



news releases

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IT'S ALL YOURS: GREEN ACRES PROGRAM MARKS 50 YEARS AS NATIONAL LEADER IN LAND PRESERVATION AND RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TRENTON - New Jersey's Green Acres Program, which began in 1961 as a result of a bond referendum aimed at doubling New Jersey's open space and recreational lands, is now celebrating its 50th anniversary as one of the most successful land conservation efforts in the nation.

Together with public and nonprofit partners, the Green Acres Program has directly protected 650,000 acres of open space and provided hundreds of outdoor recreational facilities in communities around the state. Over the years, voters have authorized \$3.1 billion in Green Acres funding, approving all 13 bond referendums put before them.

This support is a reflection of the overall desire of residents to preserve land in the nation's most densely populated state. Over the years, more than 1.4 million acres have been preserved in New Jersey, a number that includes land that was already under state management prior to the creation of the Green Acres Program, plus conservation efforts undertaken at the local and county level, and preserved farmland.

"New Jersey is a nationally recognized leader in land conservation efforts," said Governor Chris Christie. "I am proud of this Administration's continued commitment to protecting New Jersey's open spaces and natural resources for future generations to enjoy."

"The Green Acres program is the oldest, continuous state-supported open space program in the country," said DEP Commissioner Bob Martin. "Much of this results directly and indirectly from the first Green Acres bond referendum. The idea of using public money to purchase open space and setting it aside for public conservation and recreation in perpetuity was groundbreaking at the time of its inception and remains one of the most enduring and important environmental measures ever undertaken in New Jersey."

Using the slogan, "Green Acres: It's All Yours," the DEP is marking the 50th anniversary this year by highlighting the importance of open space at events to be held throughout the year at dozens of properties acquired or developed with Green Acres funds. The official anniversary is June 3, the date then-Governor Robert B. Meyner signed the first Green Acres bond act.

In addition, there will be a contest for the public to showcase photographs of Green Acres properties. To keep up with the latest plans, visit: www.njgreenacres.org

A recent study by Penn State University concludes that investments in parks and recreational services have a positive effect on health and fitness and may result in less strain on the health care system. Studies also demonstrate that people are more likely to be more physically active if they live close to parks and recreational sites.

"Today, Green Acres acquisitions reach into every corner of the state and every landscape - cities and suburbs, farmlands and villages, mountains and forests," Commissioner Martin said. "The natural areas, city parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, boat ramps, docks and fishing piers acquired and developed through Green Acres dollars provide virtually limitless recreational opportunities to our residents, making the Garden State a great place to call home."

As just a few examples of its diversity and breadth, the program has:

- Preserved more than 1,500 acres of the pine forests and cedar swamps in the Forked River Mountains of Ocean County;

- Protected 276 acres of forests, meadows and wetlands that are home to endangered bog turtles in Warren County;
- Helped the Newark Conservancy establish wild gardens in the heart of New Jersey's largest city;
- Protected habitat for migrating hawks and neo-tropical songbirds along Delaware Bay in Cape May County;
- Funded new wildlife exhibits, including a reptile education center, at the Essex County Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange;
- Helped build athletic fields, including baseball fields for the disabled, at Overpeck County Park in Bergen County;
- Restored Camden's Eldridge R. Johnson Park near Rutgers University to its 1930s neoclassical grandeur;
- Helped Keyport Borough construct a new pier, providing greatly enhanced public access and fishing opportunities in Raritan Bay;
- Redeveloped and beautified Perth Amboy's Bayview Park on the Raritan Waterfront;
- Established hiking trails through hardwood and hemlock forests and protected picturesque waterfalls on Hunterdon County's Locketong Creek.

Today, the Green Acres sign - green and white and emblazoned with a Mercer oak symbolizing strength and endurance - can be found in most of New Jersey's municipalities.

But in 1961, nine years before the creation of the DEP, no one was certain how long the program would last, said Howard Wolf, who served as the Green Acres local acquisition director in what was then the Department of Conservation and Economic Development.

"It gives me so much pride to see how the acreage totals grew year after year with every bond issue that was approved," said Wolf, who still works part-time with the Green Acres Program. "The residents of New Jersey have been the backbone of this program. It would not be the success it is today without their support."

While land was plentiful and the state park system seemed adequate in the 1950s, concerns about the pace of development caught the attention of Governor Meyner. His administration drafted legislation authorizing the sale of \$60 million in state bonds to fund Green Acres acquisitions. The referendum was placed on the ballot in November. Voters approved the measure by a 3-2 margin.

"Living in the nation's most densely populated state, New Jersey residents understand the value of protecting open space perhaps better than anyone," said Richard Boornazian, Administrator of the Green Acres Program. "Their approval of every bond referendums is an expression of their desire to maintain a high quality of life through open space and outdoor recreation. It's impossible to imagine what New Jersey would be like today if not for the foresight of the architects of the first Green Acres bond act."

The Green Acres Program is currently preparing recommendations for approval of project applications for half of the \$242 million authorized by the 2009 bond act, the last referendum approved by voters. The next round of recommendations for the remainder of the money is expected by the end of the year.