

BY Sean Robertson

# ADVOCACY DAY AND YOU

*These visits are really important, but it's even more important for you to forge a real connection with your members of Congress back at home...Think about organizing a forum on land conservation...or a tour of a piece of property that you've preserved. And be persistent about it...if you want us to be there, just ask, and ask again, and ask again, and eventually you will get yes for an answer... And, let's not just be on the defensive...There's always time for offense in this place, and sometimes the moments of opportunity sneak up on you.*

—Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) at the 2013 Land Trust Advocacy Day

Just a decade ago there were perhaps a dozen members of Congress who understood what land trusts do. At the 2013 Land Trust Advocacy Day, the warm welcoming remarks of Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Chris Murphy (D-CT) demonstrated just how far our community has come. Both senators answered questions from participants, sharing their personal insights on legislation and effective advocacy.

Selected from key districts across 18 states, 72 land trust board members and executive directors descended on Washington to demonstrate widespread support for land conservation programs and the growing influence of our community.

Together we arranged 155 meetings on Capitol Hill, focusing on members of the agriculture, appropriations and tax-writing committees who will be critical to enacting land trust priorities, such as a permanent conservation easement tax incentive and dedicated funding for land trusts in the 2013 Farm Bill.

As Connemara Conservancy Foundation board member Kirk Evans put it, “We made some great connections, had some



Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut (center) receives an award from Catherine Rawson, Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust (CT) and Rand Wentworth, Land Trust Alliance, at the 2013 Land Trust Advocacy Day.

great conversations and learned a lot.” But Senator Murphy has an important point—before you ever think about getting on an airplane to D.C., be sure that you’ve demonstrated your organization’s value and influence back home in the district.

That goes for your legislators’ staff as well. Last month I had the opportunity to join Centre County Farmland Trust and ClearWater Conservancy for a meeting with their congressman’s district representative. They introduced him to the concept of conserving private lands, demonstrated their deep roots in the ag community, established themselves as a resource and made plans to get out into the field.

That evening, a well-briefed Rep. Glenn “GT” Thompson (R-PA) delivered perfectly on-message remarks at the Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Association dinner, where he presented a local hero award and congressional commendation to the Farmland Trust’s retiring executive director.

Congressman Thompson chairs the House Subcommittee responsible for redesigning Farm Bill conservation programs this year, so all land trusts stand to benefit from the efforts of these two small land trusts.

We’ve produced a free webinar to help you follow in the footsteps of these and other effective land trust advocates who’ve forged strong relationships in their districts. View the webinar and Senator Murphy’s remarks and learn more about Advocacy Day at [www.lta.org/advocacyday](http://www.lta.org/advocacyday).

## Powerful Friends Reintroduce Tax Incentive Bill

As participants arrived at the Advocacy Day training, some exciting news came across the wires. Senate

Finance Committee ranking Republican Orrin Hatch (UT) joined with our longtime champion Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) to introduce the Rural Heritage Conservation Extension Act (S. 526) to make the enhanced conservation easement tax incentive permanent.

Representatives Jim Gerlach (R-PA) and Mike Thompson (D-CA) are eager to reintroduce similar House legislation, and are seeking original co-sponsors.

You can help by urging your senators and rep to sign on. Learn more at [www.lta.org/easementincentive](http://www.lta.org/easementincentive).

### Dueling Budgets Prelude to Battles Ahead

The political theater of next year's budget has kicked off with House, Senate and White House releases of starkly contrasting budget blueprints. For all their differences, President Obama and the Budget Committee chairs Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) all relied on cutting the Farm Bill and "closing loopholes" as part of tax reform to achieve their goals. The Farm Bill is the single largest source of federal funding for conservation available to land trusts, and some in Congress see the charitable deduction as a "loophole" to be reformed. While none of these proposals is likely to become law, they show just how much land trusts have at stake in future budget negotiations.

The Alliance is already hard at work in D.C. championing land trust priorities. On February 14, Alliance President Rand Wentworth testified before the House Ways & Means Committee to make a case for the enhanced easement incentive and to oppose capping charitable deductions. Meanwhile, Western Policy Manager Lynne Sherrod has met with all major players on the Farm Bill in anticipation of new drafts expected in the coming months.

For the latest updates, subscribe to our Advocates newsletters at [www.lta.org/advocates](http://www.lta.org/advocates).

### Pennsylvania Land Trusts Restore Millions

It's an all too common story—but this one has a happy ending. Pennsylvania's relatively new governor proposed a budget that would permanently eliminate roughly \$80 million in dedicated annual funding for park, natural area and farmland preservation projects. The Keystone Fund and farmland preservation programs have received a dedicated portion of realty transfer and cigarette taxes since 1993.

Then the Pennsylvania House passed a bill that would have allowed local governments looking for easy cash to sell parks and protected open spaces to the highest bidder.

In each case, Pennsylvania's land trusts teamed up through the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association to unite key stakeholders, develop communication strategies and organize land trust staff, board members and supporters to play crucial roles in successfully turning back these attacks on conservation. By empowering land trusts to reach out to their legislators, PALTA turned what would have been a catastrophe into a powerful demonstration of support for parks, natural areas and working landscapes. 🍀

Leaders of Centre County Farmland Trust and ClearWater Conservancy met with their congressman's district representative, Mike Glazer (2nd from right) at the Pennsylvania Land Trust Conference.



SEAN ROBERTSON

## MEET BARTON JAMES



**BARTON JAMES** has joined the Land Trust Alliance as our new Conservation Campaign Director, a role that will guide the Alliance's advocacy program in building a national advocacy network. Over the years, Barton has worked closely with the Alliance policy team as director of public policy for Ducks Unlimited, an accredited land trust.

"Barton's commitment to conservation is an energizing force, and his relationships on Capitol Hill are great examples of the type of relationships we look forward to helping our member land trusts build," said Executive Vice President Mary Pope Hutson. "His vast experience in political advocacy will contribute greatly to the Alliance's ability to increase the political strength of the land conservation community."

Prior to his role at DU, Barton served as a political appointee in the Bush Administration at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Small Business Administration. He has also served as a staff member in the U.S. House of Representatives and as a political operative. Barton grew up in southern Arkansas and now lives in Virginia with his wife, Danielle; twin boys, Palmer and Preston; and hunting buddies, labs Lilly and Hattie.

You can reach Barton at 202-800-2239 or [bjames@lta.org](mailto:bjames@lta.org).