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SMITH STATEMENT ON MONDAY'S OPEN SPACE VOTE

TRENTON – Senator Bob Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, Chairman of the Senate Environment and Energy Committee released the following statement today regarding Monday's Senate voting session on SCR-160, legislation that would, through a constitutional amendment, dedicate \$200 million annually for the next thirty years of the state's sales and use tax revenue for preservation of open space:

"New Jersey has protected nearly 650,000 acres of open space since the inception of our preservation programs more than half a century ago. These programs have bettered our water supply, improved our air quality and increased the quality of life for New Jersey's families and children.

"Our current system requires the state to ask New Jersey voters time and again to dedicate funds towards the continued conservation of our state's parks and forests, beaches, rivers and lakes and farmland. But once again, the funding has run out. It is imperative that we act swiftly to ensure the program's continued success. With this Constitutional amendment, we can use existing revenue to create a constant stream of funding for these vital programs that will improve New Jerseyans quality of life for decades to come.

"In addition, Hurricane Sandy brought a host of concerns to light above and beyond the normal challenges we face in ensuring a healthy and clean environment. The federal government has supplied the state with \$300 million to buy out flood-prone lands through the state's Blue Acres program. This legislation will add to that and provide a source of stable funding to make New Jersey more storm resilient.

"I want to thank Senate President Sweeney for calling a session on Monday and I want to thank my colleagues in the Senate for coming to Trenton to vote on this important measure. We cannot let another year pass by without ensuring funding to protect New Jersey's open spaces."