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Public-Private Partnerships to Boost Local Land Conservation

Communities Across New York State to Benefit

(Albany, NY) The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Land Trust Alliance (the Alliance) joined members of the state Legislature and land trust representatives today to announce \$1.4 million in Conservation Partnership Program grants. The grants, funded through New York State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), will enable local nonprofit land trusts to increase the pace, improve the quality, and ensure the permanence of voluntary conservation of private lands, resulting in significant environmental and economic benefits for communities across the state.

"The New York State Conservation Partnership Program advances Governor Cuomo's agenda for A Cleaner, Greener New York," said Joe Martens, Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation. "New York State's financial support for the Partnership Program is critical to the important work of land trusts who, in partnership with communities across New York, provide vital protection of open space for its environmental and economic value."

"New York State has demonstrated its support of local land trusts and their vital mission to save the places New Yorkers cherish and depend on for clean air and water, food, and recreation," said Rand Wentworth, President of the Land Trust Alliance. "I commend Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Martens, Senator Grisanti, Assemblyman Sweeney, and other members of the Legislature for their support of this pioneering initiative. The EPF and the Conservation Partnership Program are cost-effective investments that pay dividends for public health and New York's economy."

The competitive state grants announced today will be matched by more than \$1.82 million in private and local funding. Since the program's inception in 2002, the Conservation Partnership Program has leveraged over \$12 million in additional funding, creating employment and advancement opportunities in the conservation field and helping local communities permanently conserve approximately 15,000 acres of farmland, wildlife habitat, recreation areas, and urban open space.

Since 2002, the Conservation Partnership Program has awarded matching grants for 350 projects benefitting 75 different land trust organizations across the state. The grants announced today will help local land trusts sustain and expand community and landowner outreach, land conservation, stewardship, and education programs. The grants will create new land trust jobs and strengthen partnerships with local and state governments, advancing efforts to preserve prime farmland, municipal watersheds and green infrastructure around the state. Land trusts will also apply funds to prepare for national accreditation, supporting New York land trusts' commitment to best practices and rigorous standards for organizational excellence.

State Senator Mark Grisanti (R-Buffalo), Chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, said "By working together and connecting the work of land trusts in communities from Buffalo to Long Island, we are helping New York be a national leader in conserving and protecting working farms and private lands that support local jobs and businesses. This partnership benefits Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo and is a model for the EPF, and I look forward to its continued success."

Assemblyman Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst), Chair of the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee, remarked, "This is a challenging time for homeowners, charities, and businesses across New York State. Empowering local communities through the Conservation Partnership Program is one proven way to give New York's citizens a voice in their future. It is also an effective way for New York to get the most out of the Environmental Protection Fund. We applaud the work land trusts do on Long Island and across the state and look forward to supporting the program in the coming years."

Recent research underscores how investments in land conservation and open space boost property values, support local businesses, save taxpayer dollars, and protect public health, for example, by preserving watersheds and aquifers that provide clean drinking water for millions of New Yorkers. A report last year from the Trust for Public Land found that parks and open space on Long Island generate \$2.74 billion in direct economic benefit from tourism, reduced government costs and public health. A 2010 report from the New York State Comptroller recommended the Conservation Partnership Program as a model for public-private collaboration because it leverages substantial resources for local efforts to preserve clean air and water resources, agriculture, and outdoor recreational opportunities close to home.

In all, 57 nonprofit land trusts across New York will receive grant funds announced today, including the North Shore Land Alliance, Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Columbia Land Conservancy, New York Agricultural Land Trust, Finger Lakes Land Trust, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, Genesee Land Trust and Western New York Land Conservancy. Grant funds are intended to assist land trusts in advancing goals set in the New York State's Open Space Plan and state wildlife action plan.

The grants will also support urban open space programs administered by the Manhattan, Bronx and Brooklyn-Queens Land Trusts, Yonkers Land Conservancy, Kingston Land Trust, Capital District Community Gardens, and Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo.

More than 150 land trust representatives and environmental advocates were on hand for the announcement, held in conjunction with the Friends of New York's Environment Lobby Day in the State Capitol. Earlier in the morning, land trust leaders thanked Governor Andrew Cuomo for avoiding additional cuts to New York's Environmental Protection Fund in his proposed Executive Budget. Environmental leaders urged the Legislature to consider the economic benefit of EPF investments in local communities, including projects funded through the Conservation Partnership Program.

“The Conservation Partnership Program is an example of an EPF initiative that has demonstrated impressive state-wide success by supporting and investing in land trusts in our communities,” said Becky Thornton, president of the Dutchess Land Conservancy and chair of Land Trust Alliance’s New York Advisory Board. “This program unites the goals of New York’s Open Space Plan, the needs and desires of local municipalities, and the energy and enthusiasm of private landowners and grassroots land trust partners to protect the land. When we work together, we can make a huge difference for communities across New York State.”

“Conserving productive farms benefits New Yorkers by ensuring the availability of fresh, local food and also by supporting the agricultural industry, an important contributor to the state’s economy,” said Teri Ptacek, executive director of the Agricultural Stewardship Association. “The Conservation Partnership Program is allowing us to dramatically accelerate the pace and quality of farmland conservation in Washington and Rensselaer counties while enhancing our capacity to support farmers and agricultural businesses in our community.”

“North Shore Land Alliance is increasing local land protection efforts by building relationships between land and people throughout our community,” said Lisa Ott, president of North Shore Land Alliance. “We have been fortunate to receive several grants through this very important program, enabling us to engage stakeholders throughout Nassau County. Examples include our new Small Farm Initiative and a youth stewardship program in Hempstead, an under-served community. These programs would not have been possible without support from the New York State Conservation Partnership Program and the Land Trust Alliance.”

“Community gardens are the lifeblood for many New Yorkers,” said Demetrice Mills, board president of Brooklyn Queens Land Trust. “The 37 community garden properties managed by the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust provide for nutritious local food production, quiet contemplation, social and cultural events, youth and adult programs, and appreciation of nature and the environment. Our 500 gardeners treasure the opportunities provided by these permanent urban open spaces. Support from the Conservation Partnership Program and the Environmental Protection Fund gives us this opportunity.”

“Preservation of forests, working farms, rivers and natural open space is crucial for maintaining the character of our rural communities and protecting irreplaceable natural resources,” said Gregory Belcamino, board president of Delaware Highlands Conservancy. “The Conservation Partnership Program is providing critical funding for the Conservancy to prepare for accreditation, expand the scope of its private land protection activities in Sullivan and Delaware counties and connect with more landowners and citizens through educational programming, for the benefit of all New Yorkers.”

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About the Land Trust Alliance

The Land Trust Alliance is the national leader of America’s land trust movement, serving 1,700 non-profit land trusts nationwide, including 90 organizations in New York. The Alliance works to accelerate the pace, increase the quality, and ensure the permanence of land conservation in New York and across the country.

The Alliance administers the Conservation Partnership Program in coordination with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. For information about the Land Trust Alliance and the Conservation Partnership Program, please visit www.landtrustalliance.org or contact Ethan Winter in the Alliance’s Northeast office at (518) 587-0774 (ext. 207) or at ewinter@lta.org.