

**Testimony of The Land Trust Alliance Before the Joint Legislative Hearing on the  
Environmental Conservation Portions of the Executive Proposed Budget for  
New York State Fiscal Year 2026-2027**

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Jamie Brown, Senior Program Manager, New York  
Land Trust Alliance

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of New York's land trusts and conservation community in response to the Governor's proposed environmental funding in the 2026-27 Executive Budget.

In New York State, the Land Trust Alliance serves as a leader, convener, partner, and technical assistance provider to a network of over 100 nonprofit land trusts that work in every Senate and Assembly district. Our extensive involvement with New York land trusts gives us a keen insight into the benefits of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and the role of public-private initiatives such as the Conservation Partnership Program (CPP) and Forest Conservation Easements for Land Trusts (FCELT) in advancing the state's environmental conservation and economic development goals.

***We are asking for your support of at least a \$425 million EPF that:***

- Includes at least \$3 million for the Conservation Partnership Program and at least \$1.5 million for the Forest Conservation Easement for Land Trust Program.

***We are asking for your support of a state budget that streamlines conservation and:***

- Builds on the Governor's recommendations in the Executive budget to remedy the longstanding backlog of land acquisitions, including for the State to use title insurance.
- Adopts the Governor's position that land trusts should be exempt from paying the mansion tax on conservation properties.

**EPF SPENDING:**

We urge the Legislature to follow the lead of the Governor and maintain the EPF appropriation to at least \$425 million. The Governor's budget proposal grows the total budget by \$10 billion. We should be growing environmental funding as the budget grows, as programs funded through the EPF benefit all New Yorkers.

*Maintain the CPP at its current funding level of at least \$3 million*

The CPP is a model of efficiency: Annually, appropriated dollars are awarded to land trusts under a single contract with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), delivering tangible impacts for communities and directly advancing New York's Open Space Plan. Funds are typically awarded *within eight months*, and the appropriation is spent down each year. Administered by the Land Trust Alliance in partnership with the DEC, CPP funds are disbursed annually through a

competitive grant process, creating immediate, lasting, and visible impacts on job creation, drinking water protection, recreational opportunities and community resilience to the impacts of climate change. In its over twenty-year history, the CPP has awarded 1,269 grants totaling more than \$34 million to 100 land trusts across the state. Grant funds have helped leverage more than \$34 million in local matching funds and have supported the protection of more than 36,000 acres. In the past several years, demand for the program has sky-rocketed, as requests for funding reached \$5 million, despite only \$3 million in funding.

Investments in the CPP have built New York's land trust community to be one of the strongest in the nation. As a result of these investments, land trusts also serve as vital partners to the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Department of Agriculture and Markets. Land Trusts spur economic growth, contribute to public health and help make communities more resilient to climate change.

We urge you to maintain funding for the CPP, as part of the Open Space Account, at least at \$3 million in FY 2026-27.

*Maintain FCELT at its current funding level of at least \$1.5 million*

The FCELT program is a public-private partnership designed to increase the rate of forest conservation in New York by providing grant funding for land trusts to purchase conservation easements from willing landowners of forested land to ensure the benefits these forests provide to the public continue for generations to come. The program has seen rapidly increasing demand since it began, with the last two years seeing much greater demand than available funds. To date, the Alliance and NYSDEC have provided \$5 million that will protect over 5,000 acres, ensuring that these forested acres are protected and offer benefits to all New Yorkers including:

- Forests store carbon dioxide: Conserving them can draw down the carbon pollution that causes climate change.
- Forests filter water: They improve water quality for millions of New Yorkers.
- Forests provide jobs: Sustainable forestry and forest products generate important economic activity throughout the state each year.
- Forests provide important habitat for wildlife and recreation for people.

Unfortunately, without continued and increased funding, the window to protect these forests will close. Forest landowners are generally of modest means and under tremendous pressure to see their land for development, putting the clean air, water and economic benefits these lands provide at risk.

Now, more than ever, land conservation is playing an important role in mitigating the worst effects of climate change, offering welcoming outdoor opportunities for families, improving

health, building community and boosting local economies.

We urge you to maintain funding for FCELT, as part of the Open Space Account, at least at \$1.5 million in FY 2026-27.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on the proposed New York State FY 2026-27 Budget. Providing the people of New York with an EPF that meets today’s needs and solves tomorrow’s problems is key to our state’s long-term health and well-being. This can only be done by fully funding the EPF, investing in land trusts and conservation easements, and supporting the programs and people that complement these efforts.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Brown  
Senior Program Manager, New York  
Land Trust Alliance

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**Background on the *Land Trust Alliance* and *New York’s Land Trust Community***

The *Land Trust Alliance* works to save the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America. In New York, the Alliance serves as a leader, convener, partner, and technical assistance provider to a well-coordinated network of more than 100 nonprofit land trusts. These relationships provide the opportunity to see, firsthand, the benefits of the EPF and the role it plays in communities across the state. Public-private initiatives funded through the EPF such as the Forest Conservation Easement for Land Trust Program and the Conservation Partnership Program (CPP) advance the state’s conservation and economic development objectives with projects that are locally developed and broadly supported. Both programs are particularly notable for how quickly they move appropriated funds to communities across the state.

The *New York Land Trust Community*: Land trusts work in every region, including the Adirondacks, Western New York, the Finger Lakes, Tug Hill Plateau, Genesee Valley, Upper Delaware River Watershed, Hudson River Valley, Catskill Mountains, New York City and Long Island. Land trusts also save green space and promote community gardens and trails in The Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan and in cities like Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, and Kingston.

These permanently protected places provide fresh food, clean air and water, and wildlife habitat and help strengthen communities by providing opportunities for people to enjoy the nurturing health benefits of being outdoors. The State’s 100 land trusts play essential roles in New York’s communities. These non-profit organizations are dedicated to serving the people and places where they are located and have decades of experience and relationships that allow them to make positive, meaningful, and lasting impacts on their communities.

To date local, regional and national land trusts operating across New York State have permanently conserved approximately two million acres through conservation easements, land acquisitions and re-conveyances to other conservation organizations or public agencies.

Although the numbers are impressive, it is truly the relationships and understanding of the communities that these land trusts have built over many years that is the key to their success. Land trusts seek to understand their communities' needs and then work to address them.