



News Release

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Pace of Land Conservation Accelerates

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A recently released study by the Land Trust Alliance has found that private land trusts across America have saved an average of 1.2 million acres from 2000 to 2005, three times more than the average from 1995 to 2000.

Between 2000 and 2005, the total acreage conserved by local and state land trusts nearly doubled to almost 11.9 million acres, an area twice the size of the state of New Hampshire.

The National Land Trust Census is the nation's only tabulation of the pace, volume and type of voluntary land conservation by private land trusts in the United States. The report also measures the organizational development of the nation's 1,667 land trusts.

Michigan's 44 land trusts, including Midland-based Little Forks Conservancy, have protected 34,263 acres since 2000. This represents a 48 percent increase in privately conserved land. With 105,419 total acres conserved by land trusts, Michigan ranks first in the Midwest region and 20th nationally.

Between 2000 and 2005, the Little Forks Conservancy protected more than 910 acres, with an additional 159 acres protected in 2006.

"We've definitely recognized a rise in responsiveness to our program," states Doug Koop, executive director of the Little Forks Conservancy, "and with new financial incentives available, 2007 should be a busy year for us and for land trusts across the nation."

Conservation easements, voluntary legal agreements between a private landowner and a land trust that permanently protects land with conservation value, accounted for nearly 52% of the total acres conserved by land trusts in Michigan.

The report found a dramatic increase in the use of conservation easements nationally. Local and state land trusts held conservation easements on 6,245,969 acres at the end of 2005, up from 2,514,545 in 2000. The report credited this increased usage to available federal and, in some cases, state tax incentives and the cost-effective nature of conservation easements, which allows land trusts to preserve more land. Conservation easements are also a desirable option for landowners to protect their land while still maintaining ownership.

The report noted that the use of conservation easements is likely to continue rising following the President's signing of a new law which increases the federal tax incentives for donations of conservation easements.

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Additional findings of the report include:

- The states with the highest totals acres conserved are California, Maine, Colorado, Montana, Virginia, New York, Vermont, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Notably, Colorado and Virginia are two of the few states offering a state tax incentive for conservation, operating in tandem with the federal incentive – a likely factor in the rankings.
- The land type reported as being the primary focus of land trust efforts is protecting natural areas and wildlife habitat (39%), followed by open space (38%) and water resources (26%), especially wetlands.
- The American West is the fastest-growing region in both the number of acres saved and the number of land trusts, followed by the Southeast. The Northeast gained the most acreage under conservation easement, nearly tripling the acres held under easement in the past five years.

A link to the Land Trust Alliance's National Land Trust Census can be found at www.lta.org/census/.

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