

# **Future Needs for Continued Investment in State Preservation Programs**

*A Compilation of Reports, Plans and other Studies Detailing the Need for Land  
Preservation and Stewardship, Farmland Preservation and Historic Preservation in  
New Jersey*

*A Project of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation  
in cooperation with  
New Jersey- Keep It Green Coalition  
Paper written by Elliott Ruga  
4/15/09*

## **Introduction**

The Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT) is a national model for financing land conservation and one of the largest state-run efforts ever launched in the United States. The GSPT serves as the financing authority to secure funds for the state Green Acres Program, Farmland Preservation Program, and the New Jersey Historic Trust. The accomplishments of the Trust as well as the economic and environmental benefits realized in New Jersey because of the GSPT are measurable and remarkable.

Voters on November 3, 1998, approved Public Question #1 amending the New Jersey Constitution to dedicate \$98 million a year from the Sales and Use Tax for land preservation, historic preservation and park development. The dedication began in 1999 and continues until 2029. The objective was to fund a ten-year preservation program. The final 20 years of the dedication were in place to cover the debt payments on bonds that would be issued during the ten-year acquisition program to finance the appropriation. The acquisition period ends in 2009. Yet the work of land and historic preservation is unfinished. Unmet needs remain, and taking care of the lands and properties already preserved is one of those pressing needs.

To this end, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation in cooperation with the New Jersey- Keep It Green Coalition has developed a series of white papers about the statewide benefits, accomplishments and future needs for continued state funding for open space and farmland preservation, restoration and stewardship of natural and recreational areas, and historic preservation. This paper represents a compilation of research reports, studies, and plans that detail the need to continue statewide funding for open space and farmland preservation, restoration and stewardship of natural and recreational areas, and historic preservation.

### **Summary**

Funding is necessary to meet the following resource needs, as identified in the most current state sponsored literature:

- Preserve 700,000-1,000,000 acres of high quality natural resource land
- Preserve 450,000 acres of farmland
- Implement the land acquisition directives of the Highlands Regional Master Plan totaling \$1.3 billion
- Purchase an additional 30,000 acres of open space in the Pinelands
- Purchase flood prone areas along the Delaware River
- Accommodate the \$18,000,000 per year in funding requests for historic preservation
- Provide adequate recreational facilities throughout the State
- Implement the New Jersey Trail Plan Update recommendations
- Manage and steward natural resources in all preserved open spaces for a healthy biodiversity and maintain protected places to allow public access for recreation.
- Increase support staff for all state protected lands, including parks, forests and wildlife management areas.
- Implement the capital improvement projects required for State parks, historic sites and wildlife management areas at a cost of \$410,000,000.
- Increase support staff in state parks
- Provide safe, accessible, high-quality parks in urban areas

### **Background**

New Jersey is unique among states. Within our relatively small area considerable diversity can be found among the distinctive geophysical provinces of the Coastal Plain, the Piedmont, the Highlands and the Ridge and Valley. New Jersey's human and natural environments range from dense urban areas, suburbs, farmlands and significant natural areas. Our cultural and ecological treasures are appreciated and enjoyed by residents and non-residents alike. Natural beauty and historic legacy are apparent in all reaches of the state; from the forested hills of the Highlands to the primordial richness of the Pinelands; from our endless miles of soft, sandy beaches, to our Revolutionary War era legacy—achieving a new level of recognition with the designation of the Crossroads of the Revolution National Heritage Area. New Jersey's wildlife is as diverse as its human population. Within the United States, New Jersey is ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> for biodiversity, ahead of Montana, Massachusetts and Hawaii. However, with development pressures from the continually sprawling metropolitan areas of New York City and Philadelphia, it will take continued deliberate actions to retain, and deserve, the state's longstanding nickname, "The Garden State".

For nearly 50 years, the people of New Jersey have demonstrated an unwavering support to protecting these special places. Since the establishment of the Green Acres program in 1961, New Jersey voters have overwhelmingly approved nine bond issues totaling \$1.4 billion dollars for these purposes"<sup>1</sup>. In November 2007, despite an economic downturn, voters approved an additional \$200 million for open space preservation and recreation while spurning a property tax rebate for themselves that appeared on the same ballot.

The State has regularly documented the vital need to preserve New Jersey's natural and cultural resources. Reports include the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), New Jersey Wildlife Action Plan, New Jersey Trails Plan Update, and the New Jersey Historic Preservation Plan. According to these reports, not only is there an urgent unmet need to protect these resources but there has also been a consistent lack of sufficient funding to do so.

These public needs are discussed below for the following five areas: open space preservation, historic preservation, farmland preservation, recreation, resource maintenance and an area that has unique challenges requiring particular attention—urban parks.

### **Open Space Preservation**

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation, in partnership with the State Green Acres Program and Rutgers University, developed a vision for land preservation for the state. Entitled Garden State Greenways, the project used geographic information system (GIS) mapping layers to identify the highest quality natural resource lands—beach and dune zones, wetlands, prime agricultural soils, forests, and grasslands—remaining in New Jersey. Garden State Greenways identified one million acres of these unfragmented, undeveloped resources still in need of protection ([www.gardenstategreenways.org](http://www.gardenstategreenways.org)).

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) updates the Statewide Comprehensive Open Space and Recreation Plan (SCORP) every five years. The Plan is a requirement for the state to remain eligible to receive federal funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Plan describes the open space needs of the State and sets forth the goals for meeting those needs.

According to the most recent SCORP, "New Jersey's population has increased by 300,000 people since the 2000 Census. During that same period, land has been developed at a rate of 18,000 acres per year. 232,938 residential building permits were issued between 2000 and 2006. The Rutgers Center for Remote Sensing has predicted that if these land development patterns continue, New Jersey can expect to reach full build-out within the next 30 to 40 years. There is a need to preserve 700,000 acres of high value natural resource lands statewide."<sup>2</sup>

"The continual population increases and the development that has occurred to accommodate them are putting serious pressures on the remaining

natural resources of the state. The resultant loss in vegetation and increase in impervious cover directly impact the ability of the state's natural resources to sustain the State's residents. From an environmental standpoint, aquifer recharge, wildlife habitat, and stream and groundwater quality are greatly diminished by these changes in land use."<sup>3</sup>

Further, many of the state's threatened open spaces provide an incredible amount of biodiversity--

"This biodiversity includes 2,134 known native plant species and close to 900 wildlife species. Approximately 1 million shorebirds and as many as 80,000 raptors make migratory stopovers here each year. To sustain this rich biological diversity, New Jersey must protect the habitats of plant and animal species through land preservation and the regulation of growth and development".<sup>4</sup>

The NJDEP Green Acres Program has a legislative mandate to develop an open space master plan to guide the State Land Acquisition Program.<sup>5</sup> The most recent issuance is the 2005 – 2007 Land Preservation Plan. The plan provides the scientific basis for the SCORP's recommendation to preserve an additional 700,000 acres of high quality resource lands. The factors that were considered in this calculation include the need to protect groundwater resources, restrict development within flood prone areas, and preserve landscape habitats and other environmentally sensitive areas.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of consistency, the Land Preservation Plan and Wildlife Action Plan share the same Landscape Project habitat data to identify species of greatest conservation concern<sup>7</sup>.

In addition to providing habitat for nonhuman creatures, open space preservation also creates places for people to enjoy and interact with the outdoors. The SCORP cites that the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOL) has predicted that the population of New Jersey will reach 9.8 million people by 2025<sup>8</sup>, an increase of 1,000,000 residents within the next 17 years. The demand for outdoor recreational opportunity will increase proportionately. However, the state has been unable to meet even current open space preservation needs. Green Acres, a program within the NJDEP, oversees funding for land acquisition and facility development. Lands purchased with Green Acres funds must be set aside for recreation and conservation purposes in perpetuity. From 2000 to 2006, the Green Acres Program could provide only 18.5% of local government funding requests and 17.6% of non-profit funding requests.

**Green Acres Program - Unmet Need  
Average Annual Requests vs. Project Approvals<sup>9</sup>**

2000 – 2006

Local Government

Requests	\$489,000,000
Approvals	\$ 90,400,000 (18.5% of requests)

Nonprofit

Requests	\$93,900,000
Approvals	\$16,500,000 (17.6% of requests)

Total

Requests	\$582,900,000
Approvals	\$106,900,000 (18.3% of requests)

The SCORP recognizes the need for continued funding in its Conclusions and Recommendations:

“It shall be the policy of the State of New Jersey to continue to preserve land to protect water resources, biodiversity, historic resources, provide statewide public recreation opportunities and for the retention of agriculture in New Jersey....The preservation of land for conservation, recreation and agricultural purposes will *require substantial long term funding* and a concerted planning and acquisition effort.”<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added)

**New Jersey Highlands**

The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act of 2004 recognized the significance of this special natural resource area. The surface waters and aquifers underlying the 860,000 acres that make up the state designated New Jersey Highlands region is an essential source of drinking water to half of the state's population.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the Highlands provides habitat for a large number of threatened and endangered species while providing recreational opportunities such as swimming, fishing, hiking, birding, canoeing, kayaking, cycling, skiing, camping, and horseback riding.<sup>12</sup>

The Highlands Act established the NJ Highlands Council and charged this agency with developing a Regional Master Plan (RMP) that would establish a regional land management initiative to insure the protection of the Highlands' water supply. The RMP was adopted in September, 2008. The RMP, as mandated by the Act, provides several mechanisms to compensate landowners whose property values may have been altered by the Act's resource protective mandates. Three such mechanisms are Transfer of Development Rights, fee simple and development rights purchases. According to the RMP, the total cost for the requisite land acquisition in the Highlands area will total \$1.3 billion<sup>13</sup>. In

order for the RMP to succeed in its mandate to preserve the region's water and other environmental and cultural resources, Green Acres and Farmland Preservation funding must be available for the next 10 years at levels consistent with the prior 10 years.<sup>14</sup>

### **New Jersey Pinelands**

The New Jersey Pinelands is home to the most extensive surviving forest on the Eastern Seaboard between Maine and Florida. The Pinelands is a region of 1.1 million acres defined by federal and state legislation enacted to protect the unique ecological values of the Pine Barrens ecosystem by controlling development on a regional basis. The realization that the Pine Barrens is underlain by one of the continent's largest fresh water aquifers and that the Pines also serves as home for many rare and endangered plants and animals, led to passage of federal and state legislation to protect the area's natural resources. Section 502 of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 created the Pinelands National Reserve. New Jersey adopted the Pinelands Protection Act the following year. This Act implemented the federal statute, created the Pinelands Commission, and directed the Commission to adopt a Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) to manage development throughout the region.<sup>15</sup>

Although the State has preserved over 205,000 acres in the Pinelands, according to the Comprehensive Master Plan, at least half of the Pinelands is not protected. There remain at least 30,000 acres yet to be preserved.<sup>16</sup>

Echoing the need of the NJ Highlands Council and many others for a stable source of preservation funding, the Pinelands Preservation Alliance makes this appeal in their 2008 Annual Report:

"As New Jersey gets closer and closer to build out, open space, farmland, historic sites and flood-prone areas will be under ever greater development pressure. It is important that the residents of the state continue to lend their support to this effort as we begin the uphill battle over the next couple of years to develop a stable long-term source of funding."<sup>17</sup>

### **Barnegut Bay Watershed**

The Trust for Public Land with a steering committee of 50 stakeholders who live in or work on issues pertaining to Barnegut Bay developed a vision for future conservation called *Barnegut Bay 2020*. The goals of the plan include protection of water quality and supply, improvement of water quality, protection of native habitat and restoration of habitat, improvement of recreational access and retain scenic quality within the 425,000-acre Barnegut Bay watershed. According to the plan, the number of parcels and acreage needed to satisfy each goal is as follows:

- Water and habitat protection priorities: 192 parcels; 18,697 acres
- Recreation and access priorities: 447 parcels; 11,093 acres
- Water and habitat restoration priorities: 513 parcels; 4,792 acres
- Scenic priorities: 48 parcels; 1,845 acres

Deleted: ¶

A 1995 plan (*Century Plan*) by TPL of about the same area identified nearly 76,000 acres that needed to be preserved. In the 14 years since the development of that plan, a total of 32% of the priority acres were preserved but over 6% were also developed.<sup>18</sup>

### **Delaware River**

Like the Highlands and Pinelands areas, the Delaware River and its associated watersheds and tributaries are natural resources that provide potable water, significant recreational opportunities and a rich habitat for many threatened and endangered species. In July, 2008, in recognition of the high resource and special scenic value of the entirety of the non-tidal portion of the Delaware (Ft. Hancock, NY to Trenton, NJ), the NY/NJ/PA and federal Delaware River Basin Commission designated the river as "Significant Resource Waters" under its "Special Protection Waters program," requiring heightened discharge monitoring and mandating increased standards and enforcement.<sup>19</sup>

However, the River has been subject to serious flooding within the past several years. This underscores the need to develop flood management strategies to safeguard the health and welfare of the public. In 2007, New Jersey appointed a Flood Mitigation Task Force to study the seriousness of this issue. The Task Force concluded that the key component to any flood mitigation plan was the acquisition of flood plain properties for the Delaware and additionally, several other water bodies in the State.<sup>20</sup> The cost of these acquisitions should be calculated in order to document the funding need for this critical flood control strategy.

### **Historic Preservation**

Settled in the 1630s and one of the thirteen original colonies, New Jersey is home to 1,601 sites that are designated on either the State or National Registers of Historic Places.<sup>21</sup> New Jersey provided the primary staging ground for a number of important Revolutionary Era battles and events; its iron mines provided ammunition to soldiers; its hills provided safe encampments and overlooks for General Washington and his army. In addition to recognizing such historically significant buildings and sites, New Jersey also has demonstrated a commitment to honor and preserve historic neighborhoods and villages, e.g. the Abbott Farm National Historic District, Skillman Village and Whitesbog Village<sup>22</sup>.

The preservation and restoration of many of these sites, particularly in urban areas, represent a cost effective approach to meeting the escalating demand for housing, schools, jobs and cultural facilities. Adaptive reuse of existing properties in areas with infrastructure in place represents Smart Growth principles at their best. They reflect two of the primary goals of the State's Development and Redevelopment Plan: The redevelopment of existing centers and the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas.<sup>23</sup>

The New Jersey Historic Trust was established by law in 1967 and has been a leading technical and financial resource for preservation of historic properties. The mission of the Trust is to facilitate historic preservation through education,

Deleted: ¶

financial programs and stewardship. This three-pronged approach to historic preservation will be effective only if the funding for its implementation is secured. Since 2000, the Trust has been the recipient of \$44 million of funding from the Garden State Preservation Trust; these monies were used to rehabilitate 273 sites. However, given that there are over 1600 registered sites in New Jersey, there remains a great deal of work to be done. Sites require ongoing stewardship and eligible sites need funding for listing on the registers. Important sites are yet to be discovered and recognized for their contribution to our historical and cultural landscape.

Waterloo Village, a 400-acre state owned historic site in Stanhope in Sussex County has been mothballed due to lack of funding. The village is a restored 19<sup>th</sup> century canal town approximately halfway along the 102-mile length of the Morris Canal, a National Historic Site. Waterloo possessed all of the services of a canal way-station, including an inn, general store, church, blacksmith shop, gristmill and watermill. In past years it played host to an annual jazz festival, rock concerts and the highly regarded Dodge Foundation Annual Poetry Festival. About 40,000 schoolchildren visited its 30 historic buildings, canal lock and inclined plane annually.<sup>24</sup> The Village is closed to the public due to lack of funding to maintain the buildings and grounds.

According to the NJ Keep It Green Coalition website:

"The New Jersey Historic Trust has received capital and planning grant requests totaling more than 3 times the \$6 million in grant funds available each year."<sup>25</sup>

### **Farmland Preservation**

New Jersey's early economy was predominately agrarian and our farming heritage is proudly memorialized by the three plows in the center of the Great Seal of New Jersey, adopted in 1777. In addition to the important role agriculture has played in the State's economy, it has also provided many portions of the state with a small town, rural lifestyle that has sustained many generations of family farmers. New Jersey's agricultural tradition provides recreation and outreach opportunities as well. Farm tours and farm vacations, wineries, organic co-ops, pick-your-own crops and farm stands. A 2006 study conducted by the NJ Department of Agriculture categorized 96 distinct revenue producing, farm-related outreach and recreational activities.<sup>26</sup>

According to the Census of Agriculture, the farmland in New Jersey totaled 987,309 acres in 1978. The 2007 Census shows that the number of acres in farmland has dropped over 250,000 acres, a 26% decline to 733,450 acres. In the five-year period between 2002-2007, farmland has dropped 9%. Since 1978, the average farm size decreased 43%, and the average age of farmland owners has increased. In 1978, the average age of a farmland owner was 52. In 2007, the average age was 57.<sup>27</sup> As a result of the State's Farmland Preservation Program, 1,810 farms totaling 176,435 acres have been preserved in 17 counties.

<sup>28</sup>

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) oversees the farmland preservation program for the state. SADC estimates that an additional 450,000 acres of these lands should be preserved to ensure a stable base of farmland to sustain the State's agricultural industry.<sup>29</sup> According to the SADC, the demand for State Farmland Preservation Program funding in fiscal year 2009 is \$270 million, compared with \$91 million in state acquisition funding that is actually available.<sup>30</sup>

### **Recreation**

Publicly supported recreational facilities in New Jersey accommodate a great diversity of activities, including those that rely on the quality of the outdoor environment (trails, boat launch facilities, picnicking areas, campgrounds, others) to those that rely on quality built facilities (athletic fields, courts, others).

The very same open space landscapes that provide water quality benefits and wildlife habitat are also magnets for the increasing recreational pursuits of residents. According to a report<sup>31</sup> prepared by the NJDEP in 2007, approximately 2.4 million people participate in some form of wildlife recreation in New Jersey each year. As stated above, the NJDOL has predicted that the population of New Jersey will increase by 1,000,000 residents within the next 17 years. In addition, it is likely that there will be an upward shift in the age of this population given the sheer number of baby boomers entering the senior stage of life. These senior residents are predicted to be a very active group that will engage in many outdoor recreational activities. The SCORP indicates that the need for open space and recreation will continue and possibly even escalate.<sup>32</sup>

The SCORP utilizes the Balanced Land Use Concept to develop guidelines for determining the acreage required to meet the recreation and park needs of municipalities and counties. This approach recommends the following MINIMUM areas:

Deleted: ¶

	<b>Balanced Land Use Guidelines</b>
Municipal Level	3% of the developed and developable area of the municipality
County Level	7% of the developed and developable area of the county

Developable Areas excludes acreage of slopes over 12%, wetlands, low density areas of the Pinelands, and federal and state-owned open space.<sup>33</sup>

This approach provides a relatively simple tool to evaluate the adequacy of recreational facilities in order to determine the unmet need for these amenities. It is unknown how many towns or counties meet these criteria.

### **Trails**

The New Jersey Trails System Act of 1974 recognized the need for a State Trails System as well as a comprehensive plan for its implementation. The New Jersey Trails Plan Update of 2008 is the most recent iteration of this plan.

According to the Update there are funding shortfalls for developing and maintaining the current and future trail network in the State. At current staffing levels in the Office of Natural Lands Management, the advancement of the State Trails System has slowed, and current funding levels do not cover the cost of trail acquisition, maintenance, updating inventories or trails information. The NJDEP has received an average of 125 grant applications per year for the last three years to develop and maintain trails. Only about 30% of the applications have received funding. The total funding requested over the last three years has been over \$3 million, over 3 ½ times the amount available.<sup>34</sup>

Other needs as outlined in the 2008 Trails Plan Update include trails in urban areas, trails for people with sensory and mobility impairments, facilities to accommodate a diversity of trail uses (canoeists, equestrians, etc.) and trail maintenance<sup>35</sup>.

### **Resource Stewardship**

Since the inception of the Green Acres Program, New Jersey has invested \$2.7 billion dollars in land preservation, parks and recreation. In order to ensure that this investment retains its value for future generations, it must be maintained and stewarded. Like any basic housekeeping activity, stewardship is not glamorous, but it is a fundamental responsibility in order to maintain the integrity, resource and recreational value held in the public's trust. The SCORP discusses several maintenance activities as being paramount to these efforts.

Invasive species represents one of the most serious threats to the biodiversity of preserved lands. Non-native invasives crowd out native flora and disrupt ecosystems. Unchecked invasives in lakes and ponds can impact water quality, drinking water distribution systems and the health of the aquatic population. Recreational experiences can be degraded—and if not properly managed, recreational access may even contribute to the problem by the unintentional distribution of invasive species.

Maintaining the investment of natural lands for wildlife integrity is also cost effective. According to the State Wildlife Action Plan, "It is more costly to protect an imperiled species than to prevent a species from becoming imperiled."

In addition, there are improvements and upgrades needed for state park facilities, visitor's centers, public access sites and urban parks. The costs for stewardship of preserved lands must be considered in order to determine appropriate funding levels. According to the SCORP:

"Over \$410 million in capital improvement projects have been identified as needed for state parks, forests, historic sites and wildlife management areas".<sup>36</sup>

The Keep It Green (KIG) coalition of over 90 statewide, local and regional organizations ranging from sportsmen's groups, environmental organizations, affordable housing and urban park advocates asserts that every New Jersey resident deserves well-maintained, accessible neighborhood parks, wildlife areas

and historic sites. KIG also cites a \$200 million backlog in repairs as well as reduced numbers of conservation officers, park facilities and lost educational opportunities. "Communities rely on these areas for a high quality of life, livable neighborhoods and sustainable economics." (quote from KIG website) Consistent funding to address capital projects and adequate park support staff is needed to protect and maintain New Jersey's natural and cultural resource investments. KIG identifies the following funding needs per year: \$225 million for land acquisition, \$100 million for capital projects (\$36 million for state projects and \$20 million for grants to local governments), \$56 million for operation, maintenance and stewardship.

As an example, the NJ Division of Parks and Forestry staffing fell by 1/3 in the last decade even as open spaces acquisitions increased by 350,000 acres during that time. The State Park Service has also been unable to fill 130 vacancies in its staff. Funding to replenish enforcement and management staff is required in addition to the appropriation necessary for capital improvement projects. If the entire state landholdings were included, the number of acres that require stewardship grows to 738,388 acres and accomplishes different goals. Wildlife management areas, as an example, are managed to maintain biodiversity. The Division of Fish & Wildlife, manager of state wildlife management areas, has 150 employees, and reportedly at less than 80% staffed.

There is no study available that identifies local government need for stewardship funding or how they are caring for the lands preserved through open space trusts or in other ways. With increasing public pressure to reduce local property taxes and decrease in state aid that supplements local government budgets, it is not an unlikely assumption to propose that capital development and general management funds are not allocated. Most local governments are just trying to keep up with mowing sports fields and are not actively managing open space or natural lands.

### **Urban Parks**

Urban parks are critical to the infrastructure of successful, livable cities. Preserving sufficient natural areas and maintaining these as healthy environments represent a challenge in densely populated spaces.

Newark is the fifth most densely populated large city in the United States (after New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and Boston). However, it has fewer acres of parkland per resident than any of the 55 biggest cities in the nation: only 2.9 acres per 1000 residents. Only 5.3 percent of the city's area is devoted to parks. It is hard to overstate Newark's dearth of park acreage and facilities. Essex County operates the two large parks in Newark, Branch Brook and Weequahic Parks and five medium-size parks. Fifty-five very small parks, ten acres or less, are run by the city (many of these are, in fact, traffic triangles and medians). Even counting a hypothetical quarter-mile radius around each small park and half-mile radius around the big parks, large numbers of Newarkers are not close to greenspace. The situation is particularly dire for children; 34% of Newark's children under age 14 do not live within one-quarter mile of any parkland at all.<sup>37</sup>

In comparison to 29 other major American cities, Newark is second to last in terms of municipal spending on parks and recreation.<sup>38</sup>

The litany of parks and park facilities that have been closed and lost in Newark is disheartening. Playgrounds in parks are also remarkably scarce, with each one serving an average of 27,000 people, compared to a national big-city average of about 6,400. Newark has large amount of vacant land potentially available for the creation of parks and community gardens, but the concept has not generated the widespread interest seen in New York and Philadelphia.<sup>39</sup> The city is in need of greater park and open space leadership from both the political and the private sectors.<sup>40</sup>

Weequahic Park, an Olmstead designed 311 acre Essex County Park in Newark's South Ward had deteriorated into a danger zone of drug dealing, prostitution and gang related homicides with deteriorated roads and recreational facilities. The Weequahic Park Association, formed about 17 years ago, provided the stewardship to turn the park around so that it is vibrant and safe, heavily used by families, bicyclists, joggers and others on mild evenings and weekends. The Association has installed a rubberized running track, a combination playground and water park, restored the tennis courts and installed an artificial turf multi-use athletic field with night lighting and stadium seating.

According to Wilbur O'Neil, the Association's President, the Association is unable to raise enough money to qualify for Green Acres matching funding. Essex County, however, receives matching funding from the state to benefit the park that is managed by the Association. But, claims O'Neil, there is no accountability to show that the Association, a non-profit agency, actually receives or manages the grant award. In addition, Green Acres does not provide any financial support for nonprofit staff. Private foundations are a possible source of funding for Green Acres matching grants. However, O'Neil says, they are reluctant to fund grass roots organizations, like the WPA, who are not staffed to Foundation standards.<sup>41</sup>

The City of Camden faces so many challenges that recognition of the value of its parks is of low priority. While many similar industrial cities— Pittsburgh, Providence and Chattanooga, for example — have framed their revitalization around parks and greenspace, Camden has not embraced this concept. Camden's parks and greenspaces are hugely undervalued for their role in neighborhood revitalization, beyond the value of commercial development on the Delaware River waterfront.<sup>42</sup>

In 2003, the city spent nearly \$7 million on capital improvements for parks, funded primarily from the state Green Acres program. However, support for parks management was not secured, nor was there success in finding community-based partners who might have leveraged maintenance partnerships. In the city's rush to reorganize and become more efficient, the parks department has been more or less dismantled with parks-related tasks being divided among the departments of planning, public works and health and human services. The city's ability to manage its own park system is in question.

Camden County's open space tax was created by voter approval (67% Yes) in November 1998. With a tax rate of 1 cent per \$100 of assessed property value, the fund was projected to raise roughly \$2 million per year. A subsequent open space plan was approved in 1999 and land acquisition began in 2000. Projects sponsored by any of the 37 Camden County municipalities, qualified non-profit land trusts, and county agencies such as the Department of Parks and the County Agricultural Development Board (CADB) are eligible for funding. Important to note is that Camden City has not yet received funding from this measure, though city voters approved the measure by 70% (2,239 votes) — a *higher margin of approval than county residents*.<sup>43</sup>

Deleted: ¶

---

<sup>1</sup> New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection, Green Acres Program, 2008 – 2012 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), November 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Page 2

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Page 31

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Page 16

<sup>5</sup> NJ Legislature, S-889, A-1997, signed by Gov. August, 2002

<sup>6</sup> New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection, Green Acres Program, 2005–2007 Land Preservation Plan, December 2004, Pages 20 - 22

<sup>7</sup> New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife Action Plan for Wildlife of Greatest Conservation Need, September 9, 2004, Revised: January 23, 2008, Page x

<sup>8</sup> SCORP, Page 50

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p.53

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Page 67

<sup>11</sup> The NJ Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act, P.L. 2004, c. 120)

<sup>12</sup> NJ Highlands Coalition website, <http://www.njhighlandscalition.org>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Page 132

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> 2008 Annual Report, Pinelands Preservation Alliance

<sup>16</sup> SCORP, Page 80

<sup>17</sup> 2008 Annual Report, Pinelands Preservation Alliance

<sup>18</sup> Trust for Public Land, *Barnegat Bay 2020: A Vision for the Future of Conservation*, draft, 2009.

- 
- <sup>19</sup> DRBC News Release, July 2008
- <sup>20</sup> New Jersey Flood Mitigation Task Force, Report on Delaware River Flood Mitigation, August 22, 2006
- <sup>21</sup> NJ State Historic Preservation Office website, [http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/1identify/nrsr\\_lists.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/1identify/nrsr_lists.htm)
- <sup>22</sup> New Jersey Historic Trust website, <http://www.njht.org/>
- <sup>23</sup> NJ State Historic Preservation Office, *NJ Partners for Preservation: A Blueprint for Building for Building Historic Preservation into NJ's Future*, 2002
- <sup>24</sup> New York Times "In the Region" section, *Mothballed 19<sup>th</sup> Century Village Waits for Revival*, February 19, 2007
- <sup>25</sup> NJ KIG Coalition website, <http://www.njkeepitgreen.org/needs.htm>
- <sup>26</sup> NJDA and the Food Policy Institute at Rutgers U., *The Opportunity for Agritourism Development in New Jersey*, October 2006
- <sup>27</sup> [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/New\\_Jersey/index](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/New_Jersey/index).
- <sup>28</sup> <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/sadc/farmpreserve/progress/stats/preservedsummary.pdf>
- <sup>29</sup> SCORP, Page 41
- <sup>30</sup> Correspondence from SADC to NJCF, April 17, 2009.
- <sup>31</sup> New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection, *Evaluating New Jersey's Natural Capital An Assessment of the Economic Value of the State's Natural Resources*, April 2007
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid, Page 53
- <sup>33</sup> SCORP, Page 55
- <sup>34</sup> NJ Trails Plan Update, Page 10
- <sup>35</sup> NJ Trails Plan Update, Pages 22 - 24
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid, Page 1
- <sup>37</sup> Harnik, Peter, *An Open Space Analysis of Newark, NJ*, The Trust for Public Land
- <sup>38</sup> Greater Newark Conservancy Website, <http://www.citybloom.org/environmental-justice.htm>
- <sup>39</sup> Harnik, Peter, *An Open Space Analysis of Newark, NJ*, The Trust for Public Land
- <sup>40</sup> ibid
- <sup>41</sup> Written statement from Wilbur O'Neill and discussion with author, March, 2009
- <sup>42</sup> The Trust for Public Land, *The Role of Parks and Greenspace in Redevelopment: Camden, New Jersey*, 2004
- <sup>43</sup> ibid