

Talking Points:

Cuts to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP):

- The governor's proposed budget would cut the DEP's budget by 15% and eliminate 200-300 jobs at the agency.
- The DEP cannot absorb these cuts because it has already borne a disproportionate share of budget cuts in recent years. In the 1990's under Governor Whitman the budget was cut by almost a third and a quarter of the staff was laid off, and the agency has not recovered from those losses. In the past five years, an additional 400 jobs have been lost due to various hiring freezes. The DEP simply cannot sustain yet another cut and continue to effectively protect the state's environment.
- The DEP's Division of Parks and Forestry has 40% fewer staff members than it did in 1994 and 40% more land to manage. Likewise, the Site Remediation Program had 270 case managers handling 12,000 contaminated sites in 1994 – now it has 170 case managers handling 18,000 sites.
- The loss or reduction of DEP programs will have real and serious consequences. For example, with fewer staff to administer the Site Remediation Program, contaminated sites will take longer to clean up and more toxins will be leaked into our air, water, and soil, threatening public health. *[Also see park closings as a major consequence.]*
- The DEP constitutes only 0.7% of the overall state budget. Because of fines, fees, permits, and federal grants brought in by its programs, the department is 90% self-sustaining with only 10% of its budget coming from general state funds.
- In fact, cutting DEP will cause the state to LOSE money. The state currently receives federal monies both in the form of matching funds, which will be lost if the state funding is not available, and as grants in exchange for administering federal environmental programs, which will also be forfeited if there is no staff available to carry out those programs. With fewer staff to administer and enforce regulations, permit fees from programs such as the Site Remediation Program will be reduced and fines from Natural Resource Damages and other sources will drop off. *[Also see park closings for economic consequences to DEP and the state's general funds.]*

Park Closings:

- On April 1st, the DEP announced that the proposed budget cuts would result in the closing of 9 state parks and portions of 3 other parks. These include Monmouth Battlefield State Park, High Point State Park, Brendan T. Byrne State Forest, Jenny Jump State Forest, Round Valley Recreation Area, Stephens State Park, Worthington State Forest, Parvin State Park, Fort Mott (including Hancock House), Bulls Island Recreation Area at D&R Canal State Park, and Shepherd's Lake Recreation Area at Ringwood State Park. Washington Crossing State Park will also have reduced hours and services.
- Parks serve as places for people to spend vacation time with their families, enjoy nature, and exercise, providing a higher quality of life. The closure of public parks will disproportionately affect low- and middle-income families who do not have access to private facilities for these purposes.
- Seventeen million people visit New Jersey's state parks every year, adding \$3.9 billion to the state's economy through park fees, sales tax, and tourism-related service industries, such as hotels and restaurants.
- There are alternative ways to fund these parks instead of closing them. Environmental groups have suggested many options for raising revenues, from raising camping fees to a modest sales tax on outdoor recreation equipment and ATVs to renegotiating leases of state land to reflect fair market value. *[Note: Some corporations and other organizations lease state land – for example, utilities may lease state land to run power lines across. Currently these groups pay only \$1 an acre, which is 100 times less than the market rate.]*
- New Jersey voters have voted repeatedly to fund public open spaces, including most recently a 2007 bond initiative to keep the state's open space, farmland, and historic preservation programs going for another year. The cuts in parks funding ignore the demonstrated will of the people.
- New Jersey voters have paid for these parks. They belong to us. For the Corzine Administration to deny us access to them is unacceptable and wrong.