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Sustainability Communicator is a quarterly publication about population, consumption, and conservation issues. Its purpose is to promote dialogue and action among League members and others interested in building a sustainable future.

# SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATOR

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## sprawl

### Partnerships to Protect Rural Open Space

When people talk about sprawl and smart growth, they are usually referring to urban areas and their surrounding suburbs. It is now common to see articles in major metro newspapers about longer commute times, battles over infill development, and increasing infrastructure costs as communities absorb ever more population. So it might be surprising to learn that unplanned development and the loss of open space is also a serious problem in rural areas. That is the conclusion of a new publication produced by the U.S. Forest Service, *Cooperating Across Boundaries: Partnerships to Conserve Open Space in Rural America*.

Though the Forest Service is a relatively new voice in the national sprawl debate, it made a big splash in 2004 when Chief Dale Bosworth named the loss of open space as one of the four major threats to the quality of life in America. "Every day, America loses about 4,000 acres of open space to development," he said in a speech at the Idaho Environmental Forum. "That's about 3 acres per minute, and the rate of conversion is getting faster all the time."

According to the new publication, the United States converted 24,000 square miles of farms, forests, or rangelands to some developed use during the 1990s. That's an area the size of West Virginia. Over the next 15 years, it's projected that we could lose an area the size of California (100,000 square miles).

To the Forest Service, what is most important is not only the rate of loss, but also where it is taking place. As of 2000, 227 million acres were settled at rural densities (1.7 to 40 acres per dwelling), compared to 31 million acres at urban and suburban densities (with less than 1.7

acres per dwelling). And the growth in rural areas is increasing at a whopping 10 to 15 percent annually.

Each new house in rural areas impacts a greater amount of land than one closer to the urban core. Not only are the lot sizes bigger, but they also generally require new roads and power lines that divide forests into fragments. Fragmented forests lower the quality of wildlife habitat and interrupt migration routes. They also help to spread invasive species. Fragmentation leads to another trend called "parcelization," which means that the number of forest landowners is going up while the size of their parcels is going down. About 10 million family forest owners now control 42 percent of all forestlands in the U.S. Ninety percent of them have less than 50 acres. Such parcels are harder to manage and are more susceptible to pressure to sell for development.

In the publication, the Forest Service discusses why the gobbling up of America's rural lands is important. It documents the loss of habitat and wildlife diversity, increased risks of wildfire damage, and the loss of access for outdoor recreation. It describes the economic cost of losing openspace that supports working lands and tourism and provides free services such as water filtration and flood control.

Although the picture of development impacts in rural America painted by *Cooperating Across Boundaries* is alarming, the publication makes a strong case that there are effective approaches and tools to successfully protect open space functions and values. As the title indicates, the Forest Service feels that the key is to invest in

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# Partnerships to Protect Rural Open Space

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communication and partnerships that cut across the common divisions between people and agencies. Numerous case studies are described where citizens, working landowners, government agencies, and businesses have come together. By figuring out the growth they can expect, the resources they most want to protect, and the most appropriate places to build, people can bridge the divides between property rights and public interests, layers of bureaucracy and legal jurisdiction, and the differing approaches of scientific disciplines.

According to members of the Blackfoot Challenge in Montana, where local residents have been able to guide the future ownership and management of nearly 88,000 acres of large, intact landscapes, the secret to success is when partners “focus on the 80 percent that people agree on and not the 20 percent that divide us.”

## Key Tools for Protecting Open Space

1. Protect environmentally important land through land acquisition and conservation easements.
2. Maintain working lands by helping timberland, farms, and ranches remain economically viable.
3. Cluster new growth in existing towns or well-planned, compact developments.
4. Minimize the environmental impacts of existing and new developments by using innovative designs and strategies that maintain ecosystem functions.

## Five Key Messages to Use in Talking About Open Space

1. Open space provides clean water, habitat for wildlife, places to recreate, a rural way of life, and some protection from wildfires.
2. Both public and private lands provide open space benefits.
3. Rural areas with scenic forests, lakes, and public lands are attracting new residents and businesses at record rates.
4. Low-density patterns of rural growth can negatively impact the environment and local economies.
5. Cooperating across boundaries can lead to informed decisions and help keep forests and grasslands healthy across the landscape.

The Izaak Walton League is helping the Forest Service's Cooperative Forestry Program to increase its contacts and partnerships in the conservation-outdoor recreation community on this vital issue. In addition to helping facilitate presentations and discussions at national conservation meetings, we are also distributing the program's publication, *Cooperating Across Boundaries: Partnerships to Conserve Open Space in Rural America*, among conservation partners and the general public. For a PDF version or hardcopy of the publication, visit <http://www.iwla.org/fsopenspace>, e-mail [sustain@iwla.org](mailto:sustain@iwla.org), or call (800) 453-5463.

## conservation easements

# Big News for Conservation Tax Incentives

Last year, *Sustainability Communicator* reported on pending threats to the popular and effective tax breaks for donating conservation easements. In August, we got the welcome news that President Bush signed a bill that not only protects the tax incentives, but also enhances them.

Following the public outcry over the threat to derail the incentives, conservation and sporting groups, including the Izaak Walton League, got busy hammering out new legislative language to protect and improve the easement program as an invaluable conservation tool. The groups played a key role in persuading Congress to pass and President Bush to sign the bill. Several provisions will encourage

conservation easements and expand tax breaks to family farmers, ranchers, and other moderate-income landowners who donate land to protect natural resources. The provisions include:

- Raising the maximum deduction for conservation easements from 30 percent to 50 percent of the landowner's adjusted gross income;
- Allowing qualified farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income;
- Increasing the number of years over which a donor can take deductions, from 6 to 16 years; and,
- Reducing the chance of fraud in land donation transactions.

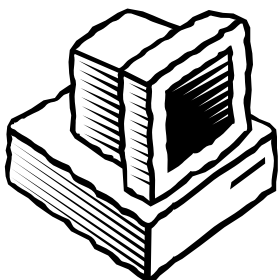
The changes will be effective for donations made through December 31, 2007. After that, the law would revert back to previous provisions, unless Congress extends the provision. So, if you have some property that needs protection or would like to get some relief from skyrocketing land values, you may want to see if a land donation would work for you.

For more information on conservation easements, contact your local land trust. The Land Trust Alliance has links to many local and state land trusts, as well as information on conservation easements and other land conservation options. Visit [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org) or call (202) 638-4725.

# Freecycling: Turning Trash into Treasure On Line

Admit it: Haven't you occasionally slowed down to cast an appraising eye at some collection of junk on the sidewalk? One of those with the cardboard sign saying, "FREE!" If you are a hardcore recycle-reuser (or maybe just cheap), you may have even stopped and surreptitiously put a chair, old cabinet doors, or a plastic sandbox for kids into your trunk. In any community or neighborhood, what one person wants to get rid of is often just what someone else is searching for. Now, this time-honored exchange is getting a whole new look in the Internet age. It even has a catchy name—freecycling.

Though swapping stuff via e-mails and listservs has probably gone on ever since there has been an Internet, the birth of an organized movement took place on May 1, 2003, in Tucson, Arizona, midwifed by 37-year-old Deron Beal. Beal works for a Tucson nonprofit named Downtown Don't Waste It! In the spring of 2003, the group had accumulated office equipment that they wanted to unload. So, Beal began calling other nonprofits who might want it. As he told *Grist Magazine*, "I started to learn, 'Okay, they take computers, they take office materials. Then I thought, 'Why don't I just make up a listserv?' Then, I said, 'Well, hey, if I'm going to do a listserv, why not just open it up to anyone who wants to join?'" Beal launched the fledgling service with an e-mail offering a queen-sized bed to a handful of friends and interested people and agencies. Someone responded and soon, the group began to post not only things they wanted to get rid of, but also requests for things they needed. Interest and activity grew quickly, and an article in the Tucson paper helped to spread the word. "Freecycling" was off like a shot.



The system is simple. You set up or join an existing Yahoo listserv, and then post a message about an item you want to give away. Someone sees it, responds to you, and you both make a plan for the exchange. There are three basic rules. Items must be described as they are (flaws and all). They should be safe, legal, and appropriate for all ages. And, the most basic tenant of all, everything must be offered for free. Beal and others helped facilitate the process, developed procedures, etiquette (it is bad form for a new member to put out a request before offering something of their own), and tips based on the early experience. They created a Web site platform to share the information and facilitate communication.

In just three years, the growth has been astonishing. From the original group in Tucson, there are now more than 3,700 groups. The number of members has now passed 2.6 million, growing at a rate of 1600 per day. The network is intensely local, yet networked globally with groups in 70 countries. Media interest has been piqued by the buzz around freecycling and has done much to spread the word. Interest has gone from local to national outlets. Stories have now appeared in *Utne Reader*, *Grist*, the *New York Times*, *People*, *PC World*, *National Public Radio* and *CBS News*. Local group moderators

are reportedly so popular with their local press that they recruit volunteers just for media communication.

As a sustainability practice, organized regiving (as supporters call it) gets high marks. Economically, it prolongs the productive life of products and saves, or at least defers, the landfill fees that citizens or municipalities would pay. By meeting their consumer needs locally for free, people have their cash for other uses and are not sending it outside the community. Environmentally, it means less waste being transported to landfills (the Web site estimates 200 tons avoided per day). But it may be in the realm of social or community capital that freecycling really shines. The whole effort generates tremendous volumes of volunteer labor and creativity. The "locally global" Freecycle Network brings thousands of people into contact with each other and with the media. All this contact serves to educate people about the benefits of recycling and reusing in a way that is practical and fun. Finally, it creates an opportunity for the giver and the recipient to meet face to face, something that the average shopping trip does not usually do. The Web site has numerous accounts of heartwarming encounters like this one:

"I gave a loveseat to a lady who had nothing. Her husband had walked out on her and her children, and they were starting over from scratch. She was so thank-

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## E-Communicator

You can now receive your *Sustainability Communicator* via email in a PDF file. Contact us at [sustain@iwla.org](mailto:sustain@iwla.org). If you still want the printed version but would like the ease of a PDF file for sharing with others, you can download recent issues from the IWLA website: [www.iwla.org](http://www.iwla.org).



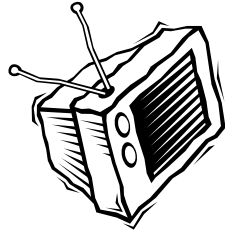
## Freecycling: Turning Trash into Treasure On Line

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ful she cried—over a loveseat I would have probably thrown away.”

—Louisville, KY

Despite the growing trend, Devon Beal and the Freecycle Network are not without detractors. Some in the “regiving” community feel he has monopolized a shared idea. They especially object to his action to trademark the term “freecycle.” Several lawsuits are pending. Beal is accepting corporate sponsorship from solid waste giant Waste Management, Inc. (and taking a salary from it), which has caused division among those who thought it was a reasonable



way to expand the network and those who saw it as a sellout. As a result of these divisions, several groups have formed alternative networks.

But controversy aside, there is no doubt that Beal and people like him have tapped into something big. Two and a half million people are out there right now, exchanging and reusing at least part of the massive number of products that the world economy creates. They are creating economic and community capital and helping to slow the accumulation of waste. Most important, they are having fun.

*You can find the Freecycle Network on the Web at [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org).*

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*Founded in 1922, the Izaak Walton League of America is dedicated to common sense conservation that protects America's hunting, fishing, and outdoor heritage relying on solution-oriented conservation, education, and the promotion of outdoor recreation for the benefit of our citizens. The League has more than 40,000 members and supporters in 21 state divisions and more than 300 local chapters in 32 states.*

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