

What about cremation?

Scattering of cremated remains will be allowed, likely for a small fee and in designated areas. However, cremation is considered a less environmentally friendly burial method because of fuel use; one cremation requires roughly 30 gallons of propane.

How will plots be sold, and how much will it cost?

The burial site will be surveyed in advance, so that plots can be organized around trails. A map of this survey will then be available on KLT's website and on brochures, allowing people to visit the cemetery on their own and select plots. There will also be family plot sections available. Once a plot is selected, people will fill out an online form to make a purchase. KLT has yet to determine the pricing of the plots.

What will the burial process look like?

The typical format will be as follows: individual purchases plot, family calls funeral home to arrange service after death, funeral home handles paperwork and preparation of body and casket, funeral home coordinates burial with cemetery contractor, funeral home handles transportation to cemetery and interment service, family pays funeral home for funeral service and interment fee, funeral home pays contractor, and contractor notifies KLT of name, date, and location of burial. This format will differ slightly in the case of a home funeral or a non pre-purchased plot.

Who will keep track of which plots are sold and who is buried?

KLT will keep track of plots sold and communicate with funeral homes and cemetery contractors to stay up to date on burials. Each burial site will be tracked with a survey number and GPS coordinates.

How will KLT handle home funerals?

KLT will not be able to offer guidance for home funerals. All aspects of transportation, paperwork, and coordination with cemetery contractors will be the responsibility of the family.

What is the difference between green cemeteries and conservation burial sites?

Green cemeteries are cemeteries that ban toxic embalming fluids, cement vaults, and treated wood caskets. Conservation burial also has these requirements, but takes place in a much larger, natural area, thus serving as both a cemetery and a conservation strategy.

Will animals disturb the gravesites?

At thirty inches deep, graves are shallow enough to have ideal microbial activity but deep enough to be undetected by animals. There have been no reports of animal disturbances from the two green cemeteries in Maine.

Will there be burials in the winter?

Yes, modern excavation machinery will allow KLT to offer winter burials. However, winter burials will have a slightly higher interment fee to reflect the season's increased labor costs and plowing needs.

The Kennebec Land Trust works cooperatively with landowners and communities to conserve the forests, shorelands, fields, and wildlife that define central Maine.

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Conservation Burial Initiative

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an overview of the past, present, and future of KLT's newest strategy for conservation in central Maine

By Jack Daley
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Background

As defined by the Green Burial Council, conservation burial takes place in a conserved area of ten acres or more and uses only natural burial materials. In contrast, most modern burial methods use deforested landscapes, toxic embalming fluids, cement vaults, and treated wood, all of which are detrimental to the local environment and worker health. While the United States' first official green burial site opened in South Carolina in 1988, the concept of green burial is as old as time; embalming only began during the Civil War as a way to preserve corpses for long distances, and the building of cement vaults became common in the 1880s as a way of keeping cemetery grounds flat for landscaping and headstone maintenance.

Conservation burial has the potential to bring many benefits to KLT and the community at large, including satisfying local demand for scenic, natural places of burial, serving in perpetuity as a dignified area of conserved land for recreation and wildlife habitat, and encouraging the creation of other natural burial sites. However, despite the promise of conservation burial, it has very little precedent nationally, and there are only a few green burial sites in Maine. Thus, one of KLT's areas of focus in recent months has been to research conservation burial and all its ecological, organizational, and fiscal ramifications.

KLT first became interested in conservation burial in 2007, and summer intern Josh Caldwell wrote a research report on the topic in 2015. In 2017, KLT members Paul Kuehnert and Judith Graber, along with a 5:1 matching from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, pledged funding specifically towards a burial project. This donation prompted KLT to set a goal of establishing a conservation burial site by 2020.

Initial Progress

Working with Maine state soil scientist Dave Rocque, KLT started out by researching ideal soil types for burial and mapping these soils across KLT's service territory. KLT then selected a ~60 acre site in Fayette (see figure) due to its rural location and scenic hillside. Field tests have since confirmed that the soil at this site has the ideal physical and microbial properties for burial. During the past year, KLT also had initial meetings with board members and small business experts to help frame the goals of the initiative.



Current Work & Plans for Future

KLT's recent work has focused on gathering information about the organizational and fiscal side of conservation burial, interviewing other conservation burial developers, and drafting a business plan for the project. KLT has also met with future partners in the community, including several funeral homes and cemetery contractors. Looking forward, KLT is scheduling meetings to discuss purchasing the burial property, forestry and land management, and building of ADA-accessible trails.

Frequently Asked Questions

How does this cemetery benefit KLT and its mission?

Besides offering environmentally friendly burial, the cemetery's scenic location and planned ADA accessible trails will make it a destination for birdwatchers, hikers, and families. The cemetery will also serve as a model of financially sustainable conservation, because the proceeds from plot sales will support the property's stewardship needs. In addition, the cemetery would likely attract additional KLT donations from families.

What exactly will KLT's role be with this new cemetery?

KLT's primary aims are to prepare the site, establish the cemetery as a 501(c)13 organization, coordinate plot sales, and manage the property for low impact recreation, natural scenery, and wildlife. All other facets of cemetery operations and death services will be left to funeral homes and contractors, with minimal time and resources required from KLT.

What are the initial and long term costs associated with this project for KLT?

The initial costs of this project include land acquisition, forest and view shed clearing, trail building, road building, and website design. The long term costs include plowing in the winter, forest and trail management, and the staff time associated with plot sales and burial records.

What types of burials will be allowed?

With green burial, bodies are simply placed in a biodegradable coffin or shroud and interred without a burial vault. Engraved memorial stones made of unpolished stones will be used in lieu of traditional tombstones.