

LAND & OPEN SPACE

New Jersey stands as a national leader in preserving open space, farmland, and historic sites, having protected over 1.5 million acres—more than a third of its land—through coordinated investments and policies. Yet, with full build-out expected within 25 years, the state faces escalating threats to its natural heritage, biodiversity, and residents' well-being.

Despite our dense population, **New Jersey boasts diverse ecosystems and geographies**, from the Highlands forests to the Pinelands' globally recognized aquifer. However, degraded landscapes, invasive species, overdevelopment, and climate stressors continue to erode these critical resources. Our **Natural Lands Trust and parks system** suffer from underfunding and staff shortages, threatening oversight, ecological health, and access.

Preserved lands—ranging from forests and wetlands to historic farms—provide invaluable ecosystem services, returning \$10 for every \$1 invested in the form of clean water, flood control, pollination, and recreation. Yet, urban communities often lack access to safe parks and green spaces, exacerbating health inequities. We must aim to ensure every resident lives within a 10-minute walk of a park.



The Farmland Preservation Program has protected over 250,000 acres, with a goal of reaching 550,000. Yet farms are under siege from sprawling warehouse development driven by e-commerce and port logistics. This threatens not only land but also local food systems, wildlife habitats, and rural economies. Additionally, excessive and high impact commercial non-farm events on preserved lands risk undermining the purpose of farmland preservation.

Equity in land use must guide the future. Indigenous voices, communities of color, and low-income neighborhoods have been excluded from decision-making. Urban agriculture presents a way forward—supporting food security, education, career pathways, and local economies—but must be backed by policies addressing land access, water infrastructure, and culturally appropriate nutrition.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Climate and Water Resilience

- Use existing authority to deny all new fossil fuel infrastructure and pipeline proposals.

Advance Environmental Justice and Inclusion

- Support the leadership of on-the-ground environmental justice organizations in their work and advocacy.

Protect and Manage Natural and Indigenous Resources

- Fully fund NJDEP and increase staffing, particularly for enforcing wetlands protection, illegal off-road vehicle use, dumping, and other violations.

Strengthen Farmland Preservation and Soil Health

- Preserve 315,000+ additional acres to meet NJ's goal of 550,000 acres of preserved farmland.
- Prohibit warehouses and non-farm commercial infrastructure on prime agricultural soils.

Ensure Equitable Access to Parks and Open Space

- Fully fund and staff NJ's state parks and address the \$600M+ backlog of capital improvements (see Pinelands Preservation Alliance's *Fix Our Parks*).
- Set a 2050 goal to preserve 50% of NJ's most critical ecological, agricultural, and water-rich lands.

Reform and Reimagine Development

- Create a state program to help municipalities revise master plans and zoning to reduce warehouse sprawl and responsibly site development and promote redevelopment.

Universalize Environmental Stakeholder Community Input

- Amend the Municipal Land Use Law to require every municipality to establish an Environmental Commission.

