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Kuster, Watson Coleman, Malinowski, Quigley, Huffman Introduce Legislation to Protect Conservation Land from Pipeline Development

Washington, DC – Today, Congresswoman Annie Kuster (NH-02), Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ-12), Congressman Tom Malinowski (NJ-07), Congressman Mike Quigley (IL-05), and Congressman Jared Huffman (CA-02) introduced the [Protecting Our Conserved Lands Act](#). This legislation will prevent the use of eminent domain to seize conservation land protected by local governments and nonprofits, like land trusts, for the purpose of constructing natural gas pipelines.

“Growing up in New Hampshire, I understand how important it is that we preserve our natural wonders and resources for future generations,” **said Kuster**. “Across our nation, local governments and nonprofit conservation organizations have stepped up to protect the environmental, agricultural, and historical significance of land in their communities. This issue came to the forefront in my district several years ago, when a proposed pipeline project cut an indiscriminate path across southern New Hampshire and threatened critical parcels of conserved land across more than a dozen towns. The Protecting Our Conserved Lands Act will give local governments and nonprofits a voice and a seat at the table, enabling them to protect their land from being recklessly sacrificed when a planned natural gas pipeline route crosses through it.”

“This issue is personal for residents of New Jersey,” **said Watson Coleman**. “Our state has a long and impressive record of preserving green spaces — something that’s as difficult as it is important in the most densely populated state in the country. Our hard work to protect our land and our investments in New Jersey’s natural resources should not be undone by the greed of oil and gas companies. We’ve recently fought and won costly battles against unwanted and unnecessary pipelines. The *Protecting our Conserved Lands Act* will give our local governments the tools to prevent future land grabs that threaten our environment and public spaces.”

“In my district well over 2,000 acres of protected state land could be seized by the PennEast Pipeline if we do nothing,” **said Malinowski**. “I am a proud cosponsor of this legislation because

Congress must do everything in its power to protect agricultural, environmental, and water resources from needless exploitation.”

“Our public lands are our shared natural heritage and the unique legacy we leave to future generations. The Protecting Our Conserved Lands Act is essential legislation that would prevent pipelines from using eminent domain to seize protected land, including near our national parks and forests,” **said Quigley**. “This legislation gives local organizations and governments the power to fight back against pipeline projects to keep public land in public hands.”

“My district is home to several land trusts which play a critical role in preserving agricultural lands, ranches, working forests, and open spaces for future generations. These organizations protect habitat for wildlife, provide opportunities for recreation, support farmers and ranchers, and help maintain the natural beauty and biodiversity of our country,” **said Huffman**. “The Protecting Our Conserved Lands Act will prevent protected lands from being seized for pipeline construction, and keep ownership in the hands of the local governments and non-profit organizations that have worked hard to preserve these lands for future generations.”

The Natural Gas Act of 1937 currently stipulates any natural gas pipeline project that obtains approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) may exercise eminent domain to secure the purchase of land along the permitted route. Unlike lands conserved by the federal and state governments, as well as tribal lands, there is a lack of explicit provisions in current law designed to help protect lands conserved by local governments and nonprofit entities like land trusts. With over 300,000 miles of natural gas pipelines already covering the United States, and FERC having only denied permits to two pipeline projects in the last 20 years, local governments and land trusts are left in an increasingly tenuous position.

[*The Protecting Our Conserved Lands Act*](#) addresses this issue by removing the ability of pipeline projects to use eminent domain to seize land owned or held in easement for the purpose of conservation by nonprofits or local governments. This bill will enable these nonprofit and local government stakeholders to protect the lands for which they serve as stewards. It will compel pipeline companies to either negotiate a mutually agreeable solution or redirect their routes to less environmentally-sensitive paths, such as existing rights of way identified for pipeline projects.

After seeing FERC failing to adequately take into account the concerns of many New Hampshire communities during that process, Rep. Kuster pushed for reform by helping to introduce [the Public Engagement at FERC Act](#), which would establish an Office of Public Participation and Consumer Advocacy at the Commission. She also supported the bipartisan [John D. Dingell, J. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act](#), which included a permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and has cosponsored [legislation](#) to permanently fund the LWCF.

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