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SMITH BILL REPLENISHING OPEN SPACE FUNDS CLEARS SENATE

TRENTON – Legislation sponsored by Senator Bob Smith and Senator Kip Bateman that supports the 2014 voter-approved Public Question 2 amendment dedicating money to replenish the depleted Green Acres, Blue Acres, farmland and historic preservation programs from an existing business tax was approved by the Senate today.

The bill, S-969, sets guidelines for implementing the constitutional amendment, which created a permanent funding source to ensure the preservation of New Jersey's recreation spaces, productive farmland and historic sites, for Fiscal Year 2016 through and including Fiscal Year 2019. All funds from the statewide bond that voters approved in 2009 were fully allocated, leaving no new money for preservation programs in New Jersey.

"New Jersey, as the nation's most densely populated state, must be cautious to preserve and care for its recreational spaces, farmlands, historic treasures and water sources. What we do today has a direct impact on the future of our natural resources," said Senator Smith (D-Middlesex, Somerset), chair of the Senate Environment and Energy Committee. "This legislation sets the framework for how we can responsibly continue to fund the Garden State's most valuable natural riches."

"Securing a responsible and sustainable means of providing long-term funding for preserving open space and flood-prone properties is the key to ensuring a safer, cleaner and greener future for us all," said Senator Bateman (R-Somerset, Hunterdon, Mercer). "Today's action solidifies our commitment to New Jersey voters to preserve our state's beautiful open spaces, farmland, historical landmarks, and vital natural resources for generations to come."

Under the bill, funding from the corporation business tax will be allocated for the Green Acres, farmland and historic preservation programs at roughly the same percentages that they have historically been funded. Additionally, each State park, forest or wildlife management area that generates revenue would receive an amount equal to its annual revenue from leases or conveyances of lands for recreation and conservation purposes.

The bill continues the State's existing open space, farmland and historic preservation programs, and provides that funds may also be used for emergency intervention to preserve historic properties. The Department of Environmental Protection, the State Agriculture Development Committee, and the New Jersey Historic Trust are also expected to submit recommendations for prospective projects to the Garden State Preservation Trust at least once every two years.

The bill passed the Senate by a vote of 32-5. It now heads to the Assembly for consideration.