

Leaders cite need for renewed preservation funding

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TRENTON, Monday, May 4 – More than 170 proponents of open space, farmland and historic preservation gathered at the Trenton Masonic Temple this morning to highlight the importance of replenishing the Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT), which is running dry after funding hundreds of preservation projects during the past 10 years.

State, county and local government officials joined non-profit, business and community leaders to applaud the accomplishments and benefits of New Jersey’s open space, farmland and historic preservation programs, and to emphasize the need for continued funding in the future.

The educational forum, “A Wise Investment in the Future of the Garden State,” was sponsored by a group of more than 30 businesses, non-profit environmental, local government and community organizations, and park and recreation groups.

Speakers included New Jersey Audubon Society President Tom Gilmore, Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo Jr., and former state Assemblywoman Maureen B. Ogden, Trenton Mayor Douglas Palmer and Paterson Mayor Jose Torres.

Panelists included Maia Farish, chair of the New Jersey Historic Trust; Eileen Swan, executive director of the New Jersey Highlands Council; Bradley M. Campbell, former commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Protection; and Richard G.

Lathrop, director of the Center for Remote Sensing & Spatial Analysis at Rutgers University.

Essex County Executive **Joseph DiVincenzo Jr.** said a new infusion of preservation funding is needed to continue work that has started in his county and beyond "The Garden State Preservation Trust has helped to provide high-quality parks and to restore historic sites throughout Essex County, enriching our communities and quality of life," said DiVincenzo. "But there are still enormous needs that must be addressed, and reinvesting in these efforts now can help to create jobs and revitalize struggling communities."

"From our great history, to the farmlands, to the natural beauty of the Delaware Water Gap to the Jersey Shore, our state has more to celebrate, *and more to lose*, than any state in the union," said Paterson Mayor **Jose Torres**. "When we celebrated our bicentennial back in 1976, New Jersey adopted the phrase 'Crossroads of the Revolution.' Today we are at another crossroads and our mission has never been more urgent... and the mission of the Garden State Preservation Trust has never been more crucial."

Tom Gilmore said a depleted Garden State Preservation Trust would mean lost opportunities to improve Jersey's environment and economy. "New Jersey has been a national leader in preserving our precious green spaces and rich history, but as the Garden State Preservation Trust runs out this year, we will miss opportunities in the current real estate market -- opportunities that could be lost forever," he said.

"Preserving open spaces, working farmland and historic sites improves our access to wildlife, recreation, and education, not to mention clean water and healthy food," Gilmore added "Activities such as building parks and restoring historic sites are also among the best ways to create jobs and support property values today and in the long run. Now more than ever, creating a diverse and healthy environment is also a key to our economic future."

Maureen Ogden noted that, “Although New Jersey is one of the smallest states in the country, its commitment to preserve open space is only surpassed by California and Florida. As residents of the most densely populated state in the U.S., New Jerseyans know the value of preserving open space to protect our water supply, purify our air and mitigate global warming, protect natural habitat, and provide multiple recreation opportunities.”

“The preserved farmland of the Garden State will continue to provide ‘Jersey Fresh’ fruits and vegetables to its residents,” Ogden added. “By renewing the GSPT, we will ensure that our commitment to save the best for tomorrow will be our enduring legacy.”

"Open-space funding is critical to nearly every facet of New Jersey's environmental and economic future, from water supply and pollution control to tourism and urban renewal" said **Bradley M. Campell**, former Commissioner of New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection. "If we fail to renew our investment in the GSPT now, we will diminish the future health and prosperity of communities throughout New Jersey."

Maia Farish, of the New Jersey Historic Trust, stressed the economic benefits of the Trust’s bricks-and-mortar grant program. “Since 2000, our GSPT-funded grants have benefited New Jersey with over \$60 million, leveraging more than \$120 million in private reinvestment – real dollars for real projects that generate jobs, create housing and visitor-ready cultural destinations, revitalize neighborhoods, and restore our civic buildings. Without a secure, predictable source of funding for GSPT, we lose our capacity to be a critical funding partner in creating jobs, and reclaiming the civic, cultural, and economic vitality of our cities and towns.”

Eileen Swan, of the New Jersey Highlands Council, said renewal of the GSPT is critical to the future of the Highlands region. "As Governor Jon Corzine noted in Executive Order 114, it is vitally important that the Garden State Preservation Trust be reauthorized, not only to preserve and protect the drinking water for more than half of the state's residents, but also to address the landowner equity issues in the Highlands," said Swan.

"Implementation of the Highlands Regional Master Plan relies upon the success of continued preservation to protect critical state water supplies and provide compensation to those who are being asked to bear the burden while the residents of the state reap the benefit," Swan added. "The State Legislature in the Highlands Act made a 'strong and significant commitment by the State to fund the acquisition of exceptional natural resource value lands,' and that commitment must be kept."

Richard Lathrop, Director of the Rutgers University Center for Remote Sensing & Spatial Analysis, said land use trends point to a need for more preservation. "Examination of the most recent land use change data reveals that the loss of New Jersey's forest lands has intensified over the last decade. This is especially troubling as forests provide a range of ecosystem services from water quality protection, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat to open space and recreation."

A series of papers detailing the accomplishments, benefits and future needs of New Jersey's preservation programs was released at the forum. They can be accessed online on New Jersey Conservation Foundation's website at www.njconservation.org.

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