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RE: Joint Finance Committee DNREC Hearing; in support of \$10 million in funding for open space preservation

The League of Women Voters of Delaware urges the Joint Finance Committee to support \$10 million for open space preservation.

Per capita health care costs in Delaware are \$8,480 annually.¹ *The Nature Fix*, by Florence Williams, describes a plethora of studies which cite the causal relationship of open space and health. Close to home, a study was done in southeastern Pennsylvania that shows that access to outdoor recreation spared the residents \$800 million in healthcare costs. Allowing for the difference in population size, that would be equivalent to about \$188 million in Delaware.²

The inexorable growth of development gives some communities an unmerited sense of fiscal well-being. Why is it unmerited? It's because taxes on open space result in a net gain for community coffers, while taxes on developed land don't cover the costs of providing services.³

The nearby study mentioned earlier shows the enormous economic benefit of open space in filtering water, controlling flooding, and cleaning the air. In 2016, outdoor recreation in Delaware added \$3.3 billion to our gross domestic product.⁴

Unquantifiable is the truly lovely quality of life we experience here in Delaware as a result of preserved open space.

But our population is growing, development continues unabated, and opportunities to preserve open space are becoming increasingly limited.

Full funding for Delaware's open space preservation program makes sense, not only in terms of costs but also for the increase in quality of life for Delawareans. We urge the Joint Finance Committee to concur with the \$10 million proposed by the Governor for open space preservation.

¹ "Health Care Costs and Spending in Delaware," June, 2017 <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhcc/files/healthcarecosts062017.pdf>

² "Return on Environment: the Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania," GreenSpace Alliance and Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, 2010 <http://www.dvrpc.org/reports/11033B.pdf>

³ "Cost of Community Services Studies," American Farmland Trust, August 2010 https://www.communitypreservation.org/sites/macpc/files/uploads/community_services.pdf

⁴ "Tourism Is an Economic Engine in Delaware," Delaware: Endless Discoveries, Feb. 2018 <https://www.visitdelaware.com/articles/post/value-of-tourism-2016/>