

Letter to the Editor of the Washington Post

As a long time professional in the field of open space conservation and a former Nature Conservancy employee (1988-1993), I read with interest your series on the Conservancy. I thought the articles missed the mark and painted a grossly unfair picture.

Your articles glossed over the scale of the Conservancy's work. They have closed hundreds of thousands of real estate transactions across the globe. Real estate is an uncertain business and at times the Conservancy has been cutting edge, like any effective leader in a complex field. Given the volume and risky nature of its work, it should not surprise anyone that the Post's investigators could cherry pick two or three deals and decisions that don't look so great with 20/20 hindsight.

Also off base is the suggestion that the Conservancy's relationship with the corporate community is inappropriate or unseemly. It should not be news that a lot of wealth in this country resides in the corporate sector and thus, many major charities develop the business relationships the Conservancy has. But your articles ignore the facts that the vast majority of the Conservancy's corporate donations are made in the form of land not cash and the vast majority of the Conservancy's cash comes from individual members. Still, it is critical that the Nature Conservancy be working with corporations to protect biologically critical land.

The Nature Conservancy is a highly effective organization that has protected millions of acres of some of the most ecologically important land in the world. Without the institutional integrity and creative work of the Conservancy, numerous rare species would already be lost forever. In its zeal to find a juicy "story", the Post missed the healthy forest for a couple bad trees. I urge the Conservancy not to flinch in the eye of the Post's "expose" and keep on doing the great work it does protecting our ever diminishing natural places.
Sincerely,

Jim Desmond