



Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition

April 22, 2015

The Honorable Mike Kelly
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dean Heller
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Rep. Kelly and Sen. Heller:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to offer our support for the Conservation Easement Incentive Act of 2015 (H.R. 641, S. 330). As a coalition of organizations focused on the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes, we want to add our voice to supporting a tool that will help protect a source of drinking water for over 30 million people.

As you know, your bills reauthorize an important provision of the tax code in order to make permanent a conservation easement tax incentive. Originally passed in 2006 and then renewed in 2012, 2013, and 2014, this enhanced tax deduction benefits landowners who donate a conservation easement. This incentive has helped restoration advocates, such as land trusts, across the country work with willing landowners and boost conservation easement donations by a third, to more than a million acres a year. Using this tax deduction, landowners can retire the development rights on their land by donating a conservation easement keeping farms, ranches and forestlands in productive use, while protecting valuable natural resources like prime soils, fish and wildlife habitat, and clean water. The decision to donate a conservation easement usually takes many months, and even years, which is why permanent authorization is needed.

Before this enhanced tax deduction became law, landowners—often farmers with modest incomes—received little or no tax benefit when donating what may be their family's most valuable financial asset. By allowing such donors to deduct a larger portion of their income over a longer period of time, this incentive makes conservation affordable to thousands of landowners.

Providing an incentive for conservation easement donations benefits the Great Lakes. Undeveloped lands, especially forests and well-managed agricultural properties, filter both surface water and groundwater. Developed lands, dominated by impervious surfaces that do not allow water to filter directly into the ground, contribute significantly to sedimentation, allow other contaminants to enter our waterways, and increase the concentration of runoff entering the Great Lakes. Impervious surfaces not only accelerate stream erosion and degrade the water quality of surface waters or streams, they also block or divert water from infiltrating the soil to recharge ground water. The tax incentives provided under these bills allow restoration advocates to protect undeveloped areas that contribute to protecting our Great Lakes.

Please do not hesitate to contact Chad Lord, our coalition's policy director, at 202-454-3385 or clord@npca.org with questions.

Sincerely,


Lynn McClure
Co-chair


Kristy Meyer
Co-chair


Nicole Barker
Co-chair