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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Testifies in Washington on the Garden State's Open Space Preservation Program

Gov. Christie Whitman today testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, highlighting New Jersey's historic initiative to preserve 1 million acres of open space and farmland.

Attached is the text of the Governor's remarks.

TESTIMONY OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES WASHINGTON, D.C. TUESDAY, APRIL 27, 1999

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify on the various legislative proposals before the Committee that address land and natural resource conservation.

States and local governments are leading the way in the preservation of land and natural resources, and we welcome federal efforts that build on and complement what we are already doing.

I want to applaud the Committee and the sponsors of the various bills for the bipartisan and inclusive process that recognizes the critical role of state and local governments in preserving and protecting natural resources.

Before I comment specifically on the federal legislation, I would like to briefly discuss what we have already done in New Jersey.

By way of background, New Jersey is a state of 8 million people living on 5 million acres. Ours is the most densely populated state in the country, yet it maintains five national wildlife areas, two national park areas, three nationally designated estuaries, the internationally recognized and environmentally sensitive New Jersey Pinelands, and 127 miles of ocean shoreline.

The Garden State has made consistent and aggressive efforts to preserve and protect its natural resources. In fact, between 1961 and 1995, our voters approved bond issues totaling more than \$1.4 billion to acquire 390,000 acres of open space, protect 50,000 acres of farmland, preserve historic sites, and develop parks. And last November, by a 2-to-1 margin, New Jersey voters approved a

long-term, stable source of funding to preserve forever 1 million additional acres of open space and farmland.

Saving our precious land is the centerpiece of New Jersey's effort to build a future in which we can sustain both the strength of our economy and the integrity of our environment.

That effort includes directing future growth to areas that have the infrastructure already in place, such as our cities and town centers. In support of that effort, we are working hard to revitalize our cities as thriving centers of culture and commerce. We are also committing some of our preservation funds to protect and preserve our most significant historic treasures.

New Jersey's commitment to land preservation dates back to the 1960s. Since 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery program have provided New Jersey with over \$145 million in matching funds to acquire open space and develop and maintain recreational facilities and urban parks.

Some recent projects the Land and Water Conservation Fund has supported include the first county park in Hudson County in 80 years and the development of Liberty State Park, one of New Jersey's most culturally and historically significant attractions.

Clearly, while my state will continue to make open space preservation a priority, the need to preserve land exceeds state and local funding levels, particularly given the federal government's decision in 1995 to stop the flow of land and water conservation funds to the states.

Restoring the stateside funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund would assist New Jersey's open space and farmland preservation efforts by enhancing our ability to partner with local governments and nonprofit agencies in order to achieve our million acre goal.

Mr. Chairman, an important priority in New Jersey is preserving our farmland, and I would encourage the Committee to allow Land and Water Conservation Fund money to be used to purchase farmland conservation easements to assist us in this effort.

When it comes to wildlife, the reinvestment of Outer Continental Shelf revenues will enable states to ensure that we bequeath to our children and grandchildren healthy and abundant species populations with adequate habitat.

Federal funding would allow New Jersey to fully implement projects that protect critical wildlife habitats and species and encourage private landowners to do the same. We have saved the peregrine falcon and the osprey, and we have increased the number of nesting bald eagles from one pair in 1988 to 22 pairs in 1999. Increased revenue would allow New Jersey to continue these efforts and develop a strategic plan for the preservation of all species and their habitat.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to comment on the coastal impact assistance provision in your proposal. The New Jersey coast generates more than \$20 billion per year. Supporting a thriving coastline is critical to our economy and our environment.

Coastal impact assistance could be used for vital projects such as restoring beaches, dunes, and wetlands as well as state and local smart growth planning.

New Jersey does not have oil and gas exploration or production off our coast, and we support the existing moratorium on oil and gas production off New Jersey's coast.

Members of the Committee, I recognize that approving the proposals before you would require a shift in the budgets of other federal programs. It is important that funds provided to states under this legislation not come at the expense of other federally supported state programs.

I do believe, however, that since Outer Continental Shelf revenues come from a nonrenewable resource, it makes sense to dedicate them to natural resource conservation rather than dispersing them for general government purposes.

I would urge the Committee to give state and local governments maximum flexibility in determining how to invest these funds. In this way, federal resources can be tailored to complement state plans, priorities, and resources.

I look forward to continuing to work with you as this legislation moves forward. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on an issue of great importance to New Jersey and the nation. I would be happy to answer any questions.