

**THE PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS, INC.**  
**RECORDS RETENTION AND DESTRUCTION POLICY**

**Recommended by Accreditation Committee: March 15, 2012**  
**Adopted by TPE Board: May 16, 2012**

TPE staff uses record management to determine which records must be maintained by them, how such records are to be backed up and stored and how long such records shall be retained. Legal, business, financial, personnel and real estate records shall be kept in accordance with the schedules on this document.

While privacy requirements dictate that certain records, including employee files and project files to the extent necessary to protect landowner privacy, shall have access limited, TPE desires to be as transparent as possible. Therefore its policy is to make all of its records public, subject only to the above limitations.

**Section 1 - Acquisition of Property and Easement Management**

It is crucial that TPE Board of Directors and legal counsel have ample opportunity to review all proposed conservation projects and to maintain those that are approved and implemented. For this purpose, TPE staff will create and maintain files for each conservation project in both digital and physical form. The staff shall not be required to convert them from physical to digital form until the project has been completed. Formal project files will be initiated when the Board of Directors provides initial approval for a conservation project. TPE staff shall carefully document all steps in the development of conservation projects as they progress according to TPE policies and procedures. Original, signed documents and contact records and a digital backup for each conservation project are to be permanently stored and protected in an offsite archive, as described in Section 3 below.

**Section 2 - Other Records**

It is crucial that TPE Board of Directors, staff and other persons working for TPE have the opportunity to review all legal, business and financial records. Personnel records, and project files to the extent required for landowner privacy, shall be limited to members of the board and to the Business Manager. TPE staff shall create and maintain all business records both in digital and physical form. All records maintained in physical form shall be converted to digital form on a regular basis.

**Section 3 - Off-site Record Storage**

It is essential that TPE maintain secure records. To that end, it is the policy of TPE to store original conservation project documents, business, financial, legal and personnel in a secure off-site storage facility that is protected from disasters. Removal of documents from the off-site facility will be allowed only as approved by the President, Business Manager or Accountant. Documents placed in the off-site storage facility shall include:

- (1) Conservation Easements, Easement Amendments

- (2) Baseline Reports & Photo Documentation
- (3) Option Agreements, Leases, and other original documents related to interests in real property
- (4) Deeds, Transfer Agreements, Access Easements
- (5) Promissory Notes, mortgages and other security instruments
- (6) Reserved Rights Documentation
- (7) Annual conservation easement monitoring reports and photo/video documentation
- (8) Annual Digital Back-ups of Computer Data Files
- (9) Annual Digital Back-ups of Quick Books Financial Records
- (10) Annual Financial Audit Reports
- (11) Financial Records

#### Digital Document Back-up System

In addition to the off-site archive storage of physical documents described below, TPE maintains a back-up system for all digital data. The purposes of this system are:

- (1) to create reliable, retrievable data in the case of computer malfunctions;
- (2) to create copies for historical purposes, since it is physically unmanageable to archive every document; and
- (3) to preserve digital copies of physical documents and photographs that may deteriorate over time. Data is backed up nightly utilizing two different mediums. A digital back up is archived at the off-storage facility on an annual basis.

#### **Section 4 - Financial Records**

As a tax exempt organization and an organization responsible for easement defense in perpetuity, TPE must manage its finances and assets in a responsible and accountable manner. To that end, it is the policy of TPE to maintain complete, accurate and credible documentation of its financial management activities.

The types of financial records managed by the Business Manager include TPE's accounting software; annual reports; balance sheets; budgets; reconciliations and cancelled checks; invoices and receipts of payables; copies of checks deposited; copies of donor restrictions.

Access to these records is limited to those persons approved by the President, Business Manager and Accountant, due to the confidential nature of certain contents (i.e. payroll). Specific reports that do not contain confidential information will be made available to staff and volunteers as needed (e.g. past event expenses). The accounting software is password protected, as are certain financial reports.

#### **Section 5 - Fundraising Records**

As a publicly supported charitable organization, TPE is committed to raising funds in an ethical and accountable manner. Quality recordkeeping of the fundraising program will demonstrate that TPE complies with charitable solicitation laws, accurately represents its claims and intended use

of funds, and uses restricted funds as specified by donors. To that end, it is the policy of TPE to retain templates of all fundraising solicitation letters for a period of three (3) years.

**Section 6 – Business Records**

The person who possesses the books and records of the organization shall be the Business Manager, who may be reached by mail at P.O. Box 1148, Madison, WI 53701, by phone at (608) 577-0584, by e-mail at [carolwinge@yahoo.com](mailto:carolwinge@yahoo.com), or at such new contact as may be published on TPE website from time to time.

In order to practice sound business procedures, it is the policy of TPE to maintain records of its business activities, board meetings, and office administration, and to carefully maintain these records in a secure manner. It is also TPE policy to diligently protect and secure all digital records and the organization’s computer system through use of current and complete security tools and equipment.

**BUSINESS RECORD GUIDELINES**

All legal, business, financial and personnel records shall be kept in accordance with the following schedule:

Governing Documents	Governing documents shall be retained for the life of the organization. The Articles of Incorporation, the Bylaws and all policies shall be published on the website of the organization.
Board Minutes	Board Minutes shall be retained for the life of the organization. Available from Business Manager and published on website.
Financial Statements	Retained for life of organization and made available through the Business Manager.
Tax Returns	Retain until statute of limitations expires, generally three years from date of return or date of filing, whichever is later.
Employee Earnings	Retain at least four years.
Employee Timesheets	Retain for at least three years.
Personnel Records	Retain at least three years after an employee has been terminated.
Employment Tax Records	Retain at least four years from the date the tax was due, or the date it was paid – whichever is longer.
Employee Business Expenses	For travel and transportation expenses supported by mileage logs and other receipts, retain at least three years.

Sales Tax Returns	Retain at least seven years.
Backup Records	Any written evidence that supports figures on the tax return, such as receipts, expenses, logs, bank notices and sales records, retain at least three years after the tax return is due or filed, whichever is later.
Business Property	Records used to substantiate the cost and deductions (such as depreciation, amortization and depletion) associated with business property must be maintained to determine the basis and gain (or loss) on the sale. Retain these for as long as TPE owns the asset, plus an additional seven years thereafter.
Real Estate Records	Retain at least as long as TPE owns the property, plus three years after the property is disposed of and the transaction is reported on our tax return. Throughout ownership, keep records of the purchase, as well as receipts for improvements, relevant insurance claims, and documents relating to refinancing.
Securities	Retain detailed records of purchases and sales. These records should include dates, CUSIP numbers, quantities, prices, dividend reinvestment, and investment expenses, such as broker fees. Retained for as long as TPE owns the investments, plus the statute of limitations on the relevant tax returns.
Issues Affecting More Than One Year	Records that support figures affecting multiple years, such as carryovers of charitable deductions, net operating loss carrybacks or carryforwards or casualty losses, retained until the deductions no longer have effect, plus seven years.