



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
news releases

April 24, 2018

**DEP MARKS EARTH WEEK BY PRESERVING 1,155 ACRES OF
SOUTHERN PINELANDS FORESTS AND WETLANDS IN ATLANTIC COUNTY**

TRENTON – As part of its commitment to advancing New Jersey as a national leader on environmental protection, the Department of Environmental Protection today helped mark Earth Week by announcing the preservation of more than 1,100 acres of forests and wetlands in the ecologically sensitive Great Egg Harbor River watershed in the southern Pinelands.

The DEP's Green Acres Program, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, preserved 1,155 acres in Hamilton Township, Atlantic County. The land becomes part of an extensive existing network of preserved open space in this ecologically unique region of pine and cedar forests.

"During Earth Week, it is important to remember that preservation of open space is fundamental to our mission at the DEP," said Acting Commissioner Catherine R. McCabe. "By protecting wildlife and their habitats, preservation of open space such as this improves the health of our air and water while enhancing our quality of life."

The Green Acres Program and The Nature Conservancy partnered to purchase the land from Property Development Atlantic Associates for \$2.9 million. The Green Acres Program provided \$2.47 million. The Nature Conservancy contributed \$450,000.

The land, protecting the headwaters of several tributaries to the Great Egg Harbor River, is being added to the state's Great Egg Harbor River Wildlife Management Area, providing a protected corridor of forests and wetlands linking to Atlantic County's Lake Lenape Park.

During Earth Week, it is important to remember that preservation of open space is fundamental to our mission at the DEP. By protecting wildlife and their habitats, preservation of open space such as this improves the health of our air and water while enhancing our quality of life.

Acting Commissioner Catherine R. McCabe

In addition, the acquisition expands an extensive network of protected land around the Great Egg Harbor River that includes some 60,000 acres of state wildlife management areas as well as thousands of acres of county parkland and areas preserved by nonprofit groups.

A federally designated National Scenic and Recreation River, the Great Egg Harbor River, known locally as the Great Egg, flows through Camden and Atlantic counties into the Great Egg Harbor at Ocean City. Most of the 129 miles of the Great Egg Harbor River and its tributaries flow through the Pinelands National Reserve.

This region of the Pinelands provides habitat for a wide array of wildlife such as the Pine Barrens tree frog, Cope's gray tree frog, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, osprey, and the diamondback terrapin, New Jersey's only saltmarsh turtle species. The river system also provides important habitat for recreationally important fish such as striped bass and spawning habitat for river herring, a species that is important to the aquatic food chain in estuaries and the ocean.

"As part of the Great Egg Harbor River Wildlife Management Area, the property will provide the public with opportunities for fishing, hiking, bird watching and enjoying the beauty of the southern Pinelands," said DEP Acting Assistant Commissioner for Natural and Historic Resources Martha Sapp.

The land is located along Atlantic County Route 559, also known as Weymouth Road. The acquisition protects the headwaters of Mare Run, Cedar Brook, South River and Lake Lenape, all of which are tributaries to Great Egg Harbor River.

"In New Jersey we always celebrate diversity, and there's no better representation of that in nature than the Pinelands, part of our state's great iconic outdoors, that encompasses a vast mix of species, habitats and water resources," said Barbara Brummer, The Nature Conservancy's New Jersey State Director. "This natural area will make the region more resilient to the effects of our changing environment, and we are pleased to have helped protect it."

"On behalf of the members of Property Development Atlantic Associates, my family and friends, we would like to sincerely thank the Department of Environmental Protection, the Green Acres Program and The Nature Conservancy, New Jersey Chapter, for joining with us to assure the protection of this peaceful resource," said Robert Muroff, managing member for the group. "Our roots in this land are deep. Three generations ago, our forefathers acquired this property and held it in an operating mode that refused to let it be spoiled."

Created in 1961, the Green Acres Program is the first conservation effort of its kind in the nation. Along with public and private partners, the Green Acres Program has directly protected more than 657,000 acres of open space and provided opportunities for a wide range of projects, including natural areas, trails, areas for enjoying nature, parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, boat ramps, docks and fishing piers.

In addition to providing recreation opportunities, Green Acres projects help protect water quality and stimulate economic development by creating jobs, at the same time making cities and towns more attractive places to live and work.

