

The Garden Club of America
National Affairs and Legislation Committee
Washington, DC February 25th-28th, 2013

Three hundred GCA delegates from garden clubs throughout the United States attended a 4 day conference in Washington DC on environmental and conservation issues. The attendees were representing a total of 17,000 members of GCA nationwide. The purpose was to increase education and awareness of environmental and conservation issues, and to discuss strategies to more effectively influence our legislators on the environmental issues the GCA supports. These "Position Papers" can be found on the GCA website. The major issues supported by GCA are: sustainable agriculture, seed diversity and food security, clean air, clean water, strategies to address climate change, our national park system, preservation of native plants, national public lands, and environmentally responsible transportation legislation.

The list of speakers included the following:

- Katie Heins, 1st Vice President, GCA, Melissa McAdams, Chairman, NAL Committee, Fayette Weaver, Chairman, Conservation Committee, Nancy McKlveen, Advisor, NAL Committee
- Frances Beinecke, President, Natural Resources Defense Council
- Harris Sherman, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture
- Tom Kiernan, President, National Parks Conservation Association
- Sharon Blackburn, NAL Vice Chairman, National Parks/Public Lands, Marsha Merrell, Conservation Vice Chairman, National Parks/Public Lands, Georgia Schell, Conservation Vice Chairman, Partners for Plants
- Peggy Olwell, Plant Conservation Program Lead, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior
- Gina McCarthy, Asst. Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- J.P. Leous, Outreach Director, U.S. Climate Action Network
- Lesley Kane Szynal, Director, Outdoors America Coalition
- David Moulton, Policy Director, The Wilderness Society, and Flip Hagood, Senior VP, Student Conservation Association
- Melissa McAdams, Chairman, NAL Committee, Knoxville GC, TN
- Congressman Bill Owens, D-New York-23rd
- Senator Angus King, I-Maine
- Barbara Geltosky, NAL Vice Chairman, Energy Sources, Frances Trafton, NAL Vice Chairman, Transportation Corridors, and Sarah Young, NAL Vice Chairman, Agriculture
- Congressman Earl Blumenauer, D-Oregon-3rd
- Peter Byck, Director and Producer, Carbon Nation
- Congressman Rob Wittman, R-Virginia-1st
- Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, D-Rhode Island

- Rich Innes, Consultant for GCA NAL, Martha Phillips, NAL Comm. Vice Chairman, Legislative Update, and Suzanne Booker-Canfield, NAL Comm. Vice Chairman, Climate Change

Much of the discussion throughout the 4 days related to the following climate change issues: Climate change is threatening us in a wide variety of ways. It is a trend, not an isolated storm. An increase of catastrophic fires and droughts, and more frequent and intense hurricanes and storms have affected our air, water, forests and coastlines, damaging our health and living standards. The changing climates affect growing seasons, which have become a problem for the pollinators leading to a pest problem. The melting of the ice in the Arctic and Antarctic was also discussed. As we all know, there are a multitude of consequences and we have to prepare our children and ourselves to find better solutions. We have to adapt our behavior to climate change.

One of the speakers, Frances Beinecke, discussed reducing carbon. She feels the carbon tax will not be passed right away but encourages us to use the Clean Air Act instead to reduce carbon. We should reduce fossil fuel by using more renewable energy such as wind and solar.

Other topics included establishing more partnerships to protect and preserve our land (due to lack of funding and the threat of closing National Parks). Massive outbreaks of mountain pine beetles in western states are killing our trees, along with the infestation of other insects throughout the country. The Farm Bill has been extended until September 2013, yet we are calling for a longer 5-year extension. This bill promotes sustainable agriculture along with encouragement for locally-grown foods, reduced use of pesticides on crops and hormones for farm animals, wildlife protection and labeling foods.

We need to protect our environment while growing the economy at the same time. We need to educate our children and get them involved in finding solutions at the local level. Students at various schools throughout the country are taking the initiative to study energy efficiency, and this is an example of what we have to continue to do on a local level. We are the ones representing these issues, and all of the speakers encouraged us to educate our individual garden clubs and express our opinions to our legislators.

We ended our conference with visits to the offices of Senator Blumenthal, Senator Murphy, and Congressman Himes, all of whom are very supportive and appreciative of our efforts on prioritizing environmental issues. Please continue to express your opinions to our legislators:

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal, www.blumenthal.senate.gov/contact/

Christopher s. Murphy, www.murphy.senate.gov

The Honorable James A. Himes, <https://himes.house.gov/contact-me>

Peggy McDermott Conservation Chair

