

Protect the environment

Letters to the Editor/The Star-Ledger
April 30, 2010, 5:18AM

Dennis Toft's opinion piece in the April 23 Star-Ledger ("Environment, economy go hand in hand") advocates balancing environment and economic growth in New Jersey. That sounds reasonable, but the scale is heavily weighted against the environment. New Jersey inherited serious, persistent water and air pollution problems from its early industrial growth.

Air pollution is still a problem. In the 2010 "State of the Air" report, the American Lung Association again flunked parts of northern and southern New Jersey metropolitan areas because of pollution from particulates and ozone pollution.

Water pollution is shockingly prevalent. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, most New Jersey watersheds are in decline due to excessive nutrient loading, a direct result of development near waterways.

Wetlands are valuable public interest resources doing \$9.4 billion a year in ecosystem services, such as flood moderation, water quality improvement, fish nurseries, carbon sequestration and more. Toft vastly overexaggerates when he says degraded or man-made wetlands are treated as if they were located in the Pinelands. Not true. Pinelands wetlands prohibit development within a 300-foot buffer; degraded wetlands require 50-foot buffers and permit requirements are much weaker.

The fact is, over time, New Jersey's urban areas especially, have lost so many wetlands that protecting man-made or degraded wetlands is one way the state can compensate the public and mitigate earlier losses.

Abigail Fair, Association of N.J. Environmental Commissions