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CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION PRESERVES 1,500 ACRE SPLIT ROCK WATERSHED IN MORRIS COUNTY

\$3.1 MILLION GREEN ACRES PURCHASE OF SPLIT ROCK FROM JERSEY CITY

TRENTON – The Department of Environmental Protection’s Green Acres Program has negotiated a \$3.1 million purchase of 1,500 acres of pristine watershed buffer land from Jersey City, providing permanent protection to land that surrounds the city’s Split Rock Reservoir located primarily in Morris County’s Rockaway Township, Commissioner Bob Martin announced today.

Under terms of the agreement that were finalized on December 31, Jersey City will retain water rights, via a permit from DEP, to continue to use water resources from Split Rock Reservoir, which is a water supply source for the city’s water system. The city also will retain ownership, use and maintenance of the Split Rock dam and the road leading to the dam. The state will have access to the road and to the reservoir.

“This is yet another an example of Governor Christie’s continued commitment to preserving our open and natural spaces in New Jersey,” said Commissioner Martin. “Permanently preserving this spectacular property, which is located in the North Jersey Highlands, ensures a continued high quality of drinking water for state residents, while safeguarding habitat for many plant and animal species, enhancing recreational opportunities for our residents, and protecting the quality of life in our state.”

The preserved tract is a greenway connector, linking the state’s Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area, Farny State Park, and Buck Mountain. The land is primarily forested, with hiking trails and fishing access, and includes a wide range of plant and animal species –including threatened and endangered species.

The DEP has long held a conservation easement on nearly all of the 1,500 acres, dating back to 1996, which has offered a level of protection for the land. With this acquisition, the state will obtain full ownership of the property, allowing for public enjoyment of the site’s recreation and conservation resources.

“This is a magnificent property which offers a wide variety of opportunities for wildlife-associated and other forms of outdoor recreation, including fishing, hunting, birding, canoeing, kayaking and hiking,” said the DEP’s Director of Fish and Wildlife Dave Chanda. “Shoreline fishing, birding and hunting, in particular, will be greatly enhanced by this acquisition.”

Split Rock Reservoir and surrounding watershed lands represent a unique natural resource, supporting a wide variety of endangered plants and animals, including the Indiana bat, bobcat, timber rattlesnake, northern goshawk, red-shouldered hawk, and the golden-winged warbler. Black bears and white-tailed deer are common in the woodlands surrounding the reservoir.

Splitrock Reservoir itself supports bald eagles and a wide variety of waterfowl during migration, including wood duck, ruddy duck, bufflehead and common mergansers. The reservoir boasts an excellent fishery for smallmouth and largemouth bass, chain pickerel and black crappie.

The large contiguous forested blocks of land surrounding the reservoir, and filled with excellent trails, provides outstanding opportunities for birding, particularly during migration.

Species of special concern such as the solitary vireo, Canada warbler and broad-winged hawk can be seen and/or heard regularly in the parcel’s woodlands. Aesthetically, there are few places in New Jersey, in which the public can enjoy outdoor recreation, that rival this area for its pristine natural beauty.

“We are looking forward for the public to have an enjoyable and safe experience on this property while obeying state and local laws,” said Rockaway Township Mayor Michael Dachisen. “As a result of this transaction, we look forward to enhanced enforcement activity from state conservation officers, who have previously done a good job of patrolling the area, but have had limited authority to access the tract.”