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**RE: Office of Management and Budget DNREC Hearing; in support of \$10 million in funding for open space preservation**

The League of Women Voters of Delaware urges the Office of Management and Budget to allocate \$10 million for open space preservation.

We've come a long way since the Forestry Commission paid \$100 for the 58 acres that began Redden State Forest. That was back in 1927, and land prices are higher nowadays. Yet the need for public open space is ever-increasing, just as the population increases and as many back yards shrink. Since the Delaware Land Protection Act was passed in 1990, 62,680 acres of open space have been permanently preserved.

The League extends its hearty thanks to DNREC for its excellent stewardship of these public lands.

Even though Covid 19 has stretched our state budget, it's a matter of good economics for the state to continue its support of our excellent open space preservation program.

First of all, consider health care costs in Delaware. They amount to about one-third of our state budget, and \$8,480 per capita annually.<sup>1</sup> The Nature Fix describes a number of studies which note the causal relationship between open space and health.<sup>2</sup> A study was done in southeastern Pennsylvania that shows that access to outdoor recreation spared the residents \$800 million in health care costs.<sup>3</sup> In Delaware that would translate to about \$188 million spared in health care costs, if we compare just the populations of the two areas.

Secondly, the relentless growth of development gives some communities an unmerited sense of fiscal well-being. Why is it unmerited? It's because for every tax dollar paid to the government, the government spends only \$.37 for services to open space and farmland, while it pays \$1.16 for services to residential development.<sup>4</sup>

And in the third place, the southeastern Pennsylvania study mentioned earlier shows an enormous economic benefit of open space in filtering water, controlling flooding, and

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

<sup>2</sup> Florence Williams, The Nature Fix, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2017

<sup>3</sup> *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>

<sup>4</sup> American Farmland Trust, *Cost of Community Services Studies* 2016 [https://conservationtools-production.s3.amazonaws.com/library\\_item\\_files/352/1464/Cost\\_of\\_Community\\_Services\\_Studies\\_AFT\\_FIC\\_201609.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIQFJLILYGVDR4AMQ&Expires=1605206565&Signature=f3EjIU5lri10IrPZS%2FkvHWgiJdM%3D](https://conservationtools-production.s3.amazonaws.com/library_item_files/352/1464/Cost_of_Community_Services_Studies_AFT_FIC_201609.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIQFJLILYGVDR4AMQ&Expires=1605206565&Signature=f3EjIU5lri10IrPZS%2FkvHWgiJdM%3D)

cleaning the air. The researchers find that access to open space in the area even adds about \$10,000 to the price of every home.

All of this information on financial advantages to increased open space preservation doesn't cover the sheer joy of having outdoor places to play, or to just enjoy as we pass by in our cars or on our bikes.

The League urges the Office of Management and Budget to support a \$10 million allocation for open space preservation.