



# Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts

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*The Mission of the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts is to promote and support land conservation excellence in Colorado through leadership, advocacy, education and outreach.*

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## **Gov. Ritter gets bill putting brakes on land conservation abuses** *Conservation community lauds bipartisan vote for easement reforms*

DENVER – Legislation on its way to Gov. Bill Ritter’s desk to tighten up oversight of the state’s conservation easement program will strengthen the program by adding an extra layer of protection against abuses, according to conservation groups.

House Bill 1353 won final approval from the Colorado General Assembly today (May 2, 2008) and now needs Ritter’s signature to become law.

“With the approval of this bipartisan legislation, the Colorado Legislature has supported the conservation of Colorado’s great natural landscapes while slamming the door shut on those who just want to make a quick buck off of the state’s conservation tax credits,” said Jill Ozarski, executive director of the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts.

“The legislation will increase accountability and oversight of the state’s conservation easement program while maintaining the tax incentives that 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 Chris West, executive director of the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust.

HB 1353 was authored by House Majority Leader Alice Madden and Senator Jim Isgar. The legislation won final approval from the House today, just a day after the Colorado State Board of Real Estate Appraisers summarily suspended the license of an appraiser involved in conservation easement deals.

“The actions of the Board of Real Estate Appraisers and the passage of the legislation together send a clear message,” Ozarski said.

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.

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“Conservation easements are a cost effective way to preserve land because they don’t cost as much as buying the land outright,” West said. “The vast majority of conservation easements in Colorado are consistent with the intent of the program and these high-quality deals will be able to continue under this legislation.”

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.

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