

CHAPTER VI

WARREN COUNTY OPEN SPACE AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION TRUST FUND

In the November 1993 election, a non-binding referendum was placed on the ballot to provide dedicated revenue for land acquisitions. It polled the residents of Warren County on their sentiment for the creation of an Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund. Warren County voters approved this referendum by a 2 to 1 ratio. The fund has been collecting revenue by raising the property tax by a rate of \$.02 per \$100 of total county equalized real property valuation. This equates to a tax increase of \$20 for every \$100,000 of property value. This non-binding referendum has given the elected officials of Warren County the opportunity to enact a system for:

- Protecting wetlands, stream corridors, aquifers and aquifer recharge areas.
- Protecting existing park lands and provide outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Protecting and/or preserve areas of scenic, historic, and cultural value.
- Preserving prime farmland, including small operations, which receive low priority from the present state program.

Twenty-five percent of the trust fund is set aside for the Warren County Board of Recreation Commissioners to acquire lands in accordance with this open space plan. Annually, \$280,000 has been raised since the trust fund was established in 1995.

In 1997, the official name of the trust fund was changed to the Warren County Open Space, Recreation and Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund in accordance with the State Statute.

Municipal Role

Traditionally, municipal parks and recreational areas include ball fields, playgrounds, picnic areas, swimming pools and bike trails. Often, municipal programs are tailored to suit the needs of

preschoolers, teens, adults and senior citizens. These areas are typically smaller in size and focus more on the active recreation that county, state, and federal agencies do not address. Many times, the local schools provide the recreational facilities in a community.

To assist municipalities, the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders has set aside 25 percent of the County Open Space, Recreation and Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund for use by municipalities and charitable conservancies. A Municipal and Charitable Conservancy Trust Fund Committee has been established by the Board of Chosen Freeholders to review and recommend applications from municipalities and charitable conservancies for funding land acquisition.

Currently, Alpha, Greenwich, Mansfield, Knowlton, Pohatcong, and Washington Townships have their own dedicated tax, and six others had non-binding referendums approved in November 1998. They are Hardwick, Harmony, Independence, Liberty, Franklin, and White Townships.