



Inside the Institute

LandServer: A Conservation Assessment Tool for Farmers and Woodland Owners

Eric Sprague

The number and complexity of conservation programs that are available to farmers and woodland owners has expanded rapidly over the past few years: Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, forest mitigation banking, Environmental Quality and Incentives Program, wetlands mitigation banking, carbon sequestration, nutrient trading... the list goes on.

Each program's point of contact, approval process, specialized technical needs, land use restrictions, payment structure and other rules are equally diverse.

James Remuzzi, then with the Forestry for the Bay program, began searching for an easier and faster way to communicate the variety of conservation programs available to landowners and to empower them to take action.

With advances in online web technologies and the availability of public datasets, Forestry for the Bay, Sustainable Solutions, LLC, and the Pinchot Institute collaborated to build LandServer, an online conservation assessment tool for private landowners. Through a grant to the Institute from the USDA Forest Service, LandServer was piloted in Maryland and Delaware and recently expanded to Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Using an intuitive web-based mapping tool to draw a line around a map of their property, LandServer (www.landserver.org) provides landowners with a quick and easy evaluation of their property's contributions to clean water, wildlife habitat, flood control, and other ecosystem services. LandServer then matches these public benefits with eligibility requirements of multiple sources of conservation funding to help identify opportunities available to the landowner.

"Often the biggest barrier to taking action is knowing the potential opportunities," notes Craig Highfield, Coordinator of Forestry for the Bay. LandServer helps bridge the gap between state, federal, and private conservation programs and landowners who may potentially be eligible to participate.



Prince George's County, Maryland operates a forest banking program that allows private landowners to generate "credits" by protecting existing woodlands or by protecting newly planted trees. These credits can then be sold to residential and commercial developers that need to mitigate the loss of trees on their development projects. A property must meet a variety of eligibility requirements before setting up a bank. These include presence of sensitive wildlife, wetlands, steep slopes, and


county priority areas. LandServer screens properties to see if they meet these requirements in Prince George's and other counties.

LandServer is equally valuable to the organizations that seek to provide funding or other assistance to landowners. The tool helps organizations raise awareness on the importance of conservation actions, increase participation in conservation programs, and target conservation programs to priority areas. As organizational budgets tighten, LandServer will be a valuable, money-saving resource for organizations seeking to reach landowners.

The tool can be updated to account for changes in programs and eligibility requirements. In the past month, LandServer has added two new features. The first allows landowners to find land trusts that are interested in purchasing or receiving donated conservation easements. The

second allows landowners to view estimates of the air quality benefits provided by their trees thanks to the nation's most advanced data from the USDA Forest Service.

The Pinchot Institute is now building on its initial efforts in the Chesapeake region and collaborating with software developer The Other Firm to identify new opportunities across the country. The Other Firm's Ty Montgomery noted, "The possibilities of using this tool for education, outreach, and program eligibility determination on a national level are almost endless. Conservation agencies and organizations are excited when we expand coverage to their state or region." If you are interested in how LandServer can help your region's landowners, please contact Eric Sprague at esprague@pinchot.org.


LandServer was developed with support from USDA Forest Service, Alliance for Chesapeake Bay, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, US Environmental Protection Agency, Sustainable Solutions, Delaware Department of Agriculture and Center for Chesapeake Communities, and Virginia Department of Forestry. 

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2011 Elisabeth S. Mortimer Internship

Karli Scott, an undergraduate at Cornell University, spent this summer at Grey Towers National Historic Site as the 2011 Elisabeth S. Mortimer Horticultural Intern. Ms. Scott worked alongside USDA Forest Service experts in horticulture and landscape architecture to maintain and restore Grey Towers' historic landscape and gardens. She describes the internship as "priceless, and a fantastic way to promote conservation to the next generation of leaders."


The Mortimer Internship, made possible through the generosity of Elisabeth S. and Charles Mortimer and administered by the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, is an opportunity for undergraduates interested in careers related to ornamental horticulture and landscape architecture to gain hands-on experience in a historic garden. The internship aims to challenge and broaden students' knowledge of practical applications of horticultural theory learned in the classroom. For more information about the Mortimer Internship please visit the Grey Towers website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/gt/>) or contact Elizabeth Hawke (ehawke@fs.fed.us). 

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unquantifiable. Passionate debates over the just and proper use of these public lands continue, as well they should in a free and democratic society. Future generations will have their own chance to debate the best use of these lands, because previous generations had the foresight to conserve it in perpetuity.

But in this age of persistent budget deficits, can we afford conservation? Most of the Weeks Act investments were made during the 1930s by a nation in the grips of what is still today the deepest economic depression this country has ever endured. We are the beneficiaries of those investments. Can we in good conscience deny future generations the same consideration?

At its centennial, the Weeks Act can be thought of not just as a historical endpoint, but as a marker in time,

like a leaf floating by on some great river. We honor the commitment and leadership of Congressman John Weeks and his contemporaries in the 20th-century Conservation Movement. We also recognize and celebrate our own generation of conservationists, who are no less committed or far-sighted than their forebears. Partnerships and cooperation based on shared conservation values and a commitment to a sustainable future are still the essential elements of success. 

V. Alaric Sample is President, Pinchot Institute for Conservation, Washington, DC.

