



May 15, 2009

Dear New York Member of Congress:

The Land Trust Alliance and our New York Advisory Board represent a statewide community of over 90 nonprofit land trust organizations working to protect farmland, clean water, wildlife habitat and community gardens throughout New York State. Our work over the past three years has been greatly advanced by an enhanced conservation easement tax incentive for conservation easement donations.

We write to urge you to cosponsor H.R. 1831, legislation introduced by Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Eric Cantor (R-VA) to make this important conservation tool a permanent part of the tax code. We urge you to also reach out to your colleagues in New York's delegation and ask them to do the same. **Time is of the essence - unless Congress acts, this important incentive will expire at the end of 2009.**

This legislation could have a direct bearing on the watershed that provides New York City with some of the cleanest tap water in the world. As you know, 90 percent of New York's downstate water supply comes from the City's Catskill and Delaware watersheds, located as far as 125 miles to the north. Your constituents (along with half the state's population) have access to clean drinking water; indeed, most take this resource and its public health benefits for granted.

However, encroaching development and certain farming activities in the rural watershed region are threatening the long-term viability of New York's upstate watershed system to supply clean, inexpensive water to city residents. If New York City is required to filter its Catskill and Delaware water supplies, the capital costs alone are likely to exceed \$8 billion. The result would be a dramatic increase in water rates for all New Yorkers. Thus, providing an economic incentive to safeguard the city's public water supply lands now and staving off the need for drinking water filtration in New York makes economic as well as environmental sense.

H.R. 1831 and its companion bill, S. 812, are critical to the long-term protection of New York City's drinking water. In short, this legislation could help make New York City's watershed land acquisition program successful. Most important, it would protect the health of city residents by safeguarding private lands from pollution that might otherwise flow into our unfiltered drinking water reservoirs. In addition, communities and partnering land trusts in New York State and across the country will take advantage of a permanent tax incentive to protect the farms that grow the fresh, locally grown food demanded by millions of consumers, markets, restaurants, schools, and countless other institutions.

By allowing landowners in the watershed to deduct a larger portion of their income over a longer period of time, the conservation easement tax incentive will help New York City conserve thousands of acres of land, including the very lands that provide millions with the clean drinking water and fresh, locally grown food they enjoy every day.

Last year with your help, the enhanced conservation easement tax incentive was extended through 2009. New York's delegation alone had 27 cosponsors in support of the two-year extension of the incentive. Already, eleven New York members have joined over 100 other member of the House in cosponsoring the legislation introduced by Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Eric Cantor (R-VA).

We urge you to cosponsor the Conservation Easement Incentive Act, H.R. 1831.

Across New York State, including in New York City's community gardens, land trusts are improving quality of life and working to preserve the clean air, water and landscapes that are so vital to public health and our economy. Your support of **H.R. 1831** will make a critical difference in our efforts.

Please do not hesitate to contact our New York office at (518) 587-0774 if you have any questions or if the Land Trust Alliance can be of any assistance in conserving special places in your district.

Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

Ethan Winter
New York Conservation Manager, Land Trust Alliance

Land Trust Alliance New York Advisory Board

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