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Bold Action

It is spring and the days are getting longer. Each year, after the snow melts, I go into the woods to see what wonders the wildflowers have to offer. No matter how tough the winter, I am never disappointed. Bloodroot is the first to poke its head up through the leaves and then a trillium unfurls its three white petals. The delicate wood anemone quietly appears at the base of a majestic oak, and then the pink lady slipper shows off her extravagant color and curves.

The certainty of spring helps us make it through the winter, and, this year, land trusts had a tough one. With property values down, it is harder than ever to convince a landowner to donate an easement. Charitable gifts are down, governments are slashing funding, and, now, Congress is threatening to revamp the tax code.

How can we achieve our conservation goals in the face of so many obstacles? The Land Trust Alliance asked our members this question and, based on their responses, we developed an ambitious five-year strategic plan. You can think of this plan as a topo map that warns of dangers but shows a clear path to success.

The strategic plan calls for bold action on many fronts, including helping land trusts forge stronger relationships with the communities they serve—like Kennebec Land Trust did (see p. 12). By listening to what their communities need and value, land trusts are creating visionary plans that have broad public support. At a time when governments are looking for places to cut, it will be more important than ever for land trusts to build public support, ensure public trust and build relationships with elected officials. To help land trusts accomplish their goals, the Land Trust Alliance is committed to creating the policies and services necessary to increase the pace, quality and permanence of land conservation in America. (I encourage you to read the summary at www.lta.org/strategicplan2011).

By working together, I am confident that we will be successful. We clearly demonstrated this in December when we convinced Congress to renew the enhanced conservation tax incentive. At a time when many in Congress are questioning the role of government, both Republicans and Democrats support the local work of citizen-led land trusts. At a time of constrained resources, land trusts offer a cost-effective way to conserve the places that Americans love. Each place we protect is like those wildflowers, giving hope year after year for generations to come.



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