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**DEC, LAND TRUST ALLIANCE ANNOUNCE \$1.4 MILLION IN CONSERVATION GRANTS TO
LAND TRUSTS STATEWIDE**

Grants Leverage an Additional \$1.3 Million in Private Money

Public-Private Partnerships to Boost Local Land Conservation

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) awarded Conservation Partnership Program grants totaling \$1.4 million to 57 nonprofit land trusts across the state, DEC and the Land Trust Alliance announced today at a news conference at the Mohonk Preserve in Ulster County as part of DEC's weeklong celebration of Earth Day. The grants, funded through the state's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), will be matched by \$1.3 million in private and local funding.

"These grants will go a long way in the conservation of private lands and will result in significant environmental and economic benefits for communities throughout New York," DEC Commissioner Joe Martens said. "By increasing open space funding by \$2.5 million in this year's budget, Governor Cuomo has placed a priority on preserving and conserving New York's natural resources. This dedicated source of funding will continue to cover critical environmental and land conservation programs.

"The Conservation Partnership Program is unique in the nation," Commissioner Martens continued. "The State's investment in building land trust capacity multiplies several times in benefits to local communities, improving both the local economy and environment."

The Conservation Partnership Program grants will help local land trusts sustain and expand community and landowner outreach, land conservation, stewardship and education programs. The grants will advance regional economic development goals, create land trust jobs and strengthen partnerships with local and state governments while advancing locally supported efforts to preserve farmland, municipal watersheds and green infrastructure around the state. Land trusts will also apply grant funds to prepare for national accreditation, supporting New York land trust commitments to rigorous standards for organizational excellence.

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“I commend Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Martens, and the New York State Legislature for supporting this initiative. At a time when states are watching their budgets carefully, the EPF and the Conservation Partnership Program are proven, cost-effective investments that pay vital dividends for public health and New York’s economy,” said Rand Wentworth, president of the Land Trust Alliance.

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

"The Conservation Partnership Program grants of \$1.4 million demonstrate New York State's continued commitment to the local land trusts who are dedicated to providing clean air, water, food and places of recreation to the communities they serve. Not only will these investments in land conservation boost property values and protect public health, but they will also support local businesses thus saving tax dollars," said Senator Mark Grisanti, chairman of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee. "I am especially pleased that today's announcement that 57 nonprofit organizations will receive funds statewide."

Senator John Bonacic said, “The Hudson Valley and Catskills area economies are assisted in part by our outdoor recreation initiatives. Ensuring key areas of open space are accessible and well maintained can help grow tourism in our community.”

Assemblyman Robert Sweeney, 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."

“The choice by the DEC of the Conservation Partnership Program as the recipients of this funding is a wise one. This partnership will make every public dollar work even harder with private and local funding matches. Land trusts are vital tools in our work to preserve the natural resources New Yorkers treasure. I am proud of the role of the Assembly in assuring the funds to make these grants possible," said Assemblymember Kevin Cahill.

Grant awards range from \$1,000 to \$75,000. Among the 57 land trusts awarded grants were North Shore Land Alliance, Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Columbia Land Conservancy, Saratoga PLAN, Champlain Area Trails, 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 Conservation Plan and state wildlife action plan.

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

The \$1.4 million was awarded by region as follows:

- Western New York /Finger Lakes/Southern Tier: 11 awards totaling \$272,250
- Central New York/Mohawk Valley: Two awards totaling \$25,600
- Northern New York/Adirondacks: 10 awards totaling \$172,750
- Capital Region: 20 awards totaling \$325,900
- Hudson Valley: 26 awards totaling \$475,300
- New York City: Three awards totaling \$56,700
- Long Island: Three awards totaling \$89,000

For a map and a complete listing of the 2013 grant recipients, visit DEC's website at:
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/48901.html>.

Since the program's inception in 2002, the Conservation Partnership Program has awarded more than \$8 million in grants for 509 projects benefiting 83 different land trust organizations across the state. This investment has leveraged more than \$14 million in additional funding. The funds have helped create employment and advancement opportunities in the conservation field and helped local communities permanently conserve more than 18,000 acres of farmland, wildlife habitat, recreation areas and urban open space. The Land Trust Alliance administers the Conservation Partnership Program in coordination with DEC.

The EPF grants announced today will support local efforts that contribute substantially to the Hudson Valley region's \$800 million agricultural sector and \$4.3 billion tourism economy by helping to preserve the state's most productive agricultural lands and expanding public access to trails and other popular recreation areas.

Recent research underscores how New York's investment in land conservation and open space boosts property values, supports local businesses, saves taxpayer dollars and protects public health. A 2011 study by the Trust for Public Land found that every dollar of investment from New York's Environmental Protection Fund generates \$7 in total economic benefits from tourism, reduced government costs and public health. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation in New York directly supports 305,000 jobs across the state, generating \$15 billion in wages and tax revenue.

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