CONSERVATION EASEMENT TAX INCENTIVE COALITION

May 15, 2013

Individually addressed to all Senators

RE: Please Co-sponsor the Rural Heritage Conservation Extension Act, S. 526

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the undersigned conservation, agriculture, and sporting organizations, we urge you to join Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) as a co-sponsor of the Rural Heritage Conservation Extension Act, S. 526.

First passed in 2006, and renewed in the Fiscal Cliff deal, the enhanced tax deduction for conservation easement donations has helped America's land trusts work with willing landowners boost such donations by a third, to more than a million acres a year. It has even greater potential – but that potential can only be realized by making the incentive a permanent part of the tax law.

Landowners can retire the development rights on their land by donating a conservation easement – keeping farm, ranch and forest lands in productive use, protecting important fish and wildlife habitat, and conserving our scenic and historic heritage across America. 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 afford conservation.

The lapse of this incentive throughout 2012 led to the loss of hundreds of potential donations of development rights on lands with important natural, agricultural and historic values – and it's set to expire again at the end of 2013. An on-again, off-again incentive makes it very difficult to educate potential donors, and 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.

Similar legislation in the 112th Congress (H.R. 1964/S. 339) had 311 House and 28 Senate co-sponsors, including majorities of both parties in the House. Presidents Bush and Obama have both sought to extend the incentive in their past budget requests.

We encourage you to co-sponsor the Rural Heritage Conservation Extension Act by contacting Tiffany Smith or Preston Rutledge at the Senate Finance Committee (202-224-4515). For more detailed information, please contact Sean Robertson of the Land Trust Alliance at 202-800-2229 or srobertson@lta.org.

Sincerely,

Darin Schroeder, VP of Conservation Advocacy
American Bird Conservancy

Gus Rassam, PhD, Executive Director
American Fisheries Society

Bob Stallman, President
American Farm Bureau Federation

Tom Martin, President & CEO
American Forest Foundation

Jon Scholl, President
American Farmland Trust

Gregory A. Miller, Ph.D., President
American Hiking Society

Kerry O'Toole, President
American Land Conservancy

Gordon C. Robertson, Vice President
American Sportfishing Association

Susan Arnold, Vice President for Conservation
Appalachian Mountain Club

J. Mitch King, Director of Government Relations
Archery Trade Association

Jen Mock Schaeffer, Government Affairs Director
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Jim Martin, Conservation Director
Berkley Conservation Institute

Steve Mealey
Conservation Policy Committee Co-Chairman
Boone & Crockett Club

Gaspar Perricone, Co-Director
Bull Moose Sportsmen's Alliance

Len Vallender, Conservation Chair
Campfire Club of America

Gary Kania, Vice-President
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

John J. Jackson, III, President
Conservation Force

Jim Lighthizer, President
Civil War Trust

Timothy Male
Vice President for Conservation Science & Policy
Defenders of Wildlife

John L. Devney, Vice President, U.S. Policy
Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Dan Wrinn, Director of Public Policy
Ducks Unlimited

Elizabeth B. Thompson
Director of Congressional Affairs
Environmental Defense Fund

Anna Gibson, Chief Executive Officer
Equine Land Conservation Resource

Scott Kovarovics
Executive Director & Conservation Director
Izaak Walton League of America

Rand Wentworth, President
Land Trust Alliance

Jean Nelson, President and Executive Director
Land Trust for Tennessee

Dennis Foster, Executive Director
Masters of Foxhounds Association

Miles Moretti, President/CEO
Mule Deer Foundation

Laura Wood Peterson
Director of Government Affairs
National Association of Conservation Districts

Brian Moore, Legislative Director
National Audubon Society

Kent Bacus, Manager, Legislative Affairs
National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Erik Hein, Executive Director
National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers

Chandler Goule
Vice President of Government Relations
National Farmers' Union

Susan Reece, Director, Conservation, Wildlife and Natural Resources
National Rifle Association

Lawrence G. Keane, Senior Vice President, Assistant Secretary & General Counsel
National Shooting Sports Foundation

Thomas J. Cassidy, Jr.
Vice President for Government Relations
National Trust for Historic Preservation

James Earl Kennamer, Chief Conservation Officer
National Wild Turkey Federation

Jim Lyon, Sr. VP for Conservation Policy
National Wildlife Federation

Keith A. Argow, President
National Woodland Owners Association

Steven P. Riley, President & CEO
North American Grouse Partnership

Keith Trego, Executive Director
ND Natural Resources Trust

Kirk Bailey, Vice President – Government Affairs
Outdoor Industry Association

Ogden Driskell, Board President
Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT)

Dave Nomsen, VP of Government Affairs
Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever

Christopher G. Miller, President
Piedmont Environmental Council

Mike Schlegel, Conservation Committee Chair
Pope & Young Club

Hedrick Belin, President
Potomac Conservancy

Kip Adams, Director of Education & Outreach
Quality Deer Management Association

Amos Eno, President/Executive Director
Resources First Foundation

Blake Henning, VP of Lands & Conservation
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Dan Dessecker, Director of Conservation Policy
Ruffed Grouse Society

Melissa Simpson, Director of Government Affairs
Safari Club International

Mary Tracy, President
Scenic America

Brady Robinson, Executive Director
The Access Fund

Kelly Reed, Director of Government Relations
The Conservation Fund

Robert L. Bendick, Jr.
Director, U.S. Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy

Adam Cramer, General Counsel & Policy Architect
The Outdoor Alliance

Will Rogers, President
The Trust for Public Land

Gary J. Wolfe, Executive Director
The Vital Ground Foundation

Wini Kessler, President
The Wildlife Society

Whit Fosburgh, President and CEO
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Steve Moyer, Vice President, Government Affairs
Trout Unlimited

Tom Tuchmann, President
U.S. Forest Capital

Douglas H. Grann, President & CEO
Wildlife Forever

Steven A. Williams, President
Wildlife Management Institute