



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF DELAWARE
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Re: Office of Management and Budget hearing for DNREC - In Support of Increased Funding for Open Space Protection

The League of Women Voters of Delaware urges the Office of Budget and Management to support \$20 million for land protection through the Open Space Program, through epilogue language, \$5 million for the Division of Parks and Recreation for open space preservation by counties and municipalities and their conservation partners.

While it may be surprising that the League engages in environmental issues, Members became concerned through work with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the 1920's. With growing involvement over the years, League's advocacy broadened by the 1970's to "protecting and managing the interrelated aspects of air, water, land use, energy, and waste management."¹ It is through deeply held League values that we have come here today to seek "to preserve and protect life-supporting ecosystems"² which are vitally important in Delaware.

A growing number of scientists predict that we will need to protect 50% of Earth's water and land to keep our planet habitable.³ For Delaware, 1.6 million acres total, that equals 800 thousand acres.⁴ While Delaware has protected 68,000-plus acres (8% of 800k) with the important goals of providing "recreational opportunities, and habitat and biodiversity protection" and "ensuring clean water, clean air, and safe, healthy communities,"⁵ much more land protection is needed to keep these goals viable into the future as more of Delaware's private natural open spaces convert to development. In Sussex County alone, between 2017-2021, 19,103 major subdivision lots were proposed, many in environmentally sensitive areas.

Therefore, Delaware's Open Space funding needs to at least keep pace with inflation. The Open Space Program was funded in the mid-1990's at \$10 million annually, equivalent to \$20 million today.⁶ At the same time, development pressures in Delaware continue to raise prices for land. So an allocation of \$20 million barely maintains the original scope of the Open Space Program.

Therefore, the League finds it critical for our state to invest \$20 million in DNREC's successful Open Space Program, and an innovative \$5 million for local public-private partnerships in land protection for FY2025.

¹ League of Women Voters. (2022). *Impact on Issues 2022-2024: A Guide to Public Policy Positions of the League of Women Voters*.

² *ibid*

³ Robbins, J. (2/13/20). *Salvation or Pipe Dream? A Movement Grows to Protect Up to Half the Planet*. Yale E360. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/salvation-or-pipe-dream-a-movement-grows-to-protect-up-to-half-the-planet>

⁴ *How Big is Delaware?* (n.d.). Retrieved November 15, 2023, from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/states/delaware/how-big>

⁵ DNREC. (2023). *Report to OMB by Secretary of the Dept of Natural Resources and Environmental Control*. <https://budget.delaware.gov/budget/fy2025/documents/narratives/dnrec.pdf>

⁶ *CPI Inflation Calculator*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 14, 2023, from https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

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