



June 23, 2009

Dear Member of Congress:

The undersigned conservation organizations urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 1831. The Conservation Easement Incentive Act permanently extends a tax incentive for the conservation of private forest, farm and grasslands that provide clean water, fresh food, and wildlife habitat for us all. As a longstanding conservation champion, we need your help to prevent this important conservation tool from expiring at the end of 2009.

While our public lands provide important wildlife habitats, most of our wildlife and native plants depend on private lands for habitat—the lands this incentive can help protect. In addition, the carbon sink provided naturally by forests, grasslands, croplands and wetlands offsets 12.5% of our greenhouse gas emissions. But that natural capacity is in danger. Just between 1990 and 2001, the loss of forests and farmland reduced that sequestration capacity by 20%.

Americans are also increasingly concerned about food quality and want access to food that is safe, healthy and sustainably produced. Preserving viable farms in our communities provides local access to diverse food products, reduces transportation costs and pollution, and provides a natural buffer against sprawling development.

By donating a conservation easement to a land trust in their community, landowners can retire the development rights on their land, protecting these important natural resources for the future. Under previous law, landowners with modest incomes received little or no tax benefit from the donation of development rights—often their family’s most valuable asset. Allowing conservation easement donors to deduct a larger portion of their income over a longer period of time helped America’s land trusts conserve 535,000 more acres with conservation easements in 2006 and 2007, than in the two years prior to its enactment.

Our organizations are just a few of the more than 65 groups working to make this incentive permanent before it expires at the end of 2009. Please call Jonathan Birdsong in the Office of Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA) or Wyatt Stewart in the Office of Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA) to sign on as a cosponsor of H.R. 1831. Thank you for your continued commitment to conservation.

Sincerely,

Noah Matson, VP for Land Conservation
Defenders of Wildlife

Franz A. Matzner, Acting Legislative Director
Natural Resources Defense Council

Elgie Holstein Jr.
Vice President for Land, Water, & Wildlife
Environmental Defense Fund

Alan Front, Senior Vice President
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Jim Lyon, Senior VP for Conservation Policy
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