



## **I BELIEVE: 'Tomorrow's children should have as good or better quality of life than that of our forebearers'**

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*Written by Dave Moore*

I believe tomorrow's children should have as good or better quality of life than that of our forebearers. New Jersey has made progress toward becoming a sustainable state, meaning our ability to meet our current needs without compromising the needs of future generations. Now, we need to advance the effort by making sure our political leaders take a long-term view of the future.

Over the past decades, New Jersey has been a national leader in sustainability. In the mid-'50s Gov. Alfred Driscoll understood that if the last large undeveloped stretch of barrier island along the Jersey coast were to be sold to the highest bidder, the state's entire ocean front could soon be covered with buildings. So he sought legislative approval to buy what is now Island Beach State Park. Almost every governor since has done something important to advance the conservation cause.

In the late 1950s it was the race for open space that caught public attention, resulting in the first Green Acres bond issue in 1961. In the mid-'60s, the Hughes administration recognized that clean water was essential for the state's economic well-being, and created a unit to solve water quality problems within the Department of Health. By 1969, attention was focused on clean air and water nationwide, and the movement that led to Earth Day in 1970 was as powerful here as any place in the country. New Jersey created its own Department of Environmental Protection to coordinate water and pollution prevention and cleanup efforts, to protect open space and to husband natural resources under Governor William Cahill.

Lots of innovative environmental law followed: pesticide control, solid and toxic waste remediation, recycling, coastal and inland wetlands protection and soil erosion control. Environmental education was introduced in every classroom by actions of both the state and federal government.

It was clear that the use of land needed to be controlled, for what happened on the land determined what natural resources were compromised. Municipal land use law — zoning — was supposed to see to that, however, it was just as clear that natural resources did not respect local boundaries, nor did towns, so regional planning came to the fore.

Regional planning started with the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission, later followed by the Coastal Area Facilities Review Act, Pinelands Protection Act, the Delaware and

Raritan Canal Commission and, in more modern times, by the Highlands Protection Act. Those laws and the commissions that emerged have all amply demonstrated their effectiveness and efficiency.

Despite all that, it seems we have been slowly moving toward a less and less sustainable state.

Now, just when we need to pick up the pace thanks to a changing climate, we are in yet another political transition that slows things down. A change of party usually means that whatever useful innovations came before are often ignored or repealed.

What is required now to sustain our life quality, health, economy and environment is to reinstate, as promised by the Christie Administration, a strong and comprehensive New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, buttressed by the Sustainable State Institute's goals and benchmarks. The State Plan is a document describing where growth and development should occur, and just as importantly, where it should not occur.

We must have those markers to measure progress, so we can be sure that our air and water continue to get cleaner, that our economy continues to improve, and that we live in a healthful state. State planning and measurement programs were in place and working when Gov. Christie Todd Whitman left office, albeit not at full power. Subsequent administrations allowed those programs to languish.

Full reinstatement of the principles of the State Plan would allow coordination of both public policy and expenditure to operate at state and local levels, and permanently put in place a measurement system to insure we are making progress toward a sustainable future for ourselves and those who follows us.

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