

BY Francesca Dalleo

# Conservation Defense Insurance Update

## The Confidence to Say “No” When Appropriate

**S**teve Goodwin of the Appalachia Ohio Alliance says that “nothing is more intimidating than sitting in a farmer’s dining room and having to deny a request that compromises the conservation easement values.” When the farmer threatens legal action to force the issue, “the situation becomes very tense.” Appalachia Ohio Alliance has responsibility for 30 conservation easements, including working relationships with dozens of landowners, and ownership of four parcels of land. Clyde Gosnell, board member and

ately. This is a *one-time opportunity* that we must take advantage of now.”

Goodwin says that “guidance from the proposed conservation defense insurance program would help us evaluate and analyze these potential challenges, especially with how far to push back on saying ‘no’ in ambiguous situations. Being able to talk with someone with much more experience in these situations, as well as knowing what other land trusts around the country do, would give us more confidence. If we could make just one phone

call to the program and get this help, it would be fabulous.”

### Goodwin emphasizes the importance of having a safety net of insurance because:

- One big case could bankrupt a land trust, especially a small or young one.
- The insurance will increase land trust confidence in dealing with challenges.
- The collective backing of the land trust community is formidable.
- Help in dealing with new issues is invaluable.
- Landowners will have confidence in the land trust when they learn about the insurance program.
- The program will provide an important selling point to prospective donors. •

“While we do have a defense fund and have recently increased our endowment reserves, **it could be expended with one trial.**”

past president says that “this has been a serious first seven years with a steep learning curve and legal challenges.”

“Our land trust has already learned how potentially vulnerable we are. We have had three new successor owners and four serious stewardship challenges,” says Gosnell. “Fortunately, we resolved them successfully without legal proceedings. While we do have a defense fund and have recently increased our endowment reserves, it could be expended with one trial.”

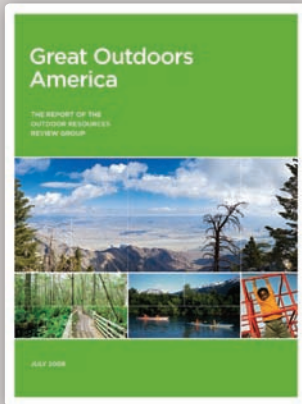
Gosnell stresses that the conservation community “*must* have a collective conservation defense insurance program. We encourage all land trusts to seriously consider enrolling in the Land Trust Alliance proposed program immedi-

THE DETAILED TERMS AND CONDITIONS AND COMMITMENT LETTER, PLUS ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION ARE AVAILABLE AT [WWW.LTA.ORG/CDINSURANCE](http://WWW.LTA.ORG/CDINSURANCE). PLEASE CALL LESLIE RATLEY-BEACH WITH ANY QUESTIONS AT 802-262-6051 OR WRITE TO [LRBEACH@LTA.ORG](mailto:LRBEACH@LTA.ORG).

Farmland protected by the Appalachia Ohio Alliance with an agricultural conservation easement.



# Fundamental Conservation Two Key Reports Released



**A**ccording to a new report by the Outdoor Resources Review Group, healthy, productive land and water resources, wildlife habitat, parks and open space are fundamental to the American way of life and our future prosperity. “Great Outdoors America” calls for a comprehensive overhaul of programs and policies to safeguard these resources for future generations. One key proposal is the development of an independent conservation trust, with dedicated and sustained funding reaching \$5 billion annually. • [www.orrgroup.org/report.html](http://www.orrgroup.org/report.html)

**A** new white paper from The Trust for Public Land, “Conservation: An Investment that Pays,” demonstrates how conservation can be a profitable long-term economic investment. The third in a series researching the economic benefits of parks and conserved natural lands, this study is particularly valuable during the economic downturn. Conservation easements are mentioned as invaluable tools to protect working lands that provide economic activity within communities. • [www.tpl.org/publications](http://www.tpl.org/publications)

## Landowner Motivation Study Research Shows that Conservation Ethic Dominates

**R**ecent studies by Colorado State University and University of Wyoming researchers show that “conservation ethic” and “spiritual attachment to one’s land” are dominant reasons for agricultural landowners to pursue conservation easements and protect land in their community. Results also show that landowners’ trust of land trusts increases through personal contact. However, the greater a landowner’s economic dependence upon the land, the less likely the landowner trusts land trusts, according to the results.

As part of a comprehensive, multi-phase research study of landowner and land trust motivations, a large group of agricultural landowners in Colorado and Wyoming were surveyed about their sense of place for their property, their attitudes toward land trusts, and perceived need for land conservation. Social scientists generally use *sense of place* to describe a multi-dimensional concept involving emotional attachment, satisfaction and identity. Analysis of 20 sense of place measures indicates that “spiritual place attachment,” “conservation ethic,” and “economic dependence upon one’s land” are three distinct dimensions. This lends insight into how land trusts should consider approaching agricultural landowners for conservation easements.

Of all of the sense of place measures, “conservation ethic” presented the highest ranking on a 5-point scale (4.36), indicating that most landowners in this sample feel a strong commitment to stewardship and land conservation. The research also shows that agricultural landowners, in general, have a strong attachment to their land.

However, those with high economic dependence upon the land that they manage are less likely to engage in a conservation easement, are less likely to trust land trusts, and are less likely to be connected with the “conservation ethic” category. This is not to suggest that those with economic dependence upon the land have less of a conservation ethic in general; rather, their motivations to protect the land may be more self-driven. Therefore, these individuals might be less likely to engage in conservation easements that they believe infringe upon operational control or production activities. However, they may be willing to support other conservation programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program. This reinforces the notion that a

spectrum of land protection policies may be effective when approaching landowners with strong economic dependence upon the land.

Other aspects of the study confirm many anecdotal land trust beliefs. Results indicate that the time land trusts spend contacting agricultural landowners is time well spent. Those who have been approached by a land trust were more likely to agree with the statement, “I trust land trusts.” The positive correlation between the “conservation ethic” and trust of land trusts is also robust. 🌱

FOR A COPY OF THE REPORT CONTACT DR. CATHERINE KESKE AT [CATHERINE.KESKE@COLOSTATE.EDU](mailto:CATHERINE.KESKE@COLOSTATE.EDU).

