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SMITH STATEMENT ON GOVERNOR'S CONDITIONAL VETO OF OPEN SPACE BILL

TRENTON – Senate Environment and Energy Committee Chairman Bob Smith issued the following statement in response to the Governor's conditional veto of the bipartisan open space bill (S-969) he is sponsoring to implement the 2014 voter-approved constitutional amendment. The amendment 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:

"Once again, the Governor has failed the voters of New Jersey by failing to follow through with their wishes reflected on the ballot in 2014. New Jersey's citizens voted to create a permanent and reliable funding source for park and preservation efforts and to ensure that critical land, water and historic preservation programs are sustained.

"This bill would have served that purpose and implemented in practice the intended goals of the amendment. The dedicated, annual appropriation also would have brought much-needed transparency to the process, with clear and specific direction for the funding. Instead, open space funding continues to be siphoned off to other programs to fill holes in the budget and to pay for salaries rather than its originally intended purpose.

"Not only has the governor failed our state and our environment for the past two years, leaving open space with inadequate funding, but he has failed in his duty to uphold the constitution. Instead, he is destroying the Garden State's most valuable natural resources by refusing a well-thought and researched bill that received bipartisan support. Unfortunately, it is our children and their children who will pay the high price of his inaction.

"Shame on him. I will continue to fight to preserve the integrity of our state's environment, and the wishes of the voters of New Jersey."