

For Release: Immediate
Thursday, June 20, 2013

Contact: *Alise Roderer*
(609) 847-3700

SMITH-WHELAN BILL TO ESTABLISH LONG-TERM FUNDING FOR OPEN SPACE APPROVED BY FULL SENATE

TRENTON – A proposed constitutional amendment sponsored by Senators Bob Smith and Jim Whelan that would ask voters to approve a stable source of funding to continue the state's open space programs was approved today by the full Senate.

"New Jersey has some of the most beautiful open spaces imaginable with fantastic parks, beautiful rivers, lakes and beaches and fertile farmland, but being the most densely-populated state, there is a real threat that development will encroach onto our open lands," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset. "For decades, New Jersey residents have supported dedicating state funds towards protecting our open space, but our pattern of passing bond acts is becoming an unreliable source of revenue. If approved by the voters, we can ensure that money already collected through the state's sales tax goes towards this important initiative."

The measure, SCR-138, would ask voters to dedicate one-fifth of a penny, approximately \$200 million, of revenue from the already existing sales tax annually for the next 30 years for open space projects including Green and Blue Acres projects, farmland and historic preservation projects.

"We must act now if we plan to preserve open spaces for the enjoyment of future generations in New Jersey," said Senator Whelan, D-Atlantic. "Urban sprawl and overdevelopment runs rampant in our state and without a concerted effort, we could lose our parks, wetlands and farmland forever. Programs such as Green and Blue Acres and farmland preservation efforts are making a real difference to protect our open spaces and to ensure the public has access to healthy air, clean water and recreational spaces that improve the quality of life for New Jersey residents."

Open space funding goes to acquiring and developing lands for recreation and conservation purposes, preserving farmland and funding historic preservation and Blue Acres projects. Green Acres has protected nearly 640,000 acres of open space in the Garden State since its inception.

In the past, New Jersey voters have funded open space projects through bond acts, approving them by large margins 13 times since 1961. Most recently, New Jersey voters in 2009 approved a \$400 million bond act, all of which has now been appropriated. According to a Fairleigh Dickinson PublicMind poll, 83 percent of New Jersey residents approve of public funding for open space and preserved farmland.

Open space funding can also be used for Blue Acres projects – a willing seller program that buys flood-prone land and land that buffers or protects other lands from storm damage. The Senators note that long-term funding of this program is even more essential as climate change is causing "100 year storms" to occur at more regular intervals, - such as Hurricanes Irene and Sandy – causing increased flooding in New Jersey's coastal regions.

The resolution was approved with a vote of 36-2. It now heads to the General Assembly for further consideration.