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

Before I begin my formal remarks I'd like to point out apropos an earlier comment, that the *Washington Post* writes in today's online edition that "the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), which manages about 90 percent of the state's electric load, said thermal power plants, which include gas, coal and nuclear, as well renewables have been adversely affected by the icy weather." The ice didn't affect only wind turbines, but a broad range of energy sources.¹

The League of Women Voters of Delaware urges the Joint Finance Committee 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. The League extends its hearty thanks to DNREC for its excellent stewardship of the public lands preserved with vigor over these many decades.

Why does funding for open space preservation make fiscal sense? 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.² The Nature Fix describes a number of studies which note the causal relationship between open space and health.³ A study was done in southeastern Pennsylvania that shows that access to outdoor recreation spared the residents \$800 million in health care costs.⁴ 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

¹ *Washington Post*, Feb. 16, 2021 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/02/16/energy-202-how-bitter-cold-snap-is-crippling-power-texas/>

² *Health Care Costs and Spending in Delaware*, June, 2017 <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhcc/files/healthcarecosts062017.pdf>

³ Florence Williams, *The Nature Fix*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2017

⁴ *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>

the government, the government spends only \$.37 for services to open space and farmland, while it pays \$1.16 for services to residential development.⁵

Thirdly, the southeastern Pennsylvania study mentioned earlier shows an enormous economic benefit of open space in filtering water, controlling flooding, and 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 Joint Finance Committee to support a \$10 million allocation for open space preservation.

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⁵ 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