

Open Space Preservation

Background

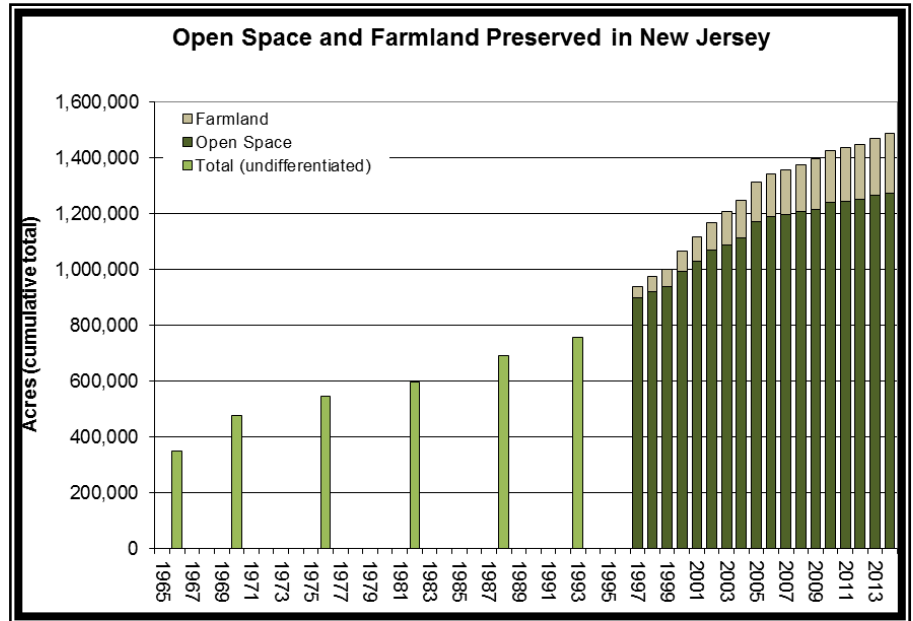
New Jersey's open space provides a variety of environmental and economic benefits including protection of water resources, preservation of biodiversity and wildlife habitats, creation of greenways, enhancement of urban centers, and support of recreational opportunities. Open space also is a vital strategy to preserve land for agriculture, protect rural landscapes and sustain the State's \$40 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.) 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%.³ In addition to State funding, 233 municipalities and 21 counties in New Jersey assess a tax for land preservation, park and recreation projects and historic preservation, which generated \$276 million in 2013.

Trends

As of December 2014, New Jersey has preserved 1,272,771 acres of public open space. With 212,129 acres of preserved farmland, the total of preserved open space

is 1,484,900 acres. Data suggest that the acreage of open space and preserved farmland continue to increase annually. (See Figure *Open Space and Farmland Preserved in New Jersey*.)



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 data, the State's population has grown by over 450,000 people since 2000, increasing to over 8.8 million people in 2012 and is forecasted to surpass 9.25 million within the next decade.⁴ With 1,205 people per square mile, New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the US. Continued development pressure is also a factor. Between 2004 and 2013 nearly

234,000 residential building permits were issued throughout the State.⁵ 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.⁶

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.state.nj.us/dep/greenacres.

References

¹Tourism economic data available at <http://www.visitnj.org/sites/default/master/files/2013-nj-economic-impact.pdf>

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 available at http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2014/Bills/SCR/84_E1.PDF

⁴Population projections available at <http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/dmograph/lfproj/sptab1.htm>

⁵Data available from the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development at http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lpa/industry/bp/bp_index.html.

⁶Hasse, J. and R. G. Lathrop. 2010. Changing Landscapes in the Garden State: Urban growth and open space loss in NJ 1986 thru 2007. Available at <http://gis.rowan.edu/projects/luc/index.html>.



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