



October 10, 2009

## Preserving open space protects drinking water

On Nov. 3, voters will have the choice to protect drinking water quality by voting "YES" for the Green Acres, Clean Water and Farmland Preservation Act.

In New Jersey, land preservation programs are a high-return investment. A recent analysis found that the proposed \$400 million open space bond act could protect 73,500 acres of land and yield \$10 in economic value for every \$1 invested. The economic benefits would be derived in the form of water purification, waste treatment, flood mitigation, farm products and eco-tourism across the state. The cost to the residents of the state would be less than \$1 per month. Whether you live in the Highlands or the Pinelands, this is one of the best investments the residents of the state have seen in many years.

Increases in population and loss of open space to housing developments threaten drinking water supplies by contributing to over-withdrawal of already stressed ground and surface water systems. Natural vegetation filters pollutants from stormwater and allows rainwater to percolate through the soil and replenish groundwater supplies. Studies have shown that it is cheaper to protect aquifer recharge areas and watersheds surrounding reservoirs through open space preservation than it is to treat pollutants once they enter a drinking water system.

A growing understanding of the role that forests and natural lands play in filtering pollutants and maintaining water quality has led many municipalities and water suppliers to consider land protection as part of an integrated approach to providing safe drinking water.

New Jersey is at a critical juncture. We are the most densely populated state in the nation, fast approaching 9 million people. We are losing natural lands at an alarming rate. Open space preservation has many benefits, including the protection of drinking water. Voting "YES" for the open space ballot question is a vote for protecting your own drinking water.

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