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United By Land

In the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln turned his thoughts, at least briefly, to land conservation. On June 30, 1864 he signed the Yosemite Land Grant—the first federal legislation to conserve land. What would motivate him to think about Yosemite at America’s darkest hour? The answer is Galen Clark, a man who had contracted tuberculosis and moved to the Yosemite Valley in hopes of recovery. “I went to the mountains to take my chances of dying or growing better, which I thought were about even.” He fell in love with the giant sequoias that saved his life and began writing to his senator to push for their protection.

If a citizen could score a victory for conservation during the Civil War, we certainly can do so in these challenging times. In spite of the partisan divide, we are united by a deep love of the land. Remarkably, a majority of both the Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives have co-sponsored a bill expanding incentives for conservation easements. With your help, the Land Trust Alliance has built an extraordinary network of relationships between land trusts and members of Congress, and we are now pushing for a new generation of conservation tools.

Over the past several months, the administration has held public listening sessions to help shape a 21st century vision for America’s Great Outdoors—one with a special focus on local action. Land trusts around the country have suggested creative, cost-effective ways to protect land. These will be essential to protect America’s special places before they are lost to a population slated to grow by almost 100 million people by 2050.

In this issue of *Saving Land*, we tell the story of land trusts that are building relationships with their elected officials and getting results. It’s simple: just ask for appointments with your elected officials and tell them about your good work. Then you could invite them to a press tour of a conserved property and give public credit for the incentives they’ve provided.

It is in times of crises that people need the places that give enduring meaning to our lives. This is a great time to build a new political movement for land conservation. The key is linking conservation to those things that Americans highly value: clean water, health, jobs, natural beauty and places for children to play.

Recessions will come and go, but we need enduring political strength to protect land for all time.



KATHERINE LAMBERT

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