



For more information:

Oliver Bass, Vice President of Communications
(p) 610-353-5587 x244, (c) 610-246-9495
(e-mail) oliver.bass@natlands.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Representative Jim Gerlach and Thirteen Pennsylvania Members of Congress Support Incentives for Open Space and Farmland Conservation

Rep. Gerlach (PA-6th District) takes lead on bi-partisan bill that would make tax incentives for donations of conservation easements permanent.

EXTON, PA (May 26, 2011) – On Tuesday, Congressmen Jim Gerlach (R-PA/6th) and Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA/1st) introduced the Conservation Easement Incentive Act, H.R. 1964. This bill will aid in the protection of millions of acres of the nation’s open spaces and agricultural lands. H.R. 1964 makes permanent an incentive that allows landowners – especially working farmers and ranchers – to receive reasonable tax deductions for voluntarily donating conservation easements that permanently protect important natural resources on their lands. The incentive is currently set to expire at the end of 2011.

“The conservation easement tax credit is a tremendously practical way to provide tax relief to property owners while helping preserve natural resources and open spaces that enhance the quality of life in our communities,” said Congressman Jim Gerlach (PA-6th District). “As co-chair of the House Land Conservation Caucus, I will continue working with the Natural Lands Trust, Montgomery County Lands Trust, the Brandywine Conservancy and others to ensure that the conservation easement tax credit continues to be an option available to family farmers, moderate-income property owners and others.”

“Each time a landowner chooses to donate a conservation easement on their land, they are making an extraordinary gift to us all – one that protects our communities and environment,” said Molly Morrison, President of Natural Lands Trust, a regional land conservation organization with 20,000 acres under conservation easement. “The deductions included in this bill make such a donation feasible for many more landowners, especially those of modest means. Representative Gerlach has long been a leader on behalf of conservation and he and many of his colleagues in the state have again demonstrated their commitment to preserving our region’s and our nation’s natural treasures.”



When landowners donate a conservation easement, they maintain ownership and management of their land and can pass the land on to their heirs, while foregoing their rights to develop the land in the future. Conservation easements have been instrumental to the success of open space preservation efforts in this region for decades. A survey by the Land Trust Alliance, a national service organization for non-profit conservation groups, shows that the current incentive helped increase the pace of private conservation efforts across the country by a third, to over a million acres a year.

The enhanced incentive applies to a landowner's federal income tax. It:

- Raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a voluntary conservation easement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allows farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Increases the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years.

"Our recent experience proves just how effective the incentive can be," said Dulcie Flaharty, Executive Director of Montgomery County Lands Trust. "Since 2009 we have permanently protected 227 acres of Montgomery County's countryside through seven donated or deeply discounted conservation easements. This represents more than \$1.6 million of value that did not have to be paid for by public conservation programs."

The Conservation Easement Incentive Act enjoys strong bi-partisan support. Two hundred and fifty-two members of Congress have co-sponsored the bill including thirteen from Pennsylvania. In addition to Rep. Gerlach who is a lead sponsor of HB1964, co-sponsors from Pennsylvania include Rep. Robert Brady (D-PA/1st), Rep. Jason Altmire (D-PA/4th), Rep. Glenn Thompson (R-PA/5th), Rep. Pat Meehan (R-PA/7th), Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick (R-PA/8th), Rep. Bill Shuster (R-PA/9th), Rep. Mark Critz (D-PA/12th), Rep. Allyson Schwartz (D-PA/13th), Rep. Michael Doyle (D-PA/14th), Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA/15th), Rep. Joe Pitts (R-PA/16th), Rep. Tim Holden (D-PA/17th), and Rep. Todd Russell Platts (R-PA/19th).

"We are very grateful for all of the support from many members of our local Congressional delegation for this critical tax incentive for land preservation," said Sherri Evans-Stanton, Director of the Brandywine Conservancy's Environmental Management Center, which holds over 400 conservation easements in southeastern PA. "Congressman Gerlach, especially, deserves credit for taking the lead in introducing this measure to make fair tax incentives for donated conservation easements permanent. When landowners donate conservation easements to preserve their land, they are voluntarily giving up value in what for many is their greatest asset. This bill has the positive effect of returning some of that value to the landowner, and by doing so, encourages more land and natural resource preservation."