



the *Washington Post* ran an exposé on conservation easements in 2004. When that happened, and some senators seemed determined to stop all deductions for conservation easements, Senator Baucus was able to say, “Wait a minute, I know about these conservation easements—and they are a good thing.”

In 2005 the Senate was poised to take away most tax deductions for conservation—but instead they ended up enacting an expanded tax deduction. That incentive not only helped the Montana Land Reliance conserve nearly a million acres, it benefitted land trusts all across the country. We owe Rock our gratitude for the investment he made in the kind of relationships that many more land trusts would benefit from creating.

At Rally 2013, Rock accepted the inaugural Advocacy Ambassador Award and became the archetype for the new Advocacy Ambassadors Program.

Like the Montana Land Reliance, the Land Trust Alliance has set ambitious goals. To effectively represent the land trust community, we are doubling our investment in public policy and seeking \$9 billion in public funding and incentives over the next five years.

If we are to succeed, it will be because many more Ambassadors like Rock step up to cultivate deep relationships with their elected officials.

The Advocacy Ambassadors Program will recognize individuals who pledge to advocate for policies that accelerate the pace of land conservation nationwide, and will raise the profile of these Ambassadors so that foundations, individual donors and the public recognize their role as leaders in the conservation movement.

We invite you to take the pledge! To learn more, visit [www.lta.org/ambassadors](http://www.lta.org/ambassadors).



## Tax Issues

### Alliance Hires Powerhouse Tax Firm

Senate Finance Committee member Ron Wyden (D-OR) once said, “Tax reform is

absolutely, totally completely impossible until 15 minutes before it comes together.” Despite widespread skepticism, Committee leaders remain deeply committed to tax reform, and we believe it remains among the greatest threats—and opportunities—that the land trust community has ever faced.

To represent land trusts in the critical months ahead, the Land Trust Alliance has retained the services of Capitol Tax Partners, a bipartisan firm with decades of combined experience in senior roles on congressional tax committees. Our lead counsel, Pat Heck, served as chief democratic tax counsel on the Senate Finance Committee and already knows our issues intimately, having lobbied for our coalition partners. In the coming months, we will work with Pat and his team to renew the enhanced easement incentive (expiring December 31) and strengthen the relationships we’ll need to look after land trust priorities in tax reform.



## Public Funding

### Demystifying Section 6

Can you imagine a single federal grant paying for a \$6 million acquisition to be held in perpetuity by your land trust? While the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund’s Section 6 grants can be difficult to navigate, they have the potential to support your work on an uncommonly large scale.

Cherie Kearney of Columbia Land Trust proactively approached her local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources to cooperatively develop a Section 6 grant acquiring 2,330 acres of critical habitat along 9 miles of Pine Creek. Preserving this cold-water mountain stream will greatly aid the recovery of the bull trout and other threatened species. Along with Forest Legacy easements on adjacent working forests, Columbia Land Trust is well on its way to its goal of conserving 20,000 acres on the flanks of Mount St. Helens.

Learn more at [www.lta.org/section6](http://www.lta.org/section6).



NRCS

## An Interview with Dave White

After USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Dave White retired this past winter, the Alliance jumped at the chance to hire him as an advisor for farm bill work on behalf of land trusts. Dave is a veteran of many farm bill battles and as final negotiations began in October, we sat down to get his take on what the new bill will mean for land trusts.

### Should land trusts get excited about this new Farm Bill?

While I don’t have a crystal ball for the final steps in this process, it seems likely that land trusts will achieve their top priority: a robust, well-funded easement program. For the first time, all working land easements will operate under the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program’s proven model of directly funding the purchase of easements by cooperating entities like land trusts.

### How can land trusts help make Agricultural Land Easements successful?

Once we do have a new Farm Bill, be sure to weigh in on the proposed rule. Follow up on your comments with a call to the NRCS contact person (named in the proposed rule) to make sure your comment was received and to explain anything that might not be clear. NRCS pays close attention to what stakeholders say, and this is your best opportunity to let the agency know what works and what doesn’t.

### Can we count on these “mandatory” funding levels?

While automatic in theory, congressional appropriators frequently reduce these amounts. That’s why it’s so important to share success stories and cultivate relationships with your members of Congress, especially members of the House and Senate appropriations committees. Tell them that you support funding the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program at its full authorized level. 🌱