

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor's Weekly Radio Message Addresses New Jersey's Open Space Legacy

Gov. Christie Whitman provides a weekly radio message to radio stations throughout the state. Each week, the message focuses on a different concern or event of interest to New Jerseyans.

This week the Governor discusses her plan to help New Jersey preserve one million acres of open space and farmland in the next decade. Experts say that New Jersey needs to preserve these acres. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture has reported that our state needs to preserve at least 500,000 acres of farmland to maintain our agricultural industry. Also, in the final report of the Council on New Jersey Outdoors, the panel recommended preservation of a total of one million acres of open space and farmland in the next 10 years in order to keep the state's quality of life.

Governor Whitman, with the Legislature, has designed a plan to reach the million-acre goal. Legislation has been introduced to ask voters on the November ballot to dedicate \$100 million in existing revenues for each of the next 10 years for open space and farmland preservation funds. The budget that the Governor will sign also includes \$50 million to match local preservation funds. The Governor urges New Jersey citizens to contact their legislators concerning this important issue.

Attached is the text of the message.

The radio message can be accessed by calling the Governor's actuality line at 609-292-3249. It will be available today, beginning at noon, and will run through the weekend

Governor's Weekly Radio Message
Our Open Space Legacy
June 26, 1998

In a few days I will sign a state budget that makes the first down payment on the pledge I made at my inauguration in January: to help New Jersey preserve 1 million acres of open space and farmland within the next decade.

Why one million acres - and why now?

Let me start with what the experts say.

According to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, more than half of all our farmland has disappeared since 1950. The Department has stated that to maintain a viable agricultural industry, we must preserve at least 500,000 acres of farmland.

That view was reflected in the final report of the Council on New Jersey Outdoors - a blue-ribbon panel with a diverse membership from many parts of New Jersey life. The Council recommended that our state preserve a combined total of 1 million acres of open space and farmland in the next 10 years to preserve our quality of life and protect the farming industry.

Tourism leaders say that preserving open space is essential to promoting tourism, our second largest industry, as it preserves the natural beauty that attracts so many visitors each year. And planners believe preservation will help re-energize cities, where the infrastructure is already in place to support development.

That's what the experts tell us. But listen to what your fellow citizens are saying.

A schoolboy named Robert from Burlington County wrote to tell me about a nearby apple orchard that was developed as houses and a golf course. He wrote, "Maybe there is nothing to worry about now, but in a few years, all of these farms, open areas, and forests will be gone, making no place for food or animals to live."

Robert wasn't alone. People from all around New Jersey have written to me about New Jersey's disappearing landscape.

A Union County woman sent me a letter declaring that "we are paving over more space and farmland than any other state." A citizen from Bergen County lamented that "New Jersey is rapidly being bulldozed from the Atlantic to the Delaware." A Sussex County man wrote to tell me, "The people of New Jersey desperately want to save the open spaces that are left."

And a Middlesex County resident put it in very clear terms: "We must preserve what is left of open space in New Jersey. As we close in upon the millennium, this may be this generation's defining moment."

I couldn't agree more. And I'm glad to see New Jerseyans young and old are recognizing that we need to save these acres today, before it's too late.

People around the state are recognizing that this isn't just about preserving acres. It's about coming to grips with the real cost of haphazard development - in traffic jams, in pollution, in the loss of New Jersey's special character. It's about maintaining the quality of life our families deserve - with clean air, clean water, and places to run around and have fun.

I've been working closely with the Legislature, and I'm glad to report that we've reached agreement on a plan to reach our million-acre goal.

Senate President Donald DiFrancesco and Assemblyman Leonard Lance have introduced legislation to ask voters on the November ballot to dedicate \$100 million in existing revenues for each of the next 10 years for open space and farmland preservation.

Even before that question reaches you on the ballot, the budget I will sign includes \$50 million to match local preservation funds.

Citizens in 13 counties and 53 municipalities have already shown their support for open space by officially dedicating a portion of their revenues for preservation. And, of course, millions of New Jerseyans have approved Green Acres bond issues over the years.

I hope you share my vision for a New Jersey that welcomes the 21st century with a lasting legacy of open space. A legacy of clean air and clean water. A legacy that keeps the Garden in the Garden State. A legacy that will make our grandchildren and their grandchildren proud to call New Jersey home.

I ask for your help. Please contact your legislators to let them know you want the chance to vote on this urgent issue this November. Together, let's win the open space race with a million acres for the new millennium.