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Kenosha/Racine Land Trust Community Newsletter article

### **Where is Roosevelt when we need him?**

In 1804 and 1805 Lewis and Clark described what they saw as they pushed west from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean: “an aggregation of wildlife...that for number and variety exceeded anything the eye of man had ever looked upon.” Less than a hundred years later Theodore Roosevelt took a hunting trip to some of the same areas and was appalled to find that virtually all the game was gone; cleaned out by commercial hunters. The culture of plundering the land had been established.

And so, when Roosevelt was elected President in 1901, he made protection of habitat and wildlife a top priority. But it was an uphill battle. Then as now, the majority of people had little interest in conservation. Instead they were only interested in making money off the land. If its environmental value was destroyed in the process, so be it. Fortunately for the country, Roosevelt prevailed. By time he completed two terms in 1908, he had cajoled, wrestled, and brow beat Congress into permanently preserving 230 million acres of wild land for the public to enjoy. By creating National Forests, Monuments, and Parks at a rate of 80,000 acres a day for 2920 days, Roosevelt did more to preserve the natural wealth of the United States than all Presidents before and after him combined. Don't we long for leaders like that now; those who would invest in the well being of future generations by establishing policies to preserve our remaining, irreplaceable agricultural and natural lands?

Though such leadership is sorely lacking at the state and federal level, it is possible for local communities to act by implementing land use plans which require each new development to also preserve land. In Caledonia, Yorkville, and Raymond new subdivisions must set aside 60% of the total area and maintain it in either agriculture or a natural state. K/RLT holds conservation easements on almost 300 acres in these subdivisions. The Land Trust will be redoubling its efforts to convince the ten other towns in Racine and Kenosha Counties to adopt similar ordinances. We will also show the benefits of neighborhood plans which seek to link protected areas to make them more viable for agriculture or ecologically healthy.

It's quite clear that the overwhelming issue the world will face for decades to come will be how to meet our energy requirements and at the same time stop global warming. While wind, solar, and nuclear (sorry to you anti-nukes out there, but at least it is CO2 free) will surely be major components of the clean energy solution, crop fuels and carbon sequestering forests are likely to also play important roles. And though the science on such fuels and sequestration are still in their infancy, we need to preserve our most productive land, and a lot of it, if we are going to benefit from these technologies. And if the science is not successful, the land will still be needed to feed our horses.

## **Congress Approves Dramatic Increase in Conservation Easements Tax Benefits**

One year ago the US Congress was seriously considering eliminating income tax incentives for conservation easements. Abuses by a growing number of “golf course” developers resulted in a proposal to eliminate the incentive completely. The vast majority of people, who would legitimately give up development rights in an easement, stood to lose a tax deduction for the gift. For some that would mean not being able to afford to protect the land they loved.

Fortunately, the Land Trust Alliance, which has over 1000 member land trusts, including K/RLT, led an effort to educate key congressional leaders on the overwhelming environmental and other benefits to society of preserving land with conservation easements. LTA also worked with Congress to tighten the rules for conservation easements to prevent abuses. As a result of this effort, last week the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives voted to not only keep tax deductions for conservation easements, but actually to increase them! This is a great victory for conservation and, locally, should accelerate the donation of conservation easements to K/RLT.

The new law has the following benefits to those donating a conservation easement.

- Raises the deduction a landowner can take for donating an easement from 30% of their adjusted gross income in any year to 50%;
- Allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income.
- Increases the number of years over which a donor can take those deductions from 6 years to 16 years.

President Bush is expected to sign the bill shortly. It is also important to note that the bill is currently only written for easements donated in 2006 and 2007. Of course, LTA will be working to make it permanent.

If you are interested in helping K/RLT protect open spaces and natural areas, please consider becoming a member. To obtain membership information, including our Spring/Summer Newsletter and brochure, write to the land trust at P.O. Box 085153, Racine, WI 53408-5153 or call us at 262-552-6861. Additional information is available on the web at [www.krlt.org](http://www.krlt.org).

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