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## Land Trust Alliance Dinner

Max S. Baucus

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## **Land Trust Alliance Dinner**

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**Date: April 17, 2012**

**Location: University Club of Washington, 1135  
16<sup>th</sup> St NW**

**Remarks: Amber Roberts, Alexis Taylor, and  
Spencer Gray**

**Number of Expected Attendees: 70**

**Podium: Yes**

**Objective of Statement: Highlight legislative work  
on permanent enhanced charitable deduction for  
easements, Farm Bill programs, and LWCF  
funding.**

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**I am pleased to be here today, because I appreciate the hard work that you all do on behalf of everyone who believes in conservation.**

**We have a responsibility to protect one of our country's most precious resources: Our Land.**

**When I speak to landowners, ranchers and**

**farmers across Montana, I hear the same thing:**

**We need to preserve open spaces for our children and grandchildren.**

**I'm going to focus this evening on the importance of making permanent the enhanced**

**charitable deduction for conservation easements.**

**I will also touch on Farm Bill conservation programs and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.**

**Our farmers and ranchers in Montana have long been the ultimate stewards of the land.**

**Many Montana ranchers and farmers are land rich but cash poor.**

**It was members of the Montana Land Reliance who gave me the idea for a bill we passed back in 2006 – an enhanced charitable deduction for donations of conservation easements.**

**The enhancement allows eligible farmers and ranchers to increase the deduction they can take for charitable contributions of qualified conservation easements.**

**The provision allows farmers and ranchers to do this by increasing the current adjusted gross income limitations from 50 percent to 100 percent and extending the carryover period from five to 15 years. In the case of all landowners, the AGI limitation was raised from 30 percent to 50 percent.**

**Conversation easements are an effective land management tool in Montana, and across the country. As of last year, my state had over two million acres covered by conservation easements.**

**To some, that may seem like a large amount, but, those easements are only 2.1 percent of Montana's total land area. I believe that now is the time for our state, and the entire country to do even more.**

**For several years now, we've managed to get the temporary provision extended. It is time to make this provision permanent -and that is why, last year, I reintroduced the Rural Heritage Conservation Extension Act of 2011.**

**Our landowners can have the certainty they need to plan ahead and conserve our agricultural lands for generations to come.**

**With a permanent deduction, farmers and ranchers facing the potential of having to sell their ranch will have another financially viable option.**

**They will be able to choose to take advantage of the conservation easement incentives, stay on their land, and invest in their farming or ranching business.**

**In practical terms, that means these farmers and ranchers do not have to sell the family farm or ranch. They can keep it in the family. This is so important to preserving the character and economic vitality of our rural communities.**

**A permanent deduction is good, common sense policy. We're going to keep working, until we get it done.**

**We're also working hard on the next Farm Bill and looking for opportunities to streamline and improve delivery on important easement programs.**

**The Senate Agriculture Committee wrapped up our last Farm Bill hearing last month and Chairman Stabenow has indicated she hopes to release her mark this week – going to a markup next week.**

**The expectation is the Senate will start the process with the House following through markup and action on the floor.**

**My colleagues and I who come from Ag states have grave concerns about cuts the House could make to agriculture programs.**

**The House budget from the past two years would have cut over \$170 billion from the Farm Bill's budget – about 8 times the level of cuts that came out of our bipartisan agreement last year.**

**But even with the odds stacked against us, Congress must push forward and pass a Farm Bill that as is as responsible to taxpayers as it is to farmers.**

**The Senate Agriculture Committee is moving forward with the agreement that Chairman Stabenow made last year to save \$23 billion from the Farm Bill's budget – which included \$6 billion from the conservation title.**

**The conservation title continues to be simplified and focused around four primary conservation functions: working lands, easements, Conservation Reserve Program, and regional partnerships.**

**I know many of you have been great advocates for a strong conservation title and in particular, continued funding for easements.**

**Many have said that conservation easements are one of the most powerful, effective tools available for the conservation of private lands - successfully protecting wildlife habitat and open space across the U.S.**

**I expect the Chairman's mark will combines the three existing easement programs: Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, Grassland Reserve Program, and Wetlands Protection Program into one consolidated easement program with two options - agricultural land easements and wetlands easements.**

**It is important to note that both the WRP and GRP have no baseline funding after the 2008 Farm Bill so streamlining these programs is essential to continue with the benefit the country has reaped from these conservation programs.**

**Keeping strong easements programs are vital to protecting agricultural working lands while continuing the restoration and protection effort for wildlife habitat.**

**I cannot stress how popular many of these easement programs are nationally - the demand for the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program was so popular it exceeded available funds by approximately 200 percent in 2009.**

**From 1992 and 1997, about 24 million acres or 4.6 percent of grasslands nationwide were converted to cropland or developed for non-agricultural uses – that’s roughly twelve times the size of Yellowstone National Park.**

**That is why the easement programs such as the Grasslands Protection Program and the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program have been so vital to protecting rural farmland.**

**From 1997 to 2008, USDA enrolled more than 533,068 acres into the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program. These acres will be protected from future urban development and able to be farmed and ranched for generations to come!**

**This new agricultural land easement option will help the most serious threats to working lands agriculture and livestock operations. This option will provide greater local input on protecting natural resources.**

**Finally, I want to touch briefly on the Land and Water Conservation Fund.**

**Since 1965, LWCF has directed revenue from a depletable federal resource to conserve a renewable one—public land—across America. LWCF is one of this country’s best achievements in public policy.**

**In Montana, we know that this program works. For example, one of Bozeman’s newest trails, the Chestnut Mountain Trail, opened last year, after the Trust for Public Land and the Gallatin Valley Land Trust leveraged LWCF funding.**

**Further north, I am pleased to see the next phase of the Tenderfoot project in the Little Belt Mountains, spearheaded by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, funded through LWCF this year. It will protect some of the best elk habitat in the country.**

**Last month, the Senate stood up to vote overwhelming in favor of LWCF.**

**Seventy-six senators voted to double the program's recent funding with mandatory spending of \$1.4 billion over two years, as well as to reauthorize the program through 2022. I will fight hard to keep this amendment in a final highway bill.**

**From conservation easements to programs like LWCF, we cannot afford to lose the natural habitat of our wildlife or to sacrifice the open spaces of our communities. We must protect our agricultural lands for future generations and keep our open spaces open!**

**Thank you again.**