

Boy Scout Land Deal Is Clean, Helpful and Thrifty

When state funds are prudently spent on a transaction that preserves open space, protects the Long Island water supply and helps out the Boy Scouts, it's hard to see any political downside.

So it's no wonder Gov. George Pataki was willing to shell out \$1.8 million from the state's environmental protection fund to buy 147 acres of Camp Wauwepex in Wading River from the Nassau Boy Scouts council. This is not only a good deal for Long Island but a wise move for a governor who's likely to run again.

It's also good for the scouts, even though they had a more lucrative offer — \$2.2 million — from a developer who wanted to build a golf course on the land. Doing that would have required a hardship exemption, because the parcel lies in the core preservation area of the Suffolk pine barrens, where development is basically forbidden. And an exemption would have been especially difficult to get because golf courses use a lot of fertilizer, which tends to pollute the aquifers beneath them.

The Nassau scouting organization ran a

\$334,000 deficit last year, and \$1.8 million equals a 60 percent increase in its endowment. Reasoning that the certainty of a check in hand is better than the possibility of a bigger check at the end of a long and costly court battle, the scouts cut a deal through the Nature Conservancy, a nonprofit group that often negotiates for the state in such matters.

This is exactly the kind of transaction the environmental protection fund was created for. Pataki deserves a hand for supporting the fund — and using it appropriately.