

BY Russell Shay and Sean Robertson

RELATIONSHIPS THAT BEAR FRUIT

In April, Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO) came to Palisade, Colorado, to celebrate the closing of five Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) easements on peach orchards—an event organized by Mesa Land Trust. The flowering peach trees made a great background for the event, caught by TV cameras and newspaper photographers, along with happy farmers, neighbors, municipal officials and land trust supporters.

This seemed to have happened on the spur of the moment. But, in fact, Rob Bleiberg of Mesa Land Trust talked to the Senator's staff about doing something like this a year earlier. And, when it didn't work out for 2011, he talked to them about it again early this year. And The Nature Conservancy staff talked to the Senator's staff about the need for the easement programs in the state. And the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts put together a statement in support of the easement programs, including color photos of conservation projects in different parts of the state that depended on FRPP funding, for Senator Bennet to use at a recent hearing—which he did, showing the pictures to his fellow Agriculture Committee members and focusing his statement on his support for the easement programs.

So it began with an invitation to a politician to join in a celebration—and has ended up teaching the Senator (whose background is in education) and his staff about farmland conservation, and building a strong working relationship among them, Rob, and other land trust leaders in the state.

Over the next few months, the House and Senate Agriculture Committees will divide up billions of dollars in a new farm bill. Thanks to these Colorado land trust leaders, and others like them in Michigan, Kansas, Pennsylvania and other states across



U.S. SENATE COMM. ON AGRICULTURE



Senator Bennet (far left) touring a protected orchard with the owners of C&R Farms, and inset, referring to a letter from Colorado land trusts at a hearing of the Senate Agriculture Committee, where he chairs the Conservation Subcommittee

MESA LAND TRUST

the country, several of the senators and representatives in the room will know and care about how much of that funding goes to fund easement purchases by land trusts.

Please consider this question: How much do your senators and representatives know about your conservation work?

Find the latest on the 2012 Farm Bill at www.lta.org/farmbill. —RUSSELL SHAY

Senate Passes Dedicated LWCF & Gulf Coast Funding

By a vote of 76 to 22, the Senate approved an amendment to its transportation bill to provide two years of dedicated Land & Water Conservation Fund funding (\$700 million/year) and to reauthorize the program through 2022. This amendment also includes the RESTORE the Gulf Coast Act, directing much of the Clean Water Act penalties associated with the 2010 Gulf spill back to the region for long-term ecological restoration and economic development.

This isn't a done deal yet. The House also approved a RESTORE Act amendment but was unable to pass its version of the Transportation Bill, forcing an extension of the old bill through June 30. We'll need to fight hard to ensure that conservation funding survives in the final package.

In the meantime, we're continuing to support President Obama's request for a one-third increase in LWCF and Forest Legacy appropriations in fiscal year 2013. For the latest updates, visit www.lta.org/conservationfunding.

State Legislatures Can Make or Break You

In the latest of several such proposals across the plains states, the Kansas Legislature recently considered a bill to limit the duration of conservation easements to no more than 50 years. That limit would make Kansas landowners ineligible for federal deductions and incentives.

"Hearings on the bill revealed how little our legislators knew about conservation easements as a voluntary tool to conserve working

agricultural lands in the state," said Mike Beam, executive director of Ranchland Trust of Kansas. "Fortunately, the bill provided an opportunity for land trusts and landowners to speak passionately about the importance of perpetual easements and collectively tell our story to legislators who had only heard misinformation about easements. The bill died in committee, but it was a wake-up call that we can't sit back and expect our state legislators to know and support our efforts."

Relationships with legislators also paid off when Georgia's governor sought to cut the expense of and add new levels of regulation to that state's newly transferable conservation tax credit. While they didn't get all they wanted, Georgia land trusts used contacts they had developed in the legislature to preserve the tax credit and secure some key changes to the law, including a delay in the requirement for participating land trusts to become accredited.

To learn more, please attend our Rally 2012 workshop, "Countering Fears and Myths About Conservation Easements." (See the back cover for Rally information).

5 Things the IRS Wants You to Know

While you were busy saving land, the IRS has been busy with a variety of new guidelines that you need to know about:

1. Their internal guide to auditing conservation easements has been released.
2. They're asking more questions about conservation easements in the Form 990 instructions.
3. There is no one correct way to record conservation easements as assets or liabilities on your form 990, but your records must be consistent.
4. For volunteers to deduct out-of-pocket expenses, nonprofits need to send contemporaneous written substantiation letters.
5. They've updated guidance publications on gift substantiation (Pub. 1771) and unrelated business income tax (Pub. 598).

Find full details at www.lta.org/policy/irs-updates.

SEAN ROBERTSON



Senator Baucus addressed land trusts at the welcome dinner of the first Land Trust Lobby Day.

Senator Baucus Speaks at First Land Trust Lobby Day

In April, executive directors and board members of 43 land trusts descended on Washington, D.C. for 136 meetings with key members of the agriculture, appropriations and tax-writing committees that decide the fate of billions of dollars for land conservation. We hope this first Land Trust Lobby Day will provide a model for similar events to cultivate new advocates with strong congressional relationships in years to come.

In remarks at the welcome dinner, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) spoke about the opportunities that come in good times and bad, saying, "There's an opportunity to make the tax incentive permanent, and there's an opportunity for you while you're here. Plant that seed." Find photos and video of the event at www.lta.org/lobbyday.

In the Know

Will the enhanced easement incentive be extended?

Check www.lta.org/easementincentive for the latest news and ways you can help.