



March 26, 2024

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
1410 N Hilton St, Boise, ID 83706

RE: Gem State Air Quality Initiative (GSAQI)

Dear Ms. Anderson,

On behalf of the Idaho Coalition of Land Trusts (ICOLT), I am writing in support of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality application to create the Gem State Air Quality Initiative (GSAQI). This initiative, funded through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grants (CPRG) Program, holds significant promise for advancing conservation efforts in Idaho.

ICOLT represents 19-member land trusts and related organizations across Idaho, serving as the collective voice for land trusts and offering support and networking to promote excellence in land conservation.

Our coalition comprises nonprofit land trust organizations and affiliate members dedicated to private land conservation and voluntary conservation agreements throughout Idaho. Working closely with farmers, ranchers and timber owners along with a diverse array of partners including county governments, sportsmen, tribes, state and federal land and wildlife management agencies, and local watershed groups, we strive to preserve Idaho's private lands for future generations.

Central to our mission is the negotiation of voluntary private land conservation agreements with interested landowners, which involve permanently retiring development rights on private land.

A crucial aspect of initiating such projects is the due diligence process, encompassing title review, appraisals, survey and legal description review, landowner negotiations, and various specialized documentation requirements. These requirements include easement drafting and legal review, baseline reports, mineral searches, environmental assessments, mapping, and evaluation of any outstanding debts associated with the property. Land trust staff must be skilled in obtaining this information, interpreting it and solving any issues that could potentially inhibit a clean closing or risk carrying out agreements in the future. Lack of funding for due diligence at the outset often presents a barrier to project commencement, potentially resulting in lost conservation opportunities. ICOLT is committed to partnering with Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) as a sub-awardee of the GSAQI funding, specifically targeting the reimbursement of due diligence costs associated with conserving Idaho's privately owned lands through perpetual conservation easements. As a sub-awardee, ICOLT pledges to work with our member land trusts to conserve a specified number of acres through conservation easements over a five-year period. Additionally, we commit to administering and distributing the GSAQI due diligence funding to our member land trusts through a structured award process during the grant period.

Throughout the program, ICOLT will provide regular progress reports to IDEQ, detailing the number of acres conserved through the initiative. We recognize that the funding provided through GSAQI is generated by a federal grant and may have limitations on its use as matching funds under certain circumstances.

The Idaho Coalition of Land Trusts is encouraged by IDEQ's inclusion of conservation easements in the GSAQI, as these agreements facilitate the continuation of traditional land use while safeguarding critical carbon sinks throughout Idaho. Each conservation easement ensures that working agricultural lands, forests, wetlands, and open spaces remain conserved in perpetuity, contributing to a healthy and interconnected landscape essential to the well-being and prosperity of all Idahoans.

Thank you for considering this vital conservation initiative. ICOLT looks forward to the opportunity to collaborate with IDEQ in advancing land conservation efforts across Idaho.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Craig Utter", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Craig Utter, ICOLT Past President