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CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION PRESERVES FORMER MAPLE RIDGE GOLF COURSE IN GLOUCESTER COUNTY AS 110-ACRE STATE PRESERVE, FIRST UNIT OF STATE PARK SYSTEM IN THE COUNTY

TRENTON – The Christie Administration has finalized the \$3.2 million purchase of a 110-acre former golf course that will become a state preserve, the first unit of the State Park Service in Gloucester County, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin announced today.

The former Maple Ridge Golf Course, straddling Mantua and Deptford townships, will be turned over to the State Park Service to become a state preserve. Gloucester County will manage the preserve, which will protect an area bisected by Mantua Creek that is naturally transforming into ecologically valuable grasslands studded with clusters of woodlands.

“We are proud to have coordinated this preservation effort, which is unique in that this preserve will become the first piece of land in Gloucester County owned by the New Jersey State Park Service,” Commissioner Martin said “We are proud to have teamed up with Gloucester County, local governments and area residents, who are witnessing first-hand the power of nature to reclaim land.”

The Green Acres Program directly provided \$983,500 for the purchase. Gloucester County provided \$1.65 million and the nonprofit South Jersey Land and Water Trust provided \$350,000. Fifty percent of these contributions came in the form of matching grants the Green Acres Program provided to these entities. Mantua Township also provided \$250,000, of which 25 percent was matched by a Green Acres grant

In addition, the Friends of Maple Ridge raised \$125,000 in donations used toward the purchase and the Frank H. Stewart Trust, established to help preserve land in southern New Jersey, provided a \$250,000 grant.

“To have a state park in Gloucester County was a once in a lifetime opportunity so we worked as hard as we could to help make this a reality,” Freeholder Director Robert M. Damminger said. “We had many groups working together to create this open space that will be saved from development forever. Many people have dedicated so much of their time, working over eight years on this effort, so that our residents will enjoy 110 acres of natural beauty instead of more development. ”

Over the years, the golf course has been known as Tall Pines, Ron Jaworski’s Eagles Nest and finally Maple Ridge. Maple Ridge closed in 2006. Its greens and fairways have reverted to grasslands with clusters of natural shrubs and trees that are taking on the appearance of natural forests. The area has become a haven for songbirds, hawks and other wildlife.

The property was purchased from GIBG, LLC of Westport, Conn. It will be assigned to the DEP’s Division of Parks and Forestry, Southern Region Office. Daily operation of the preserve will be handled by Gloucester County under a management agreement with the State Park Service. Officials with the Park Service are currently discussing possible names for the preserve.

Mantua Township and the Friends of Maple Ridge will assist the county with the management of the Park. The preserve, and its network of existing golf paths and paved paths, will offer passive recreation opportunities, including jogging, bicycling, nature trails and fishing in two ponds.

“This is truly a special place located at the junction of several suburban communities – Mantua, Deptford and Wenonah,” said State Park Service Director Mark Texel. “Although relatively small in size, this land has been big in the hearts of local residents who early on recognized its potential and worked for years to see it preserved.”

Christine Nolan, Executive Director of the South Jersey Land and Water Trust, credited the property owner for being patient as efforts to protect the area took shape over a number of years, which included coordinating complex grant applications as well as a door-to-door fund raising campaign by the Friends of Maple Ridge group.

“This really is an incredible, unique and beautiful property in an area surrounded by lots of people,” Nolan said. “It’s really a park for the people. And they will get to enjoy the beauty of Mantua Creek and the splendor of this property as it changes through the seasons and over time.”

“You know some places are special the first time you see them. With its rolling meadows, quiet walkways, forested ravines, three small ponds, wetlands and the clear waters of Mantua Creek flowing through its heart, Maple Ridge is such a place of natural beauty and ecological diversity,” said Richard Dilks of the Friends of Maple Ridge. “This will be a great park, a needed refuge for wildlife and a place for people to come and enjoy the beauty of our region’s natural heritage.”

At one time, the property had local development approvals for 123 housing units. Helping to clear the way for negotiation toward the sale was a decision by officials in Deptford to reassign state affordable housing obligations to an already paved portion of the property on Woodbury-Glassboro Road.

Support for preserving the property as a park started in January 2008. This support evolved into the founding of the Friends of Maple Ridge in May 2010, which mustered local support for preserving the land.

“Anytime you can preserve land and allow it to return to its natural beauty it’s a win for the environment, our residents, and our quality of life,” said Mantua Mayor Pete Scirroto.

“I’m excited that Mantua Township has been able to participate in this partnership to preserve the Maple Ridge site for passive recreational use,” added Mantua Committeeman Bob Zimmerman. “We’ve constantly strived for proactive smart growth here in our Township, with a perfect balance of land preservation and development. With the help of our partners, we’ve been able to secure this land, and prevent overdevelopment. This is just another example of why Mantua Township remains a great place to live and raise our families.”

Together with public and private partners, the Green Acres program has directly protected more than 680,000 acres of open space and provided hundreds of recreational opportunities for a wide range of activities, including natural areas, hiking and fishing areas, city parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, boat ramps, docks, fishing piers and environmental education.