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## **SMITH STATEMENT ON JOINT HEARING ON OPEN SPACE**

TRENTON – Senator Bob Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, and Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee, issued the following statement today regarding the joint hearing between his panel and the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee on the state of open space preservation efforts in New Jersey:

*“Today, we heard from advocates from every corner of the State who had a common message – that, even in these tough economic times, New Jersey cannot shirk its responsibility to preserve pristine open space.*

*“Whether it’s preserved farmland, community parks or vulnerable watershed, open space contributes so much to the quality of life in the Garden State. And in modern New Jersey history, in good times and bad, voters have registered their approval of State efforts to protect open space at the polls.*

*“Allowing open space preservation to lag or lapse during the current economic downturn would be a lost opportunity for ourselves and future generations of New Jersey residents. At a time when real estate values are leveling off, we can make our limited State dollars go farther in preserving untouched, unspoiled areas.*

*“Speaking for myself, Assemblyman McKeon and many of the members of our Committees, we stand committed to ensuring New Jersey does whatever it can to preserve open space. It’s definitely going to be a challenge in the current economic crisis. But the stakes are simply too high to let open space preservation efforts die on the vine.”*