

**Remarks by Mark Tercek, President and Chief Executive Officer
The Nature Conservancy
at
The Land Trust Alliance Rally
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Entering a New Era of Conservation in the 21st Century

Introduction

It's great to be here this morning with so many people dedicated to protecting our country's lands and waters. The Nature Conservancy is proud to be a member of this community and of the Land Trust Alliance.

Over the last 30 years the land trust movement has revolutionized conservation in America. While Federal land acquisition has been significant and important and there has been a dramatic increase in state conservation programs, the real change in the conservation landscape has been the proliferation of land trusts and the rapid growth in their competence and ability to get conservation done. We are a highly successful grass-roots movement that has gotten too little notice from the media and the general public. And as I will explain in just a few minutes, private land conservation now has the responsibility and the opportunity to play a pivotal role in conserving America's remarkable landscape in these very challenging times.

I've just finished my second year as head of The Nature Conservancy. While I continue to learn new things every day about the art and science of conservation, I also think I have brought fresh eyes both to The Nature Conservancy and to the conservation movement generally.

I will use that perspective this morning to talk about the conservation challenges and opportunities we face in the 21st Century.

The Nature Conservancy: How We've Changed in Recent Years

The Nature Conservancy will celebrate its 60th Anniversary next year, and we've changed in the last decade in ways that you might not all be aware of

Our mission to protect the diversity of life on Earth remains the same, but we are forging new ways to achieve that mission.

- We have expanded internationally. In addition to working in all 50 U.S. states, we now have programs in 35 countries.
- We have increased our emphasis on conservation policy
- We now focus our land acquisition efforts on projects that are larger in scale and scope and that often involve many partners
- We're also increasing our efforts to restore lands and waters that have been degraded over the years
- We are paying much more attention to the intersection of people and nature
- And I hope we are learning to be better partners with all of you and with other organizations

Conservation in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities

I am proud of these changes, but I recognize the challenges we face:

1. By 2050, global population will explode by another 2 billion people – more than tripling in size since The Nature Conservancy was founded in 1951.
2. The growing demands for clean drinking water, arable land and living space are placing unprecedented stress on the natural resources we all depend upon for survival.
3. Climate change is no longer a future threat. It is here now and is further weakening the ability of the world's resources to sustain us all.
4. Nature is increasingly too separate from people – particularly young people, people of color, and working class families of all ethnic backgrounds.
5. The economic crisis has created severe problems in financing both private and public conservation and has placed many Americans in the position of making ends meet today rather than thinking about the future of our farms and forests.
6. And America's hundred year tradition of bi-partisan support for conservation is being undermined by our divisive political environment.

And yet I am also seeing important signs of hope.

1. I recently returned from a trip to Iowa where people, from sportsmen to farmers to business leaders to conservationists, are backing the largest conservation ballot initiative in the country this year – Iowa’s Water and Land Legacy constitutional amendment.

If passed in November, this initiative will use tax dollars to create a permanent and dedicated fund that will provide \$150 million in new conservation spending each year, including \$100 million for enhancing water quality, improving watershed planning, restoring wetlands and providing incentives for farmers to reduce soil erosion.

The Iowa referendum follows on passage during the last elections by the voters of Minnesota of a constitutional amendment that increased sales taxes to generate \$300 million a year to improve the state’s water quality, to restore and protect wildlife habitat and to support the state’s parks and trails.

It is remarkable to see people voting to increase their own taxes to support conservation.

2. Despite the bad economy, the great majority of Americans continue to support conservation. A 2009 poll taken by TNC in the midst of the recession showed that almost 80% of Americans supported the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This was about the same percentage of support as during the boom time in 2004. We repeated this question in New England this fall with similar results.
3. Citizens and public agencies, often with the leadership of land trusts, are creating new and more diverse partnerships to save the places they value at much larger scales—whole regions and whole watersheds.

Here in the Connecticut River Valley, private businesses, state and federal agencies, local communities and conservation groups have joined forces to protect hundreds of thousands of acres of forests, farms and wetlands. The unique Connecticut Valley Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge reinforces this watershed-wide partnership approach by acquiring a whole string of refuge sites at strategic locations up and down the river.

4. And last April, the Obama Administration launched the “America’s Great Outdoors” initiative. Cabinet Secretaries and other senior administration officials have now traveled to communities across the country to gather ideas directly from the American people about the direction of conservation in the 21st century. Tens of thousands of citizens turned out for these sessions and hundreds of thousands have written in to express their passionate support for saving the places they love. This unprecedented government effort and the enthusiasm shown by the American public has opened the door for a new era of conservation. This effort makes us remember how important government agencies and programs and dedicated government officials are to conservation success.

Moving Forward in the 21st Century

So how do we build on these trends to advance conservation in the 21st Century? Conservation today should be guided by five objectives each of which requires specific actions by our conservation community:

1. We must work far more effectively at the landscape and watershed scale.

If we are to successfully conserve large landscape and entire ecosystems, private lands – including working lands – must be involved. These lands are often the connecting pieces to public ownerships and are frequently concentrated near threatened waterways. As we have seen in the last 30 years, land trusts are the key players in accomplishing private land conservation.

But there must be increased cooperation among different land trusts and between land trusts and government agencies in order to work far more effectively across geographic and organizational boundaries. A good example is the cooperative success of the Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust in Massachusetts which has pioneered creating multi-land trust projects and relationships with Federal programs to coordinate separate land acquisitions in places like the Quabbin to Cardigan corridor in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Key to Mt. Grace's efforts has been flexibility in the administration of the Federal Forest Legacy program which provides funds for forest conservation. Creative and flexible Federal and state support for conservation are critical tools for private lands conservation. As we meet here, the Obama Administration is writing its recommendations for the America's Great Outdoors Program. Their plan should include proposals for cooperation and flexibility in Federal agency policies that encourage, reward and work with local and regional partnerships to conserve larger landscapes, whole watersheds, and metropolitan greenspace--ideally through something like a national landscape competition. Secretary Salazar will be here this week. It is not too late to urge him and the White House to include such incentives in their AGO report.

2. We must better reconcile human and environmental needs

Many land trusts have demonstrated how sustainable farming and forestry on lands with easements can also protect public values like water supplies, open space and wildlife habitat. Institutions that come out of the land trust movement, like Peter Forbes' Center for Whole Communities, have dedicated themselves to bringing together human welfare and environmental justice with land conservation. We must now take this to another level. This, too, is best done at scale of whole watersheds and ecosystems where we can make strategic,

ecologically based tradeoffs between what should be saved, what should be developed and how we offset the impacts of development.

3. We must secure much more reliable and long-term funding for conservation including programs that encourage the protection of private lands

This is not going to be easy in the current economic climate, but the opportunities are here right now:

- We should do everything possible to support legislation for dedicated funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million a year now pending in Congress. Created with bi-partisan support in 1965, the Land and Water Fund promised \$900 million a year for conservation and recreation from the proceeds of offshore oil and gas leasing. That promise has been repeatedly broken. The House of Representatives passed full and dedicated funding for the LWCF this summer. An LWCF bill cosponsored by Senators Baucus and Bingaman is now pending in the Senate. We have a chance of passage in the lame duck session after this election. Every land trust here should ask your Senators to vote in favor of this bill.
- After the election we also have a good opportunity to secure renewal of the enhanced income tax deduction for donated conservation easements. This should, of course, be permanent. The Land Trust Alliance has been heroic in representing us all on this issue. We should call for passage now.
- The U.S. Farm Bill has become an increasingly important source of conservation funding. In a precedent-setting commitment, the Natural Resources Conservation Service just provided \$89 million in a single grant for purchase of conservation easements over cattle ranches in the northern Everglades in Florida. No other source of funding could have accomplished this. Maintaining conservation funding will be a critical issue in the 2012 renewal of the Farm Bill.
- And even if you don't live in Iowa, you should lend support to the Iowa conservation campaign. We should replicate this kind of conservation funding in every state possible.

In the use of all of these funding measures we should encourage authority for direct grants to land trusts.

4. We must respond to the challenge of climate change

The Nature Conservancy sees the immediate impacts of climate change in many places where we work. It will affect every aspect of land conservation. We have had a tough time internally getting all our chapters to engage on this issue. Some people see it as political, others as outside of the Conservancy's traditional work. I am sure many of you have had similar debates. But land trusts should not be afraid of advocacy to address threats that have a direct impact on

your missions. In fact, you can be effective because you are in every congressional district and able to testify in a compelling way to the risks to your home territories.

There are two main things we should be doing—supporting national, regional and state efforts to reduce carbon emissions and figuring out how we can adapt communities, farm and forest lands, and natural systems to the change that is already coming.

In this regard Proposition 23 on the California ballot this fall seeks to overturn that state's pioneering and limits on carbon emissions that were put in place with bi-partisan support four years ago. Proposition 23 support is fueled by out of state special interests. We are opposed to this repeal and hope you are as well.

5. And we must be far more proactive in broadening our conservation constituency.

The Nature Conservancy is far from perfect in our record of attracting and engaging a diverse membership. This must change if we are to survive as a viable organization. By 2050, minority groups will comprise the majority of Americans. America is also becoming more and more urban. I grew up in the city, and when I first came to the Conservancy, I could tell there were a lot of people who questioned my commitment and connection to nature. This is not the way to increase our effectiveness.

The Conservancy is working to improve our outreach to urban and minority communities. Our New York chapter, for example, has an internship program that brings New York City students to live and work on Conservancy preserves in states throughout the Northeast. For many of these students, it is their first time ever outside of city limits and in a natural environment. They learn basic land management and scientific research skills as well as career opportunities in conservation. With funding from the Toyota USA Foundation, we are now expanding this program to reach more students in more states.

We can also make more conservation progress by entering into agreements with non-traditional partners like non-profit organizations that struggle against poverty, the developers of alternative energy facilities, faith-based organizations and Federal agencies such as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Defense. Many land trusts have done brilliant and pioneering work in this area. The Conservancy has a long standing and successful partnership with the Department of Defense to buffer military bases against encroaching development. This helps the bases, ensures sources of employment in rural areas and protects valuable habitat. Such partnerships promote the exchange of ideas and the broadening of our conservation constituency.

6. There is, in addition, a cross-cutting issue here. As we stand up for conservation as we take more activist positions, regardless of our good intent and reasoned approach, individual land trusts and the land conservation movement generally will face criticism given the growing culture of

confrontation in America today. We must **strengthen land trust practices and strive for accreditation** to protect our credibility and ensure public support for what we do. The Nature Conservancy is currently in the process of accreditation, and I encourage every group here to work toward that goal. Moreover, we must continue to build on efforts to defend conservation easements, like the Land Trust Alliance's Conservation Defense Center and the proposed insurance program.

None of this need take away from your individual missions. The basis of our success and our credibility is saving lands and waters piece by piece, community by community. If we can't get real and tangible conservation done, we have little standing to do new things or operate at a larger scale.

Conclusion

How do these proposals fit together? How do we build on the astonishing growth in the success and power of the land trust movement that I cited in the opening sentences of these remarks to achieve even greater conservation success in this next fifty years?

My recommendations this morning suggest that we must bring together the disparate elements of land conservation to work with diverse partners and to use more flexible and reliable government tools and incentives to conserve whole landscapes, urban greenspace and watersheds for their multiple benefits to a more diverse American population. This must be done in the face of unpredictable swings in government direction, a troubled economy, political division, and competition from other societal needs.

Arising from the will of people across this country, and, now around the world, land trusts can play a pivotal role in accomplishing all this:

- Land trusts are private and voluntary organizations that transcend elections and public appointments, so they can buffer us from wild swings in public policies and programs. They can speak in compelling ways about conservation needs and provide private resources to back up their opinions. They can reinforce our country's long bi-partisan conservation tradition. All of this can help to sustain conservation in good times and bad.
- Land trusts are distributed across political boundaries, so they can be the building blocks for the long-term landscape and watershed partnerships so essential for conservation to succeed in the face of mounting threats.
- And land trusts are handed down from one generation to the next so they can provide the consistency of purpose to ensure that conservation proceeds over the very long time it takes to get these things done.

Thus, in having grown quietly but strongly over these last 30 years the land trust movement can bring to conservation in America what it needs to succeed—resilience, the ability to transcend boundaries, and the ability to endure through time.

But land trusts cannot do these things without you. Not you as an audience. You as individuals. The history of most land trusts trace back to the tireless and courageous acts of small groups of people. Conservation is a deeply personal and not entirely unselfish act. Personal conviction created this movement, and personal conviction is now required for it to fulfill its potential.

I am absolutely convinced that we can, among us, muster that personal conviction. As I now understand first hand from my experience at The Nature Conservancy, despite its challenges and difficulties, working in conservation is far more of a privilege than a burden. We benefit from the fellowship of walking the conservation trail together, and we achieve a kind of quiet immortality so rare in this complex world -- because in saving our lands and waters each of us becomes an indelible part of the places we know and love, part of the whole related, connected and astonishing constellation of places across this beautiful country.

Onward, my friends! Thank you again for all that you do and for inviting me here today.