

# **SPIRIT SANCTUARY**

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Conservation Burial Ground

# **HANDBOOK**

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**W**elcome to Spirit Sanctuary. For those who honor the beauty and abundance of nature during life, there is now a way to have the choices surrounding death be aligned with those values. Spirit Sanctuary is a private cemetery where deceased ones will naturally become a part of the earth and nourish a forever-regenerating forest. It will be a place of protected habitat for birds and other animals. Visitors to Spirit Sanctuary will experience life in its many forms and be comforted by the great circle of existence.



This land is owned by the Eddy Foundation land trust 501©(3) and as such is protected by the dissolution clause. We believe that investing in local conservation and education will additionally create a strong community around this wild place, to forever value and hold this land sacred.

## **WHAT IS GREEN BURIAL?**

Green Burial means doing as little as possible to interfere with the **natural process** of decomposition that takes place when a body is buried in healthy soil. This means that the body is not embalmed. Rather, it is placed in a biodegradable container or shroud made of natural material, and buried directly in the earth without a vault or grave liner at a depth of 3 to 3.5 feet. Green burial has a minimal impact on the environment, allowing the body to return nutrients to the ecosystem in which it is buried.

### **EMBALMING**

*Embalming disrupts the natural process of returning back to nature.*

Green burial involves doing as little as possible to interfere with the natural process of decomposition that occurs when a body is placed in healthy soil. Embalming, even with so-called “green embalming fluid”, disrupts that process. Embalming is never required by law, even when transporting a body across state lines (with the exception of Alabama and Arkansas). However, some common carriers do require embalming if the body is coming from Minnesota, Idaho, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, and Wyoming.

## ENROLLMENT & COST

The best way is to plan ahead and complete our enrollment procedures. There are two options for enrollment prior to death...

Individuals can choose to enroll as a *Wildway Champion*, for the rate of \$1,200. This means they have included a conservation non-profit partner in their estate planning. We use this two-tiered structure to encourage people to make sure their final act is one of giving—both of their body to Nature, and of some portion of their financial assets, to conserve the ecosystem their body will become a part of. In order to receive this rate, the individual is responsible for providing confirmation from the organization receiving their bequest. If the conservation organization is not on Spirit Sanctuary's list of partner non-profits (stated in our FAQ document), the individual will contact Spirit Sanctuary to get approval, prior to enrollment being complete. If you wish to enroll, please complete the enrollment application.

If you or your loved one was not enrolled prior to death or has not included a bequest, the *Wildway Friend* option is available. To enroll as a *Wildway Friend*, there is a sliding scale rate of \$2,400-\$4,000. Anything in excess of our operational budget will further our educational and land conservation efforts. As a private burial ground, our mission is to provide people with a burial that honors their wish to "live green, die green." The financial gifts of people who choose to be buried at Spirit Sanctuary is a reflection of this philosophy. Nobody will be turned away due to lack of funds.

As a consumer everyone has the right to change their mind about where they want to be buried. Please notify our office if you need to make this change. In the event plans change, all but \$450 processing fee will be refunded. It is the responsibility of the individual or loved one to let the organization of bequest aware of this cancellation and proceed accordingly following their policy.

Please note that all burials at Spirit Sanctuary are considered a final mode of disposition. This means we will not disinter a body without a court order.

Once you have enrolled, you will be put in touch with our Coordinator, who will arrange a phone or in person orientation with you, depending on location. The cost of this orientation is included with your enrollment. In this orientation, the Coordinator will review procedures and options for burial at Spirit Sanctuary, and a written summary of your orientation will be provided and kept as part of our records of your preferences.

Due to our conservation efforts, we encourage our enrolled members to cultivate a living relationship with Spirit Sanctuary and the larger efforts that you are a part of as a member. The Spirit Sanctuary is not only being protected to allow wildness to reclaim this area but is also a part of a greater effort of protection called the Split Rock Wildway Corridor. This corridor seeks to create an undisrupted tract of land available for wildlife to travel safely and freely from the High Peaks to Lake Champlain. Due to the ever-changing state of these ecosystems and our own evolving states of being, we cannot with honest integrity promise any one location for burial. Therefore, we invite you into intimate relationship with what is and what is becoming within and around you, to foster connection to place and change, and when time draws near for your physical departure, we can support you in choosing your final resting place.

[www.greenburialnaturally.org](http://www.greenburialnaturally.org)  
If you would like to find a  
conservation cemetery closer to  
you, please visit Green Burial  
Naturally.

We accept enrollment from anyone, however we please ask that you consider the carbon footprint of transportation from place of death to Spirit Sanctuary. Once orientation to completed, keep these documents with your other advance planning documents and ensure clear communication of your wishes to your loved ones who may be involved in your care.

## **ATTENDING A BURIAL**

There are three things that must be present for a burial at Spirit Sanctuary, the Burial-Transport Permit, the body (prepared for a green burial), and yourself. Spirit Sanctuary will provide everything necessary for the burial and, with advance notice, even additional people to assist in carrying and lowering the body. However, at Spirit Sanctuary we value the benefits of healing and connection that participating in the burial process can bring. We encourage the family and friends to participate by assisting in the opening and closing of the grave and providing pallbearers. We do not offer funeral services/ceremonies through Spirit Sanctuary but can connect you with celebrant services if desired. Otherwise we invite you to plan accordingly based on the wishes of your loved one and what allows you to honor this person's life. We do not have tents, so bring umbrellas if it is raining and wear hats and sunscreen if it is sunny. Burials take place between sunrise and sunset, but you may wish to bring a flashlight in order to make your way safely out of the cemetery in low light. While we are used to dressing formally for funerals, please consider that Spirit Sanctuary is outdoors and not maintained, except for the main trail. Sneakers or hiking shoes will be a better fit than dress shoes or heels. If you are going to assist in opening or closing the grave, wear something

appropriate for outdoor labor and bring work gloves that fit you. We recommend dressing in a way that feels respectful to the person, the surroundings, and the season. We cannot guarantee total access to all areas for those with mobility assistance needs.

## **AFTER DEATH PROCEDURES**

1. If an expected death, do nothing. Take some time to breath and be with the enormity of this moment.
2. Obtain a death certificate. This will happen automatically if the person passes in a hospital or under the care of hospice. If the person passes while not under medical care a Coroner will be called in to determine cause of death and he/she/they may or may not order an autopsy. Conservation burial may take place even if an autopsy is ordered.
3. Within New York State, a licensed Funeral Director is required for: a) filing the death certificate at the appropriate government office within 72 hours of death, b) the burial transit permit, c) supervision at funeral service, d) supervision at the burial.
4. The body may be kept at home, in which case the body should be kept cold. Cooling techniques can be provided at orientation following enrollment.
5. Call the current coordinator of which you would be connected to upon enrollment in order to notify Spirit Sanctuary of the death. An early decision regarding a day and time for interment is helpful. Location of exact burial spot at the cemetery, if not already decided, shall be chosen within 48 hours of death, or the decision for selecting the burial spot will be left to Spirit Sanctuary.
6. Burial containers are to be limited to those made from materials that are nontoxic/nonhazardous and natural/plant derived. Shrouds of natural fabric are also permissible. Embalmed bodies and vaults or slabs are not permissible at Spirit Sanctuary.
7. The family will arrange for transportation of the body in collaboration with a funeral director to Spirit Sanctuary. Once at Spirit Sanctuary there are a couple options. Motorized vehicles are not allowed in Spirit Sanctuary itself, but families can arrange to have a horse-drawn wagon carry the body to the gravesite from either the entrance or nearby pre-burial gathering. Please note that not all areas at Spirit Sanctuary will accommodate the horse drawn wagon, please let the Spirit Sanctuary coordinator know if you are interested in this option to determine if it is possible in accordance with the burial locations. If this option is doable, Josh Smith can be contacted directly at: (617)312-1269. Guests may walk with the wagon on foot at any point along the road to the burial site. Otherwise family and friends can carry the body with a carrier provided by Spirit Sanctuary to the gravesite. We suggest enlisting the help of 4 to 6 pallbearers. Spirit Sanctuary Stewards can assist if needed but this must be

made clear in advance if this service will be needed. In the winter there is also the option of moving your loved one via sled.

8. If a pre or post-burial gathering space is of interest the local Whallonsburg Grange Hall down the road is a great option. More information can be found at: [www.thegrangehall.info](http://www.thegrangehall.info). You are also welcome to bring and set up a tent at the Spirit Sanctuary entrance area. If you are interested in this option, you will have to let Spirit Sanctuary staff know in advance.

## **BURIAL GROUND POLICIES**

If a marker is desired it must be of wood or a naturally occurring local stone, and weigh 100 pounds or less. Letters and numbers may be carved on the stone but the stone itself should retain its natural shape. Markers are to be situated laying ‘flat’ on the grave, not erected. No unnatural items (such as plastic flower pots, Mylar balloons, etc.) are to be left at Spirit Sanctuary overnight. Any items in violation will be removed. For the sake of your time and efforts, please contact Spirit Sanctuary to ensure your chosen marker complies with our guidelines.

We encourage letting nature select which plants will cover the gravesite. However, if you or your loved ones want to choose a plant for the grave you will need to work with a Spirit Sanctuary Steward to determine what plants are allowed (only native) and a steward will need to be present for the planting. Only plants that are native to Essex County, New York. (Not just a “native” plant sold in Essex County) are allowed. If using a purchased plant, rinse the soil from the roots and carry it to Spirit Sanctuary “bare root.” This will help prevent unwanted organisms from entering the conservation area. Recommendations on what nurseries to work with can be discussed further in the enrollment orientation or post burial.

Unlike conventional cemeteries, we will generally not remove trees or other natural features to accommodate a burial location (though we may have to temporarily displace a small amount of vegetation as we dig the grave), so place of burial will be affected by the evolving natural landscape.

Spirit Sanctuary will not “maintain” gravesites. The intention is for nature to reclaim the burial areas. Most likely this will result in a forest. Friends and family may, if they wish, weed and water to encourage specific native plants and to discourage non-native plants. No pesticides of any kind are to be used on the site. Native animals are welcome to use this habitat. We will not remove, trap, or kill native animals that also call Spirit Sanctuary ‘home.’ For instance, beaver may re-appropriate trees for their own purposes, this is a natural process and will not be discouraged. Wire may be placed around special trees, if desired. Not all areas of the sanctuary are going to be easily accessible due to weather conditions. The Spirit Sanctuary does not guarantee access to gravesites due to snow, mud, and/or water. In addition, please keep

in mind that the ability and ease of loved ones to get to the chosen area is determined by the location. We cannot guarantee total access to all areas for those with mobility assistance needs.

Friends and family members are welcome to visit Spirit Sanctuary at any time. Domestic animals are welcome if on a leash. Hikers are welcome if they stay on the main trail and maintain a respectful attitude (Silent walks are encouraged). Please, no motorized vehicles of any kind.

## **CREMATED REMAINS**

For many years, cremation was thought to be better for the environment than conventional burial practices such as embalming. However, we now know that a large amount of fossil fuel is used in each cremation, releasing various pollutants including greenhouse gasses, which are upsetting our planet's fragile climate. Furthermore, cremains (ashes) have a pH of about 11.4 and are devoid of any nutrients accessible to the soil. For these reasons, we strongly discourage people who want to be buried at Spirit Sanctuary from choosing cremation. If a person previously enrolled in Spirit Sanctuary needs to be cremated for some reason, then they may still take advantage of the burying of their ashes in their reserved site. These ashes will need to be amended according to Spirit Sanctuary guidelines and interment will require Spirit Sanctuary steward supervision.

## **FAMILY PLOTS**

Yes, being near to loved ones is an option. Due to our conservation mission and efforts, we will not impede on the Spirit Sanctuary evolving ecosystem and as such, cannot confirm availability of certain spots. Your preference to be near to a loved one will be documented and honored to the best of the lands ability at the time of need. This can be specified in your preferences upon enrollment.

Each person enrolled will have his/her/their own burial site and each burial will be treated as though it was a single enrollment.

## **HOLIDAYS & SNOW DAYS**

Spirit Sanctuary is open for burial year-round, holidays or snow days are no exception. Generally, in winter, we can shovel a path to the gravesite and around the grave. If necessary, our gravediggers will thaw the ground to open the grave. They will pile the soil from the grave on top of the snow to facilitate closing the grave. They will not shovel snow from the grave once it is closed. Be aware that it may not be possible to reach the chosen area in the winter. If this is the case a Spirit Sanctuary steward will help you choose a new, permanent, burial location.



## **PETS**

Sanctuary welcomes pet burials for those who are enrolled at Spirit Sanctuary for an additional \$200. Please notify Spirit Sanctuary Coordinator of your intentions. Please note that Spirit Sanctuary has the right to limit the number of pet burials per individual/family. Pet owners are required to open and close the graves themselves in the presence of a Spirit Sanctuary steward. Markers may be placed in accordance with the regulations above.

