

Conservation Easement Incentives

Millions of acres of farms, ranches, forests, working lands and scenic open spaces will be forever lost unless Congress enacts permanent bipartisan tax incentives for conservation.

What's at Stake? Special places that people need and love are being lost, and it is putting our ways of life at risk.

- America loses 3 acres of land every minute; 1.5 million acres every year – an area the size of Delaware. Once it's gone; it's gone forever.
- Farms, ranches, forests and scenic vistas are being paved over.
- Middle class farmers and ranchers are forced to sell off lands that have been in families for generations rather than pass them on to their children. More than just land is being lost – so is a way of life.
- Owners of these special places need more choices than simply selling out to the highest bidder.
- In many parts of the country, such as Long Island, agriculture and tourism are essential economic engines of the area. Without farms, natural lands, and scenic vistas, the economic prosperity of our communities will be severely impacted.

What's the Solution? Conservation easements are America's best tool to save special places, safeguard local economies, and keep working lands in working hands.

- Conservation easements are the modern face of conservation: a completely voluntary, non-governmental and non-regulatory approach to land conservation that gives landowners more choices. They are inexpensive, simple and effective, and enjoy broad bipartisan support.
- Conservation easements allow landowners to exchange their development rights – often a farm or ranch's most valuable asset – enabling these special places to be passed on to future generations. Easements keep the land in its natural state, ensuring that these outdoor treasures aren't subdivided and exploited.
- Easements are the most cost-effective approach, as valuable natural spaces and working lands can be protected by an easement for a fraction of the cost of buying it.
- Lands placed in easement continue to be farmed, grazed, hunted or used for outdoor recreation and wildlife conservation, and lands remain on tax rolls, strengthening local economies.
- Tax incentives put into place in 2006 are directly responsible for conserving more than 2 million acres of America's natural outdoor heritage.

What Needs to Happen? Congress can vote to make the conservation easement tax incentives permanent.

- The conservation easement incentive passed the House of Representatives this summer by an overwhelming bipartisan vote.
- Landowners are left in limbo with no permanent incentive. Projects are now hanging in the balance since landowners need certainty and permanence in order to plan.

How does the Enhanced Conservation Easement Incentive Work? The enhanced incentive helps landowners of modest means choose conservation by:

- Raising the maximum deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from **30%** of their adjusted gross income (AGI) in any year to **50%**;
- Allowing qualified farmers and ranchers to deduct up to **100%** of their AGI; and
- Increasing the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to **16 years**.

Without the enhanced easement incentive, an agricultural landowner earning \$50,000 a year who donated a conservation easement worth \$1 million could take a total of no more than \$90,000 in tax deductions! Under the enhanced incentive, that landowner can take as much as \$800,000 in tax deductions – still less than the full value of their donation, but a significant increase.

For additional information, please contact:

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