GOVERNOR SIGNS OPEN SPACE LEGISLATION

PRINCETON, July 31 – Governor Jon S. Corzine today signed legislation putting an initiative on the 2007 ballot which would authorize $200 million to allow the state to continue preserving open space, farmland and historic sites. The initiative also provides for an expanded Blue Acres program, which funds the purchase of flood-prone properties.

"Preserving New Jersey’s open space, farmland and historic sites and reviving the Blue Acres program is vital to our environment and to our economy,” Governor Corzine said. “I strongly encourage voters to support this initiative, which will enable us to continue this program while we work to find a permanent, sustainable funding mechanism.”

If approved by voters, the $200 million will be allocated as follows:
- $109 million for the acquisition and development of land for public recreation and conservation;
- $45 million to the State;
- $55 million to local governments; and
- $9 million for 50 percent grants to qualifying tax exempt non-profit organizations;
- $73 million for farmland preservation;
- $12 million to revive the “Blue Acres” program, allowing the State to purchase properties in floodways that are prone to flood or storm damage; and,
- $6 million for historic preservation.

All grant proposals and funding requests will be thoroughly reviewed and evaluated by professional staff using consistent and objective criteria.

“As New Jersey’s population continues to grow, so will the amount of space needed to house all of its residents,” said Senator Sweeney, (D-Gloucester, Cumberland and Salem), who sponsored the bill in the Senate. “This funding will allow towns around the State to conserve necessary open space and historic properties so that future generations will have access to some of the State’s most valuable resources. While development is absolutely necessary, it cannot consume all of the State’s open space.”

“New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation. We have a responsibility to insure the highest quality of life for future generations,” said Senator Lance (R-Warren, Hunterdon), a Senate sponsor. “This bill is a step toward fulfilling that responsibility, by providing the funding to conserve open space, provide recreational areas and protect drinking water supplies.”

“New Jersey is running out of time to protect its diminishing tracts of open space,” said Assemblyman McKeon (D-Essex), who sponsored the bill in the Assembly. “Passage of this land preservation referendum is critically important. We have a responsibility to ensure the continued success of this far-reaching program that protects valuable open space areas like urban parks, farmlands, historic sites, and flood-prone neighborhoods.”

“New Jersey has long been lauded as having one of the nation’s most successful programs for protecting essential areas of open space,” said Assemblyman Fisher (D-Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem), another Assembly sponsor. “The future of neighborhood parks, local historic sites, and critical habitats for wildlife in the Highlands, Pinelands and wetlands across New Jersey is in the voters hands. Now, it is up to New Jersey’s residents to give their vote of support for protecting our state’s most precious natural areas.”

New Jersey has preserved over 1.3 million acres of open space and farmland. In addition to the environmental impact of preserving open space, a recent DEP report valued New Jersey’s “natural capital,” which includes open space, at $20 billion annually.

The bill, A-4402/S-3005, was also sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblymembers Gordon (D-Bergen) and Rooney (R-Bergen).