

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

[First Reprint]

ASSEMBLY, No. 2804

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: NOVEMBER 6, 1997

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 2804 (1R).

Assembly Bill No. 2804 (1R) creates the Meadowlands Conservation Trust in, but not of, the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission (HMDC). The purposes of the trust would be to acquire and hold, or acquire and convey to other governmental or qualified nonprofit entities, environmentally important lands located in the Hackensack meadowlands or within the Hackensack river watershed. Many of the bill's provisions are based on an internal HMDC staff report, with input from various non-profit groups and organizations, that addressed the feasibility of creating a land conservancy in the Hackensack Meadowlands District.

The Conservation Trust would be administered by a seven-member board of trustees that would be empowered to plan and implement strategies to maximize land acquisition and preservation; to acquire or convey lands as described above; to 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; to apply for and accept grants, gifts, donations, legacies, bequests, and endowments; and to solicit and accept rents or royalties.

The bill also establishes the Meadowlands Conservation Trust Fund. The trust fund would be the depository for all monies received as a grant or other form of aid for the Conservation Trust, including revenues connected with the issuance of Meadowlands conservation license plates as authorized by the bill.

FISCAL IMPACT:

In the legislative fiscal estimate, the Office of Legislative Services (OLS) estimated that approximately \$75,000 to \$100,000 would be needed annually to administer the Conservation Trust. This estimate is based on the annual operating budget of the N.J. Natural Lands Trust, an independent corporation that is "in, but not of" the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). This agency annually receives a State appropriation of \$90,000 that pays for the salary costs of two DEP employees and non-salary expenses. The HMDC staff

report recommended that the Conservation Trust be organizationally modeled after the Natural Lands Trust.

Due to the uncertain nature of the availability of both public and non-public monies for the purposes set forth in the bill, the OLS cannot estimate the amount of revenues the Conservation Trust may receive initially or annually from the funding sources cited by the bill.

With respect to the proposed issuance of Meadowlands conservation license plates, estimates for previous bills authorizing the issuance of special license plates found that the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) projected total fixed costs to be about \$41,000 for reprogramming agency and revenue automated systems, and for one-time die costs. Variable costs were estimated to be about \$10 for the issuance of each set of special plates. The DMV did not project revenues for the proposed license plates in any of these previous bills. However, as a possible reference range for potential revenues, the OLS notes that the FY 1997 revenues from special plates are estimated at \$250,000 for wildlife conservation and \$1.0 million for shore conservation.