

Joint Statement on the Public Lands Preservation Act Conference Committee

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A group of land conservation and environmental organizations advocating on behalf of An Act preserving open space in the Commonwealth, also known as the Public Lands Preservation Act (or PLPA) issued the following statement upon conclusion of the formal 2021-2022 legislative session:

We are disappointed that the Conference Committee did not resolve differences between the House and Senate versions of the PLPA before Sunday's session deadline. We call on the members of the Committee to continue working towards an agreement that can pass the Legislature during an informal session this year.

The PLPA was first introduced more than 20 years ago to strengthen the Commonwealth's long-standing "No Net Loss" policy, which calls for any public open space converted to a different use be replaced with land of equivalent natural resource value.

Though not provided for in the policy, in a number of instances, the Legislature has allowed cash payments in lieu of replacement conservation land, often without sufficient transparency and accountability to ensure the purposes of Article 97 of the State Constitution were met. The Legislature can remedy that now by ensuring the PLPA includes strong and specific constraints on the ability to set aside cash in lieu of replacement land.

We urge lawmakers to finalize this important legislation this year, crafting a bill that is true to the intent of Article 97, enhances transparency and accountability in the administration of the No Net Loss policy and, most of all, honors the public demand to protect precious parks and conservation land.

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