



Campaign to preserve New Jersey's parks, natural areas, clean water, farmland, and historic treasures

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PRESS RELEASE

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Assembly Environment Committee Supports Letting Voters Choose Future of Open Space

TRENTON – Today the Assembly Environment Committee affirmed its support for continuing the Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT), the state's fund for open space, farmland and historic preservation, which is essentially out of money.

During today's meeting, Assemblyman John McKeon, Chairman of the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee, reiterated the value of the Trust's investments in our neighborhoods, parks, farmland, natural areas, and historic structures.

The Committee released bill A3901, which would create a November, 2009 ballot question enabling voters to maintain the Garden State Preservation Trust. The ballot question would permit a \$600 million bond issue to renew the Trust, which is now nearly empty after the 2007 voter-approved funding. A number of members of the New Jersey Keep it Green Campaign, a coalition of 115 organizations supporting the renewal of GSPT, who were present at the committee hearing, applauded this approval.

Tom Wells, Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey, stated, "We applaud the legislators' support for sustaining the Trust. Our efforts to preserve New Jersey's natural lands depend it. Without the Garden State Preservation Trust, our ability to preserve land for the benefit of our state will slow to a trickle, precisely at the time when real estate prices are in our favor."

In the last round of the Trust committee's allocation of funds – in early March – it approved valuable projects ranging from the restoration of New Jersey's Revolutionary War sites and historically significant buildings at the heart of our urban communities, to the acquisition of natural areas needed to purify our water supply and preserve our natural resources.

"A replenished Garden State Preservation Trust would invest significantly in urban parks, farmland and historic preservation projects that will keep our children active, our food more locally-grown, and our rich heritage alive," **said Anthony Cucchi, NJ State Director with the Trust for Public Land.** "It will also enable us to continue investing in natural areas that maintain our clean water, clean air, and the healthy environment for our families."

This renewal of funding will allow for new projects. "Projects like these will put people to work and invest directly in New Jersey's economic development and natural assets," said **Kelly Mooij, Coordinator of the New Jersey Keep It Green Campaign.** "This investment needs to continue, especially in difficult economic times like these."

A number of individuals highlighted the importance of investing in our land while values are relatively low. These investments would support not just willing sellers but would raise the surrounding land values as well.

“We’re now without state funding until voters approve a ballot issue to renew preservation dollars. Approval of the bond issue affords us opportunities to save land at a bargain and to help boost the real estate market at a critical time,” **said Alison Mitchell of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.**

Studies have shown that new investments in park and historic restoration projects will create jobs and stimulate the economy. For instance, The Rutgers Center for Urban Policy found that every \$1 million invested in rehabilitating an older building creates 29.4 jobs - 13 in the construction industry and 19 in other parts of the economy. The economic impact of preservation construction even surpasses that of new construction. Further, a 2008 study commissioned by the National Parks & Conservation Association found that every dollar invested in national parks generates at least \$4 in economic value to the public.

“Without this funding,” **said John Hatch, President of Preservation New Jersey** “many of the historic places that give our communities character are at risk of being lost forever. We need to create more opportunities for community revitalization and renewal as well as provide jobs for our citizens by saving these historic treasures.”

New Jersey voters have approved every statewide measure on the ballot to fund preservation efforts in good times and bad. They deserve the opportunity to do so again this November.

The New Jersey – Keep It Green Campaign is a coalition of 115 organizations from across the state working to restore funding for the Department of Environmental Protection’s Divisions of Fish and Wildlife and Parks and Forestry in this years budget and to strengthen and renew the Garden State Preservation Trust. For more information on this Campaign, please visit www.NJKeepItGreen.org.
