

NATURE FOR ALL

REIMAGINING NATURE IN NEW JERSEY | MICHELE S. BYERS



New Jersey Conservation
FOUNDATION

——— ” ———

We owe it to ourselves and
to the next generation to
conserve the environment
so that we can bequeath
our children a sustainable
world that benefits all.

——— ” ———

WANGARI MAATHAI
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER



NEW JERSEY, THE “GARDEN STATE” AT A CROSSROADS - AGAIN

Everyone needs nature in their neighborhood, not just to survive, but to thrive.

Land and nature are the fundamental supports of life: Water, air, food, health, peace of mind, and beauty keep humans and wildlife alive and thriving. Land and nature are also essential to addressing many serious challenges New Jersey faces today - including impacts from climate change, securing a safe and adequate water supply, loss of biodiversity, and environmental injustice.

Land is a scarce, precious non-renewable resource. But once preserved and protected from development, with careful stewardship its benefits continue in perpetuity.

Over the last 60 years New Jersey has permanently preserved over 33% of the state's land area, including forests, farmlands, wetlands, parks forests and trails.

However, since the 1940s, development and urbanization have led to the loss of well over a million acres of wetlands, forests and farmlands resulting in 37% of the state developed. In fact, over the last 30 years, New Jersey lost almost 400,000 acres of farmland, forest and wetlands to development. In addition, the fragmentation of farmlands and forests has increased resulting in smaller patches of both landscape features and a loss of connected landscapes needed for full ecosystem function.

The actions New Jersey takes in the next 30 years to are critical to the future economic and environmental health of the state.

According to the Conservation Blueprint New Jersey's land area can be broken down as follows:

4,792,000 Total land and water area in acres

1,584,000 Preserved 33%

1,801,000 Developed 38%

1,407,000 Available 29%*

778,000 unconstrained 16%*

629,000 constrained 13%*

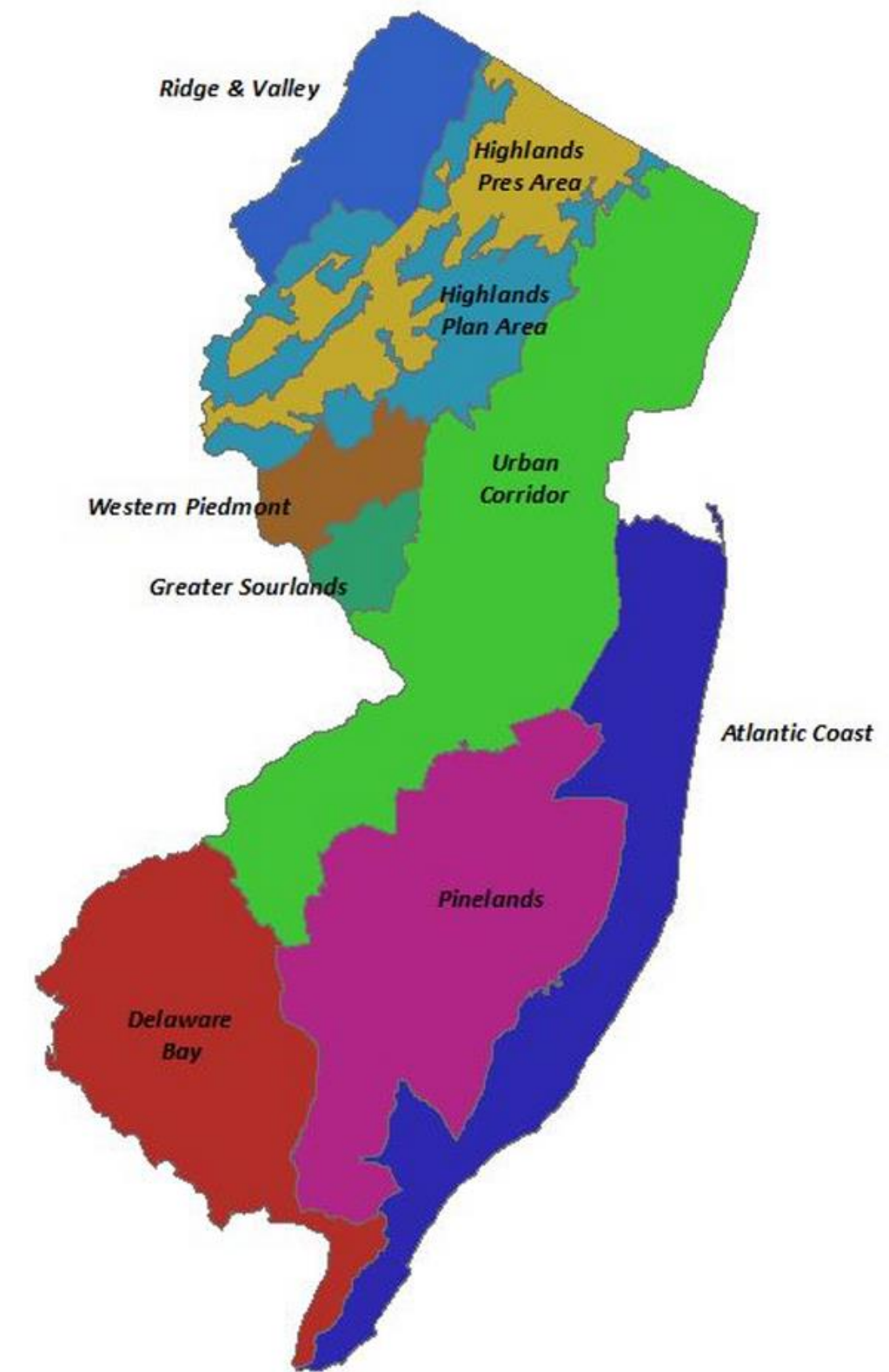
*neither preserved nor developed

WHAT IS NEXT ?

Step up for a brighter and healthier future: Permanently preserve at least 500,000 acres, or half of the most highly ranked available lands, by 2050, and make a sustained multi-year investment in the environmental health and quality of New Jersey's cities, towns, and urban communities.

New Jersey must redouble its efforts to expand its land preservation efforts to ultimately preserve 50% of the best of what's left of the state's land area by 2050 to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of our environment, communities, and economy. The Conservation Blueprint tool identifies lands most critical for ecological and water resources, agriculture, and community greenspaces. It is essential to preserve both high-value conservation lands that are at risk of development as well as high-value conservation lands that are environmentally constrained by regulations. Regulatory programs do not provide the same level of protection as is provided by permanent preservation.

PRESERVE 50% OF THE BEST OF THE AVAILABLE LANDS
BY 2050, AT LEAST 500K ACRES





The Governor and the State of New Jersey should establish a Green and Healthy Cities Initiative to create a comprehensive planning and investment program for the state's underserved urban areas to ensure vibrant healthy communities. The Initiative should be led by a Green and Healthy Cities Task Force, made up of residents from directly affected communities, who will determine the needs.

A VISION FOR NEW JERSEY: NATURE FOR ALL Reimagined and reunited

By 2050, every New Jersey resident will have:

- Vibrant, attractive and livable cities, towns and urban communities with a high environmental quality and nature in every neighborhood,
- Clean drinking water from protected water sources,
- Clean air to breathe,
- Easy access to locally sourced healthy foods,
- Safe and accessible outdoor recreation, including parks, trails, fields, forests and water access,
- High quality open spaces and parks in every community,
- Reduced mental stress and reduced loneliness through green spaces,
- Access to safe, clean beaches and inland water bodies for public recreation like swimming, fishing and birding,
- Beautiful and peaceful natural areas,
- High environmental quality and quality of life,
- Shade to protect against and to escape from sun and heat, minimizing the dangerous heat island effect,
- Sound and effective land use planning and zoning protections,
- Natural lands to recharge aquifers and absorb flood waters,
- Diverse and healthy populations of native plants and animals,
- Strong community identity and connections,
- Personal and intimate nature connections, inspiring curiosity and awe.

TWO CHOICES: TWO FUTURES



What will be the fate of roughly 29% of New Jersey's land area that is up for grabs and still needs to be developed or preserved?

Choice 1: Maintain the status quo/ take no new actions.



LAKEWOOD, NJ NEW DEVELOPMENT 2019
(COURTESY: ASBURY PARK PRESS)



CAMDEN STREET SCENE IN WATERFRONT SOUTH
(COURTESY: CATHOLICMOM.COM)



HELMETTA, NEW JERSEY | AUGUST, 2021
(COURTESY MY CENTRAL JERSEY. COM)

Choice 2: Preserve at least an additional 500K acres AND make a comprehensive investment in the environmental health and quality of New Jersey's cities, towns, and urban communities.



STREET TREES CAMDEN CITY (COURTESY NJ TREE FOUNDATION)



STOKES STATE FOREST, SUSSEX COUNTY (NJ SKYLANDS.COM)



SMALL TOWN NJ (SOURCE UNKNOWN)

TODAY'S THREATS AND CHALLENGES



Sea level rise and flooding.



HURRICANE SANDY WEBSITE PICTURE

ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

Systemic Environmental Injustice.



BIODIVERSITY

Loss of biodiversity.



WHITE- TAILED DEER (COURTESY US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE)



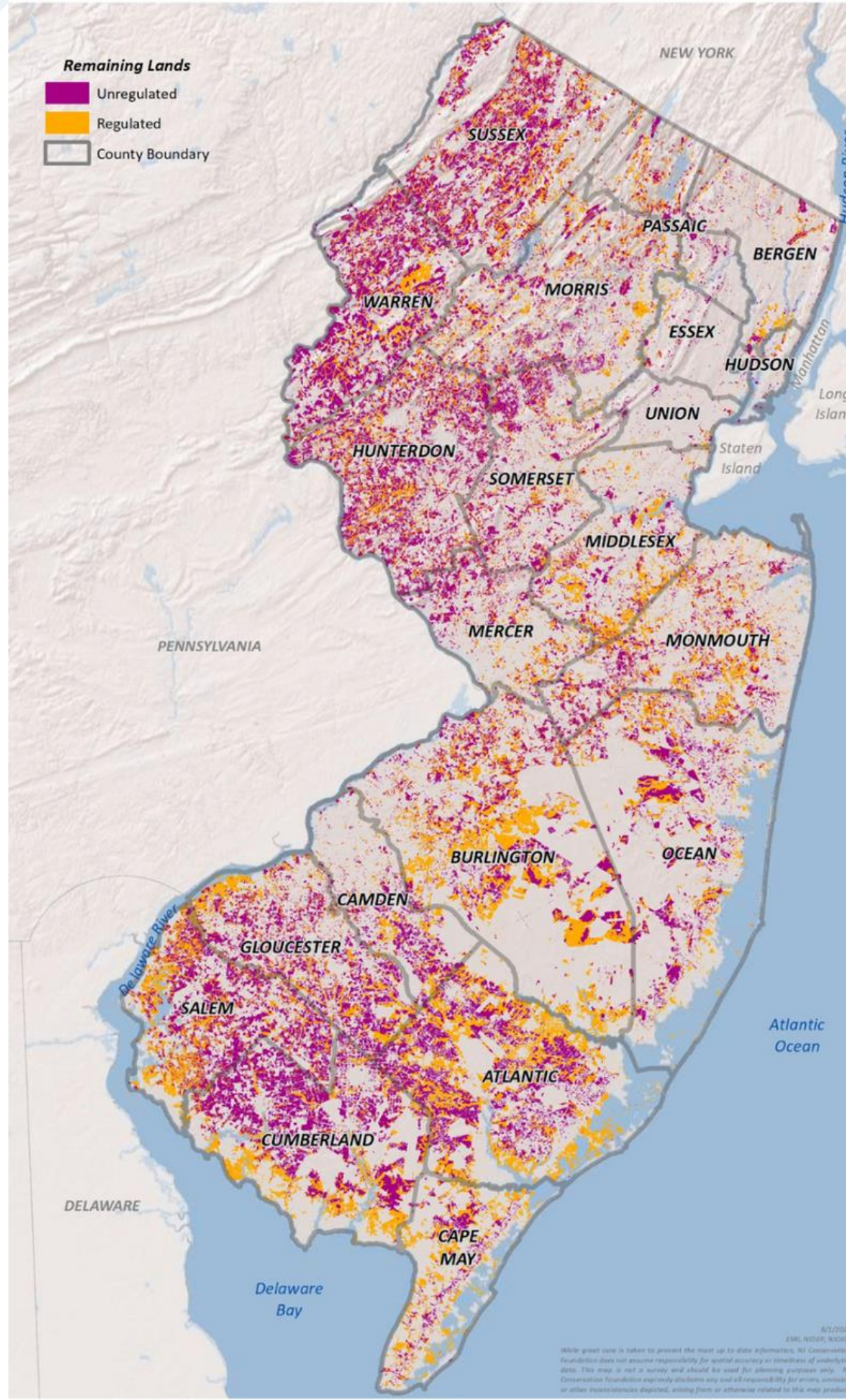
LONG -EARED BAT (COURTESY US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE)

PEOPLE & NATURE

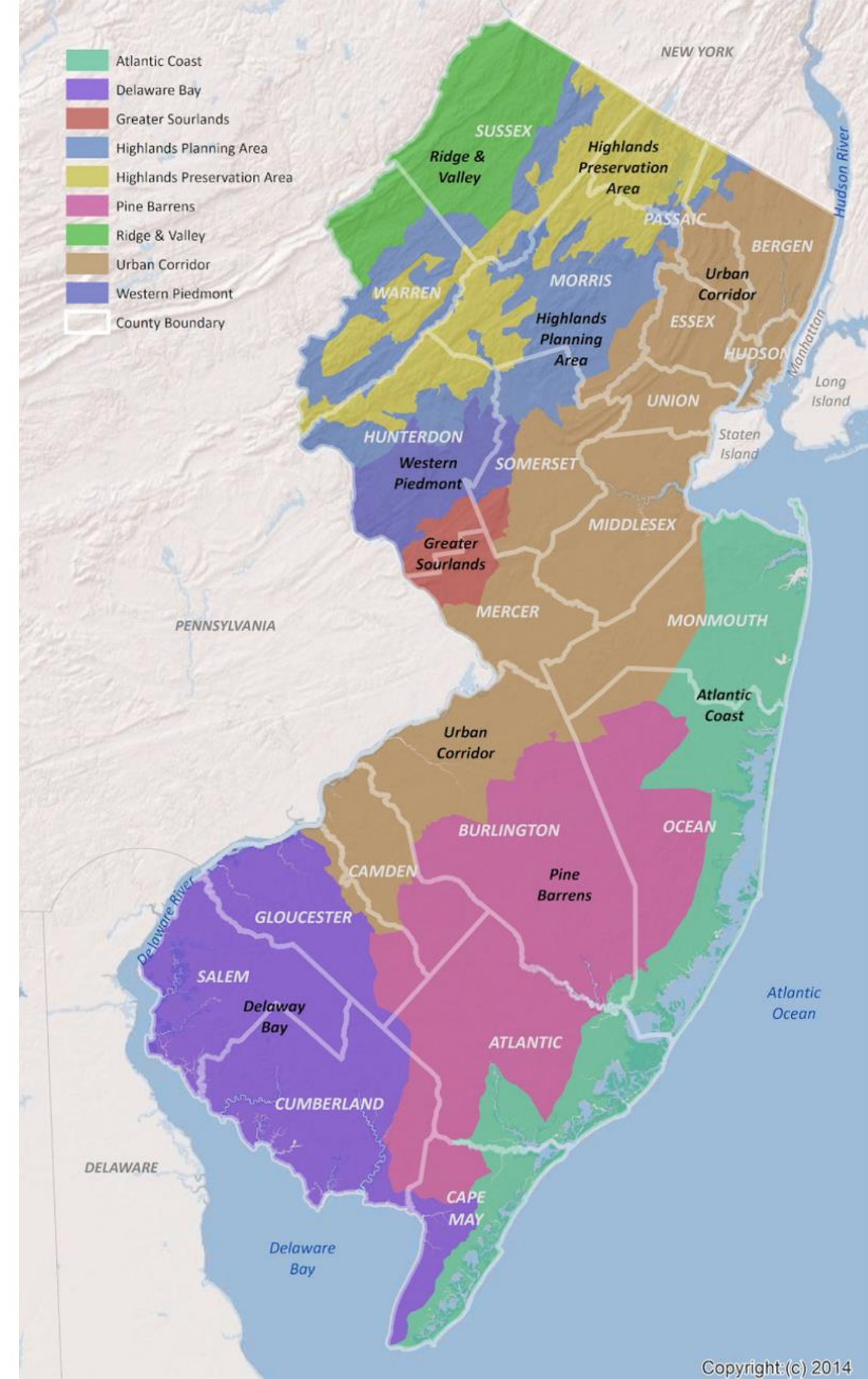


LIBERTY STATE PARK (COURTESY NJ DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION)

A V A I L A B L E L A N D S



R E G I O N S



Ecosystem Services:

- Protect and cleanse drinking water supplies
- Improve air quality
- Protect wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- Reduce flooding and storm water runoff
- Protect soils
- Sequester carbon
- Provide locally-grown foods
- Offer outdoor recreation opportunities and scenic beauty
- Reduce the "heat island" effect in urban areas
- Support human health, healing, community connections, and quality of life
- Provide access to nature and open space, which play a critical role in human health and well-being
- Provide multiple economic benefits and cost savings
- Provide buffers from impacts of adjacent development
- Buffer and increase resilience from climate change impacts
- Inspire awe, curiosity, and a sense of connection to something greater than ourselves.

Today the state's over 1.4 million acres of available lands neither preserved or developed, are currently providing ecosystem services. They are filtering and storing drinking water supplies, controlling and mitigating flooding, supplying local foods, sequestering carbon, and providing wildlife habitat and clean air. If these lands are developed, the basic environmental functions and services they provide will cease, leading to an erosion of environmental quality.

With a growing population, the need for preserving at least half of the most environmentally critical of these lands is essential.

Factors for Determining Suitability for Preservation

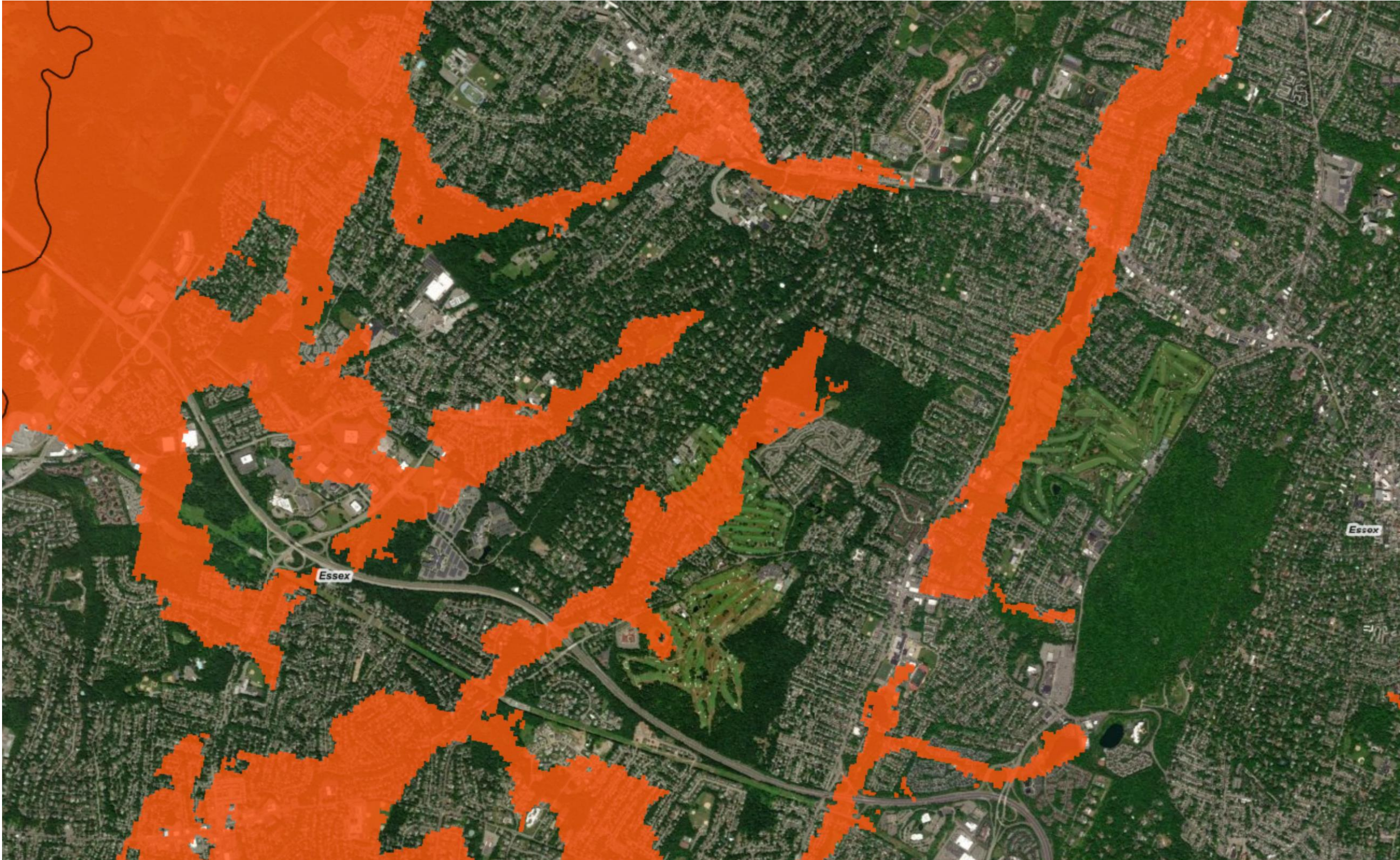
- Location, including proximity and/or connectivity to other preserved lands
- Lack of or deficit of preserved open space in the community
- Potential for linkages and wildlife habitat connections
- Potential for connecting large landscape and creating interconnected open space systems
- Natural resource features, including forests, wildlife habitat, wetlands, tributary streams, and meadows.
- Degree of threat from development, deforestation, habitat loss, climate impacts, biodiversity loss
- Potential for increasing community access to open space, “Nature in your Neighborhood”
- Ecosystem services provided by the land, such as flood control and water quality protection
- Relationship to the smart growth policies of the NJ State Development and Redevelopment Plan
- Competing demands for other public purposes, e.g. housing, tax ratables, public facilities
- Community goals and plans

Indicators for smart growth under the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan

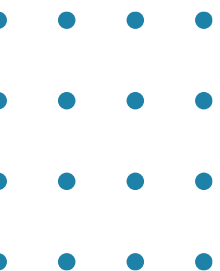
1. Growth in Smart Growth Planning Areas
2. Growth in Designated Centers
3. Growth as Redevelopment and Renewal
4. Compact, Mixed-Use Development
5. Infrastructure-Connected Growth
6. Environmentally Low-Impact Development
7. Climate Resilient Development
8. Protection of Open Space and Natural Resource

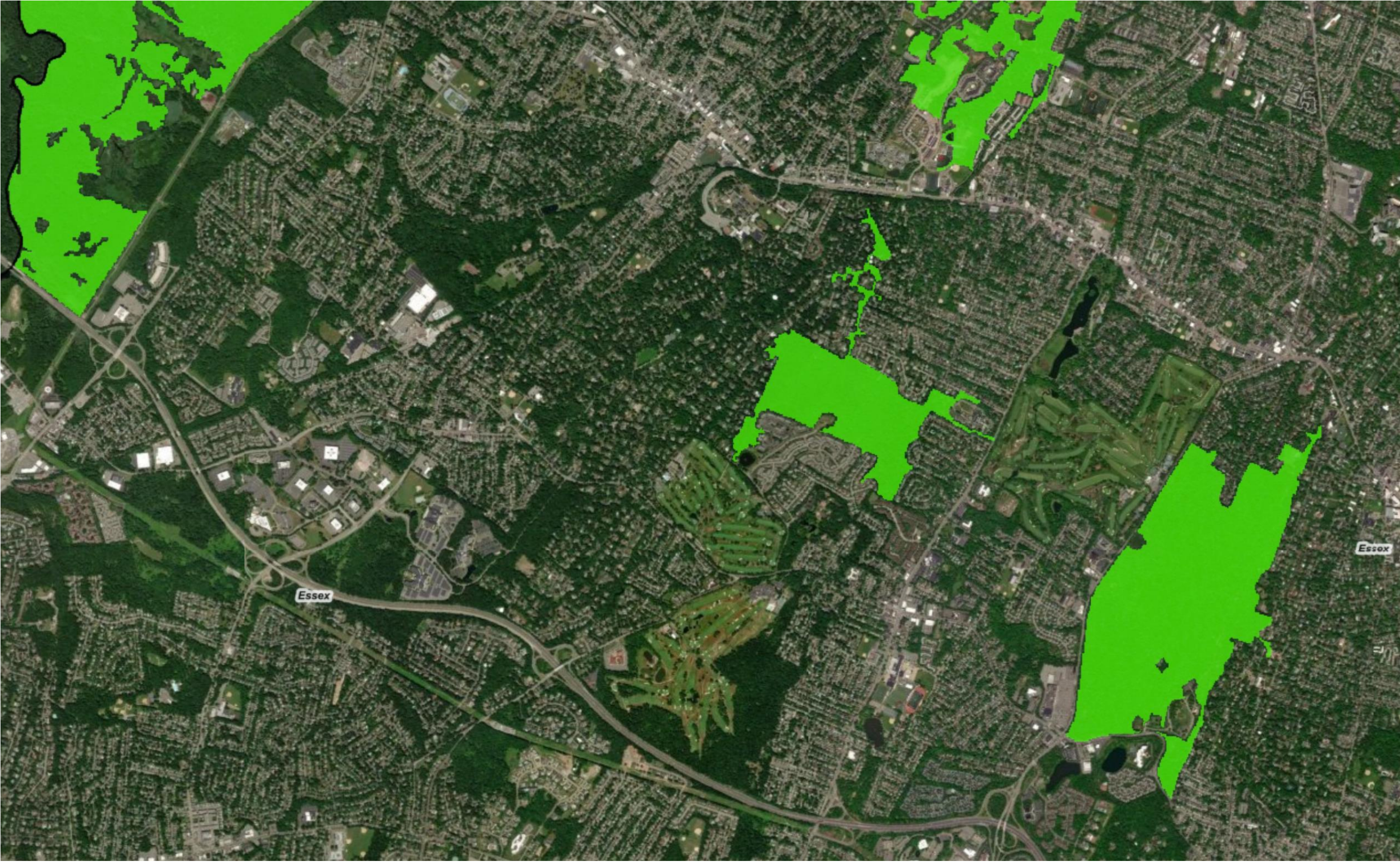
The proposed development is not consistent with the policy indicators of the NJ State Development and Redevelopment Plan.



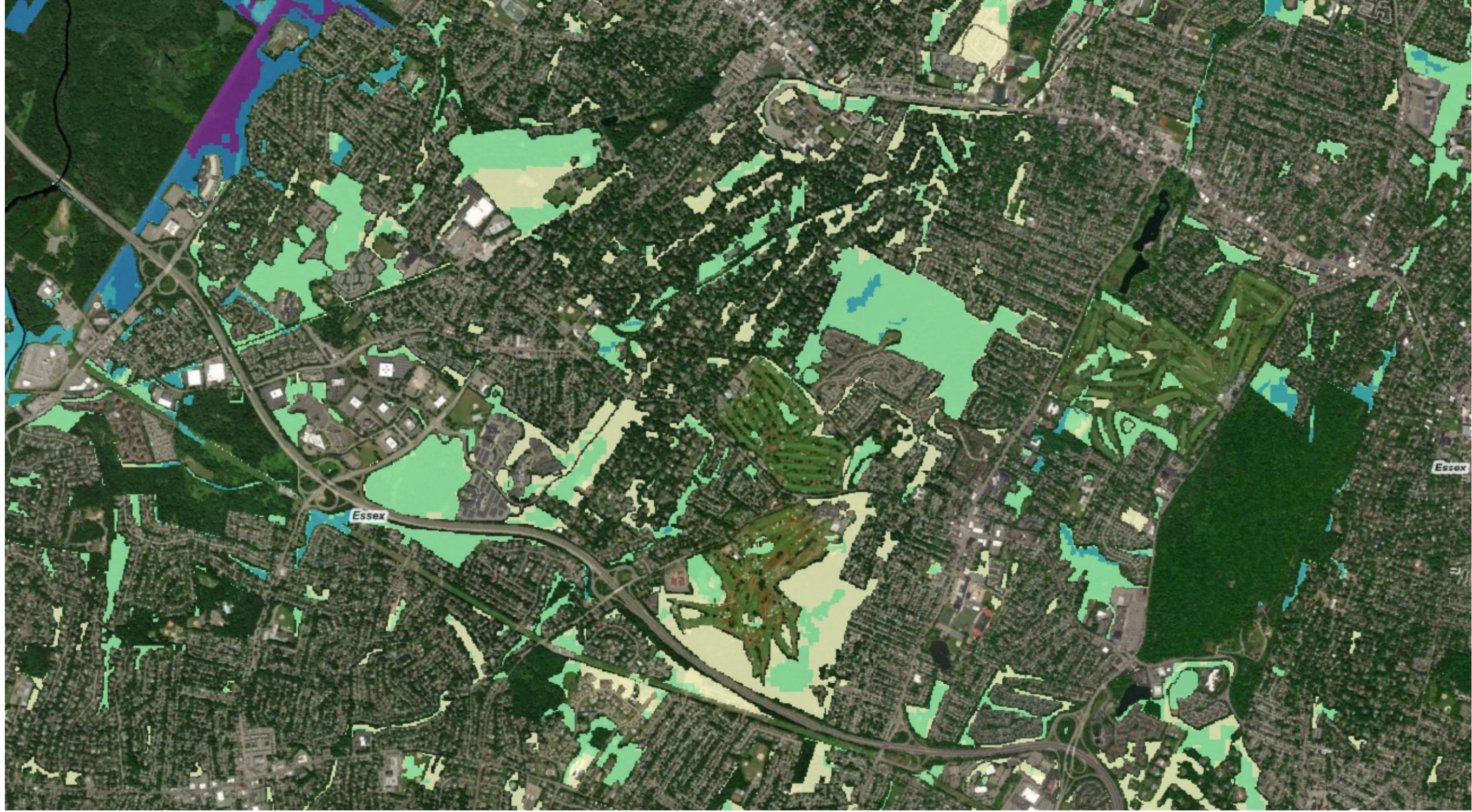


WETLANDS











FUNDING FOR PRESERVATION

New Jersey is blessed with a robust funding program for open space, parks and farmland preservation. Since 1960 New Jerseyans have affirmatively voted for more than 14 bond measures which generated over \$4 billion and resulted in the preservation of almost 34% of the state.

- **New Jersey has a permanent stable source of funding for open space and farmland preservation through the State Corporate Business Tax, administered by the Green Acres and Farmland Preservation Programs.**
- **Federal funding is available from the USDA Agricultural Land Easement Program, the Forest Legacy Program, the Highlands and Pinelands Programs, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund**
- **All 21 of New Jersey's counties have passed county-wide open space preservation measures, along with a majority of municipalities.**
- **Private funds from individuals, family foundations and philanthropic institutions have contributed millions of matching funds to secure preservation successes.**
- **Several leading NJ conservation organizations have expressed interest in leading a campaign to preserve this forest.**
- **The funding is available.**
- **All it takes now is a willing landowner.**

CONCLUSION: PRESERVATION IS THE HIGHEST AND BEST USE

Permanent preservation of the forest will:

- **Prevent increased flooding and storm water runoff**
- **Protect and clean drinking water supplies**
- **Increase open space and recreational opportunities**
- **Sequester carbon**
- **Protect air quality**
- **Protect wildlife habitat and biodiversity**
- **Protect the ancestral lands of the Leni Lenape**
- **Support human health, community and quality of life**
- **Increase resilience from climate change impacts**
- **Eliminate/reduce demand for costly municipal services**

Preservation of this forest exemplifies the type of project envisioned by the Nature for All report, and would create a lasting legacy for the residents of West Orange, Essex County, the region and the New Jersey.

Funding for the purchase of this land for preservation is available. A capital expenditure to purchase the forest and secure its permanent preservation will provide multiple health, economic and environmental benefits in perpetuity and save the town countless dollars in municipal services.