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Foothills Land Conservancy Applauds Renewal of Conservation Tax Incentive

Maryville, TN – Congress’ “fiscal cliff” deal renewed a tax incentive for private landowners, especially working family farmers and ranchers, who wish to protect their land with a voluntary conservation agreement. The incentive, which had expired at the end of 2011, helped Foothills Land Conservancy work with willing landowners in our community to conserve over 13,000 acres of productive agricultural lands and natural areas between 2006 and 2011.

Conservation-minded landowners now have until December 31, 2013 to take advantage of a significant tax deduction for donating a voluntary conservation agreement to permanently protect important natural or historic resources on their land. When landowners donate a conservation easement to Foothills Land Conservancy, they maintain ownership and management of their land and can sell or pass the land on to their heirs, while foregoing future development rights.

The enhanced incentive applies to a landowner’s federal income tax. It:

- Raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement - up to 50% of their income.
- Allows farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Increases the number of years over which a donor can take deductions - up to 16 years.

“Our region benefits when thoughtful landowners conserve their land this way, protecting wildlife habitat, clean drinking water, scenic landscapes, and productive agricultural lands,” said FLC’s Executive Director, Bill Clabough. Conservation agreements have become an important tool nationally for protecting our watersheds, farms and forests, increasing the pace of private land conservation by a third – to over a million acres a year. Foothills Land Conservancy joins America’s 1,700 land trusts and their two million supporters in thanking Congress for making this important conservation tool available.

In East Tennessee, the incentive has had quite an impact over the years. According to Mr. Clabough, “often times it’s the enhanced tax incentive that ultimately makes it financially feasible for a landowner to place a conservation easement on their property.” For some landowners, like Roane County resident and former FLC Board President, Bob Van Hook, it wasn’t the deciding

factor but simply “icing on the cake.” Mr. Van Hook adds, “back in 2007, I was concerned about what things I wanted to see happen on the property versus those things I wanted to prohibit. It was important for me the land stay in its natural state. But at the same time we wanted to be sure that we didn’t put so many restrictions that our children and grandchildren couldn’t use it as they might like. So, you can move it through time but the preservation portion stays in place. It’s a win-win situation as far as I am concerned.”

According to the Land Trust Alliance, the national organization that provides a voice for land trusts in Washington, DC, last year’s bills to make this incentive permanent had 311 House and 28 Senate co-sponsors from 47 states, including majorities of Democrats and Republicans in the House. This legislation is further supported by more than 65 national agricultural, sportsmen’s, and conservation organizations. To learn more about the enhanced incentive visit,

www.lta.org/easementincentive.

About Foothills Land Conservancy: FLC is dedicated to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the lands and environments of East Tennessee and promoting the character of the region for the benefit of the general public, now and in the future. To date, FLC now has a total of 36,000 acres preserved and the number of our conservation easement partnerships has grown to 105 throughout 23 Tennessee counties.

Foothills is a 501(c)(3) and does not receive any financial assistance from local, state or federal governments. We rely on individual and corporate contributions solely to sustain our organization, land acquisition and stewardship funds. We encourage the public to contact our office with any interest or questions at 865-681-8326 or info@foothillsland.org.

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