Board of Directors

Darrell E. Wood President

WY Senator Ogden Driskill Vice President

Blair Calvert Fitzsimons
Secretary

Chris West Treasurer

California Rangeland Trust
Steven D. McDonald
Board Chair
Nita Vail
Chief Executive Officer

Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust Bill Fales Board President Chris West Executive Director

Montana Land Reliance Phil Rostad *Board Member* Rock Ringling Managing Director

> Oregon Rangeland Trust Frank O'Leary Executive Director

Ranchland Trust of Kansas Tim Connell Board Chair Mike Beam Executive Director

Texas Agricultural Land Trust
Blair Calvert Fitzsimons
Executive Director

Wyoming Stock Growers
Agricultural Land Trust
R. Mark Eisele *Board Member*Pam Dewell *Executive Director*

At Large
Kent Bacus
Legislative Affairs Manager
National Cattlemen's Beef
Association

WY Senator Ogden Driskill

Board Member

Land Trust Alliance

Lawrence R. Kueter, Esq. Isaacson-Rosenbaum P.C. Board Member Land Trust Alliance

Lynne Sherrod Western Policy Manager Land Trust Alliance

> Staff Anne W. Garnett Executive Director



April 7, 2011

RE: Please Co-sponsor the Conservation Easement Incentive Act

Dear Member of Congress:

The 112th Congress has an unprecedented opportunity to benefit working family farmers and ranchers and advance private land conservation. On behalf of the members of the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT), I urge you to become an original co-sponsor of the Conservation Easement Incentive Act, to be introduced shortly by Congressmen Jim Gerlach (R-PA) and Mike Thompson (D-CA).

The Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT) is an association of seven (7) statewide, agriculturally oriented land trusts in California, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Oregon, Texas and Wyoming. PORT member rangeland trusts have a proven record of assisting agricultural landowners, who voluntarily assign perpetual conservation easements on their working landscapes and agriculturally productive ranches. PORT members collectively hold and administer over 1,100 conservation easements encompassing more than 1.7 million acres.

The enhanced tax deduction for conservation easement donations has helped PORT members work with farmers, ranchers and other modest-income landowners to increase the pace of conservation throughout the West and High Plains. First passed in 2006, and renewed in the December 2010 tax package, this important deduction has helped America's land trusts boost such donations by a third, to more than a million acres a year.

The deduction has even greater potential - but that potential can only be realized by making the incentive a permanent part of the tax law.

Conservation easements permanently retire development rights on private lands to protect natural resources and habitats while allowing continued farming, ranching and forestry. These perpetual legal agreements, which "run with the land", help preserve the defining landscapes in our states and permanently protect lands that provide significant value to the public...generating food and fiber, providing wildlife habitat, cradling the headwaters of our most important river systems, sequestering carbon, enhancing water quality, and nurturing a distinctly American way of life for thousands of families while benefiting millions of residents and visitors to the states we treasure.

Under previous law, landowners with modest incomes received little or no tax benefit from donating what may be their family's most valuable asset. By allowing such donors to deduct a larger portion of their income over a longer period of time, this incentive enables thousands of landowners to take better advantage of their gift of perpetually conserving their land for the use and enjoyment by future generations. The lapse of this incentive for most of 2010 led to the loss of hundreds of potential donations of development rights on lands with important natural, agricultural and historic values – and it is set to expire again at the end of 2011.

8833 Ralston Road Arvada, CO 80002 www.maintaintherange.org office: (401) 423-3547 cell: (401) 439-8926 awgarnett@cox.net

An on-again, off-again incentive makes it very difficult for landowners to make long-term succession plans that include conservation easements. Donating a conservation easement is a lengthy and expensive process that many landowners will not begin without knowing this incentive will be in place at the end.

Identical legislation in the 111th Congress (H.R. 1831/S. 812) had 274 House and 41 Senate co-sponsors from all 50 states. Presidents Bush and Obama have both sought to extend the incentive in their budget requests.

We encourage you to become an original co-sponsor of the Conservation Easement Incentive Act by contacting Lori Prater in Congressman Jim Gerlach's Office (202-225-4315) or Carla McNeill in Congressman Mike Thompson's Office (202-225-3311).

Thank you for your continued commitment to safeguarding farm and ranch land, supporting rural economies and conserving our natural resources.

Sincerely,

Darrell E. Wood Board President

cc: National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Land Trust Alliance