

June 3 2021



MURPHY ADMINISTRATION CELEBRATES 60th ANNIVERSARY OF DEP GREEN ACRES, NATION'S LONGEST-RUNNING STATE CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and several partner organizations gathered today at the Holly Farm tract of the Menantico Ponds Wildlife Management Area to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the DEP Green Acres Program that funded the state's acquisition and conservation of this environmentally sensitive land and announce the Cumberland County site as the future southern regional headquarters for the DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife.

The acquisition of the Holly Farms tract is one of the largest land preservation deals in state history, and was brought together by the Murphy Administration after more than 30 years of negotiation among multiple parties. DEP acquired the 1,400-acre property from Atlantic City Electric with funding assistance from New Jersey's Green Acres Program, established 60 years ago today on June 3, 1961. The DEP also secured funding through the Open Space Institute to assist with land surveys and plans for



potential improvements to the property situated between Menantico Creek and Manumuskine Creek, two federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers.

“Having supported land conservation, open space stewardship, and recreational opportunities for 60 years, New Jersey’s Green Acres program is a source of great pride,” DEP Acting Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette said. “As one of the first state land acquisition programs, Green Acres was groundbreaking in 1961 and is now the longest-running continuous program of its kind in the country, preserving nearly 700,000 acres of land and hundreds of recreation facilities across New Jersey.”

Preserving the Holly Farm tract provides numerous benefits, from protecting New Jersey’s largest concentration of endangered species to maintaining a natural buffer to the harmful effects of climate change. Green spaces can store large amounts of carbon emissions and absorb water to reduce flooding, making the area more resilient.

Green Spaces For All

The reach of Green Acres ranges from preserving pristine forests in New Jersey’s most rural communities to transforming vacant lots into city parks, enhancing quality of life for residents and, in some cases, providing recreational amenities where none had previously existed.

As part of the DEP’s recent kickoff of Operation Jersey Summer, Acting Commissioner LaTourette visited Paterson in Passaic County to announce Clean Communities grant recipients, followed by a tour of Green Acres-funded properties including Great Falls Overlook Park, Vista Park, Quarry Lawn and others.

“As we celebrate the 60th anniversary today of the first Green Acres bond act, we thank New Jersey residents for consistently supporting funding to expand state parks and forests, preserve wildlife management areas, create local parks in cities and towns across the state, and much more,” said Green Acres Program Director Martha Sullivan Sapp. “Our goal has been and will remain providing something for everyone.”

Atlantic City Electric prioritized environmental stewardship in deciding the future of the property and selling it to the state of New Jersey and DEP. “We are committed to powering a cleaner and brighter future for our customers and communities,” said Dave Velazquez, president and CEO of Pepco Holdings, which includes Atlantic City Electric. “We are extremely pleased that the sale of this property furthers our dedication to protecting open space and is helping preserve the lasting benefits of Holly Farm and its unique ecosystems, creating new opportunities for outdoor activities for local residents and visitors to the region for generations to come.”

“The value of this property for the people of New Jersey cannot be understated,” said David Golden, Director of the DEP’s Division of Fish and Wildlife. “In addition to providing habitat for the largest concentration of endangered

species statewide, the property will serve as Fish and Wildlife's future southern regional headquarters, where we will manage the property in perpetuity for the public and open up lands for vital ecotourism and wildlife-related recreation in the region."



Among the nonprofit and conservation groups that advocated for the acquisition are The Nature Conservancy, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, NJ Audubon, Natural Lands, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions and Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River. Their work has been instrumental in ensuring that local planning and zoning efforts safeguard water resources and critical habitats on the property.

"The Nature Conservancy first became involved with the preservation of Holly Farm over three decades ago," said Barbara Brummer, NJ State Director for The Nature Conservancy. "It is incredibly rewarding to see dedicated patience, perseverance and partnership result in the protection of this land, which provides so many benefits for people and countless threatened or endangered plants and animals."

DEP records have documented suitable habitat for a diverse array of rare wildlife species that require pristine, intact Pinelands ecosystems for their continued survival. These include emblematic Pinelands amphibian species such as the Pine Barrens treefrog and Cope's gray treefrog, both of which depend upon preserved wetlands and aquifer recharge areas to sustain their breeding habitats.

Habitat will also be preserved for a variety of Pinelands snakes, rare odonate and lepidoptera species (dragonflies/damselflies and butterfly/moth), more than 70 species of breeding birds and nine species of migratory bird species such as the barred owl, red-headed woodpecker and Cooper's hawk. The area has also been deemed an important nest buffer and critical foraging habitat for bald eagles, least tern, and ospreys.

"The preservation of the Holly Farm will have a profoundly positive impact on the rare plants and animals that live in this ecologically sensitive area -- Pine Barrens tree frogs, barred owls, red-headed woodpeckers, and so many others. It will also boost public visitation and enjoyment in the area, bringing in much needed economic benefits through ecotourism," said Michele Byers, executive director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

The Holly Farm property includes an area that the DEP has deemed a National Heritage Priority Site and represents some of the best remaining habitat for rare plant species and rare ecological communities in New Jersey.