



**NEW HAMPSHIRE
LAND TRUST
COALITION**

May 23, 2016

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NHLTC
54 Portsmouth St.
Concord, NH
03301

www.nhltc.org

Governor Maggie Hassan
Office of the Governor
State House
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301

RE: VETO OF SB 324

Dear Governor Hassan:

On behalf of the board of directors of the New Hampshire Land Trust Coalition, I write to urge you to veto SB 324, a bill to require approval from the governor and executive council for federal land acquisitions from willing sellers. The mission of the New Hampshire Land Trust Coalition, established in 2012, is to advance land conservation in New Hampshire through professional development, policy advocacy, and education. Our 31 member land trusts represent thousands of New Hampshire citizens who value our state's natural, scenic, and recreational assets.

New Hampshire's conserved open spaces are widespread and diverse, yet nearly all share one thing in common: an origin in a private landowner's personal and momentous choice to donate or sell land to a land trust or government agency. When that choice is to donate or sell to the federal government, SB 324 would undermine the landowner's private property rights by placing in his or her path a needlessly burdensome and politicized process.

SB 324 appears to be rooted in fears that the federal government, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in particular, will acquire land through forced takings. These fears are unfounded, as nationally less than one percent of Fish & Wildlife Service properties were acquired through the power of eminent domain¹. At a West Lebanon hearing in early May, Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge officials stated that the last time the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service used the power of eminent domain was 1970 in Texas².

From Lake Umbagog to Great Bay, New Hampshire's land trusts have long viewed the federal government as a partner in our efforts, often achieving conservation objectives critical and complementary to our own. For example, the Wetlands Reserve Program of the Natural Resources Conservation Service is employed by many land trusts to purchase federally-held conservation easements on critical inland and coastal wetlands. That program, too, would be impacted by SB 324. We also have concerns that the bill, poorly written and unclear, could be interpreted to apply to other programs in which the federal government is a co-holder of conservation interests.

For all these reasons, we urge you to veto SB 324. Thank you for your attention to this important issue, and please do not hesitate to contact us if you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Ryan Owens
President
NHLTC

¹ <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/realty/faq.html>

² <http://www.nhtoa.org/news-and-events/news/73-big-crowd-questions-comments-on-conte-refuge-expansion-plan.html>