

ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 2804

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 1, 1997

The Assembly Environment, Science and Technology Committee favorably reports Assembly Bill No. 2804 with committee amendments.

This bill would create the Meadowlands Conservation Trust in but not of the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission. The purposes of the trust would be to acquire and hold, or acquire and convey to other governmental entities or to qualified nonprofit organizations, environmentally important, valuable, or sensitive lands located in the Hackensack meadowlands or within the Hackensack river watershed, which lands would be permanently preserved and managed in their natural state or in a largely natural or undeveloped state for the purposes of conserving and enhancing natural resources, protecting elements of natural diversity, providing open space, or providing public outdoor passive recreational opportunities.

The trust would be administered by a seven-member board of trustees comprising: four private citizens appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate; the Commissioner of Community Affairs; the executive director of the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission; and a mayor, or elected chief executive of a municipality, appointed by, and who would serve at the pleasure of, the Hackensack Meadowlands Municipal Committee.

The trust would be empowered to, among other things:

(1) plan and implement strategies to maximize land acquisition and preservation and environmental enhancement in the Hackensack meadowlands and the Hackensack river watershed in keeping with the purposes of the trust;

(2) acquire and hold, or acquire and convey to other governmental entities, including but not limited to the New Jersey Natural Lands Trust, or to qualified nonprofit organizations, environmentally important, valuable, or sensitive lands located in the Hackensack meadowlands or within the Hackensack river watershed; and preserve and manage those lands in their natural state or in a largely natural or undeveloped state for the purposes of conserving and enhancing

natural resources, including but not limited to wetlands mitigation sites and banks, and protecting elements of natural diversity, providing open space, or providing public outdoor passive recreational opportunities;

(3) establish a special working relationship with the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission and the Hackensack Meadowlands Municipal Committee in furthering the purposes of the trust;

(4) apply for and accept grants and other aid; solicit and accept gifts, donations, legacies, bequests, and endowments; and solicit and accept rents or royalties, all to be used for the purposes of the trust;

(5) if deemed useful, authorize establishment by appropriate persons or organizations of a tax-exempt nonprofit organization or organizations for the purposes of assisting the trust; and

(6) establish incentive programs to encourage landowners within the Hackensack meadowlands or the Hackensack river watershed to (a) convey land to the trust or to other public or private entities seeking to preserve land in keeping with the purposes of the trust, or (b) manage their lands in keeping with the purposes of the trust.

The bill would also establish the "Meadowlands Conservation Trust Fund." The trust fund would be the depository for all moneys: (1) received as a grant or other form of aid by the trust or by the State and designated for the trust; (2) given, donated, bequeathed, or endowed to the trust from public or private sources; (3) received as rent or as a royalty by the trust or by the State on behalf of the trust; (4) received as net revenues from the Division of Motor Vehicles in the Department of Transportation in connection with the issuance of Meadowlands conservation license plates as authorized by the bill; and (5) appropriated or otherwise made available to the trust by the State. The moneys in the trust fund would be specifically dedicated to be used only for the purposes of the trust. No moneys in the trust fund could be utilized for the development of any land for any purpose or for the acquisition of land that will not remain in a natural or largely natural or undeveloped state, except that up to 5% of the moneys annually received and deposited into the trust fund could be used to pay for development of sites to allow for public access and environmental education and interpretation and for the development of trails, and up to 2% of the moneys annually received and deposited into the trust fund could be used to pay for promotional and program awareness efforts. No moneys in the trust fund could be used to pay or discharge the principal of or interest on any indebtedness incurred for any purpose by the trust or any other governmental entity.

The committee amended the bill to: change the effective date; modify the selection process for the four appointments by the Governor to the trust; and make technical amendments.