



The Greening of New Jersey Continues

By JENNIFER WEISS

With a new governor in office, emissions goals to work toward, new funding for open space and big energy projects in the works, there are a lot of big environmental decisions — and debates — in store.

In November, the public approved borrowing \$400 million for land preservation projects, a stopgap measure that will allow for preservation of open space, farms, historic and flood-prone properties. The debate over long-term funding will continue — this year, not later, environmentalists hope.

“We should reconvene and talk about stable funding,” says Dena Mottola Jaborska, the executive director of Environment New Jersey. “The real worry is legislators will feel they can sit back because they have two years of funding.”

Several proposals that would have significant environmental impact hang in the balance: The

Board of Public Utilities this month is expected to decide the fate of the high-voltage power line proposed for North Jersey by PSE&G. Another proposal with implications for the Highlands, an underground natural gas pipeline project, is on the table. And a 750-megawatt coal plant proposed for Linden — whose carbon emissions would be piped to a spot deep beneath the ocean floor, instead of off-gassed to the atmosphere — was dealt a setback by a city council vote late last year, but remains a concern to residents and environmentalists who don’t buy “clean coal.”

“What we are faced with in New Jersey is this barrage of proposals to pipe dirty energy in, when we are actually trying to get cleaner energy into the state,” Jaborska says.

Funding concerns will continue to plague NJ Transit’s \$8.7-billion Access to the Region’s Core commuter rail tunnel between Jersey and New York. And with mass transit ridership up, along with pedestrian and

bicyclist fatalities, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, New Jersey Future and other groups will keep lobbying for a new, comprehensive plan for safe streets.

The looming ARC tunnel will mean more smart growth, says Peter Kasabach, executive director of New Jersey Future. “I think we’ll see investment in the ARC tunnel starting to drive development in transit-oriented locations,” he says.

The Transportation Trust Fund for bridge and road projects needs a refill, and the New Jersey Sierra Club is among the groups promoting a hiked gas tax to help restore it — at 14.5 cents, New Jersey’s fuel tax is the nation’s fourth-lowest. But it seems unlikely that Chris Christie, who promised tax cuts, would go there unless pinned to a wall.

Jeff Tittel, Sierra Club’s executive director, says the money, wherever it comes from, must be spent wisely: “We need to ensure that money goes to the right places so we’re not building highways in the middle of nowhere.”

Tittel supports a bottle bill, which adds a nominal refundable fee to drink-bottle purchases to incentivize recycling. The Smart Container Act proposed in 2008 is likely to be reintroduced this month, with changes; the last version added 10 cents to the cost of plastic, glass and aluminum beverage containers, but even a 5-cent charge would certainly boost the state’s low bottle recycling rate.

The Sierra Club also plans to fight for incentives for green buildings and community solar and wind projects — the state has renewable energy goals to aim toward, and offshore wind farms in the works — and play defense on bills that seem to coddle developers at the expense of the environment. ■

BEST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN:

The state makes progress toward goals Gov. Corzine set to cut global-warming pollution and boost wind and solar power generation, with full support from residents.

WORST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN:

Widespread weakening of environmental protections to benefit developers in the name of economic growth and jobs.

THREE DATES TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDAR:

January
 The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities should decide the fate of PSE&G’s 500-kilovolt Susquehanna-Roseland power line.

March 20
 New Jersey Land Conservation Rally at the conference center at Montclair State University. See njconservation.org/rally.

Late April
 Environmentalists will take note of what Chris Christie’s administration has done — and not done — as his 100th day in office nears. The New Jersey Environmental Federation, which endorsed Christie, expects him to keep certain promises.

