One Million More Acres or Bust:
A Quarter Century of Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation in New Jersey

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In 1999, Governor Christine Todd Whitman signed the Garden State Preservation Trust Act, a law that set a goal of preserving one million more acres of open space, farmland, and historic structures, and provided funding through a dedication of a portion of the sales tax to bond up to $2.5 billion to purchase land or development rights, (re)build parks and recreation areas, and restore historic structures. The law resulted in over 350 municipalities and all 21 counties enacting an open space tax to supplement state funds and led to planning initiatives that enabled applicants to gain priority for funding decisions.

Over a decade later, the State Legislature and Governor approved a new funding source (i.e., the Corporate Business Tax), and in 2019, Governor Murphy signed P.L. 2019, c.136 using CBT revenues for FY 2020 and beyond for Green Acres, Blue Acres, Farmland, and Historic Preservation. However, attention to open space, farmland, and historic preservation has waned as development pressure in suburban and rural communities subsided.

While 248,000 acres of farmland have been preserved since the program’s inception in 1983, making New Jersey a national leader in farmland preservation, we’re only half-way towards the goal of preserving the 500,000 acres needed to ensure a successful agricultural industry. Regarding open space, New Jersey has preserved 1.14 million acres for parks, wildlife areas, and other natural areas; however, significant lands with critical natural resources remain exposed to potential development with no real protection. And, year after year, we see Preservation New Jersey’s Top 10 List of Endangered Historic Places, reminding us that decay and disuse can rob us of our cultural assets. From publicly available GIS data, we’ve calculated that 171,800 acres of open space2 and 177,000 acres of farmland3 have been preserved since 2001. Thus, approximately 350,000 acres of open space and farmland have been preserved towards the total goal of preserving one million more acres.

Over 200 thousand acres with historic significance have been designated, but not all have been preserved.4

“New Jersey has 4.8 million acres of land. In some areas of the state, nearly 90% of that land has been developed.”5 With approximately 1.6 million acres currently remaining that are neither preserved nor developed, how can we continue to

1 https://pub.njleg.gov/bills/9899/PL99/152_PDF
4 Based on New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office data.
expand and accelerate the pace of New Jersey’s open space, farmland and historic preservation?6

As we celebrate 40 years of NJ’s Farmland Preservation program, can we wait another 40 years to preserve enough land to maintain a viable agricultural industry? Climate change is impacting New Jersey’s water quality and quantity, with wetter winters, drier summers, and more extreme storms and precipitation as the new normal threatening freshwater resources, can land based natural solutions help fortify the resiliency of urban and suburban communities?7 With a slowing pace of land preservation and Green Acres program acquisitions trending down, what modifications in funding, policy, and process are needed to both increase the efficiency, equity, and effectiveness of preservation programs?

This research project employs a policy-focused approach to review the initial goals of the Million Acre Initiative and utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to open space/farmland/historic preservation in New Jersey, and proposes policy recommendations for better land use, increased open space, farmland, and historic preservation, as well as more efficient, effective and equitable green infrastructure investment.

Key recommendations from survey responses:8

- Focus on strategic priorities that address climate resilience, watershed protection, habitat corridors, and equitable access to open spaces for underserved communities.
- Aid in support of agricultural viability, with an emphasis on assisting farmers in adapting to climate change and increasing availability of locally grown food.
- Amend state laws to provide a wider range of benefits for all landowners who choose to conserve land, including tax benefits and attractive finance vehicles.
- Create a “Woodland Management Program” aimed at purchasing easements on privately held, forested land – run in parallel with the farmland preservation program.

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7 Ibid.
8 As part of the stakeholder engagement, we developed a survey with questions spanning the field of open space, farmland, and historical site preservation. The survey questions were prepared to elicit meaningful responses that provide insights into the successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in these preservation efforts. A sample survey may be found in Appendix B along with a listing of those that responded.
• Incorporate plans to manage more regenerative programs for soil health and water quality.
• Increase the DEP budget for capital facilities and staff to manage more lands.
• Increase stewardship funding to counties and municipalities for better care and management of already preserved lands.
• Streamline the grant approval process to avoid delays.
• Re-energize the message and the benefits of preservation along with environmental education in all schools.

Key recommendations from research:

• Improve the administration of preservation efforts.
• Utilize statewide, regional, and local land use planning to enhance preservation.
• Enhance urban open space opportunities.
• Recognize how climate change, environmental injustice, economic uncertainty, COVID, and demographic and technological changes present new constraints and opportunities.
• Recognize the economic value of natural, agricultural, and cultural resources in land valuation/appraisals.
• Recognize the economic value of natural, agricultural, and cultural resources for tourism and economic development.
Abstract

This report begins with a summary of the history of open space/farmland/historic preservation in New Jersey and the efforts to adopt the Garden State Preservation Trust Act, as well as a status report to-date. Through quantitative and qualitative analyses, research of relevant reports and literature, and survey responses from over a dozen leaders in government, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector, this research project measures the overall efficacy of the Million Acre Initiative, focusing on the amount of land preserved for open space and farmland, cost to preserve lands across the state, and how future preservation efforts can meet multiple goals.

This project provides the Governor, Legislature, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, New Jersey Department of Agriculture and State Agriculture Development Committee, New Jersey Historic Trust, and other government agencies, NGOs, other stakeholders, and the public with findings and policy recommendations to improve open space, farmland, and historic preservation efforts in the Garden State.

The authors would like to dedicate this report to two leaders of the conservation movement who were instrumental in the Million Acre effort and recently passed away:

The Hon. Maureen Ogden was an Assemblywoman, Former Mayor of Milburn, Chair of the Garden State Preservation Trust, and Chair of the Governor’s Council on New Jersey Outdoors. She received her Master of City and Regional Planning degree from Rutgers University and dedicated her life to conserving natural resources.

The Hon. Robert Shinn Jr. was an Assemblyman, Former Burlington County Freeholder, Former Mayor of Hainesport, Vice Chair of the New Jersey Pinelands Commission, and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection who strongly advocated passage of the Garden State Preservation Trust Act. He led the effort to secure the first conservation easement in the Pinelands and sponsored legislation to enable Transfer of Development Rights in New Jersey.
As the nation’s most densely populated state, New Jersey has a reputation for suburban sprawl development that belies its nickname, “The Garden State.” “You’re from Jersey? What Exit?” is both a joke and a truism for many. And yet, residents value open space, farmland, and historic preservation, and have voted numerous times to support funding to keep New Jersey green.

In the 1990’s, after decades of development pressure, many were left to wonder if we’d lose the opportunity to leave our children and grandchildren with a landscape that many of us have known and valued. Development pressure threatened New Jersey’s agricultural industry by stripping it of the land base critical to support the industry. Forests and other natural lands were converted into housing, offices, strip malls, and other development. Two million acres were left in New Jersey – what would be its future?

Voters overwhelmingly approved an amendment to the New Jersey Constitution to dedicate a portion of the sales tax for open space, farmland, and historic preservation. The following year, a law was enacted to implement the desires of New Jerseyans to preserve a million more acres.

Fast-forward two decades and many of the same challenges remain. In June 2020, the American Farmland Trust (AFT) finalized a multi-year study of farmland loss across the U.S.9 “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States” identified the paradox we face:

- New Jersey ranked third among states with the most threatened agricultural land, but
- New Jersey ranked first for implementing policies and programs to stem the loss of farmland.

This project analyzes the amount of open space (parks, natural areas, blue acres, etc.) and acres of historic significance designated for preservation, compares this data with stated and implied statewide goals and targets, and provides findings and policy recommendations to ensure these programs are efficient, effective, and equitable.

This report provides policy recommendations to strengthen municipal, county, regional, and State programs, as well as enhance opportunities for nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals to preserve natural and cultural resources. The research effort also explores stewardship issues and raises critical questions regarding the optimal allocation of funding for acquisition vs. land improvement. Additionally, the research explores how climate change requires

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a reexamination of State and local conservation policies and whether other planning techniques such as Transfer of Development Rights, Purchase of Development Rights, Zoning, etc. could reduce the need for future public expenditures and result in more efficient, effective, and equitable allocation of public dollars for preservation.
New Jersey has a rich history of open space preservation dating back to the 19th century. One of the earliest efforts was the creation of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission in 1900, which protected the Hudson River Palisades from the quarrying operations along the Palisades Cliffs of New Jersey. In the early 20th century, the state also began to acquire land for state parks and forests.

The 1934 New Jersey State Plan featured a map of “Future Land Utilization” identifying lands generally suitable for continued farming and lands of low agricultural value – best devoted to forest production, recreation, protection of public water supply, and incidental uses.\(^\text{10}\)

In 1941, the State Planning Board called for preserving more land for recreation, including ocean beaches, mountain ridge tops, river corridors, and the ecologically sensitive Pine Barrens.\(^\text{11}\) A decade later, the state purchased lands that were to become the Island Beach State Park and Wharton State Forest.\(^\text{12}\) In the late 1950’s, voters approved funding to acquire land to construct the Spruce Run and Round Valley reservoirs, which serve as water supply and recreation facilities.\(^\text{13}\)

A seminal report, “The Race for Open Space,” was produced by the Regional Plan Association, documenting that New Jersey wasn’t prepared for a population projected to double or triple in the next 25 years.\(^\text{14}\) The prosperous, development-driven 1950’s led many to understand that a lot more preserved land would be needed to support a growing population.

In his 1961 address to the New Jersey State Legislature, Governor Robert Meyner outlined his idea to double the amount of state recreation and conservation lands in a 10-year, $60 million acquisition program. He signed the first Green Acres Bond Act that June, and New Jersey voters passed it by a 3-2 margin later that year.\(^\text{15}\)

In the mid-20th century, farmland preservation efforts began in New Jersey with the establishment of the State Agricultural Development Committee in 1961. This committee was tasked with preserving farmland by acquiring development rights from farmers. However, it wasn’t until the passage of the Farmland Preservation Act in 1981 that these efforts were formalized and expanded.

\(^\text{10}\) NJ State Development and Redevelopment Plan, p. 98.

\(^\text{11}\) “Green Acres ‘in it for the people’ for 60 years,” The State We’re In, Michele S. Byers, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, December 23, 2021.

\(^\text{12}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{15}\) Ibid.
Twelve more bond acts were approved by voters since 1961, with historical and cultural sites added in 1987. In 1989, funding was extended to preserve farms, building on a report by New Jersey Agriculture Secretary Art Brown where “the Department of Agriculture believes that a goal of permanently retaining 500,000 acres in economically viable farm enterprises is a reasonable standard for long-term agriculture.” That same year, nonprofit organizations gained access to Green Acres grants for the first time for suburban and rural areas. Blue Acres funding was added in 1995 to purchase flood-prone properties and restore them to open space and parkland.

Also during the ‘60s, New Jersey also began to focus on historic preservation efforts, with the creation of the New Jersey Historic Trust in 1967. This organization was responsible for providing grants to preserve historic sites and structures in the state.

The New Jersey State Planning Act, adopted in 1986, (NJSA 52:18A-200 et. seq.) advanced conservation policies on a statewide level:

"The State Development and Redevelopment Plan shall be designed to represent a balance of development and conservation objectives best suited to meet the needs of the state. The plan shall:

a. Protect the natural resources and qualities of the state, including, but not limited to, agricultural development areas, fresh and saltwater wetlands, flood plains, stream corridors, aquifer recharge areas, steep slopes, areas of unique flora and fauna, and areas with scenic, historic, cultural and recreational values;..."

The first State Development and Redevelopment Plan under this law was adopted by the State Planning Commission in 1992. An updated State Plan was adopted in 2001.

In the spring of 1996, Governor Christine Todd Whitman convened the Governor’s Council on New Jersey Outdoors, chaired by former Assemblywoman Maureen Ogden to review the state’s open space and recreational needs, and identify stable sources of funding to “keep New Jersey green.” The Council conducted six public hearings whereby residents said the state was protecting too little

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16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
open space, too slowly, and not adequately managing the lands, resources, and recreational facilities already under public ownership. The clear message was that New Jersey’s ecological integrity, economic future, and quality of life were interrelated and depended on our ability to preserve a critical mass of open space. The state was continuing the trend toward habitat fragmentation and suburban sprawl despite efforts of government, private groups, and citizens to set aside open lands.

The Final Report of the Governor’s Council in 1998 recommended a total commitment of $200 million annually for a decade to fund open space, farmland, and historic preservation, as well as meet stewardship goals. The Council also called for the protection of one million more acres to provide the critical mass of open space, farmland, and historic sites to comprehensively meet objectives for present and future generations. The Council’s report set specific targets to reach the million-acre goal:

- Preserving 500,000 acres of farmland to assure the future of agricultural activities in the state,
- Protecting 100,000 acres surrounding the headwaters, water-supply streams, and reservoir systems,
- Creating 200,000 acres of greenway linkages through preservation of open space or purchase of easements and rights-of-way, and
- Developing 200,000 acres of recreational open space.

In response, Governor Whitman issued a clarion call in her second inaugural address to advance these recommendations and proposed a constitutional dedication of a portion of the state’s sales tax. Voters approved this amendment by a strong majority. To implement the voters’ wishes, Governor Whitman proposed the Garden State Preservation Trust Act (GSPTA), a law that was approved in 1999 with a bipartisan majority vote of the Legislature. The GSPTA used the sales tax dedication to purchase bonds that would fund a decade of land preservation, with over $2 billion administered by the Garden State Preservation Trust and allocated to NJDEP Green Acres, State Agriculture Development Committee, and NJ Historic Trust. Implementation of the Act empowered municipalities and counties to be more strategic, providing incentives for those that enacted open space taxes and identified areas for acquisition through Planning Incentive Grants. By way of
example, prior to GSPTA adoption, only a handful of municipalities and few counties had open space taxes. Currently, every county and over 350 municipalities have dedicated revenue sources to match state funding for open space/farmland/historic preservation.

After a decade, state funding was almost fully extinguished, so in 2014, voters convincingly approved a ballot question establishing a permanent stable source of state land preservation funding, with a portion of the state’s Corporate Business Tax (CBT) revenue.27

Recent policy initiatives have also focused on addressing climate change and promoting sustainable land use practices. For example, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Coastal Blue Acres Program is focused on acquiring coastal properties for open space preservation and coastal resilience purposes. It is focused on acquiring flood-prone properties for open space preservation and flood mitigation purposes. This program has been particularly important in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, which caused significant flooding in many parts of the state. The state has also developed a Climate Action Plan, which includes goals for preserving open space and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The initiatives, acts, and policies in New Jersey aimed at preserving open land, farmland, and green spaces include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act/Initiative/Policy</th>
<th>Year Established</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green Acres Program</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Provides funding for the acquisition and development of open space and recreational areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinelands Protection Act</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Established the Pinelands Commission to regulate development and protect the natural resources of the Pinelands region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden State Preservation Trust Act</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Created a dedicated funding source for the preservation of open space, farmland, and historic sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland Preservation Program</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Provides financial incentives to farmers to keep their land in agricultural use and prevent it from being developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Acres Program</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Provides funding for the acquisition and preservation of properties in flood-prone areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Created a regional planning framework to protect the water resources and open spaces of the Highlands region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of these efforts beg the question made famous by former NYC Mayor Ed Koch: “How Am I Doing?” This report is intended to provide information and an initial assessment to start a dialogue that can lead to policy proposals and program improvements to help advance the voters’ desires for a clean and green state.

27 “Green Acres ‘in it for the people’ for 60 years,” The State We’re In, Michele S. Byers, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, December 23, 2021.
“The Legislature therefore determines that it is in the public interest to preserve as much open space and farmland, and as many historic properties, as possible within the means provided by the 1998 constitutional amendment; that of the open space preserved, as much of those lands as possible shall protect water resources and preserve adequate habitat and other environmentally sensitive areas; that, in recognition of the recommendations of the Governor’s Council on New Jersey Outdoors, it is a worthy goal to preserve one million more acres of open space and farmland in the Garden State in the next decade to protect the quality of life for New Jersey residents; and that, to accomplish that goal, it is also in the public interest to create the Garden State Preservation Trust and to enable it to raise revenue for those purposes, and to delegate to it such other duties and responsibilities as shall be necessary to further the purposes of the constitutional amendment and to advance the policies and achieve the goals set forth in this preamble.”

- Garden State Preservation Trust Act

Garden State Preservation Trust Act:
The Garden State Preservation Trust Act (GSPTA) is a funding mechanism created in 1999 to finance the acquisition and preservation of open space, farmland, and historic sites in New Jersey. The Act provided funding to four major programs:

1. Green Acres Program, which helps to acquire and develop open space, parks, and other recreational areas.

2. Farmland Preservation Program, which assists in preserving farmland and agricultural operations.

3. New Jersey Historic Trust, which supports the preservation and restoration of historic sites and buildings.

4. Blue Acres Program, which helps to acquire and restore flood-prone properties.

Open Space: The goal for land preservation under the Garden State Preservation Trust Act was to preserve one million more acres of open space and farmland within a decade. As of June 2022, the Green Acres Program, in collaboration with public and nonprofit partners, had successfully protected 681,234 acres of open space.
space and parkland since the program’s inception. Additionally, the program provided funding for 1,256 park development and stewardship projects in communities throughout the state.30

**Farmland:** The program seeks to preserve a minimum of 500,000 acres of farmland in New Jersey. As of January 2023, a total of 2,813 farms covering 248,009 acres have been permanently preserved in New Jersey through the Farmland Preservation Program.31

**Pinelands:** As of June 30, 2022, 481,000 acres of the Pinelands Area have been permanently protected, representing 51% of the total area.32 The majority of the protected land, accounting for 94%, is located within the conservation areas of the Pinelands, which includes the Preservation Area District, Special Agricultural Production Area, Forest Area, and Agricultural Production Area that are specifically designated for preservation and enhancement by the Pinelands Commission. Federal, state, and local land protection initiatives have been responsible for the preservation of most of the protected land, while non-profit conservation organizations have protected a smaller proportion of the land, comprising only 3% or 12,600 acres. Programs administered or funded by the Pinelands Commission have contributed to the protection of approximately 98,500 acres as of June 2022, accounting for approximately 20% of the total protected land. Overall, the protection of 51% of the Pinelands Area is a significant achievement in preserving an ecologically important region, with ongoing efforts to preserve additional land.

**Highlands:** According to the most recent analysis, approximately 38% or 329,441 acres of the Highlands Region are currently preserved. This marks a significant increase of over 66,000 acres since the Highlands Council’s initial report on preserved lands in 2008. In contrast, developed land accounts for 44% of the region, with the remaining 17% being neither developed nor preserved. Of the 414,994 acres in the Preservation Area, only 52% has been permanently preserved through methods such as deed restrictions, easements, or fee simple purchases. Another 15% of the area remains neither preserved nor developed. Out of the 329,441 acres of preserved land in the Highlands Region, 217,816 acres are located in the Preservation Area, while the remaining 111,625 acres are in the Planning Area.33

Historic Sites: The GSPTA has also helped to preserve historic sites in the state. According to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the GSPTA has provided more than $160 million in funding for historic preservation projects since its inception (NJDEP, 2021). It is worth noting that historic preservation efforts in New Jersey involve a variety of funding sources, including federal grants, state funding, private donations, and local government funds.

The Preserve New Jersey Fund was established in 2013 and is administered by the New Jersey Historic Trust, a state agency that works to advance historic preservation efforts throughout the state. The fund provides matching grants for construction and planning projects that promote the preservation of New Jersey’s historic resources. Since its inception, the Preserve New Jersey Fund has carried on the legacy of the Historic Preservation Bond Program (1990-1997) and the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust Fund (2000-2012). Over the course of three decades, the program has provided matching grants totaling over $180 million to fund an array of construction and planning projects that promote historic preservation across New Jersey.

In New Jersey, nearly 16% of historic properties and 51% of historic districts are located within the 100-year floodplain. The area within the 500-year floodplain encompasses almost 22% of historic properties and more than 54% of historic districts.

Further, a study conducted by the Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research for the New Jersey Historic Trust, funded by the National Park Service, has revealed the increasing visibility of economic benefits from historic preservation. The preliminary findings demonstrate that rehabilitating historic residential properties in New Jersey generates significant economic activity and jobs on both national and state levels. Specifically, a $1 million investment creates nearly 75 jobs and $2.5 million in economic activity nationally, and 25 jobs and $1.1 million in economic activity within the state. Moreover, the study shows that every dollar of in-state funding matched by outside dollars doubles the in-state impacts.

Funding:

The Garden State Preservation Trust Act (N.J. Stat. Ann. § 13:8C-1 et seq.) was established to provide for the first time a stable source of funding to preserve open space in New Jersey. This act ensured that $98 million per year was dedicated to preserving open space for ten years, from 1999 to 2009, using state sales tax revenue. Additionally, it authorized the issuance of up to $1 billion in revenue bonds. To allocate funding, the act set a $200 million combined annual limit.
for open space and farmland preservation. This limit was divided among three organizations - the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), and the New Jersey Historic Trust.

After setting aside enough funds to pay debt service on bonds, the Garden State Preservation Trust Act required the Trust to allocate $6 million each year to the Historic Preservation Trust. The remaining proceeds were to be distributed, with 60% going to NJDEP’s Green Acres open space preservation program, and the remaining 40% allocated to the Farmland Preservation program.

It was expected that a third to half of the $98 million given to GSPT annually for the first ten years would have to be used to pay immediate debt service on the $1 billion in bonds.

**Figure 1: What Was Promised to the Voters in 1998**

![Figure 1: What Was Promised to the Voters in 1998](image)

Source: Garden State Preservation Trust

The Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT), in collaboration with the Treasury, implemented a strategic financing plan that effectively reduced its initial debt service expenses while also adding $150 million in bonds. Additionally, the Trust secured an extra $70 million in bond premium from investors. This approach was carefully timed and implemented to achieve the best possible outcomes for the GSPT.
On November 4, 2014, voters amended the New Jersey Constitution to create a permanent annual dedication of a percentage of the Corporation Business Tax (CBT) to support conservation, historic preservation, and pollution management programs. The referendum initially mandated that 4% of CBT revenue be allocated to these environmental causes, with 71% of the allocation dedicated to conservation and preservation programs funded by the Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT). In Fiscal Year 2020, the CBT dedication increased to 6%, and the share of the allocation that went to GSPT-funded programs increased to 78%.
Figure 3: Corporate Business Tax Dedication 2020

Corporation Business Tax Dedication
Fiscal Year 2020 ONWARD

- Environmental Dedication $210 million (22%)
- Garden State Preservation Trust Conservation & Preservation Programs $164 million (78%)
  - Green Acres/DEP $98.3 million (62%)
    - State Parks Development and Capital Projects $32.4 million
    - State Land Acquisition $26.5 million
    - Blue Acres Flood Site Acquisition $2.6 million
    - County/Municipal Acquisition & Development $29.5 million
    - Non-Profit Acquisition & Development $9.8 million
  - Farmland Preservation $50.8 million (31%)
  - NJ Historic Trust $8.2 million (7%)

Source: Garden State Preservation Trust
As of December 2017, New Jersey had preserved 1,288,162 acres of public open space. With 230,040 acres of preserved farmland, the total of preserved open space is over 1,500,000 acres.

Source: Garden State Preservation Trust
This chart represents a mix of funds from GSPT sales tax dedication, bonds, 2007 and 2009 general obligation bond issues, and 2014 Corporate Business Tax dedication. Relocation and reappropriation of loan repayments are not included.

**Figure 6: Total Taxpayer Commitment from 2000-2020**

Source: Garden State Preservation Trust
Figure 7: Distribution of funds among Green Acres, Farmland, and Historic preservation.

Source: Garden State Preservation Trust

**Analysis:**

We analyzed publicly available GIS data to estimate the acres of open space, farmland, and lands designated of historic significance across the entire state of New Jersey. We also evaluated open space and farmland in four counties that are known for their land preservation efforts: Burlington, Hunterdon, Morris, and Warren Counties. Key findings from this analysis are highlighted below:

**Statewide Analysis - Open Space:**

New Jersey currently maintains a grand total of approximately 1.14 million acres of permanently preserved open space. At the end of year 2000, there were approximately 964.3 thousand acres of open space, according to the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan. This suggests that an additional 171,800 acres have been preserved since 2001.

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More than 50% of all open space in New Jersey is located within the following five counties (ranked in order): Burlington, Ocean, Cumberland, Atlantic, and Sussex. The five counties containing the least amount of open space (cumulatively, less than 6% of the state total) include Hudson, Union, Essex, Gloucester, and Bergen.
Southern New Jersey contains 40% of New Jersey’s total land area and 46% of the state’s preserved open space. Northern New Jersey (27% of the total land area) and Central New Jersey (33% of the total land area) contain approximately 26% and 28% (respectively).

Nearly two-thirds of preserved lands are both owned and maintained by the state of New Jersey. The remaining one-third are owned/maintained by municipalities, counties, and non-profit organizations.

New Jersey’s major Planning Areas designated in the 2001 Development and Redevelopment Plan (which exclude the Highlands, Pinelands, and Meadowlands areas) currently contain the following amount of open space:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Area (PA)</th>
<th>Thousands of Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PA 1 Metro</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 2 Suburban</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 3 Fringe</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 4 Rural</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 5 Environmentally Sensitive</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Figure 9 (pg. 24), the highest levels of open space preservation in New Jersey occurred during the 1990s and 2000s. However, data shows that the amount of open space preserved in the 2010s declined from previous decades. When the Garden State Preservation Act was first adopted, it received funding through a dedication of a portion of the New Jersey sales tax, which was used to pay off bonds, allowing more funds to be available earlier in the program. However, in 2014 voters approved an amendment to the state constitution, and the State replaced this funding with a portion of the corporate business tax to move from bonding to a pay-as-you-go program. A period of delay in changing the funding source might account for a portion of the decline in open space preservation during the 2010s.
New Jersey currently maintains a grand total of approximately 274 thousand acres of permanently preserved farmland, including sites in the Pinelands and Highlands. At the end of year 2000, there were approximately 97 thousand acres of farmland, according to the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan. This suggests that an additional 177 thousand acres have been preserved since 2001.

**Statewide Analysis – Farmland:**

Figure 9: Number of Open Space Acres Preserved by Decade
More than 50% of all preserved farmland in New Jersey is located within the following four counties (ranked in order): Salem, Burlington, Hunterdon, and Warren. Five percent of farmland is cumulatively located in the following six counties: Passaic, Bergen, Camden, Ocean, Cape May, and Middlesex, Essex, Hudson, and Union Counties each contain zero acres of preserved farmland.

Southern New Jersey contains 40% of New Jersey’s total land area and 50% of the state’s preserved farmland. Northern New Jersey (27% of the total land area) and Central New Jersey (33% of the total land area) contain approximately 21% and 29% (respectively).

Nearly three-fourths of preserved farms have been acquired using three programs in New Jersey: the County Easement Purchase Program (44%), the SADC Easement Purchase Program (17%), and the County Planning Incentive Grant (PIG) Program (11%).
• New Jersey’s major Planning Areas designated in the 2001 Development and Redevelopment Plan (which exclude the Highlands, Pinelands, and Meadowlands areas) currently contain the following amount of preserved farmland:

**Figure 10: Preserved Farmland According to State Planning Areas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Area (PA)</th>
<th>Thousands of Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PA 1 Metro</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 2 Suburban</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 3 Fringe</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 4 Rural</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 5 Environmentally Sensitive</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to open space, the highest levels of farmland preservation (approximately 131 thousand acres) occurred during the 2000s, however, had declined in the 2010s (Figure 11). On average, New Jersey has preserved approximately 55 thousand acres of farmland each decade and seven thousand acres of farmland every year.

**Figure 11: Number of Farmland Acres Preserved by Decade**

Farmland Preservation in New Jersey, 1985-2023
Statewide Analysis - Historic Properties:

Based on GIS data created by the State Historic Preservation Office, New Jersey currently has approximately 211 thousand acres of lands that have some form of historical significance.\(^{36}\) Note that this figure includes all historic properties, not those which have been formally preserved (this data is not currently published by the SHPO).

Map 3: Historic Properties in New Jersey

- Nearly 50% of historic properties in New Jersey (measured by number of acres) are located within the following six counties (ranked in order): Hunterdon, Mercer, Monmouth, Somerset, Morris, and Burlington.

Eleven percent of historic properties are cumulatively located in the following five counties: Sussex, Cape May, Passaic, Camden, and Hudson.

- Southern New Jersey contains 40% of New Jersey’s total land area and 29% of the state’s historic properties. Northern New Jersey (27% of the total land area) and Central New Jersey (33% of the total land area) contain approximately 29% and 41% (respectively).

- New Jersey’s major Planning Areas designated in the 2001 Development and Redevelopment Plan (which exclude the Highlands, Pinelands, and Meadowlands areas) currently contain the following number of acres of historic properties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Area (PA)</th>
<th>Thousands of Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PA 1 Metro</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 2 Suburban</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 3 Fringe</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 4 Rural</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA 5 Environmentally Sensitive</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 12: Number of Acres of Historic Properties**

**Figure 13: Number of Acres of Historic Properties in New Jersey by County**
Analysis of Select Counties – Burlington, Hunterdon, Morris, and Warren Counties

Four counties in New Jersey with high levels of preserved land include Burlington County (227 thousand acres preserved), Morris County (83 thousand acres), Hunterdon County (79 thousand), and, Warren County (75 thousand) (Figure 14). Generally, these counties have preserved more acres of open space compared to farmland, with perhaps the exception of Hunterdon County, which has preserved a similar number of acres in both groups.

Figure 14: Number of Acres of Preserved Open Space and Farmland in Burlington, Hunterdon, Morris and Warren Counties

The Garden State Preservation Trust Act certainly helped to boost the amount of land preservation seen in some counties. For instance, in both Hunterdon and Warren Counties, approximately 60% of the acres preserved in these counties occurred after the year 2000 (Figure 15). By contrast, Burlington County has lands located within the New Jersey Pine Barrens and most of its land preservation occurred prior to 2000. (Note: we suspect that land whose date of preservation is unknown is more likely to have been preserved before 2000.)

37 Burlington, Hunterdon, Morris, and Warren Counties were selected due to their strong reputations for preservation efforts as well as the potential to further analyze the data and make substantive recommendations.

38 Historic Preservation lands were not included in this tally because data was unclear as to whether some of the land was preserved.
The quality of soils is a crucial element of effective farmland preservation. In the four case study counties, the data indicates that in general, two-thirds of the acres preserved are classified as either Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance and one-third of acres preserved are classified as Not Prime Farmland (Figure 16). The preserved farmland in Burlington County might be considered some of the highest quality overall, as only 15% of its acres preserved are considered Not Prime Farmland.
Appendix A (pg. 55) contains maps that identify “opportunities” for farmland and open space preservation in the four selected counties. These maps illustrate preserved farmland overlaid on top of agricultural land cover and preserved open space on top of wetland and forest land cover. This information is based on most recent data from NJDEP’s Land Use Cover GIS data from 2015. The data is a good proxy for where additional opportunities for land preservation are located.

Surveys

As part of the stakeholder engagement, we developed a survey with questions spanning the field of open space, farmland, and historical site preservation. The survey questions were prepared to elicit meaningful responses that provide insights into the successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in these preservation efforts. A sample survey may be found in Appendix B (pg. 62).

Once the survey was developed, a list of stakeholders to be surveyed was prepared that included entities involved in preservation efforts, such as state or county agencies, non-profit organizations, and land trusts. A diverse group of stakeholders was contacted to ensure that the survey captured a broad range of perspectives. Surveys were sent to the various stakeholders via email.
Additionally, follow-up emails were written to encourage stakeholders to participate and ensure a higher response rate. Key insights from the 15 survey responses include:

**Factors that enabled success:**

The availability of sustained funding has allowed for the continued preservation of land.

- Access to robust, sustained funding, approved by the voters, and continued interest in Farmland Preservation by farmers and landowners has kept the program going.
- Public support and the willingness of farmers and landowners have ensured that the program remains a priority for local authorities.
- The prioritization of the program by the Freeholder Board in the 80s-90s provided a strong foundation for the program, and cost-sharing with state and federal agencies helped to increase the scope of the program.
- Curbing development in environmentally sensitive areas has also been instrumental in ensuring the preservation of important natural habitats.
- Familiarity with the region and funding sources is another critical factor. An experienced staff can help to identify important sites and areas that need to be preserved. The staff’s knowledge of the region can help to ensure that the preservation efforts are targeted to the areas that need it the most.

**Challenges and Impediments:**

The cost of land and lack of funding are significant impediments to the program’s success as the cost of acquiring and managing this land can be substantial. Without adequate funding, the program’s growth and expansion can be limited, hindering its overall success.

- Constraints of the traditional appraisal process make preservation offers uncompetitive. There has been a high percentage of easement value rejections in recent years, with decreased landowner interest in applying due to a perception that the easement values are too low.
- Low easement values and inconsistent enforcement can hinder the program’s success. Landowners may be dissatisfied with the compensation offered for the easements, and inconsistent enforcement of program regulations can lead to confusion and mistrust.
• **Poor planning** or lack of planning on the part of municipalities.

• "Lack of municipal engagement/response to public interest/hostility to Highlands planning/misunderstanding of benefits of conformance to Highlands Regional Master Plan."

• The farmland and open space programs are voluntary, so landowners have other options. We are seeing greater development pressures from warehouse, solar, and residential projects. Some landowners have told us that we need to pay more (over our appraised market value) and to close much faster.

• Availability of cost-share is the biggest challenge. Sustainable, continued funding for our programs is key. A line item for funding through NJDEP and NJDA would alleviate the continued grant seeking cycle and allow for more implementation.

• **Wetland restrictions** on recreational land could be another challenge for the program. The program relies heavily on the use of recreational land, and wetland restrictions can limit the available land for use.

• **Finding partners** who can own and manage the property is another significant challenge. The program requires partners who have the resources, skills, and expertise to manage the property effectively. Identifying and securing such partners can be difficult.

• Further, a **long wait and delay in getting the appraisals** timely can be challenging and can discourage farmers from participating in the program. The delay and long waiting periods can be frustrating and can lead to farmers looking for alternative options.

• **Government preservation programs** often have many rules and regulations. This can significantly lengthen the process, thereby slowing down projects and progress.

• The landowners’ willingness and **faith in the program** are crucial for its success. Some landowners may be hesitant to participate in the program, either due to a lack of understanding of its benefits or a lack of trust in the program’s ability to deliver on its promises.

• There is a need for **continued funding** of programs, stewardship, and monitoring funding as well.
Should we continue to preserve and why?

100% of respondents said yes. Reasons included overwhelming public support, land preservation as a planning tool, prevention of sprawl, and other important contributions to the quality of life. Almost all respondents supported efforts to reach the million-acre goal.

- One respondent recommended looking at strategic priorities rather than the volume of land preserved. Another emphasized that working to preserve as much of our remaining open space is absolutely critical to mitigating the worst effects of climate change, protecting our drinking water, and providing a variety of recreational opportunities for our growing population and habitat for wildlife. Integrated thinking and strategies to accomplish multiple objectives was recommended by another respondent, with increased public-private partnerships encouraged.

- “New Jersey’s ultimate quality of life is dependent on permanently protecting sufficient farmland and open spaces.”

- “I don’t know the number, but we should understand where it is important to preserve to protect water (quality and quantity) needed for today and future growth and maturing forests to mitigate for climate change through carbon sequestration. We also need to focus on preservation of high-quality agricultural lands, and on locations of warehouses and solar in the right places (i.e., not on farmlands or in forests or wetlands, not where the HUC14 already has too much impervious cover (over 10%).”

- “Yes, NJ should continue to work towards preserving another million acres of land or more. NJ is already the most densely populated state in the country. Situated within and between the converging NYC and PHL metropolitan areas, NJ will continue to face increasing development pressures as the northeast megalopolis expands. Preserving the remaining undeveloped lands in NJ as open space and farmland will benefit the residents and the environment in countless ways.”

Should stewardship be identified?

100% of respondents said yes, as stewardship is important for climate resiliency goals, controlling invasive species or mitigating human use, and preventing degradation of the land. Most public land-owning agencies have lots of preserved land but inadequate funding and expertise to implement stewardship programs. To remain a viable industry, without stewardship investments are abandoned, and
the program should be more than stopping development. Stewardship is crucial to ensure the long-term health and viability of preserved lands.

- "Yes. Unattended lands promote invasive species which **degrade natural resource values.**"
- "Yes. The public expects/demands that **lands preserved for public purposes be appropriately managed/stewarded.**"
- "Yes. After decades of aggressive acquisition, **adequate stewardship of public lands is both necessary and an obligation.** Much of the open land that has been purchased is degraded by past land use practice, pervasive invasive vegetation, insects and diseases that are negatively impacting forest health. Also, flood protection lands need to be returned to their natural state or identified as a floodway, flood storage or transformed into uses such as maritime forest, dunes or newly forested lands to provide climate resilience."
Survey respondents offered the following recommendations as crucial to improving the preservation programs for open spaces, farmland, and historical sites:

1. **Focus on strategic priorities:** There should be a focus on strategic priorities that address climate resilience, watershed protection, habitat corridors, and equitable access to open spaces for underserved communities. This approach will help to ensure that the preservation programs are targeted to areas that need it the most.
   
   a. **Publicly target critical lands for preservation:** The preservation programs should publicly target critical lands for preservation. This will help to build public support for the preservation programs and ensure that the most critical lands are preserved.
   
   b. **Target areas with large amounts of remaining open land:** The preservation programs should target areas with large amounts of remaining open land. Preserving land in large contiguous blocks is key.
   
   c. **Focus on preserving smaller parcels, and in some places, even previously contaminated lands, particularly in overburdened communities, to repurpose them in ways supported/needed by the community:** There are 19,000 vacant lots in the Highlands, nearly all of which are smaller than 50 acres, and thus do not qualify for Green Acres funding. That should change.
   
   d. **Land and stewardship for climate resilience:** The preservation programs should prioritize land and stewardship for climate resilience. This includes preserving wetlands, forests, and other critical habitats that play a significant role in carbon sequestration and mitigating the effects of climate change.
   
   e. **Habitat corridors:** Habitat corridors are essential for maintaining biodiversity and ensuring the long-term health of ecosystems. The preservation programs should prioritize the creation and preservation of habitat corridors that connect different open spaces.
   
   f. **Equitable access to open spaces and recreation areas for underserved communities:** The preservation programs should prioritize equitable access to open spaces and recreation areas for underserved communities. This includes ensuring that there are open spaces and recreation areas in underserved communities and that they are accessible to all members of the community.
2. Aid in support of agricultural viability, with an emphasis on assisting farmers in adapting to climate change and increasing availability of locally grown food.

3. Amend state laws to provide a wider range of benefits for all landowners who choose to conserve land, including tax benefits and attractive finance vehicles.

4. Create a “Woodland Management Program” aimed at purchasing easements on privately held, forested land – run in parallel with the farmland preservation program.

5. Incorporate regenerative programs for soil health and water quality: Preservation programs should include plans to manage more regenerative programs for soil health and water quality. This includes promoting sustainable farming practices, reducing the use of pesticides and fertilizers, and improving soil health.

6. Increase DEP budget for capital facilities and staff to manage more lands: The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) should have an increased budget to maintain capital facilities and hire more staff to manage more lands effectively. This will ensure that the preservation programs are adequately maintained and staffed to achieve their goals.

7. Increase stewardship funding to counties and municipalities for better care and management of already preserved lands: The preservation programs should allocate increased funding to counties and municipalities for better care and management of already preserved lands. This includes establishing scientifically valid forest stewardship goals, better managing the population of white-tailed deer, establishing a statewide, aggressive invasive species control program, and increasing the use of prescribed burning to control invasives and reduce forest fuel.

8. Streamline the grant approval process to avoid delays: The grant approval process should be streamlined. This will ensure that the preservation programs can access funding in a timely manner and can achieve their goals.

9. Re-energize the message and the benefits of preservation along with environmental education in all schools: The preservation programs should re-energize the message and the benefits of preservation along with environmental education in all schools. This will help to build public support for the preservation programs and ensure that future generations understand the importance of preserving open spaces, farmland, and historical sites.
Through this research effort, we offer several other recommendations:

1. **Improve the administration of preservation efforts**: The Garden State Preservation Trust Act created a governmental body with fiduciary responsibility to oversee the administration of preservation efforts and keep the public informed about progress in land preservation. The Trust has not met in six months and only had two meetings in 2022.39 The Executive Director’s position has been vacant for years and the last public announcement was two years ago.40

   In the early years of implementing the Garden State Preservation Trust Act (GSPTA), key staff from each of the state agencies charged with preservation met monthly as the Million Acre Task Force, organized and led by the Governor’s Office of Policy and Planning. The Task Force provided regular updates on projects and coordinated efforts to ensure a higher level of efficiency and effectiveness. By way of example, the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), Green Acres, and Historic Trust would coordinate planning efforts and identify opportunities for shared funding to ensure key parcels were preserved, especially during times when one agency could not complete the transaction alone.

   Improving the transparency of information and keeping the public engaged are critical responsibilities of the Trust and associated state agencies. Our research efforts were significantly impaired by the lack of timely information. These actions not only inform but also solidify support for actions critical to the success of preservation efforts.

   a. **Resume regular meetings of GSPT**
   
   b. **Recreate the Million Acre Task Force of State Agencies**
   
   c. **Improve transparency of information and keep the public engaged**
   
   d. **Celebrate success more often**

2. **Utilize statewide, regional, and local land use planning to enhance preservation**: One of the real successes of the GSPTA involved the synergies between planning and preservation efforts. Green Acres and the State Agriculture Development Committee instituted incentives for counties and municipalities through their Planning Incentive Grant programs to reward communities that developed plans that identified potential lands for preservation. These grants also streamlined the acquisition process and fast-tracked approvals for lands included in these plans.

39 [https://www.nj.gov/gspt/publicmeeting.shtml](https://www.nj.gov/gspt/publicmeeting.shtml)

Building on this effort, the GSPT and other preservation agencies should recognize the important role that land use planning plays, and coordinate efforts wherever possible to ensure an efficient, effective, and equitable result. The State Development and Redevelopment Plan provides overall guidance for land use planning and infrastructure investments throughout the state, with goals and strategies, statewide policies, policy map, and key indicators and targets; it should be updated and cross-accepted to ensure state agency, regional and local coordination and implementation.41 The GSPT and State Planning Commission should coordinate efforts and collaborate to monitor, evaluate, and update preservation targets. The Governor and Legislature should provide the funds necessary to properly update and implement the State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

State agencies, including the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, State Agriculture Development Committee, Historic Trust, and others should update their plans (e.g., SCORP, Farmland Preservation Plan, etc.) and coordinate preservation efforts. Other state agencies that own land (e.g., New Jersey Departments of Transportation, Community Affairs, Health, etc.) should find ways to preserve land and historic sites through deed restrictions and cooperative agreements.

Regional agencies, including the Pinelands Commission, Highlands Council, N.J. Sports and Exposition Authority, Palisades Interstate Park Commission, Delaware & Raritan Canal Commission, Fort Monmouth Economic Revitalization Authority, and others should strategically align their work with the GSPT to build upon success and leverage support to preserve lands and sites to supplement NJDEP, SADC, and NJHT programs. In particular, the Governor and Legislature should provide funding to the New Jersey Highlands Council to preserve key lands in support of the Highlands Regional Master Plan and to provide a route to preservation and natural resource protection that is unmet by other state programs.

Counties should update their comprehensive plans and open space, farmland, and/or historic preservation plans and capital investment programs to provide a strategic focus on identifying and preserving large, contiguous blocks of land that may cross municipal boundaries or address key strategic objectives.

41 https://nj.gov/state/planning/state-plan.shtml
Municipalities should update their Master Plans and open space, farmland, and/or historic preservation plans and capital investment programs to meet the community’s vision and promote the quality of life for all who live, work, or visit.

Academic, health, and other institutions should align their facility planning efforts with statewide, regional, and local preservation efforts and deed restrict lands where possible to contribute to the million-acre goal.

There are several planning tools that can help advance the million-acre goal beyond fee simple acquisition and the purchase or donation of development rights. Chief among them is Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), a realty transfer system whereby development potential in a specific preservation area can be purchased by private investors for use in a targeted growth area. TDR allows for development where smart growth and supportive infrastructure are planned, and the preservation of key lands can be achieved without requiring public funds. TDR is enabled statewide and specifically in the Pinelands and Highlands, but locating receiving areas and building political support have been difficult. The Governor and Legislature should consider greater incentives to encourage TDR as a way to promote sustainable development and save public dollars.

a. Update the State Development and Redevelopment Plan for overall direction
b. Update state agency plans (e.g., SCORP, Farmland Preservation, Historic Trust)
c. Strategically align regional plans, programs, and investments
d. Update county plans and provide regional coordination
e. Promote capacity-based comprehensive local plans, consistent ordinances, and compatible capital improvement programs
f. Align academic, health, and other institutions’ facilities planning efforts and deed-restrict lands where possible
g. Create more incentives to encourage the Transfer of Development Rights

3. **Enhance urban open space opportunities:** Redevelopment creates new opportunities for creating open space oases and linkages on lands formerly paved over and communities often neglected. However, if

municipalities don’t anticipate these opportunities, they can be lost or subjected to developer concessions that miss the chance for innovative thinking. Historically, cities have not planned nor invested consistently in parks and outdoor recreation, and facilities and services degrade due to a lack of proper stewardship. Recognizing the value of these assets and investing wisely can reap large benefits. Municipalities should align redevelopment plans, regulations, and investments to create or improve and maintain parks and other recreational areas.

Prior to the GSPTA, Green Acres provided park development grants to nonprofit organizations working in suburban and rural towns to help advance projects. With the adoption of the GSPTA, nonprofits were able for the first time to use funds in urban areas. This has led to many significant improvements in cities such as Newark, Paterson, Trenton, and Camden, among others, which has also increased economic development opportunities. The GSPT should encourage state agencies and nonprofit organizations to collaborate to more effectively develop parks and other recreational sites.

While land costs can be exponentially higher in cities than in rural areas, it is critically important to preserve open space where people live and work. A hallmark of GSPTA preceding open space bond issues has been providing funding throughout New Jersey, and voters have rewarded officials for this intentionality. The GSPT should encourage preservation agencies to work with urban municipalities on strategically aligning local redevelopment with statewide preservation goals.

a. Align local redevelopment plans, regulations, and investments to create or improve and maintain parks and other recreational areas
b. GSPT should encourage state agencies and nonprofit organizations to collaborate to more effectively develop parks and other recreational sites.
c. GSPT should encourage preservation agencies to work with urban municipalities on strategically aligning local redevelopment projects with statewide preservation goals.

4. Recognize how climate change, environmental injustice, economic uncertainty, COVID, and demographic and technological changes present new constraints and opportunities: “May you live in interesting times” is an expression that can be applied here. From a changing climate and its associated implications, through uncertainties in the market, COVID and other pandemic threats, and changes in lifestyle resulting
from demographic shifts and technological changes, policymakers need to consider both the “curses” and “blessings” afforded to preservation efforts, and strategically adjust assumptions, goals, targets, and processes to ensure a more efficient, effective and equitable result.

We know that large expanses of protected landscapes, including lands that are resilient to climate change have the best chance of protecting biodiversity. Preserved forests, wetlands, marshes, riparian corridors, and farmlands managed with sustainable agricultural management practices can help with carbon sequestration and water quality protection.43 Leveraging federal dollars for continued flood buyouts can help address the impacts of sea level rise and increased inland flooding while providing green space in overburdened communities.

Although we live in uncertain economic times, it is a truism that land will never be less expensive; it’s also proven that these public investments not only benefit the public at large but also nearby residents. By way of example, homeowners in Mercer County that live within ½ mile of protected open space saw an average increase of over $7,100 in home value.44

The COVID pandemic reminded us of the importance of being outdoors to our physical and mental health. People found respite in pocket parks, hiking trails, the beach, and other natural areas. The strategic and economic value of these places to our lives should be incorporated into preservation efforts, and proper stewardship of these assets is key to our economy as well as environment.

And demographic and technological changes are only strengthening the need for open space, farmland and historic preservation. The largest drivers of change – empty-nesting Baby Boomers, Millennials’ growing families, Gen Z choosing urban environments, and immigrants moving to the Garden State – provide significant opportunities to grow our economy by preserving land that will provide a quality of life that is unique and sustainable. Technology allows people to be more mobile in their work and residential environments, and they are choosing places that provide open spaces, farmland, and historic sites that meet their interests and values.

   a. Permanently protect large tracts of forests and watersheds to provide carbon sequestration and water quality protection

43 Re-Imagining the Nature of New Jersey, Draft.
44 The Economic Impact ofProtected Open Space in Mercer County, New Jersey, ESI Econsult Solutions, 2021. https://www.mercercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/22295/637691271473630000
b. **Enhance Blue Acres funding to advance climate resiliency**

c. **Target overburdened communities for strategic land preservation and park development**

d. **Recognize how COVID has increased use and appreciation for open space, farmland, and historic sites, and anticipate growing use of these sites**

e. **Consider changing demographics and technology to strategically target preservation and stewardship investments**

5. **Recognize the economic value of natural, agricultural, and cultural resources in land valuation/appraisals:** One major roadblock to the preservation of open space, farmland, and historic sites is the ability to find appraisals for preserving the land at a value comparable to developing the site. Zoning and other government decisions can add real or perceived value that is often hard to match for land in its natural or historic state. There has been a high percentage of easement value rejections in recent years, which has decreased landowner interest in applying for preservation due to a perception that easement values are too low.

One potential solution is a true cost accounting of the economic value of natural, agricultural and cultural resources in land valuation and appraisals by calculating the short- and long-term benefits of preservation. The World Wildlife Fund’s Living Planet Index 2018 noted that nature underpins all economic activity, presently worth an estimated US$125 trillion.45

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) developed a framework for valuing nature beyond a dollar figure, calling this broader category of value Nature’s Contribution to People, or NCP. According to IPBES, this is the assessment of value used by the Living Planet Index. For example, the Great Barrier Reef contributes US$5.7 billion a year to the Australian economy and supports 69,000 jobs. It also considers the economic contribution of the natural world by including the worth of knowledge systems within local communities and indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, the economic value of natural land-based assets in the Americas stands at more than US$24 trillion per year, according to the report, roughly equivalent to the region’s annual gross domestic product (GDP).46

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46 Ibid.
According to Dr. Sabeel Rahman, Senior Counselor, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Dr. Eli Fenichel, Assistant Director for Natural Resource Economics and Accounting, Office of Science and Technology Policy, and Dr. Jed Kolko, Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, U.S. Department of Commerce, “Our planet’s water, soil, air, and other natural assets play a critical role in sustaining and powering our economy—from supplying the food we eat, to supporting critical supply chains, to spurring innovation and providing recreational opportunities, and more. The challenges of climate change, pollution, and environmental injustice carry implications for the economy, the environment, and public health that Americans across the nation have been experiencing for decades. Yet, the data we rely on to describe and measure our economy are largely disconnected from the realities of the natural world. This disconnect in data prevents us from reaching our full economic potential while protecting the environment and ensuring future opportunity for Americans.”

Dr. Linda J. Blimes, the Daniel Patrick Moynihan Senior Lecturer in Public Policy and Public Finance at the Harvard Kennedy School argues that “Placing values on natural assets is really no different from government assessments of the benefits of new roads, bridges and other infrastructure. People intuitively understand that natural resources are precious. And the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear how closely human health is intertwined with the health of the plant.”

Archeological sites are also worthy of consideration. While not generally made public, they provide insights into previous generations and civilizations. New Jersey has a rich history that extends back tens of thousands of years, well before European colonization and including indigenous civilizations, which are today actively reclaiming their traditions and sacred places. Recognizing the economic value of open space, farmland and historic sites and incorporating this methodology into land appraisals could help conservationists compete with developers in the race for open space.

a. GSPT should develop a methodology for Green Acres, SADC, and other preservation entities that recognizes the economic value of natural resources in land valuation/appraisals

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48 “Putting a dollar value on nature will give governments and businesses more reasons to protect it,” The Conversation. [https://theconversation.com/putting-a-dollar-value-on-nature-will-give-governments-and-businesses-more-reasons-to-protect-it-153968](https://theconversation.com/putting-a-dollar-value-on-nature-will-give-governments-and-businesses-more-reasons-to-protect-it-153968)
b. The Governor and Legislature should approve legislation that allows land appraisals to recognize the economic value of natural, agricultural, and cultural resources

6. **Recognize the economic value of natural, agricultural, and cultural resources for tourism and economic development**: Investments in open space, farmland preservation, and historic sites are increasingly of critical importance in encouraging, supporting, and marketing economic development. In the case of New Jersey’s eight nationally designated scenic byways, the protection, enhancement, and marketing of their archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and/or scenic "intrinsic qualities” are part of a regionally prepared Corridor Management Plan that identifies open space, agricultural, historical, and other sites in and near the scenic byways that will benefit from investments in open space, farmland preservation, and historic preservation complemented by investments in associated tourism, economic development, transportation safety, and marketing.

New Jersey has eight nationally designated Scenic Byways that are recognized for their Federally defined “intrinsic qualities” including one or more of archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic. Each has a Corridor Management Plan that outlines the vision, goals, and strategies to preserve, protect, enhance, and promote the byway. It specifies priority actions necessary to advance the byway and assigns responsibility for implementing recommendations. The plan includes an inventory of the existing route, long term management, and maintenance recommendations, view shed management (including land use), economic benefits, funding needs, and sources and any other relevant information.

Preparing a Corridor Management Plan is an open process for engaging all stakeholders in drafting a guiding document for the byway corridor that reflects a collective vision and the framework for achieving that vision. It must be endorsed by the agencies with jurisdiction over the byway’s designated roadways, such as a municipality, county, state, or regional authority as well as the municipalities and counties located along the byway that do not have jurisdiction over the byway route.

a. **GSPT should develop a methodology for Green Acres, SADC, NJHT, and other preservation entities that recognizes the economic value of natural, agricultural, and cultural resources for tourism and economic development**
b. The Governor and Legislature should approve legislation that allows land appraisals to recognize the economic value of natural, agricultural, and cultural resources for tourism and economic development.
Conclusion

Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s (and women’s) blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons (and daughters) and our grandsons (and granddaughters) are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.

- Daniel Burnham

The effort to preserve a million more acres of open space, farmland, and historic sites has been big, bold, and aggressive. Approximately 350,000 acres of open space and farmland have been preserved towards the goal of preserving one million more acres. Despite significant progress, the vision is still far away, and current conditions suggest that the goal won’t be reached for several more decades. While some question the use of public dollars for preservation, a more comprehensive view should lead us to wonder, can we afford to wait?

Our research has provided solid evidence of advances in the overall goal of land preservation. However, there’s at least 750,000 acres to go. Survey responses and research lend insights into ways to improve the planning and execution of preservation programs on various levels of government and among the nonprofit and private sectors.

The challenges listed in this report are publicly felt problems: without preserved open space, farmland, and historic sites, the economy may be stymied, our environment will deteriorate, and our physical and mental well-being will suffer. These and other challenges listed above are publicly felt costs; therefore, solutions should be publicly supported.

Recommendations included herein provide a solid foundation for discussion and action. While the data may be dissected and revised as new information is shared, it is indisputable that there’s more work to be done. There’s a need for better data collection and more public disclosure and engagement. More peer-reviewed scholarly research is also needed to accurately assess progress without bias or favor. We hope that policymakers and implementers will take care in reviewing this work and consider how to make the preservation effort more efficient, effective, and equitable.

49 https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Daniel_Burnham
References


Blimes, L., “Putting a dollar value on nature will give governments and businesses more reasons to protect it” The Conversation, n.d. https://theconversation.com/putting-a-dollar-value-on-nature-will-give-governments-and-businesses-more-reasons-to-protect-it-153968


ESI Econsult Solutions for the Mercer County Planning Department, RETURN ON ENVIRONMENT The Economic Impact of Protected Open Space in Mercer County, New Jersey, August 2021. https://www.mercercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/22295/637691271473630000


Appendices

Appendix A: Maps

Preserved Open Space in New Jersey

Source: New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), 2023

Preserved Open Space
- Post-2000
- Pre-2000
- No Data

County Boundaries
Regional Boundaries

0 15 30 60 Miles
Opportunities for Open Space Preservation in New Jersey

Source: New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Preserved Open Space (2023) and Land Use Cover (2015)

- Preserved Open Space
- Wetland & Forest Land Cover (2015)
- County Boundaries
- Regional Boundaries
Preserved Farmland in New Jersey

Source: New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee (NJSDAC), 2023

Preserved Farmland
- Post-2000
- Pre-2000

County Boundaries
Regional Boundaries
Opportunities for Farmland Preservation in New Jersey

Source: New Jersey State Agricultural Development Committee (SADC), 2023; and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Land Use Cover, 2015
Historic Properties in New Jersey

Source: New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office, 2023
Preserved Farmland in Burlington, Hunterdon, Morris and Warren Counties, New Jersey

Sources: New Jersey State Agricultural Development Committee (NISADC), 2023; and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO), 2022

Opportunities for Farmland Preservation in Burlington, Hunterdon, Morris and Warren Counties, New Jersey

Opportunities for Open Space Preservation in Burlington, Hunterdon, Morris and Warren Counties, New Jersey

Source: New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP)
Open Space (2023) and Land Use Cover (2015)
Appendix B: Survey Form

Million Acre Survey

Name:

Title:

Agency:

1. What is the most critical reason for your agency’s success in preserving open space, farmland, and/or historic sites?

2. What is the biggest challenge to achieving your agency’s goal?

3. What impediments have you encountered?

4. How do you track the amount of land preserved?

5. How do you communicate your agency’s progress to the public?

6. Should we as a state continue to work towards preserving another million acres? Why or why not?

7. Should stewardship be identified and funded as a state priority? Yes or No, and Why?

8. What policy recommendations would you make to improve land preservation in New Jersey?

9. What additional resources are needed to meet your agency’s goals?

10. Any other recommendations?

I provide this information and consent to the data being used for research purposes.

_____________________________    _______________________
Name                                       Date
We wish to thank the following who responded to the survey and provided critical information:

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<th>Title:</th>
<th>Agency:</th>
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<td>Jennifer Coffey</td>
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<td>Association of NJ Environmental Commissions</td>
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<td>Richard Cotton</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Cotton Cattle</td>
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<td>Tom Daniels</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>University of Pennsylvania</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Epstein</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>The Land Conservancy of New Jersey</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Foelsch</td>
<td>Director, Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>Township of Morris</td>
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<td>Bob Hornby</td>
<td>CADB Administrator</td>
<td>Hunterdon County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Middleton</td>
<td>Land Acquisition Director</td>
<td>Hunterdon Land Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Millette</td>
<td>Open Space Coordinator/Principal Planner</td>
<td>Hunterdon County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Payne (on behalf of Secretary Douglas Fisher)</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>State Agriculture Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia Somers</td>
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<td>NJ Highlands Coalition</td>
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<td>Laura Tessieri</td>
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<td>North Jersey Resource Conservation &amp; Development</td>
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<td>Corey Tierney</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Wilson</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Burlington County Agriculture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Appendix C: Blog Posts**

*One Million Acres or Bust: A Quarter Century of Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation*
https://policylab.rutgers.edu/one-million-acres-or-bust-a-quarter-century-of-open-space-farmland-and-historic-preservation/

*One Million More Acres, But Who’s Counting?*
https://policylab.rutgers.edu/one-million-more-acres-but-whos-counting/

*One Million Acres or Bust: Initial Findings*
https://policylab.rutgers.edu/one-million-acres-or-bust-initial-findings/
The New Jersey State Policy Lab assists the State of New Jersey and its many communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of state policies and programs by conducting rigorous evidence-based research that considers equity, efficiency, and efficacy of public policies and programs in holistic and innovative ways.

The lab leverages input from a robust network of multidisciplinary scholars, members of the community, and outside policy experts in New Jersey to craft innovative and equitable policy solutions that are sensitive to the needs of our state’s diverse population.

By utilizing the combination of strong ties to New Jersey’s diverse communities and significant expertise in collecting, cleaning, and analyzing data, the New Jersey State Policy Lab engages and collaborates with stakeholders such as community groups, the state government, and municipal governments to create high quality datasets and evidence that reflects our state’s diversity and empowers state policy makers to address the needs of New Jersey communities more effectively, innovatively, and equitably.