



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 22, 2015

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Major Conservation Legislation Congress Passed Will Have Local Benefits

Arvada, CO (Dec. 18, 2015) – Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT), praised a bipartisan congressional vote that makes a federal tax incentive supporting land conservation permanent.

Farmers, ranchers and the public will directly benefit from the incentive that encourages landowners to place a conservation easement on their land to protect important agricultural, natural, scenic and historic resources. CCALT was among the 1,100 land trusts to support the incentive through a collaborative, multi-year campaign.

"Conservation is a great American value that helps ensure the long-term prosperity of our great nation," said Erik Glenn, CCALT executive director. "The action taken by Congress last week to make permanent the enhanced conservation easement tax incentive will provide environmental, economic and health benefits to all Coloradans as well as future generations."

CCALT is a member of the Land Trust Alliance, the national land conservation organization that led the campaign for permanence.

"The importance of this vote – and this incentive – cannot be overstated," said Rand Wentworth, the Alliance's president. "This is the single greatest legislative action in decades to support land conservation. It states, unequivocally, that we as a nation treasure our lands and must conserve their many benefits for all future generations."

In a strong bipartisan action, the House voted 318-109 and the Senate voted 65-33 to pass the bills that included the tax incentive.

First enacted as a temporary provision in 2006, the incentive is directly responsible for conserving more than 2 million acres of America's natural outdoor heritage. The incentive grants certain tax benefits to landowners who sign a conservation easement. Such private, voluntary agreements with local land trusts permanently limit uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. Lands placed into conservation easements can continue to be farmed, hunted or used for other specified purposes. The lands also remain on county tax rolls, strengthening local economies.

Once signed into law, the incentive will be applied retroactively to Jan. 1, 2015. An earlier version of the incentive expired Dec. 31, 2014.

The incentive advanced through Congress as part of the America Gives More Act, a package of tax incentives to encourage charitable giving. It passed the House earlier this year, 279-137. A standalone version of the incentive, the Conservation Easement Incentive Act, earned 52 Senate sponsors this year, including 26 Democrats, 24 Republicans and 2 Independents. The agreement announced this week additionally encourages donations to food banks and facilitates charitable deductions from IRAs.

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