



FLC Applauds the Renewal of the Conservation Tax Incentive

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Knoxville, TN - Congress just renewed a tax incentive for private landowners—especially working family farmers and ranchers—who protect their land with a voluntary conservation agreement. The incentive, which had expired at the end of 2009, helped conservation organizations like East Tennessee’s Foothills Land Conservancy work with willing landowners in our community to conserve over 8200 acres of productive agricultural lands and natural areas between 2006 and 2009.

Conservation-minded landowners now have until December 31, 2011 to take advantage of a significant tax deduction for donating a voluntary conservation agreement to permanently protect important natural or historic resources on their land. When landowners donate a conservation easement they maintain ownership and management of their land and can sell or pass the land on to their heirs while foregoing future development rights. They can also decide to bequeath the land to private or public entities.

The enhanced incentive applies to a landowner’s federal income tax. It:

- Raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allows farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Increases the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years.

“Our whole community wins when thoughtful landowners conserve their land this way, protecting wildlife habitat, clean drinking water, scenic landscapes, recreational spaces, and productive agricultural lands,” said Bill Clabough, FLC’s Executive Director. He adds, “A conservation easement is currently the only way a private land owner can ensure their tract of land will never be developed for commercial or residential use.”

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In East Tennessee, the incentive is having a real impact as Bill Clabough notes. “Just in the last few weeks, FLC has experienced an increase in inquiries about conservation easements and this is largely due to the new tax incentive. However, it’s worth noting that seldom are tax breaks the only reason or even the main factor in this type of decision. Ultimately, it’s about a family or individual deciding to leave their legacy, preserve space for wildlife - land that will benefit future generations.” He adds, “That’s a big decision and often these types of incentives assist the landowner so that it is financially feasible to make their wishes a reality.”

According to the Land Trust Alliance, the national organization that provides a voice for land trusts in Washington, DC, last year’s bills to make this incentive permanent had 274 House and 41 Senate co-sponsors from all 50 states, including majorities of Democrats and Republicans in the House. This legislation is supported by more than 65 national agricultural, sportsmen’s, and conservation organizations. To learn more about the enhanced incentive visit: www.lta.org/easementincentive.

The mission of Foothills Land Conservancy is to protect, preserve, and enhance the natural landscape of the East Tennessee region. FLC provides landowners the tools and resources to protect their property from development in perpetuity. Now in its 26th year of service as a land trust, FLC has established, assisted or donated over 10,000 acres of land for local parks and recreation areas. Foothills has also partnered with landowners on over 70 conservation easements agreements in 13 East TN counties. All conservation easement agreements coordinated through Foothills are customized, voluntary, approved by a Board of Directors and monitored at least once a year. FLC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and does not receive any financial support from federal, state, or local governments.