



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

142 W. State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608
Website: www.NJKeepItGreen.org

Tel: (609) 392-1181
Fax: (609) 392-1182

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
June 4, 2009

Contacts:
Kelly Mooij, NJ Audubon Society, 609-577-1434
Tom Gilbert, Trust for Public Land, 267-261-7325

Groups Cite Preservation Efforts at Risk without Nov. Ballot Measure as Last of Funds Appropriated

Numerous critical preservation efforts now underway throughout the state are at risk without a November ballot measure to replenish the Garden State Preservation Trust, said members of the NJ Keep It Green coalition today.

"Today the Legislature is set to make the last open space appropriations from funds approved by voters in 2007," said **Kelly Mooij, Coordinator of the 115+ member Keep It Green Coalition**. "And yet the Assembly Appropriations Committee and Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee have not yet taken up bills that would enable the State to continue its open space investments."

Bills A3901 and S1858, which would put a \$600 million bond measure before voters on the November ballot to continue preservation efforts for three years, must be approved before the Legislature's June 30th recess, but still need to clear the Appropriations committees in order to receive a full vote in each house. The bills were approved by the Assembly and Senate Environment Committees in May with bipartisan support.

After today's appropriations, the Garden State Preservation Trust will no longer be able to match funds invested by municipalities, counties and non-profits to acquire open spaces for natural areas, parks and recreation, or to preserve farmland and historic areas.

Specific Needs at Risk

"There are enormous and pressing needs for continued state investments to provide safe, accessible, high-quality parks in New Jersey's cities," said **Anthony Cucchi, New Jersey State Director with The Trust for Public Land**. "In the City of Newark, for example, we are working with the Booker Administration to develop parkland along the Passaic River waterfront, which will serve as a catalyst for economic growth in the adjacent communities. To succeed, this ambitious project will require continued investment from the State as a lead partner and significant funding from the Green Acres Program." In fact, Newark has fewer acres of parkland per resident than any of the 55 biggest cities in the nation.

In the New Jersey Highlands, approximately 19,000 more acres of the most critical land in the Special Environmental Zones must be protected in order to minimally protect the state's drinking water. An additional 162,557 acres have been identified as "Priority" acquisitions, necessary to maintain the ecological integrity of the Highlands region and its water supply. "Today, as New Jersey Highlands municipalities work through conformance and identify lands vitally important for the protection of our State's clean and plentiful drinking water supplies, preservation dollars through the GSPT must continue to be available to assist acquisition efforts at the local, county and regional level," explained **Julia Somers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition**. "Our quality of life, economic well-being and the future of our drinking water supplies depends on it!"

Preservation needs spread across New Jersey. “To meet the growing needs for preservation around the state, we must be able to bring funding to the table when needed. There are many farms in the Delaware Bay watershed – the heart of New Jersey’s agricultural industry – that we are working to preserve, but we need State funds to make it happen. Preservation of these farms helps ensure a local food supply, protects natural resources and stimulates the local economy,” said **Alison Mitchell, Director of Policy for the New Jersey Conservation Foundation**. More than 450,000 acres of additional farmland should be preserved to maintain a viable agriculture sector in New Jersey, according to the SADC.

In the New Jersey Pinelands, at least 30,000 acres have yet to be preserved according to the Master Plan. In the Barnegat Bay Watershed, at least 76,000 more acres must be preserved to protect the area, its residents, and visitors. Meanwhile, over 1,300 registered historic sites in New Jersey have not received funding for rehabilitation, despite their high value to our neighborhoods, educational opportunities, and economy. The creation of new trails is also falling behind the state’s needs, according to the 2008 Trails Plan Update.

Open Space and the State’s Budget

The Keep It Green coalition also addressed the state’s open space needs in light of the state’s fiscal concerns. They noted that **the time to borrow and invest wisely is now, when borrowing costs are low, land prices have declined, and land is becoming scarcer in New Jersey**. These are the kinds of terms that wise investors embrace, they noted.

Open space investments also stimulate job creation and economic growth. "Grants from the NJ Historic Trust go directly into the economies of not only the state, but towns and cities in every county across New Jersey," said **Ron Emrich, Executive Director of Preservation New Jersey**. “Historic rehabilitation projects create good paying, skilled jobs and pump millions of dollars into sales, employment and business tax collections, while revitalizing communities and attracting private investment in our downtowns. Now is not the time to end this proven economic stimulus program and endanger hundreds of jobs."

“Investing in land and natural resources that we truly need to grow our economy and improve our quality of life is imperative for the state to continue,” says **Rich Nieuwenhuis, President of NJ Farm Bureau**. “Preservation programs are not like flicking a switch. Once the state interrupts its open space programs, they will be greatly damaged and difficult to start back up again. We need to continue the 20 years of momentum in preserving farmland, open space, and precious historic sites.”

Among Voters, Support for Open Space Remains Strong

Recent polling commissioned by the Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy found that 80% of likely voters want their legislator to vote in favor of putting the measure on the ballot, and two-thirds are likely to support it when told that it would cost less than \$16 annually per household.

“The poll showed that our citizens continue to view open space as an essential investment in New Jersey,” said **Tom Wells of The Nature Conservancy**. “If we discontinue these investments, we’re gambling the future of our water supply, our air quality, our biodiversity, and all the other things we count on to make our state habitable.”

#####

The New Jersey – Keep It Green Campaign is a coalition of over 110 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 contact us directly or visit www.NJKeepItGreen.org