



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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Poll shows voters support \$600 million bond to continue state preservation efforts

TRENTON – Today a coalition of over 100 groups released the results of a recent statewide public opinion survey showing that a solid majority of voters would support a \$600 million bond measure if placed on the ballot this November to continue funding for state open space, farmland and historic preservation efforts. The poll of 600 likely voters, commissioned by the Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy, was conducted April 3-5 by Fairbanks, Maslin, Maullin & Associates.

When read sample ballot language for a \$600 million bond measure, 59% of voters backed the measure with 33% percent against. When provided with additional information about what the funds would be used for and told the annual cost to the average household (\$16 annually), support increased to two-thirds of voters. In addition, 80% of those polled said they would want their legislator to vote in favor of putting the measure on the ballot to let voters decide. The strong support for the measure is particularly noteworthy given the high level of concern about the economy evident in the survey data.

"These results demonstrate that a strong majority of voters would likely support a \$600 million bond measure if placed on the ballot this November," said **Tom Gilbert of The Trust for Public Land**. "They clearly view the cost as reasonable and a worthwhile investment, even in difficult economic times."

The funds would replenish the Garden State Preservation Trust, which has allocated virtually all the funds approved for it by voters under a November, 2007 \$200 million bond measure, which was to last for one year. The GSPT works with its partners such as the Green Acres Program to match private, municipal and county investments in high-priority open-space projects. "These projects help put clean drinking water in our glasses and clean air in our lungs, provide playgrounds and parks for all residents to enjoy, preserve New Jersey's farms and local sources of food, and put people to work restoring historic buildings that improve the character of our neighborhoods," said **Kelly Mooij, Coordinator of the Keep It Green Campaign**.

"The results of the poll are consistent with the long-standing public support for open space measures in New Jersey," said **Tom Wells of The Nature Conservancy**. "Voters approved every statewide ballot measure to fund open space since 1961, in good times and bad. They should be given the opportunity to do so again this November."

On Monday, the Assembly Environment Committee voted out legislation to place a \$600 million bond measure on the November ballot with unanimous bipartisan support. The Senate Environment Committee approved similar legislation last week. The bills must now go to the budget and appropriations committees.

“We applaud and thank Senator Bob Smith and Assemblyman John McKeon for their leadership in advancing a bond measure through their committees to continue vital preservation efforts,” added **Kelly Mooij**. “If we cut off funds to the Garden State Preservation Trust, we will miss tremendous opportunities to conserve land in the current real-estate market, and to create jobs through park improvement and historic restoration projects.”

Highlighting the GSPT’s importance for farmers, **Rich Nieuwenhuis, President of the New Jersey Farm Bureau**, stated, “New Jersey leads the nation in open space preservation, particularly farmland preservation. This is an investment in our future and for the quality of life for all New Jerseyans.”

The GSPT is also vital to New Jersey’s historic preservation projects. “Preservation New Jersey will announce the annual ‘Ten Most Endangered Historic Sites in New Jersey’ next week,” said **Ron Emrich, Executive Director, Preservation New Jersey**. “Almost all these historic places, which represent hundreds of similar sites across the state, could be saved, preserved and given new productive uses if New Jersey Historic Trust funds were still available. But they are not! The citizens of New Jersey, who nominate these endangered places that are valuable to their communities, should have the opportunity to show their commitment to preservation of the historic places that make their towns and cities special at the ballot box in the fall.”

Studies have shown that open space investments can also help reduce stormwater runoff, control erosion and flooding, and keep our shorelines clean – all issues that become extremely expensive to fix, once they’re broken. Issues like these are seen as particularly acute because of New Jersey’s status as the most densely populated state in the nation. With New Jersey’s open space disappearing at a rate upwards of 50 acres per day, experts have shown that full build-out could occur in as little as 20 years.

“The legislature and the Governor should give the voters the opportunity to vote on a \$600 million bond measure this November,” said **Tom Gilmore, President of the New Jersey Audubon Society**. “If we make this investment now, it will yield a return in the near-term and for generations to come.”

Many leaders in New Jersey have concurred. At the Garden State Preservation Trust Educational Forum on May 4 in Trenton, nearly 200 people attended to discuss the accomplishments, benefits and future needs of the GSPT. Municipal and county leaders were among the 20 presenters.

“In tough economic times, New Jersey voters know that the State’s preservation programs are a wise investment – stabilizing property taxes, creating jobs and supporting key industries like tourism”, said **Michele S. Byers, Executive Director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation**. “The proposed bond act will cost less than \$1.50 each month for New Jersey households – a small price to pay for the many environmental, health and economic benefits we will derive from the preservation programs this will fund.”

The \$600 million bond measure would span three years, maintaining the average annual commitment of the \$200 million that voters approved in November ’07.

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 year’s budget and to strengthen and renew the Garden State Preservation Trust. For more information on this Campaign, please visit www.NJKeepItGreen.org.