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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Ethan Winter
Land Trust Alliance
(518) 587-0774

Maureen Wren
NYS DEC
(518) 402-8000

DEC and Land Trust Alliance Announce \$825,000 in Conservation Partnership Grants

40 Community-Based Land Trusts Across New York State to Benefit

(Albany, NY) A major investment in land conservation was announced today by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Land Trust Alliance.

DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis joined members of the New York State Legislature and local land trust representatives in announcing 52 grants totaling \$825,000 to 40 local and regional land trust organizations across New York State. This year's land trust grant awards represent an unprecedented investment in New York's land trusts that will help make New York's communities better places to live and work.

"Land trusts are an invaluable partner to state and local governments in the implementation of smart growth principles," said Commissioner Grannis. "The success of this partnership is reflected by the record \$1.575 million set aside for the program in this year's state budget. Further, the growth shows that the conservation program strikes a chord with communities around the state."

The land trust grants are administered through the New York State Conservation Partnership Program, a pioneering public-private initiative administered by the Land Trust Alliance and overseen by DEC. The New York State Conservation Partnership Program helps land trusts create new nature preserves and save environmentally important lands including wildlife habitat, sensitive watersheds, wetlands and aquifer recharge areas, and working farms and forests across the state. The grants will allow local community-based organizations to do more in conserving natural areas and important open space in their communities.

The New York State Conservation Partnership Program is funded by the state Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). As part of the recently enacted 2008-09 state budget, the program received a \$1.575 million appropriation – an unprecedented amount since the program was first funded at \$250,000 in 2002.

Since 2002, the Conservation Partnership Program has provided a total of \$3 million for technical assistance and funding for over 200 competitive grants to 64 different land trusts serving rural, suburban, and urban communities in more than 30 counties across the state. To date, the land trust grants have also leveraged over \$9 million in privately raised conservation funds, directly leading to protection of nearly 10,000 additional acres of important land through permanent conservation easements and fee acquisitions.

A table of all grant recipients and project descriptions is attached. Below is an overview of the New York State Conservation Partnership Program grant projects and initiatives funded this year.

- **12 Conservation Transaction Grants (total funding: \$144,150)** to accelerate land protection through conservation of 955 acres of open space and community landscapes, including lands prioritized in the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan. In six years, Conservation Transaction Grants have leveraged millions of dollars in private funds to permanently conserve nearly 10,000 acres of critical open space across New York State. Many of these protected properties will remain on local tax rolls and provide public access for recreation and educational purposes.
- **7 Conservation Catalyst grants (total funding: \$109,500)** to launch and strengthen new conservation initiatives and partnerships amongst local governments, land trusts, landowners, and other partners. These projects will dramatically expand regional conservation efforts in the Hudson Highlands region as well as in Cattaraugus, Erie, Genesee, Nassau, Niagara, Suffolk, Tompkins, and Ulster counties.
- **28 Conservation Capacity and Excellence Grants (total funding: \$308,350)** to strengthen the organizational impact and effectiveness through targeted investments that aid land trusts in implementing *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, which are best business practices for land trusts. Many New York land trusts are preparing for accreditation. Accreditation will provide public recognition of land trusts that are engaged in the long-term protection of the land in the public interest. Rigorous compliance with Land Trust Standards and Practices, a stated goal of the Conservation Partnership Program Grants and Technical Assistance program, is required for accreditation.
- **5 Professional Development Grants (total funding: \$263,000)** to transform the professional capacity, mission effectiveness, and financial sustainability of local land trusts. These major two-year grants are intended to dramatically increase professional capacity, leading to expanded land protection, community outreach and fundraising capabilities. This year's grantee land trusts include: Delaware Highlands Conservancy, Otsego Land Trust, Thousand Islands Land Trust, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, and Wallkill Valley Land Trust.

Funding for the program also enables the Land Trust Alliance to provide targeted technical assistance to New York's growing land trust community. The technical assistance is designed to help New York land trusts complete organizational assessments and implement best business practices. These national quality standards for land trusts are codified in *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, and are among the most stringent ethical and technical standards in the non-profit sector. In 2007, the Alliance launched a national, voluntary land trust accreditation program that will increase public awareness of, and confidence in, land trusts and land conservation. Rigorous compliance with Land Trust Standards and Practices is required for accreditation.

State Senator Carl Marcellino (R-Syosset), Chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, said: "The partnership between the Land Trust Alliance and New York State has a long and proud history. By working together, we have taken great strides to preserve and protect our natural resources. I am very proud to announce that with the award to the North Shore Land Alliance, planning efforts with municipalities will ensure crucial protection for Nassau County's remaining wetlands and open spaces. Once again, this partnership with land trusts around the State has shown real results in improving the quality of our life for generations to come."

Assemblyman Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst), Chair of the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee, said: "Development pressure continues to grow 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. We have seen the work land trusts do on Long Island and across the state. Today we are announcing new grants and we look forward to expanding the program even more in the coming years."

Denise Schlener, National Director for Land Trust Alliance, applauded the State's investment in land conservation. "New York State has made an important statement in 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. We commend Governor David Paterson, Commissioner Pete Grannis, EnCon Committee chairs Senator Carl Marcellino and Assemblyman Robert Sweeney, and other members of the Legislature for their leadership and visionary support of this program. We are especially grateful that funding for the New York State Conservation Partnership Program has been expanded to \$1.575 million in the 2008-09 EPF budget. New York land trusts have so much important work to do and this continued investment will dramatically expand their efforts in preserving quality of life in New York State."

The Conservation Partnership Program advances the goals of New York's Open Space Conservation Plan by making competitive grants to New York land trusts for four purposes:

Conservation Transaction Grants provide up to \$30,000 for projects that enable land trusts to protect and steward environmentally significant lands in New York. There is a particular emphasis on land protection priorities described in the New York State Open Space Plan. Transaction grants are available to cover costs associated with purchasing or accepting a donation of fee land or a conservation easement, and costs associated with providing for public access on these properties.

Conservation Catalyst Grants provide up to \$30,000 to enable land trusts to launch local and regional land protection initiatives that lead to the conservation of resources specifically identified in New York State's Open Space Plan, in a local or regional open space plan, or in a local or regional farmland protection plan.

Conservation Capacity and Excellence Grants provide up to \$30,000 to help land trusts enhance their ability to protect and steward land. The majority of funded projects focus on the implementation of one or more of the *Land Trust Standards and Practices*, the nationally accepted guidelines for the effective and ethical operation of a land trust.

Professional Development Grants provide the seed funding up to \$30,000 to help all-volunteer and small land trusts increase the pace and quality of their conservation programs. These are highly competitive, multi-year grants which are intended to transform all-volunteer and small, under-staffed land trusts into sustainable, professional organizations.

Founded in 1982 and headquartered in Washington D.C., the Land Trust Alliance works in support of more than 1,660 land trusts nationwide, including 90 New York land trusts representing more than 36,000 individual members. Working with state and local governments, local, regional and national land trusts have protected over one million acres of land in New York State and more than 36 million acres nationwide.

For information about the Land Trust Alliance and New York Conservation Partnership Program, please go to www.LTA.org or contact Ethan Winter, New York Conservation Manager, at (518) 587-0774 or via email at ewinter@lta.org.

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NEW YORK STATE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM
2008 LAND TRUST GRANTS SUMMARY

NUMBER OF NYSCPP GRANTS: 52 grants to 40 land trusts (5 first-time grantee land trusts)

CONSERVATION TRANSACTION GRANT AWARDS: \$144,150 (12 grants; 955 acres protected)

CONSERVATION CATALYST GRANT AWARDS: \$109,500 (7 grants)

CONSERVATION CAPACITY AND EXCELLENCE GRANT AWARDS: \$308,350 (28 grants)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT AWARDS: \$263,000 (5 grants)

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