why you would not consider placing a conservation easement?
v. Are there certain types of conservation organizations that you would be more or less comfortable working with? (For example, government agency, national nonprofit organization, local nonprofit organization, etc.)?

8. Aside from conservation easements, are there any other tools or programs you have considered for the long-term conservation of your property? If so, please explain.
9. Do you have anything you would like to ask me or would like to add/mention?
10. Finally, to help us in our final report to describe broadly who we have talked with, I have three optional demographic questions if you are willing.
    a. How long have you owned your land?
    b. What year were you born?
    c. What is your gender?

Probes:

a. What do you mean?
b. Can you clarify what you mean by that?
c. Do you want to elaborate on that?
d. How so?
e. Do you have any examples?
f. What happened?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time and effort today! Sometimes, questions come up when we review responses. Would it be okay for us to contact you for clarification on anything you may have said in the interview? What is the best way for us to contact you?

In order to process your check for $25, may I please ask for your name, street address, city, state, and zip code? Excellent, we will send out your check for $25.

If you have any further questions, feel free to contact me at conservationstudy@missouri.edu or (573) 279-4173, or the Principal Investigator, Prof. Robin Rotman, at rotmanr@missouri.edu or (573) 882-5693. If you want to talk privately about your rights or any issues related to your participation in this study, you can contact the University of Missouri Research Participant Advocacy by calling 888-280-5002 (a free call), or by emailing MUResearchRPA@missouri.edu.