

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Hugh Archer, Executive Director
Kentucky Natural Lands Trust
502-545-6555 | harcher@KNLT.org
November 21, 2011

First National Census of Land Trusts in Five Years:

Big Gains in Voluntary Land Conservation Despite Recession

Land Trusts Conserve 10 Million U.S. Acres, Outpace Major Government Land Acquisition Program

[Berea, KY] – The first census of land trusts in five years found 10 million new acres conserved nationwide since 2005, including 23,976 acres here in Kentucky.

The National Land Trust Census, released by the Land Trust Alliance, shows that voluntarily protected land increased 27 percent between 2005 and 2010. In the same time period, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, a major federal conservation program, added just over 500,000 acres and saw a 38% funding cut. The census is online at www.lta.org/census.

A total of 47 million acres—an area over twice the size of all the national parks in the contiguous United States—are now protected by land trusts. A greater percentage of the new acreage comes through local and state land trusts like Kentucky Natural Lands Trust. In Kentucky, land trusts conserved 23,976 acres between 2005 and 2010, a 134% increase in land protected.

“Kentucky landowners value their land, and we are conserving it at the community level,” said Hugh Archer, Executive Director of Kentucky Natural Lands Trust. “Here in Kentucky, we are investing in our future by ensuring clean water, wildlife habitats, large forest blocks, farms and parks are here for our children and generations to come. A significant incentive for Kentucky to catch up with the national trend would be to consider joining the many states offering a state tax credit for conservation easement donations.”

Over the last five years, Kentucky Natural Lands Trust has added several hundred acres to the land protected in the Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve, purchased land to be used for sustainable forestry demonstrations, purchased property that is now part of the Pine Mountain Trail State Park, and protected acreage in the “South America” area of Whitley County, Kentucky. Several hundred acres are also now preserved through conservation easements.

An enhanced tax deduction for conservation easement donations has helped America’s land trusts work with farmers and other modest-income landowners to sustain a remarkable pace of more than one million acres protected by conservation easements each year! But if Congress allows this incentive to expire at the end of 2011, fewer landowners will receive tax benefits from the generous donation of development rights on their land.

Kentucky Natural Lands Trust thanks Rep(s) Guthrie, Yarmuth, Davis, and Chandler for being among the 262 House and 11 Senate co-sponsors of H.R. 1964/S. 339, bills to make this important conservation tax incentive permanent. That's more co-sponsors than any other tax bill in Congress! We encourage Rep(s) Whitfield and Rogers and Senators McConnell and Paul to join them as co-sponsors of this important legislation.

Other findings of the new National Land Trust Census include:

- Land trusts saw a **70% increase in volunteers** from the previous 5-year period.
- Since 2005, there are **19% more paid employees and contractors at land trusts**.
- **Operating budgets for land trusts are up 36% since 2005**. State and local trusts **nearly tripled operating endowments** in five years ensuring that land trust-protected land stays protected.
- **The preservation of family farms and ranchlands is now a priority for 61% of trusts**, up from 21% that listed farmland as the top priority in 2005.
- **Urban parks, gardens or open spaces is now a priority for 27 % of trusts**, a threefold increase over respondents in 2005.

Kentucky Natural Lands Trust is a statewide land trust committed to preserving Kentucky's diminishing natural places and protecting its rich biodiversity.

The Land Trust Alliance is a national conservation organization that works to save the places people love. The Land Trust Alliance is based in Washington, D.C.

###