

STATE-WIDE WRAPUP DIRECTOR'S REPORT

by Jeff Tittel, Chapter Director



SMART GROWTH, SMART POLITICS

Recent polls have shown that the people of New Jersey are fed up with being stuck in traffic, and by how sprawl is impacting our quality of life and our environment. We've seen local citizens in almost 200 towns and 20 counties vote to raise their property taxes in order to buy open space. We have seen dozens of towns change political parties over the issues of sprawl and overdevelopment. So, not only is the Governor's State of the State message important for New Jersey, but Smart Growth is becoming smart politics.

New Jersey has had four State Plans. The first in 1935 called for the protection of the Highlands, cleaning up the Passaic River and saving two million acres of New Jersey farmland. Here we are 68 years later and the Highlands aren't saved, the Passaic River is still dirty and as of this year we have actually saved only 100,000 acres of farmland out of the remaining 800,000 acres. We have heard previous Governors talk about sprawl and saving open space. But what makes Governor McGreevey's anti-sprawl agenda different is that it sets up a regulatory, fiscal and legislative framework to protect our natural resources and implement Smart Growth.

As part of the regulatory framework, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has come out with the "Big Map" which divides the state into red, green and yellow areas, based on natural resources. Red areas are environmentally sensitive: wetlands, groundwater recharge, reservoir catchment, and threatened and endangered species habitat, and farmland. The red areas are not sacrosanct: development is possible, but with tougher standards to be met. Existing development and growth-appropriate areas—our cities, older suburbs and small towns—are colored green. Applying stronger standards where we need to protect drinking water and natural resources, and alternatively using the regulatory process to encourage growth in the areas that are more appropriate, instead of one size fits all, is a quantum shift for the DEP. While the Big Map is still a work in progress, and has to be adopted by other agencies, what sets it apart from previous attempts to manage growth is that it establishes a regulatory framework for implementation.

As the Governor's plan goes forward, we environmentalists will have to work carefully in order for the green light areas to accommodate the amount of growth New Jersey is going to get. We can help identify underutilized lands, abandoned properties and brownfields as well as other sites, and then encourage the infrastructure that will allow them to be developed. We need to deal with issues like combined sewer overflow, schools, and existing utilities that are falling apart, and the need to provide more mass transit. We also need to give our green light areas green parks. To pay for this, we'll have to shift the monies we currently use to subsidize sprawl, like running sewer lines next to our reservoirs and highways through our open spaces and subsidizing office parks in farm fields.

The Governor's Smart Growth agenda will require new legislation. In the past, many bills proposed to manage growth in New Jersey have been defeated by the builders and others. For example, the first Transfer of Development Rights bill, proposed 25 years ago, was defeated. In the last legislative session Timed Growth legislation was stopped. It is going to take a lot of work and political will to pass bills that will allow towns to turn down development because of impacts to traffic or water, or to have a time out or moratorium on building, or to provide for regional planning—giving counties more say in border wars between municipalities.

We have seen how sprawl pollutes our air and water, makes droughts worse, causes increased flooding and increases traffic congestion. New Jersey is losing open space faster than at any other time in our history, and the public's demand to do something about it is at an all time high. We need to move quickly before we run out of time and land. The fix will not be easy because we need to pass major legislation and a large regulatory package, and we need to have financial resources at a time of tight budgets. New Jersey's population is denser than that of any other state—even denser than India or Japan. The only thing denser has been our politicians who don't get it, but at least now we do have a Governor who gets it. ☺

REPORT ON TRANSPORTATION ISSUES:

TEA-21 RENEWAL WORKSHOP on TRAFFICBUSTING

by Bob Johnson, our Transportation Issues Coordinator

The NJ Chapter will hold a traffic buster workshop on Saturday, May 3, in the Morris County library (<http://www.gti.net/mocolib1/>). The workshop will run from 10am to 4pm and will feature presentations on various modes of transportation including passenger rail, freight rail, bicycling and walking. The theme of the workshop will be "How can New Jersey's quality of life be improved by transportation?"

TEA-21 is the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st century. It is the main source of federal funding for surface transportation. It comes up for renewal every 6 years and the current Act

expires on Sept 30 of this year. For more information about it, see <http://www.tea3.org/>. Its renewal is important because it will determine how much money will be spent on new highways, and how much on alternate modes of transportation. The focus of the workshop will be to explore the various transportation options made possible by TEA-21

If you are interested in transportation, the chapter has a specialized list serve for this issue. To join, send a blank message to: NJ-Sierra-Transportation-subscribe@topica.com. I can be reached at robert.johnson@comcast.net ☺

Conservation Efforts

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sion of the Solberg Airport in rural Hunterdon County (with help from the **Hunterdon Group**), which would lead to noise, fumes, and light pollution, as well as potential aquifer contamination; development of the Cornell Farm in Piscataway; and a proposed recycling center next to the Hillsborough Mercury Depot. In addition, the Group is fighting development along streams, wetlands, floodplains, and steep slopes, and is monitoring local master plans.

The **Hunterdon Group** is helping to develop the Hunterdon County Growth Management Plan, defining broad goals, then forming the specifics, as well as analyzing environmental indicators and build-out scenarios. The Hunterdon Group has been the only environmental advocacy group present at the committee meetings. Meanwhile, all of the contentious housing developments that the Hunterdon Group has opposed are in litigation.

In Mercer County, Washington Township has given approval for over half a dozen warehouses, "The Matrix," to be built on 300+ acres of farmland. Containing wetlands, streams, and the potential habitat for several endangered species, this site would be prime acreage for preservation. But Washington Township insists it needs the property taxes generated from this development, and it cares not for the Upper Freehold residents across the street, who would be affected by the noise, traffic, and runoff. The **Central Jersey Group** has asked the DEP to review the wetlands delineations for the site because it appears that the consultants hired by the Matrix missed a few. Central is also asking for a thorough wildlife survey.

Several Groups are working on transportation projects. The **Hudson-Meadowlands Group** is playing a leading role in substituting light rail for a highway in Jersey City's Bergen Arches rail corridor. The DEP's Bergen Arches Final Study Report lists a light rail line as one of the three best uses for the Arches. The Hudson-Meadowlands Group is drafting a response to the report in which the Group will stress the importance of public transit in an already crowded and transit-amenable city.

In the Highlands, the **North Jersey Group** has opposed the widening of Rte. 15 at its intersection with Rte. 206. Not only will the widening lead to more sprawl development and congestion, but it will also disturb the central

section of the Highlands. The North Group is hopeful, however, because the Governor's Big Map has placed this section of road in the red zone.

The **Jersey Shore Group** has been involved in hearings for the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex (MOM) rail line. The Group submitted comments at the EIS Scoping Hearing, encouraging the construction of a rail line that will encourage new riders to use the trains rather than shift current riders from one rail line to another.

The Central Jersey Group has been involved in the Penns Neck Area EIS Partners Roundtable, an effort by the DOT to include stakeholders, regulators, and citizens in a highly contentious highway bypass project. A portion of the proposed road would have been built near the Millstone River and the Delaware and Raritan Canal. Club members have been working with other environmentalists to propose alternate options, including bus rapid transit, that would move or eliminate the road from environmentally sensitive areas. As of early February, reports of bald eagles (endangered nationwide) and a long-eared owl (threatened in NJ) have been filed with the DEP, but the DOT continues to refuse to conduct a wildlife survey of the study area. The Central Jersey Group and others will continue to push for a wildlife survey.

We have several victories to report! 400 Acres on the top of Hamburg Mountain will now become State property and remain largely undeveloped, thanks in part to work by the North Jersey Group. An undeveloped site on the Princeton Ridge may stay undeveloped now that the Central Jersey Group alerted the State to a violation of an agreement with Princeton Township not to develop on environmentally sensitive land. The **West Jersey Group** helped residents of Bordentown City and Bordentown Township thwart an effort by Conectiv to build a power plant along the Delaware River. And the **South Jersey Group** has been working with the National Park Service in the designation and protection of the Great Egg Harbor as a Wild and Scenic River.

For more information, and to volunteer for any of these projects, please visit our Group Reports web site at <http://www.sierraactivist.org/groupreports>. ☺

**Our new Trenton office still needs donated furniture:
Desks, chairs, and electronic equipment. Can you help?
Please call Tina Schvejda at 973-427-6863.**



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

RECYCLING RUBBER TIRES

In Nevada, a recycling program was developed to convert discarded automobile tires into heat and electricity, supplying electricity at 1.5 cents a kilowatt hour. This is about half the cost of conventional fossil fuel electricity.

Would-be pollutants are extracted to make valuable by-products. High-grade steel is removed and recycled. Sulfur is removed to make wallboards. Carbon is extracted to make carbon filters, more tires, or enough mascara to supply millions of women. Carbon dioxide is extracted and sold to the bottlers of car-

bonated beverages. It is also piped to hydroponic green houses to make bigger and better tomatoes.

The system greatly exceeds air quality standards. The effluent can be reduced to pure nitrogen.

Further information about this process can be obtained from <http://www.nathanielenergy.com>. How many rubber tires are clogging up our over-crowded landfills?

Sid Goodman (our onetime Energy Issues Coordinator), Mahwah, NJ

YOU HAVE MORE TO GIVE THAN YOU KNOW

Maybe you can't make a gift to protect the environment during your lifetime, but you can become a financial hero by remembering the Sierra Club in your will. You can even direct your gift to a special Club program or to the New Jersey Chapter.

For information about making a bequest to the New Jersey Chapter call George Denzer at 609-799-5839.