

Open Space Preservation

Background

New Jersey's open space provides a variety of environmental and economic benefits including protection of water resources, preservation of biodiversity and wildlife habitats, creation of greenways, enhancement of urban centers, and support of recreational opportunities. Open space also is a vital strategy to preserve land for agriculture, protect rural landscapes and sustain the state's \$42.9 billion tourism industry.¹ Furthermore, open space projects and park and recreation projects are important to successful urban redevelopment initiatives. Because preserving open space plays such an important role in bolstering the state's quality of life and benefiting the environment, but incurs only minimal costs for upkeep, it is generally considered one of the most cost-effective and efficient means of environmental protection.

In 1998, New Jersey voters approved a constitutional dedication of \$98 million annually to create a stable funding source to preserve open space, farmland and historic resources, as well as to provide funds for recreational development. Signed into law in 1999, the "Garden State Preservation Trust Act" (N.J.S.A. 13:8C-1 et seq.) provides a framework for the state to set aside that amount of state sales tax revenues each year for 10 years, and to issue up to \$1 billion in bond proceeds to supplement the sales tax revenues over the same period. Between June 1999 and May 2007, the Trust approved \$1.4 billion for state, local government, and nonprofit open space preservation as well as park and recreation projects. Additional open space funding has come from a \$200 million Green Acres bond referendum in 2007 and another Green Acres bond referendum in 2009 which approved \$242 million for state land, local government, nonprofit, and Blue Acres projects.² Beginning in July 2015, 4% of the revenue derived from the Corporate Business Tax Act (CBT) (C.54:10A-1 et seq.), estimated to be \$71 million, will be dedicated to Green Acres, Blues Acres, and Farmland Preservation programs as well as historic preservation under the New Jersey Open Space Preservation Funding Amendment. In 2019, the CBT dedication for these programs will increase to 6% which will generate an estimated \$117 million annually.³ In addition to state funding, 236 municipalities and 21 counties in New Jersey assess a tax for land preservation, park and recreation projects and historic preservation, which generated \$292.8 million in 2017.⁴

Status and Trends

As of December 2017, New Jersey has preserved 1,288,162 acres of public open space.⁵ With 230,040 acres of preserved farmland, the total of preserved open space is over 1,500,000 acres.⁵ Data suggest that the acreage of open space and preserved farmland continue to increase annually (See Figure 1).⁴

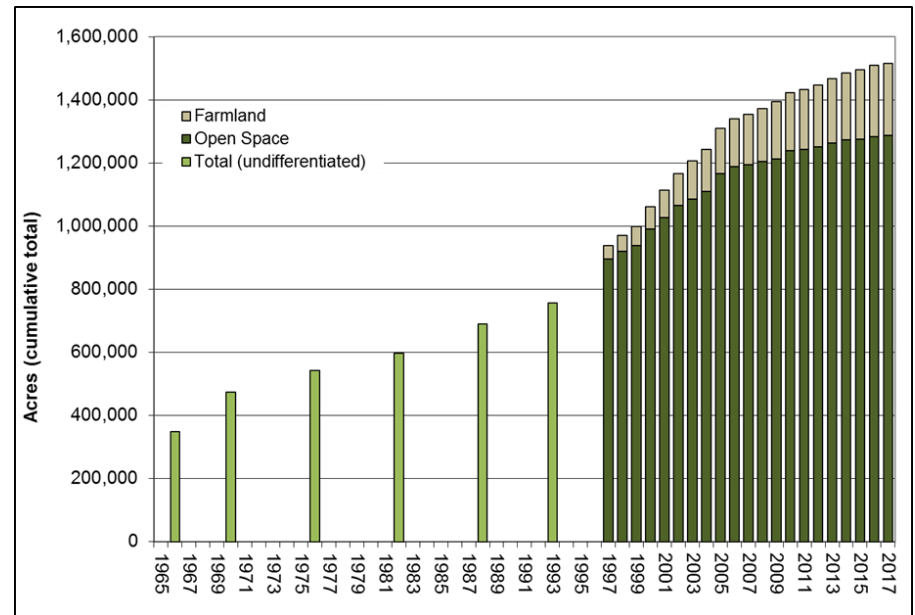


Figure 1. Open space and farmland preserved in New Jersey over time. ⁴

In February of 2005, the Department announced the completion of its Land Preservation Plan and State Open Space Acquisition Priority System, which was mandated by 2002 legislation (N.J.S.A. 13:8C-25.1 et al.). This master plan placed particular emphasis on identifying areas important for water resource protection. In addition, the priority system evaluates potential state open space acquisition projects and guides funding decisions, giving special weight to water resource and flood prone area protection.

Outlook and Implications

While significant progress has been made in open space preservation, as shown in the graph above, population and development pressures continue to be the major threats to preservation efforts. According to census data⁶, the state's population has grown by nearly 214,000 people since 2010, increasing to over 9 million people in mid-2017 and is forecasted to surpass 9.53 million during 2029.⁷ With an estimated 1,225 people per square mile⁸, New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the U.S. Continued development pressure is also a factor. Between 2013 and 2017, 138,703 residential building permits were issued throughout the state.⁹ The combined pressures of development and population increases make open space preservation a critical issue. Given the amount of buildable land remaining in the state and potential rates of land development and preservation, New Jersey could be built out by the middle of this century.¹⁰ Coupled with the fact that New Jersey has experienced a steady loss of farmland of about 9,000 acres on average annually since 1997, the need to preserve open space becomes obvious.¹¹

Ironically, as the population grows and the open space available for protection dwindles, the need for that open space increases. The amount of open space necessary to perform vital functions, such as replenishing aquifers, protecting wildlife habitats and satisfying recreational demand, will increase. The ongoing dedication of state and local funding efforts will help to meet this growing need.

More Information

DEP's Green Acres program has compiled detailed information on open space preservation in New Jersey, available at www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres.

References

¹State of New Jersey, Division of Travel and Tourism (posted) Tourism Economics, 2017. The Economic Impact of Tourism in New Jersey, 2017. <https://www.visitnj.org/sites/default/files/2017-nj-economic-impact.pdf> Accessed 10/1/2018.

²Personal communication with Steve Jandoli, Supervising Program Specialist with NJDEP's Green Acres Program.

³Funding estimates from Legislative Fiscal Estimates; Senate Committee Substitute for Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 84, State of New Jersey 216th Legislature dated: August 11, 2014. http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2014/Bills/SCR/84_E1.PDF, Accessed 4/11/2018.

⁴Personal communication with Eric Knudsen with NJDEP's Green Acres Program, May 2018.

⁵State of New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection, Green Acres Program, 2018. Draft 2018-2022 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Recreation Plan, April 2018. http://www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres/pdf/2018_draft_SCORP.pdf, Accessed 6/14/18.

⁶Census Bureau, 2018. Datasets – Population, Population Change, and Estimated Components of Population Change: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017. <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2017/demo/popest/state-total.html#ds>, Accessed 4/11/2018.

⁷NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2014. <http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/dmograph/lfproj/sptab1.htm>, Accessed 4/1/2018.

⁸NJ Department of Health, 2015. Population Density by County and Municipality: New Jersey, 2010 and 2015. <http://nj.gov/health/fhs/primarycare/documents/Rural%20NJ%20density2015-revised%20municipalities.pdf>, Accessed 4/11/2018.

⁹NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2017. http://www.nj.gov/labor/lpa/industry/bp/bp_index.html, Accessed 5/3/2018.

¹⁰Hasse, J. and R. G. Lathrop. 2010. Changing Landscapes in the Garden State: Urban Growth and Open Space Loss in NJ 1986 through 2007. <http://gis.rowan.edu/projects/luc/index.html>, Accessed 4/11/2018.

¹¹USDA, 2012, Census of Agriculture New Jersey State and County Data, Vol. 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 30, Issued May 2014: Table 1 (Historical Highlights: 2012 and Earlier Census Years). https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/New_Jersey/, Accessed 4/11/2018.