

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **Whitman, DiFrancesco and Collins Announce Consensus on Enabling Legislation For Open Space**

Governor Christie Whitman, Senate President Donald DiFrancesco and Assembly Speaker Jack Collins today announced the introduction of the legislation to move forward New Jersey's bold open space preservation initiative. The legislation will implement the ballot initiative, passed by voters in November, to preserve one million acres of open space, farmland and historic sites over the next decade.

"It's exciting and satisfying to move forward with this legislation because there can be no doubt we are doing the people's will," said Gov. Whitman. "New Jersey's voters are leading the nation in their commitment to this issue. Because of them, our state is being held up as a model of effective land preservation."

"The Legislature proved its commitment to this issue by getting the Public Question on the ballot," said the Governor. "Now it's time to make good on that vote. The sooner we get it passed and set the wheels of preservation in motion, the sooner we will achieve the ambitious goal we have set for the Garden State."

"The synthesis of the many ideas that went into this initiative has produced a legislative measure that I am confident will truly make a difference in bettering and protecting the future environmental, economic, historic and cultural landscape of this state," said Senate President Donald DiFrancesco. "It will ultimately take us closer to our goal of saving 1 million acres of open space and will meet our commitment of meeting statewide needs, from farmland to urban parks to historic sites."

"This legislation implements the agreement New Jersey voters made with the state government when they approved this historic open space, farmland and historic preservation funding proposal last year," said Assembly Speaker Jack Collins. "We now have a preservation plan that is truly visionary in its scope. It clearly defines the goal of preserving an additional one million acres of open space in the next decade and outlines a plan to accomplish that objective."

The legislation unveiled today, called the "Garden State Preservation Trust Act", will establish, once approved by the Legislature, a Garden State Preservation Trust Fund Account that will receive \$98 million annually from the General Fund for ten years. The legislation provides that \$6 million of the Fund will be allocated annually for historic preservation and the remaining funds will be shared between open space and farmland at a 60/40 percent ratio.

For the first ten years, most of the \$98 million will be used for acquisition and development. From FY 2010 to FY 2029 funds not to exceed \$98 million will be used to satisfy debt service on the bonds.

In addition, a Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT) will be formed to receive and approve projects that the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) submit. Lists of proposed projects will be submitted at least twice a year. The Trust will be required to submit to the Legislature two appropriation bills each year.

The Trust will consist of nine members including the State Treasurer, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Secretary of State, as ex officio members. The remaining members are as follows: one public member appointed by the Governor, two public members appointed by the Senate President, and two public members appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly. The Governor's public appointee will serve as the first chairperson. Subsequently, the chair will rotate annually among the public appointees. Public members appointed to the Trust will serve a five year term, while other appointed members serve on the Trust at the pleasure of the Governor.

The bill also establishes the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust Fund. This program provides for matching grants for historic preservation projects. The historic preservation trust will submit a list of projects to the Legislature for funding approval.

The legislation continues the existing duties and responsibilities of the DEP with respect to the Green Acres program. The bill includes State and local acquisition and development as authorized uses of the funds. In addition, the bill provides for a process to determine the value of a development easement in the Pinelands. Appraisals for the acquisition of land other than the Pinelands will be based on land use zoning in effect on November 3, 1998.

In continuing the commitment to farmland preservation, money appropriated to the SADC will be used for State and local acquisition projects. In addition, the bill provides for a process to determine the value of a development easement on farmland in the Pinelands.

The legislation will also provide a program to ease the burden of lost tax revenue due to the preservation program.

Public question #1 passed last November when voters overwhelmingly supported the initiative by a 2-1 margin. The plan will preserve 1 million acres over the next ten years- and creates a stable source of funding (\$98 million annually).