

BY Russell Shay and Sean Robertson



Congressman Jim Gerlach (R-PA) picks blueberries on a farm conserved by Montgomery County Lands Trust. MCLT worked with Natural Lands Trust and Brandywine Conservancy to host a press event thanking the congressman for introducing H.R. 1964.

Making Friends IN Tough Times

The federal government now faces a budget crisis not dissimilar to those that state governments have faced over the past three years. Solutions that were unthinkable four years ago are now on the table, including major changes to Medicare and Social Security. The House passed a budget that proposes to reduce natural resources spending by 46% over the next 10 years. The President proposed cutting the tax deductions higher-income Americans can take—including deductions for charitable contributions—by 20%.

The need to make radical changes can be good. It can open the door to new solutions. Unfortunately, it can also empower politicians to put forth their most radical proposals, making constructive dialogue and compromise difficult. A big budget crisis also tends to overwhelm smaller issues. Just about anyone on Capitol Hill can say, quite honestly, that they have bigger things to worry about than land trusts.

So how, in all this mess, have we gotten a bipartisan group of 260 representatives to co-sponsor legislation to make the enhanced tax incentive for conservation easements permanent? The answer isn't here in Washington, D.C.; it's back home, where you live, and where your land trust works.

Your outstanding efforts to win friends for the work we do are having an impact. Three land trust leaders held an event with

Rep. Jim Gerlach (R-PA) at a farm whose owner was able to donate a conservation easement to Montgomery County Lands Trust because of the enhanced incentive. They got the press to come, filling local media with pictures and video of Congressman Gerlach picking blueberries, being praised by conservationists, getting a blueberry pie, and hearing from the brewmaster of Victory Beer—a high-profile employer in the district—about how important conservation is to the clean water his business depends on. These folks have made you a friend.

Centre County Farmland Trust, a volunteer-led land trust in central Pennsylvania, invited Congressman Glenn Thompson (R-PA) to their Farmland Preservation Celebration and gave him a painting of a historic barn in the district. Congressman Thompson spoke at length about the importance of conservation easements and the work of land trusts. These folks have made you a friend.

Rep. Gerlach is a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, and he has taken a lead role in trying to enact H.R. 1964, the bill to make the enhanced easement incentive permanent. Rep. Thompson is chair of the House Subcommittee that will play a primary role in allocating funding to farm bill conservation programs. Your congressperson may not be in such an obviously key position, but as my mom used to tell me, you can't have too many friends! And in these times, the land trust community needs every friend it can get.

For pictures, videos and suggestions for hosting your own event, visit www.lta.org/advocacy-events. —RUSSELL SHAY

More Co-sponsors than Any Other Bill

The enhanced income tax deduction for donations of conservation easements is still set to expire December 31, 2011—please ask your senators and representative to help save the incentive today!

We're already making great strides. Our House bill to make the incentive permanent, H.R. 1964, has more co-sponsors than any other bill! Thanks to your help, Congressmen Jim Gerlach (R-PA) and Mike Thompson (D-CA) have already gathered 260 supporters, including the Chairman, Ranking Democrat, and majorities of both parties on the Ways and Means Committee.

In the Senate, Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) introduced S. 339 with 11 co-sponsors. In an ordinary year such support would virtually guarantee smooth sailing, but with Congress gridlocked, we'll need even greater support.

Check if your members of Congress have co-sponsored, find sample materials and learn more at www.lta.org/easementincentive.

Doing More with Less in the 2012 Farm Bill

The Farm Bill has provided \$4 billion per year for conservation, but its next iteration will be considered in a climate of unprecedented fiscal constraints. After listening to land trusts around the country, we've developed a set of proposals to expand partnerships with land trusts to achieve more in a time of less.

Our primary objectives are to maximize funding for the purchase of perpetual conservation easements in the Farm Bill, and to increase land trusts' access to these programs by streamlining processes, expanding eligibility and adjusting match requirements.

There is already great pressure to reduce this funding or eliminate programs entirely. To win, we need your conservation program success stories—particularly examples that highlight the economic benefits of conserving farmland, rangeland and forests. We love sharing the example of Shoreline Fruit, which cited the nearby presence of permanently protected cherry orchards as a major factor in its decision to expand a processing plant



Centre County Farmland Trust President Larry Hutchinson (right) presents Congressman Glenn Thompson (R-PA) with a painting of historic Round Barn by local artist Karl Leitzel (left).

in northern Michigan. We need more stories like that!

To read our proposals and submit your stories, visit www.lta.org/farmbill.

Federal Funding Threatened

Natural resources budgets—including many programs land trusts rely on—are under assault. Our efforts to defend appropriations for specific programs like FRPP, GRP, NAWCA, LWCF and Forest Legacy depend on the outcome of current and future negotiations over the debt limit—which could dictate spending cuts over the entire federal budget.

The recent House budget resolution calls for a 46% cut to natural resource spending by 2016—a budget category that comprises just 1.26% of the federal budget and has grown just 2% over the past 30 years, while the U.S. government budget grew by 132% in real dollars. If such cuts are codified by law, we will have a very hard time maintaining the federal programs that most directly support land trusts—whatever their individual merits.

More than 200 land trusts signed letters opposing these cuts in June. For the latest details and new ways to help, please visit www.lta.org/conservationfunding.

State Cuts Averted

The grim federal funding picture is echoed in state houses around the nation, yet there are glimmers of hope from several states where land trusts have banded together

to overcome budget pressures and preserve the state programs on which they rely:

South Carolina – Land trusts persuaded their legislators to overwhelmingly override Governor Nikki Haley's veto of all funding for the South Carolina Conservation Bank.

Wisconsin – Gathering Waters Conservancy and American Farmland Trust led a successful effort to save the Working Lands Initiative, which had been slated for elimination.

Colorado – Faced with several proposals to reduce or eliminate the state's conservation tax credit, the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts worked with legislators to enact an alternative bill that addressed their concerns without permanently reducing the program cap.

Georgia – That state actually *improved* the tax incentives for conservation by making its existing state tax credit for donations of land and easements transferable.

Read more and share updates about your state at www.lta.org/statefunding.

In the Know

Want more?

Sign up for Land Trust Advocates alerts at www.lta.org/advocates

You'll be the first to know about important developments in Washington and how you can influence policies that support land conservation.