

BY Sarina Katz

ADVOCATING TOGETHER FOR

Conservation



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The Land Trust Alliance Advocacy Days 2018 brought together a powerful cohort of ambassadors for land conservation.

The week of April 9 was a very busy one in Washington, D.C., as land conservationists arrived in the nation's capital. On behalf of their land trusts back home and for land conservation around the country, advocates came from Alaska, Florida and everywhere in between to attend the seventh annual Land Trust Alliance Advocacy Days and associated networking receptions.

For some, walking the halls of the Senate and House buildings has become much like a walk in the park. For others, this was their first time learning to navigate on the Hill. But for the experienced and the newcomers alike, this was an opportunity to push land conservation priorities to the forefront of their representatives' agendas and reiterate the fantastic work our community does day in and day out to protect our country's working lands and natural spaces.

Land Trust Alliance Advocacy Days

Advocacy Days 2018 was held at a strategic time to maximize the potential to advance multiple federal funding and policy priorities for the land trust community, including passing legislation to halt conservation easement tax shelters, advocating on behalf of our Farm Bill recommendations and urging reauthorization and funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Almost 120 land trust participants attended more than 200 meetings with elected officials and their staff.

Conservation Easement Tax Shelters

Thanks to support in the form of bipartisan bills in the House and Senate, we have an opportunity to stop conservation easement tax shelters (also referred to as syndicated transactions) once and for all.

Fortunately, we had members in town from the districts and states of sponsors of H.R. 4459 and S. 2436, the Charitable Conservation Easement Program Integrity Act.

Oliver Bass of Natural Lands (accredited) and Brian Gallagher of Western Pennsylvania Land Conservancy (accredited) attended a meeting with bill sponsor, Rep. Mike Kelly (R-PA). Bass and Gallagher have been attending Advocacy Days from the very beginning and strongly believe in the power of community. "Coming here helps me to keep up to date on policy issues and also shows a concentrated effort on behalf of the land trust community," Bass said. In a brief discussion in the hall outside the congressman's office, Bass and Gallagher discussed a strategy for their meeting with Kelly's policy director, Lori Prater. Both incorporated



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Brian Gallagher (left) and Oliver Bass (right) meet with Rep. Mike Kelly, who sponsored a bill to stop tax shelters.

all they learned from briefings provided by the Alliance into their talking points.

The two thanked Prater and Rep. Kelly for their support of H.R. 4459 and their continued leadership on this issue. “If it looks like a tax shelter, smells like a tax shelter, it’s clearly a tax shelter,” Prater said. “It’s undermining the goodwill of the community and the original intent of the federal conservation tax incentive.”

All those who attended Advocacy Days were encouraged to urge their representatives to support H.R. 4459 and S. 2436 in the weeks to come.

Farm Bill

The reauthorization of the Farm Bill was another top priority for Advocacy Days. As the single largest federal source of funding for private land conservation, the next Farm Bill package will have a significant impact on the future of conservation across the country.

Land trust coalitions, like the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT), came prepared with stories and statistics about how the Farm Bill, and particularly the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP),

have supported conservation work on their properties for years.

During one particular meeting, members of PORT met with Ashley McKeon, a senior staffer in Sen. Debbie Stabenow’s (D-MI) office. Sen. Stabenow, who also spoke at a breakfast hosted by the Alliance during Advocacy Days, is the ranking member on the Senate Agriculture Committee and has been a longtime supporter of the Farm Bill conservation programs and its reauthorization.

Speaking to McKeon, Erik Glenn, executive director of the accredited Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust, reiterated the community’s desire to see ACEP funding restored to \$500 million. He also honed in on the community’s desire to increase the flexibility of the Agricultural Land Easements program, hoping to streamline applications and ongoing management.

For other delegations, Farm Bill discussions took a less traditional route. Nicole Braddock, executive director of the accredited Solano Land Trust in California, greeted Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA) like

an old friend. “Our representatives appreciate us coming in person to talk about these issues. It’s a big gesture and helps us to stand out in such a large state,” Braddock says.

The California delegation discussed the Farm Bill in great detail, urging Rep. Garamendi to support reauthorization. But their discussion soon turned to home; many land trusts in the room are still recovering from devastating fires, and funding from Farm Bill sources could help establish programs for fire and forest management.

Linus Eukel, executive director of the accredited John Muir Land Trust, thanked the congressman for his continued support: “You’ve been a champion of our work for a long time, and we can’t thank you enough.”

The efforts of all those who attended Advocacy Days, and the ambassadors who work from afar, have paid off. At press time, almost all of the Alliance’s recommendations for the 2018 Farm Bill have been included in the most recent House Bill. For the latest on the Farm Bill, visit www.lta.org/farm-bill. 🌿

SARINA KATZ IS COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING COORDINATOR FOR THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE. THIS WAS HER SECOND ADVOCACY DAYS.

Celebrating NRCS

This year the land trust community and the Department of Agriculture came together to celebrate 25 years of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation easement programs. NRCS provides America’s farmers, ranchers and forest landowners with financial and technical assistance to voluntarily put conservation on the ground. NRCS is responsible for the implementation of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, which includes the Agricultural Land Easements program and the Wetlands Reserve Program, both authorized and funded through the Farm Bill.

The reception gathered members of Congress, federal agency staff and many partner organizations. Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee Pat Roberts (R-KS), USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Bill Northey and Acting NRCS Chief Leonard Jordan all delivered remarks during the event. Sen. Roberts underscored the importance of the Farm Bill and noted the strong bipartisan commitment to getting it done in the Senate. Under Secretary Northey recognized that “conservation requires lots of different approaches to get lots of different things done.”

All speakers encouraged continued bipartisan cooperation for these programs. Jordan promoted a message of people and partnership. “We have to do everything in our power to keep working lands working,” he stated. The Alliance and its members are hoping for another successful 25 years!