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Contact:

Russ Shay, Director of Public Policy
202-638-4725, ext. 305, rshay@lta.org

White House Report Embraces Local Partnerships for Land Conservation

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) February 17, 2011 – Voluntary conservation of private land received a boost yesterday when President Obama mentioned the work of land trusts in his remarks introducing the landmark America’s Great Outdoors Report at a reception in the East Room of the White House. The collective voice of land trusts was reflected in the report, which proposes to extend the enhanced tax incentive for conservation easement donations beyond 2011, fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and focus a portion of LWCF on innovative projects that support urban parks, community green spaces and large-scale land conservation.

Mr. Obama said that “at a time when America’s open spaces are controlled by a patchwork of groups, from government to land trusts to private citizens, it’s clear that conservation in the 21st century is going to take more than what we can do here in Washington...Meeting the new test of environmental stewardship means finding the best ideas at the grassroots level, it means helping states, communities and nonprofits protect their own resources, and it means figuring out how the federal government can be a better partner in those efforts.”

The report draws inspiration from hundreds of land trust participants at America’s Great Outdoors listening sessions around the country. “I am proud of the nation’s 1,700 land trusts for pioneering the voluntary conservation incentives and locally driven partnerships embraced in this report,” Land Trust Alliance President Rand Wentworth said. “This initiative will significantly reorient federal conservation efforts to emphasize working lands and to embrace local governments and land trusts as effective partners in conserving the places that give meaning to our lives.”

The report’s vision statement describes a future in which “Rural lands—our working farms, ranches and forests—are conserved and restored through local partnerships.” The president’s Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request makes a down payment on that vision by providing \$200 million for the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and \$900 million for the LWCF, some of which “will be competitively awarded to address priorities and leverage resources for urban parks and public-private conservation projects.”

In communities across America, nonprofit land trusts are working with private landowners to keep farm, ranch and forest lands in productive use, create community parks and open space, protect important fish and wildlife habitat, and conserve our scenic and historic heritage. With the help of more than 100,000 volunteers and 2 million members, land trusts have conserved more than 37 million acres, including more than 12 million acres protected by voluntary conservation agreements with private landowners.

About the Land Trust Alliance

The Land Trust Alliance is a national conservation group that works on behalf of America’s 1,700 land trusts to save the places people love by strengthening land conservation throughout America. The Alliance works to increase the pace and quality of conservation by advocating favorable tax policies, training land trusts in best practices and working to ensure the permanence of conservation in the face of continuing threats.

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