



Testimony of The Land Trust Alliance Before the Joint Legislative Hearing on the Environmental Conservation Portions of the Executive Proposed Budget for New York State Fiscal Year 2020-21

January 27, 2020

My name is Meme Hanley and I am the New York Program Manager for the Land Trust Alliance. On behalf of the state’s 85+ land trusts and their champions, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Governor’s proposed environmental funding in the 2020-21 Executive Budget.

I am honored to share with you our commitment to advancing land conservation by empowering the work of land trusts across the state. We are proud of the Governor’s and Legislature’s commitment to protecting open space for the many benefits it provides the public and today ask for your continued investment and partnership. Working together, alongside our many partners, we can improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers.

I testify today in support of investing at least \$300 million in the Environmental Protection Fund, including \$2.5 million for the highly successful Conservation Partnership Program, \$20 million in farmland protection and \$3 million for the new Conservation Easement Program. New York’s land trust community also appreciates the Governor’s proposed \$3 billion Restore Mother Nature Bond Act. We look forward to working with you, other legislators, and the Governor, to shape and implement this forward-looking initiative.

The Land Trust Alliance works to save the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America. In New York State, the Land Trust Alliance serves as a leader, convener, partner, and technical assistance provider to a well-coordinated network of nonprofit land trusts. These relationships provide the opportunity to see, first hand, the benefits of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and the role it plays in communities across the State. Public-private initiatives funded through the EPF such as the Conservation Partnership Program (CPP) and the proposed Conservation Easement Program for land trusts advance the state’s conservation and economic development objectives with projects that are developed locally and broadly supported.

Land trusts work in every region, including the Adirondacks, the Finger Lakes, Tug Hill Plateau, Genesee Valley, Upper Delaware River Region, Hudson River Valley, Catskill Mountains and Long Island. Land trusts also save green space and promote community gardens in The Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan and in cities like Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, and Kingston.

These permanently protected places provide fresh food, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and help strengthen communities by providing opportunities for people to enjoy the nurturing health benefits of being outdoors.

Now, more than ever, land conservation can play an important role in mitigating the worst effects of climate change, improving health, building community and boosting local economies.

As legislators, you will play a pivotal role in defining our state's future for generations to come with the decisions you make in this year's EPF.

Land Trusts are proven partners

- To date, local, regional & national land trusts operating across New York State have permanently conserved some 2.7M acres through conservation easements, land acquisitions and re-conveyances.
- New York's land trusts are engaging more members of their communities than ever before. New York's land trusts now count nearly 10,000 active volunteers, and draw direct support from more than 73,000 members and donors mostly from their own local communities.
- Land Trust are serving more people, in more places than ever before. Today we see land trusts working in rural, suburban and urban areas and identifying ways that land conservation can have tangible benefits by increasing food security, providing flood and storm mitigation, supplementing classroom learning and supporting neighborhood stability.

Taking Action:

In light of the overwhelming evidence that land conservation provides an impressive return, we urge you to support an EPF of at least \$300 million. To ensure New Yorkers have the best chance for a healthy environment and healthy economy, adequately funding the EPF is crucial and we hope you will work to increase this to \$500M by 2025.

A cornerstone of the EPF are appropriations for open space. It is imperative to right size the open space funding to reflect the needs and priorities of our state. We are concerned that the Executive Budget reduces the open space allocation to \$30M from \$33M. The consequences of this action and cuts in previous years are adding up. We hope you will work to restore this funding to its historic levels.

Staffing at State Agencies that support conservation must also increase, but not as part of the EPF. These funds are intended, and have always been used for, capital expenses, not operating expenses of the State.

The consequences of allowing this funding to be eroded will be felt for years to come and will saddle future generations with an unhealthy environment.

Continue Investing in the Conservation Partnership Program at \$2.5M

As local, nonprofit organizations, land trusts engage private landowners in efforts to conserve and enhance our most important natural resources – prime agricultural soils, local farms and community gardens; lakes, streams, wetlands, municipal watersheds and aquifers; forests and critical wildlife habitat; fragile coastal areas and estuaries. Land Trusts have the local knowledge, technical expertise and commitment to perpetuity that makes them excellent partners to the State and municipalities.

Continued investment in the Conservation Partnership Program will make certain that the rich legacy of conservation we enjoy today endures and that people in all regions can benefit from the EPF.

- The CPP is a model of efficiency: Annually appropriated dollars are awarded to land trusts under a single contract with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), delivering tangible impacts for communities and directly advancing New York's Open Space Plan.
- Over the past 16 years, the CPP has awarded 928 grants totaling \$19.45 million to 90 land trusts across the state. Grant funds have helped leverage at least \$20 million in local matching funds and have supported the protection of tens of thousands of acres.
- Administered by the Land Trust Alliance in partnership with the DEC, CPP funds are disbursed annually through a competitive grant process, creating immediate, lasting, and visible impacts on job creation, drinking water protection, recreational opportunities and community resilience to the effects of climate change.

Investments in the CPP have built New York's land trust community to be one of the strongest in the nation. The California Landscape Stewardship Network recently commissioned a Case Study on Building and Sustaining Landscape-Scale Stewardship Networks in the 21st Century. The nation-wide study recognized the New York State Conservation Partnership Program as *"A powerful example of how public funding can successfully leverage private funds to advance regional collaboration and stewardship through long-term public-private partnerships."*

We urge you to continue funding the CPP at \$2.5M

Land Trusts can Accelerate the Rate of Conservation for Agricultural and Forest Lands

One of most notable achievements of the EPF is the substantial investments that have been made in protecting farmland. By working with land trusts to conserve agricultural land across the state, the EPF has helped preserve an important part of our economy and a way of life for thousands of farm families. Land trusts are proud to have been a partner in helping the state protect 75,000 acres of farmland through the Farmland Protection Grants program. As farmers

grow older and issues of farm succession become more pressing, your work to ensure our farms stay in production is vitally important. We urge you to ensure this work is well funded at \$20M.

We also ask that you now create a bold new program for the protection of New York's forests. Our state's forests provide critical benefits to our communities.

- Forests store carbon dioxide: conserving them can draw down the carbon pollution that causes climate change.
- Forests filter water: they improve water quality for millions of New Yorkers.
- Forests provide jobs: sustainable forestry and forest products generate important economic activity throughout the state each year.
- Forests provide important habitat for wildlife and recreation for people.

While we have huge, publicly-owned forests in our Adirondack and Catskill Parks and state forest areas, 75% of New York's forests are privately owned. These assets have been stewarded by New York forest owners, who are now facing many of the same issues that are facing our family farmers. The median age of a forest owner is 60, and most do not have a viable plan for the long-term future of their forest lands. These lands risk conversion at a time when New Yorkers need forests most as a first line of defense in a changing climate.

The average income of most family forest owners in New York State is less than \$100,000, putting their forests at high risk for conversion due to the high costs of carrying property, such as property taxes. The average parcel size for a family forest is generally too small to fall under the criteria for state protection. In addition, for many forest landowners, their assets are in the land and they are not in a position to donate their lands. Many forest owners are left with limited options to protect their property. The proposed Conservation Easement Program for Land Trusts would be a meaningful step in addressing this problem.

These are risks not just for forest owners, these are risks for all New Yorkers. All of us rely on forests for clean air and water. New York can lead the way on climate, health and a strong economy by protecting these lands before it is too late.

Land trusts are experts in permanent land protection, but lack access to funds to conserve the forests on which we all depend. Creating the Conservation Easement Program for Land Trusts will give land and people the best possible chance to conserve forests without burdening state agencies with permanent maintenance and stewardship obligations.

We urge you to fund, as part of the Open Space Account, the Conservation Easement Program for Land Trusts at \$3M

In Closing

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today on the proposed FY2020-21 budget. Providing the people of New York with an EPF that meets today's needs and solves

tomorrow's problems is key to our State's long-term health and well-being. This can only be done by fully funding the EPF, adding state agency staff capacity with noncapital funds, investing in land trusts and conservation easements, and supporting the programs that complement these efforts.

We look forward to playing our role in the development, passage, and successful implementation of the Restore Mother Nature Bond Act which we hope will provide additive funds to EPF and other important initiatives.

The Land Trust Alliance is proud to work in New York State and partner with land trusts that foster on-the-ground conservation as well as our hardworking state agencies. Thank you for considering our proposals. The land trust community looks forward to helping as you shape the next state budget. Please turn to us for any help we might provide.



Land Trust Alliance

Together, conserving the places you love

The New York State Conservation Partnership Program

Investing in Land Trusts for Healthy Communities

16th Round: \$2.25 million awarded in April 2019

70 grants awarded to 47 land trusts

Projects leverage \$2.2 million in local matching funds and conserve 5,339 acres of open space
Program funded through New York's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)

New York State Conservation Partnership Program Overview (2003-2019)

928: # of Grants, totaling \$19.45 million, awarded to 90 different land trusts across the state

\$21.2 million: Local matching funds leveraged through grant-funded projects

35,019: Acres of prime farmland, forest, wildlife habitat, urban open space conserved

Grantee Organizations

Adirondack Land Trust *
Agricultural Stewardship Association *
American Farmland Trust - New York
Audubon International
Battenkill Conservancy
Bedford Audubon
Bronx Land Trust
Brooklyn Alliance of Neighborhood Gardens
Brooklyn-Queens Land Trust
Buffalo Niagara Land Trust
Capital Roots
Catskill Center
Cazenovia Preservation Foundation *
Central New York Land Trust
Champlain Area Trails *
Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
Chenango Land Trust
Columbia Land Conservancy *
Cragsmoor Conservancy
Delaware Highlands Conservancy *
Ducks Unlimited *

Dutchess Land Conservancy *
Esopus Creek Conservancy
Farm Catskills
Finger Lakes Land Trust *
Fire Island Land Trust
Friends of the Great Swamp
Friends of the Washington Co IBA
Genesee Land Trust *
Genesee Valley Conservancy *
Grassroots Gardens WNY
Great Swamp Conservancy
Greenburgh Nature Center
Green Guerillas
Greene Land Trust *
HL Ferguson Museum
Hudson Highlands Land Trust *
Huyck Preserve & Biological Research Station *
Indian River Lakes Conservancy *
Kingston Land Trust
Lake Champlain Land Trust *
Lake Placid Land Conservancy
Lake George Land Conservancy *
Lewisboro Land Trust

New York State Conservation Partnership Program (2003-2019)

Grantee Organizations (continued)

Manhattan Land Trust
Mianus River Gorge *
Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy *
Mohonk Preserve *
Mount Sinai Heritage Trust
Nassau Land Trust
New York Agricultural Land Trust
New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
North Salem Open Land Foundation *
North Shore Land Alliance *
Northeastern Cave Conservancy
Northeast Wilderness Trust *
Oblong Land Conservancy *
Ontario Bays Initiative
Open Space Institute *
Open Space Preservation Trust
Orange County Land Trust *
Otsego Land Trust *
Peconic Land Trust *
Pound Ridge Land Conservancy
Putnam County Land Trust*
Queensbury Land Conservancy
Rensselaer Land Trust *
Rensselaer Plateau Alliance *
Rev. Williamson Memorial Park Association
Rondout-Esopus Land Conservancy *
Saratoga PLAN *
Scenic Hudson *
Schoharie Land Trust
Somers Land Trust
Southern Madison Heritage Trust
St. Lawrence Land Trust
Teatown Lake Reservation
The Nature Conservancy *
The Wetland Trust
Thousand Islands Land Trust *
Three Village Community Trust
Trust for Public Land *
Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust *
Wallkill Valley Land Trust *
Westchester Land Trust *
Western New York Land Conservancy *
Wilton Wildlife Preserve & Park
Winnakee Land Trust *
Woodstock Land Conservancy *
Yonkers Land Conservancy

*Organization is accredited through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance.

Did you know?

From 2005 to 2015, local and regional land trusts in New York permanently conserved an additional 440,000 acres through conservation easements, land acquisitions and re-conveyances. This equates to **120 acres of land conserved every day, for a decade.** New York land trusts employ more than 400 full and part time staff and have 85,000 active volunteers, members and supporters.

Contact us to learn about the New York State Conservation Partnership Program!

Land Trust Alliance - New York Program
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New York State Conservation Partnership Program – Recent Regional Highlights

Capital District

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance – 2018 Transaction Grant (\$45,000) – Funding to complete public access improvements on a 353-acre property that will be home to the land trusts second community forest project.

Central New York

Otsego Land Trust – 2018 Stewardship & Resource Management Grant (\$40,000) – Funding to complete streambank repairs and improve public access to its signature preserve (Brookwood Point) on Otsego Lake, a source of drinking water for the Village of Cooperstown.

Hudson Valley

Columbia Land Conservancy – 2019 Catalyst Grant (\$40,000) – Funding to build on relationships with partners in the Hudson City School District to engage youth in community science at the land trust's Greenport Conservation Area.

Long Island

North Shore Land Alliance – 2018 Catalyst Grant (\$40,000) – Funding to develop a community garden center in an underserved area of Nassau County. The Roosevelt Community Garden is a place where residents can gather, recreate outdoors and grow healthy food together in a safe and supportive community environment.

Peconic Land Trust – 2019 Catalyst Grant (\$45,000) – Funding to partner with the Town of Riverhead (Suffolk County) to develop a comprehensive inventory of protected and unprotected farmland in support of the town's Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program and to advance a Peconic Bay Region Community Preservation Priority Project Plan.

New York City

Brooklyn Queens Land Trust – 2018 Transaction Grant (\$40,000) – Funding to offset the costs of acquiring the Serenity Garden, a new community garden site in Flatlands, Brooklyn, and to make enhancements to ensure the property is a safe and appealing place for community member to gather and garden.

Green Guerillas – 2019 Capacity Grant (\$25,000) – Funding to enable Green Guerillas to continue providing support to the Bronx and Manhattan land trusts with specific focus on improving member engagement, fundraising and outreach and long-term stewardship and sustainability of each organization's community gardens.

North Country

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust – 2019 Capacity Grant (\$36,800) – Funding to create a comprehensive, regional farmland protection plan and to develop materials to educate municipalities in their service area about the importance of farmland protection.

Western New York

Buffalo Niagara River Land Trust – 2019 Stewardship & Resource Management Grant (\$30,000) – Funding to begin landscaping of a waterfront property in the City of Buffalo the land trust has spent the last three years remediating. Improvements, which will include trails, habitat restoration and a boat launch, will also restore the community's access to the Niagara River.