



Working with Land Trusts

A Primer for Congress

What's a land trust?

Land trusts are private, nonprofit organizations that acquire and manage land for the purpose of permanent conservation. They also steward land for public benefit. Land trusts harness three fundamental aspects of the American ethos: volunteerism, community spirit and connection to the land. Most land trusts are community-based, making them deeply connected to local needs and well positioned to provide local benefits such as trails, school programs and more.

What are “conservation easements,” and how are they tied to land trusts?

Conservation easements are voluntary, legal agreements between landowners and land trusts that provide a financial benefit for permanently limiting uses of lands to preserve habitats, natural resources and economic opportunities. Each easement is custom tailored. For example, an agricultural conservation easement allows for farming to continue uninterrupted. When landowners sell or donate land covered by easement, the easement remains in full effect. Land trusts help oversee – and, when necessary, enforce – conservation easements.

What's the Land Trust Alliance?

Founded in 1982, the Land Trust Alliance works to save the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America. Its work in the nation's capital represents the policy priorities of land conservationists from every state; its education programs improve and empower land trusts from Maine to Alaska; and its 1,000 member land trusts are supported by 4.6 million members nationwide.

What have land trusts accomplished?

Land trusts have cumulatively conserved 56 million acres of land – an area of protected land that is double the size of all the land in national parks across the lower 48 states. These conserved natural spaces vary widely in scope and appearance, encompassing everything from working ranches to community gardens.

How does Congress influence local land conservation?

Support for local land conservation most clearly manifests in federal tax incentives for conservation easements, first enacted in 2006. Other sources of support include the Farm Bill and the Land & Water Conservation Fund. In total, spending on land, water, ocean and wildlife programs comprises just 1.26% of the federal budget, yet these programs support 9.4 million jobs and over \$1 trillion in economic activity.