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Land Acquisition Costs in the Highlands

In order to address the requirement in the Highlands Act, in Section 11.a(2)(a), to detail the cost of implementing the RMP, including five year and ten year acquisition costs to preserve land, the following discussion will be included in Chapter III. Analysis of the Highlands Region, Part 8. Sustainable Economic Development and Chapter V., Part 1. Natural Resources, Land Preservation Program.

Program

Determine the Cost of 5 and 10 Year Priorities for Land Acquisition.

Discussion

In order to derive the cost of lands that are 5 and 10 year priorities for land acquisition, the Highlands Council applied a series of assumptions to those lands within the confidential inventory, which are fully discussed in the *Financial Analysis Technical Report*. The findings of that analysis are as follows:

- The cost to preserve the 5 year agriculture confidential priority list is estimated at \$544 million with the 10 year priorities costing an additional \$109 million, totaling \$653 million.
- The cost to preserve the 5 year conservation confidential priority list is estimated at \$599 million with the 10 year priorities costing an additional \$79 million, totaling \$678 million.
- Total cost of preserving the entire agriculture and conservation priority lists is estimated at approximately \$1.3 billion.

Total funding allocations from the Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT) from 2000 through 2009 (2007 referendum) to the Green Acres Program account for approximately an average of \$132,000,000 (59%) annually. Approximately 9% of the annual funding allocation from Green Acres was attributed to open space preservation in the Highlands Region based on historical acquisition costs. The SADC Program accounts for approximately an average of \$84,870,000 (38%) annually. Approximately 21% of the annual funding allocation from SADC was attributed to farmland preservation in the Highlands Region based on historical acquisition costs.

DRAFT – FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE JUNE 26, 2008
HIGHLANDS COUNCIL MEETING

The total acquisition cost for both the Agriculture and Conservation Confidential Priority Lists is approximately \$1.3 billion (162,557 acres). The GSPT figures for Green Acres would need to be consistent over the next ten years and enhanced considerably for SADC regarding agriculture to preserve the properties on both Confidential Priority Lists for agriculture and open space.

It is important to keep the momentum going in preserving Highlands open rural landscapes, natural areas such as the forests, working farms and crucial watersheds. As a result, conservation acquisitions need to be maintained at least at current levels. Moreover, funds for farmland preservation should be at least doubled in order to prevent the loss of farms to non-agricultural development and achieve a critical mass of preserved farmland to sustain the agriculture industry. It should be noted that the current preserved lands shows that the preserved conservation land area (237,994 acres) is over eight times the preserved farmland (28,528 acres) in the Highlands Region, emphasizing the need for increased emphasis on farmland preservation. Preserving land is a challenge in planning and a challenge in public finance. In partnership with the federal, State, county and municipal governments, and non-profit land trusts, preserving open space and farmland can be accomplished.