



SEAN ROBERTSON

STEP UP and Be Counted

I am one person with one vote, and it was easy to think that I couldn't make a difference, even though land conservation is a cause I believe in. I decided to be part of the solution rather than a passive observer and was encouraged by Land Trust Alliance staff and board members to step up and take action.

The experience really grabbed me in a way I did not expect.

While in Washington, D.C., to attend the Alliance board meeting in February, I made appointments to meet with staff from Senator Elizabeth Warren's (MA) and Rep. Joseph Kennedy's (MA) offices to talk about the conservation easement tax incentive legislation. This was my first in-person meeting on Capitol Hill, and I was grateful to have guidance from Sean Robertson of the Alliance's policy team.

The congressional staff were generous with their time and asked good questions. I described my favorite land project in Wareham, Massachusetts, that uses conservation restrictions. It is a collaborative enterprise by the all-volunteer Wareham Land Trust, Mass Audubon and town of Wareham that saved 300 coastal acres and was funded by a combination of federal, state, town, nonprofit and individual donor contributions.

It was an empowering experience to walk through the halls of the Senate and House and it gave me a true sense of how our legislative process works. I felt

connected in a way I had not felt before. Now I understood how an average citizen could ask for and get a meeting with her representatives. An added bonus was accompanying fellow Alliance board member and seasoned advocate Sherry Huber on her visit with Senator Susan Collins (ME).

I have been very impressed with the Alliance's (and other conservation groups') success in getting a majority of both parties to sign on to the tax incentive legislation, even during a time of congressional gridlock and divisiveness. As the Alliance perseveres to make the incentive a permanent provision of the tax code to increase the pace of land conservation in the United States, I was glad to add my voice to the chorus.

I recommend this experience to other board members of land trusts, especially all-volunteer land trusts like mine. Local land trusts are critical to connecting the dots of land conservation all across the country, keeping it alive and making a difference in our communities. We can use our deep local connections to meet with those who can make a difference nationally for the benefit of all of us.

Our legislators want to hear from us. If you think about it from their perspective, wouldn't it be nice to talk with someone from your district who can bring a message of hope about the people and special places you care about and to hear a "thank you" for what you do?

If you don't want to start with a visit, you can test the waters in simpler ways. I wrote a letter to Congressman Barney Frank before he signed on as a co-sponsor of the tax incentive. I researched his position on the environment, then took the Alliance's model letter (there are great materials on the Alliance website) and added local examples of how the easement incentive has enhanced land protection in his district. I was pleased when he signed on within a week to cosponsor the legislation!

No matter what form your advocacy takes, know that it works, it's easy and fun, and that one person can make a difference. 🌱

MARY MCFADDEN FOUNDED THE WAREHAM LAND TRUST IN 2001 AND NOW SERVES ON ITS BOARD, AS WELL AS ON THE BOARD OF THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE. SEE P. 11 FOR ADVOCACY INFORMATION.