



## Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts

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*Digital photos of signing ceremony available*

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Contact: Jill Ozarski, Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts  
(720) 289-2688 (mobile)

### **Gov. Ritter signs new law to prevent Colorado land conservation abuses** *Conservation advocates praise statute's tough standards for tax credits*

DENVER – A new state law enacted by Gov. Bill Ritter today (June 5, 2008) supports Colorado's incentives for preserving unique natural lands by sending a strong message that abuses of the program won't be tolerated, according to conservation advocates.

Ritter signed House Bill 1353 at a State Capitol ceremony with the legislation's sponsors, House Majority Leader Alice Madden and Sen. Jim Isgar, as well as land conservation organizations including the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts, the Nature Conservancy, the Colorado Conservation Trust, and the Trust for Public Land. (Other supporters of HB 1353, including additional legislative sponsors and endorsing conservation organizations, are listed below.)

“The new law keeps Colorado at the forefront of national efforts to encourage conservation of one-of-a-kind landscapes,” Ritter said. “But it creates tough new safeguards against abuses of Colorado's conservation easement tax credits. Colorado will continue to support legitimate land conservation but we will not tolerate schemes to exploit the program for financial gain.”

“The value of Colorado's conservation easement program has always been clear but we needed to weed out the fraud and get the focus back on the quality deals that protect Colorado's scenic lands,” Madden said. “With the help of the mainstream conservation community, the governor's office and state regulators, we have accomplished that goal with this new law.”

“This law preserves the conservation easement tax credit program because of all the good it's done to preserve agricultural lands and to give farmers and ranchers an option to stay on their farms,” Isgar said. “It's important to take these steps to preserve this cost-effective program and the state budget.”

Conservation easements are considerably less expensive than buying land outright. Conservation easements are sold or donated by private landowners to nonprofit or governmental entities to guarantee that a parcel of land will never be developed. Property owners may continue using their land as they have – for example, for farming or ranching.

The new Colorado law comes close on the heels of new federal incentives for land conservation. On May 22, Congress enacted a new Farm Bill, which renewed and expanded federal tax incentives for land conservation that had expired at the start of this year.

“The Colorado legislation will increase accountability and oversight of the state's conservation easement program while maintaining the tax incentives, which have helped preserve a total of more than 1.2 million acres of working farms and ranches, river corridors, wildlife habitat and scenic open lands across Colorado,” said Jill Ozarski, executive director of the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts, which represents 54 land trusts, conservation groups and government entities touching every corner of the state.

The bill's tougher standards include:

- Increased accountability for conservation easement appraisals.
- A certification program for the groups that hold conservation easements.
- Strengthened oversight and enforcement of the state tax credit.
- The creation of a Conservation Easement Oversight Commission.

**Other legislative sponsors of HB 1353 include:**

Sen. Josh Penry  
Sen. Bob Bacon  
Sen. Betty Boyd  
Sen. Dan Gibbs  
Sen. Peter Groff  
Sen. Moe Keller  
Sen. Brandon Shaffer  
Sen. Abel Tapia  
Sen. Jack Taylor  
Sen. Ron Tupa  
Sen. Jennifer Veiga

Rep. Bernie Buescher  
Rep. Kathleen Curry  
Rep. Ellen Roberts  
Rep. Alice Borodkin  
Rep. Dorothy Butcher  
Rep. Terrance Carroll  
Rep. Randy Fischer  
Rep. Mary Hodge  
Rep. John Kefalas  
Rep. Andy Kerr  
Rep. Jim Kerr  
Rep. Claire Levy  
Rep. Larry Liston

Rep. Rosemary Marshall  
Rep. Tom Massey  
Rep. Mike May  
Rep. Buffie McFadyen  
Rep. Anne McGihon  
Rep. Michael Merrifield  
Rep. Jack Pommer  
House Speaker Andrew Romanoff  
Rep. Ray Rose  
Rep. Christine Scanlan  
Rep. Judy Solano  
Rep. Debbie Stafford  
Rep. Robert Witwer  
Rep. Steve King

**Groups supporting HB 1353 include:**

**Land Trusts:**

- Aspen Valley Land Trust
- Black Canyon Land Trust
- Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust
- Continental Divide Land Trust
- Crested Butte Land Trust
- Crestone/Baca Land Trust
- Douglas Land Conservancy
- Eagle Valley Land Trust
- Estes Valley Land Trust
- Gunnison Ranchlands Conservation Legacy
- La Plata Open Space Conservancy
- Land Trust of the Upper Arkansas
- Mesa Land Trust
- Montezuma Land Conservancy
- Mountain Area Land Trust
- Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust
- San Isabel Land Protection Trust
- San Miguel Conservation Foundation

**Governmental Entities:**

- Boulder County
- City of Boulder
- Chaffee County Development Services Department
- Elbert County
- Larimer County
- Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District

**Conservation Organizations:**

- Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts
- Colorado Conservation Trust
- Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
- The Conservation Fund
- The Nature Conservancy
- Trust for Public Land

**Other Organizations:**

- Colorado Association of Realtors
- Colorado Cattlemen's Association
- Rocky Mountain Farmers Union

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