



American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Americans Donate their Treasured Lands in Canada for Conservation

Seattle, Washington (December 19, 2011)--Most people dream of buying or owning land. Luckily for Canadians, some people dream of giving away their land, or at least the right to develop it. Until very recently, Americans hoping to donate properties they own in Canada for conservation were thwarted by tax barriers created by both U.S. and Canadian laws. American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts (American Friends), a U.S. charity, was created to facilitate the permanent protection of the portion of Canada's natural legacy that is owned by Americans. Today, American Friends announced it had received its first two gifts of conservation property; one in Nova Scotia, the other in Ontario.

Americans own cottages, fishing camps, hunting lodges, island retreats, working forests and mountain hideaways in some of Canada's most scenic areas. Although firm figures are not widely available, analyses such as the one done by Georgian Bay Association and anecdotal information from Canadian conservation leaders suggests that 25% of the land in some prime vacation areas such as the Maritimes, Great Lakes' island country and BC's Gulf Islands is owned by U.S. citizens. Many of these properties are part of multi-generational family traditions that link the two countries.

Canadian land trusts - private nongovernmental conservation organizations - that are focused on preserving the land and water heritage in provinces with high numbers of American owners, discovered that these landowners often truly cherish their properties. According to American Friends President, John Finley, "Vacation homes hold tremendous emotional value, serving as a common thread through time and across distance that holds families together. Memories of the past and hopes for the future inspire landowners to protect and share the places they love." However, when Americans wanted to give their property, or an agreement to restrict development, directly to a Canadian land trust there were undesirable tax consequences that could be financially punishing, particularly if the generous donor had owned the land for a long time.

Bonnie Sutherland, Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Nature Trust and a founder of American Friends, has been working with American landowners for over 11 years to overcome the obstacles to "cross-border conservation." The Nature Trust undertook ground-breaking research on the legal, tax and conservation issues of cross-border conservation, assembled the technical and financial resources and ultimately provided the impetus behind the creation of a the U.S. nonprofit to assist both Canadian land trusts and U.S. philanthropists.

In 2005, a coalition of conservationists from both countries united to create American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts. It took until 2010 - and required nationwide pressure and support from Canadian land trusts and other conservation partners - for the organization to secure the necessary charitable status and legislative amendments in both countries to make cross-border conservation possible.



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Finley, who is also a director of the Muskoka Heritage Trust recalls, “We all believed that American Friends was offering an important service to Canadian land trusts and that U.S. landowners would respond favorably, but we were delighted with the tremendous response and the number of proposed land gifts coming forward as soon as we launched our program last fall.” He added, “We are really thrilled to announce the completion of our first two cross-border conservation gifts and are so grateful to the donors for being pioneers in this frontier of resource protection.”

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust was the first Canadian land trust to connect potential donors with American Friends. Luckily, one of those donors, a resident of the Boston area named Merloyd Lawrence, is knowledgeable about conservation easements and absolutely passionate about ensuring that the land she owns in Nova Scotia be protected in perpetuity. Mrs. Lawrence gave a conservation easement to American Friends that guarantees that the entire 130 acre undeveloped, ecologically sensitive frontage of the pristine Little Annapolis Lake will remain as a sanctuary. The Nature Trust will be responsible for overseeing the stewardship of the Lawrence property, which remains privately owned.

Two other donors, sisters who coincidentally are also from the Boston area, worked with the Georgian Bay Land Trust in Ontario to structure a gift of 47 acres of the 50 acre Ingersoll Island. Mary Nelson and Polly Naughton grew up spending their summers swimming, canoeing and chasing frogs in what used to be the Canadian outback. Now in their 80’s the sisters wished to preserve “Ingersoll’s unique shallow shoreline, thick forest, flowers, birds and animals that have given us so much pleasure.” Reflecting on how many of the islands are owned by Americans in their part of Georgian Bay, they added, “We are also happy that the new alliance between the American and Canadian land trusts opens the door for the many other American islanders to think about similar transfers.” Georgian Bay Land Trust will manage Ingersoll Island as part of the adjacent 425-acre Sandy Island Preserve.

Mrs. Lawrence expressed similar sentiments after donating to American Friends, advising other Americans “If you really love a place and want it to stay unspoiled and just as you and your family have always enjoyed it, this partnership with Canadian land trusts and the American Friends organization offers a wonderful opportunity to fulfill that dream.” She added, “It also gives landowners like us the opportunity to be a small part of preserving Canada’s unique natural legacy—that beautiful, irreplaceable wild lands that drew us to Canada in the first place”.

Other Americans are already on the same wavelength as these pioneers in cross border conservation. Nine other land gifts located in four provinces are underway with American Friends currently and other landowners have begun strategizing with Canadian land trusts on how to make their own conservation dreams come true.



American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts

American Friends' mission is twofold: to protect and support the ecological integrity and other conservation values of the natural areas of Canada through securement of land, stewardship and public education, and to support Canadian land conservation entities and organizations. The charity accomplishes its mission through its unique partnership with Canadian land trusts. American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts is a US based, publicly supported 501(c) 3 charity.

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Available for interviews:

- John Finley, President, American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts

- Bonnie Sutherland, Nova Scotia Nature Trust Executive Director,
and Board member and founder of American Friends of Canadian Land Trust
- Conservation Easement Donor (Nova Scotia), Merloyd Lawrence

- Mark Carabetta, Georgian Bay Land Trust, Executive Director
- Conservation Land Donors (Ontario), Polly Naughton and Mary Nelson

Photos available. See samples below.



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Ingersoll Island, Georgian Bay, Ontario



Clockwise from top left- View from Ingersoll Island, Mary Nelson paddling by Ingersoll Island, Mary Nelson and Polly Naughton on Ingersoll Island (1937), Mary and Person Nelson, and Mary Nelson and Polly Naughton on Ingersoll Island.

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Little Annapolis Lake Conservation Easement, Nova Scotia



Clockwise from top left—Merloyd Lawrence and John Myers, the cabin on Little Annapolis Lake, Black duck, Palm warbler.

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