

APPENDIX



New Jersey Conservation F O U N D A T I O N

170 Longview Road • Far Hills NJ 07931 • (908) 234-1225

Testimony Before the Senate Environment and Energy Committee Regarding SCR2

January 27th, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SCR2 which provides a long term stable source of funding for open space, farmland and historic preservation. My name is Alison Mitchell and I am Policy Director at New Jersey Conservation Foundation. As many of you know, the Conservation Foundation is a nonprofit conservation organization that has preserved approximately 120,000 acres over our 53 year history.

We thank the sponsors of SCR2 for putting forth this important proposal that will ensure that New Jersey's critical preservation programs continue into the future with all of their attendant benefits. There are several reasons why we support SCR2 and urge its passage. The bill provides a stable source of funding for preservation programs which is so critical to the success of the State's preservation efforts. The State has used the sales tax for this purpose before with great success. Long-term funding offers predictability, which is an essential component of effective and efficient government preservation programs. We at the Conservation Foundation know from direct experience that land protection projects typically take several years from start to finish. When funding is extended in fits and starts, it isn't possible to assure a landowner that money to complete a transaction will be there at the end of the process. At the moment we are in a really difficult situation because there is no funding in the pipeline and we are not able to initiate any new transactions where state funds are required (which is the vast majority of our transactions).

In addition, there are 235 local open space trust funds at the county and municipal level. Historically those funds have generated as much as \$300 million each year. Those local programs rely on State funds to leverage their dollars, and historically State dollars have been a large percentage of the overall funds for a project. Without the State money, local government can accomplish much less. This in turn makes it harder for some municipalities to justify taxing their residents to fund preservation projects because their dollars cannot accomplish their open space and greenway plans. Public support for preservation is steady. We need the funding to be steady to fulfill public expectations.

Finally, it takes tremendous resources to carry out a successful ballot initiative and the same resources are required for a one or two year stopgap measure as for a thirty year funding program. We've just been through two stopgap measures. SCR2 would allow us all to focus scarce resources on one ballot question and to get back to the work of preserving land and historic resources for the citizens of New Jersey. Thank you again for your consideration of our comments.



Campaign to preserve New Jersey's parks, natural areas, clean water, farmland, and historic treasures

204 W. State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608 Tel: (609) 392-1181
Website: www.NJKeepItGreen.org

**Senate Environment and Energy Committee Public Hearing
Testimony Regarding SCR2
January 27, 2013
Submitted by Tom Gilbert, NJ Keep It Green Chairman**

On behalf of the more than 185 member groups of the NJ Keep It Green Coalition, thank you Chairman Smith and Senator Bateman for your bipartisan sponsorship of this legislation, and to Senators Greenstein and Whelan for your sponsorship of similar bills in the last session.

Our coalition is grateful for the Senate's continued commitment to advancing a sustainable source of funding for land, water and historic preservation efforts that are essential to protecting quality of life, public health and safety, and economic vitality in New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the nation.

A recent draft report by the NJ DEP, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, clearly demonstrates why a sustainable source of funding is needed, rather than a stop-gap approach. According to the report, at least 650,000 acres still need to be preserved to protect water quality, provide parks and other recreational opportunities, and support the economy. This does not include the 400,000 acres of farmland that still need to be preserved to maintain a viable agriculture industry, according to the Department of Agriculture.

Furthermore, between 2008 and 2012 the Green Acres Program received \$1.6 billion in requests from local governments and non-profits for land acquisition and park development projects, and awarded \$367 million. This means that more than 75 percent of grant requests have gone unmet.

Finally, the state report emphasizes that "The preservation of land for conservation, public and recreation purposes will require (a) long term stable funding source along with a concerted planning and acquisition effort."

SCR2 would provide exactly that, a reliable funding source over the next three decades to preserve critical lands, waters, parks and historic sites, before it is too late. It is the only viable proposal on the table that can accomplish this.

A stop-gap bond measure would barely scratch the surface of these needs, and bring no predictability in funding to long-term preservation efforts. A water user fee does not have sufficient public or political support to move forward. Those who don't support this approach haven't provided any viable alternatives that can provide long-term funding at \$200 million annually.

This is the right approach and the voters deserve the opportunity to have their say on this.

The legislation has been modified to include fiscal safeguards that will cap funds at \$200 million annually, less than 1% of the state budget, and reduce funding if revenues were to fall. It is important to note that revenues are growing, with sales-tax revenues up 8.5% year-to-date, and projected to grow by \$445 million this year.

If these trends continue, preservation efforts will be funded using less than half of the growth in revenues, not at the expense of other programs. In fact, there would still be more than \$200 million annually in new revenues to address other needs. And this is a wise investment that will support key industries, and return \$10 for every \$1 invested through nature's goods and services, such as water filtration and flood control.

In closing, we thank you for continuing the bipartisan tradition of leadership on open space, farmland and historic preservation in New Jersey, and urge the Assembly to work with the Senate to give the voters an opportunity to consider a sustainable source of funding on the Nov. 2014 ballot.

Thank you.