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\$1 Million Program to Bolster Michigan Land Conservancies

LANSING, MI. Conservation groups today reported that Michigan ranks only 25th in the nation in terms of percent of land conserved in the state (1.3%) and called on the state's nonprofit conservancies to step up and do more to stop the rapid loss of land to development. Toward that end, Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy and the Land Trust Alliance (the Alliance) announced today a new conservation program in Michigan to help transform the state's land conservancies into a high-performing, sustainable and cohesive conservation community.

Called the "ACE" program for *Advancing Conservancy Excellence*, this call-to-action initiative will provide three years of sustained coaching, training and capacity-building to strengthen land conservancies across the state. Over the course of the next 30 years, more than four million acres of land in Michigan, including vital open space in urban areas, will disappear to development. The ACE program will accelerate the growth and development of Michigan conservancies so that they have the ability to scale up their operations and the sustainability to increase greatly the number of conservation transactions.

The new program will also help position Michigan's land conservancies to win national accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Alliance. Accreditation provides the assurance of quality and permanence of land conservation and recognizes a conservancy's ability to protect important natural places and working lands forever.

"Michigan's nonprofit land conservancies are doing great work helping communities save the land that defines our quality of life," said Rachel Kuntzsch, Executive Director of Heart of the Lakes. "With the tools, training and technical assistance provided through ACE, they can achieve so much more."

Rand Wentworth, President of the Land Trust Alliance, an umbrella group for the 1700 land conservation groups in America, said: "This is the right program, the right strategy, and the right group of experienced players who can really make a difference on the ground. Model programs like ACE are what the land conservation community needs if we hope to double the pace of conservation over the next 25 years. The alternative will be over 50 million acres of land paved and lost to development across America that would otherwise sustain our drinking water supplies, wildlife habitat, and recreation lands."

The ACE Program is made possible through the generous support of the Carls Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Frey Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and Wege Foundation.

Tom Bailey, Executive Director of Little Traverse Conservancy in Harbor Springs, Michigan, and President of Heart of the Lakes credited the funders for their leadership, saying, “Thanks to the support of a number of Michigan foundations, Heart of the Lakes and the Land Trust Alliance will be able to help land conservancies increase their level of performance and advance collaborative, strategic and high-impact land conservation in Michigan.”

Helen Taylor, State Director in Michigan for The Nature Conservancy noted, “This program will be a great resource for land trusts in Michigan—a resource that not only will strengthen the performance of individual organizations, it also will strengthen our skills and ability to partner and collaborate effectively to collectively achieve greater results.”

Michigan is home to more than forty active land conservancies who have collectively protected more than 400,000 acres of Michigan coastline, forests, unique agricultural land, and other natural areas for future generations to enjoy. Conservancies work on a local, regional, or statewide basis with private landowners, local units of government, and the state to ensure the permanent protection of the state’s natural assets.

New state and federal tax incentives for private land conservation are leading to increased landowner interest in conservation options. This, combined with declining public budgets for conservation programs, points to the need for a strong, sustainable conservancy community.

Michigan conservancies will have the opportunity to participate in the ACE program’s technical trainings, organizational assessments, mentoring, and consultations tailored individually to their needs. Capacity-building grants up to \$20,000 per conservancy will also be available on a competitive basis. In addition, the program will facilitate the formation and strengthening of strategic partnerships among conservancies, government agencies and the private sector that will achieve more conservation throughout the state.

For more information on ACE, visit Heart of the Lakes at www.heartofthelakes.org or the Land Trust Alliance at http://www.lta.org/community/Regions/mid_west.

Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy is a nonprofit organization serving as the policy voice and convener of Michigan land conservancies. Our member organizations have helped to protect more than 400,000 acres of Michigan forests, farmland, coastline, and other extraordinary places. Heart of the Lakes is also a source of independent research, analysis, new ideas, and communications on Michigan’s biggest conservation successes and challenges.

The Land Trust Alliance is a national conservation group that works to save the places people love by strengthening conservation throughout America. It works to increase the pace and quality of conservation by advocating favorable tax policies, training land trusts in best practices, and working to ensure the permanence of conservation in the face of continuing threats.