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PLEDGES OF SUPPORT; BUT NO PROMISES

L.I. Environmentalists in Albany Get No Assurances on Funding

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They came, they saw and if they didn't conquer, at least they gained a foothold. Long Island environmentalists descended on Albany lawmakers, Wednesday, to press for restoration of state funding for open space and for the state's Environmental Protection Fund which supports clean air, clean water and the preservation of open space and farms.

Multiple representatives of some two dozen groups visited State Senators and Assembly Members at the State Capitol yesterday in response to a proposed cut of more than one-third in funding for critical environmental programs.

Senators pledged restoration of the EPF to the \$222 million level, a compromise number agreed to weeks ago, but they specified no program areas, nor funding sources. Assembly Members were more specific, suggesting restoring funds to only the \$168 million level but promising more than \$40 million for open space purchases and \$15 million for farms. Still, they would make no prediction of what the EPF might end up looking like when the Assembly, Senate and Governor's office begin negotiating on the 2010-2011 state budget -- probably the week after Easter.

"There was plenty of sympathy but little distinction between the impacts of projects that can be delayed with only inconvenience, and land preservation on Long Island which can be lost forever, if funds are killed," said Pine Barrens Society Executive Director, Richard Amper. "Long Island will never get out of the recession if we lose tourism, farming, fishing and the second-home industry because the land that supports these economic engines would be lost forever to development. That can never be repaired," he added.

Among the groups attending the day-long marathon were representatives of The Nature Conservancy, Group for the East End, Citizens Campaign for the Environment and many others. Group leaders promised to revisit the issue when legislators return to their Long Island districts for the holiday week beginning March 29. "There'll be no 'Spring Break' for environmentalists or lawmakers, next week," Amper promised.