

Office of the Governor

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor
Wendi Patella
609-777-2600

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Governor Christie Whitman Visits Monmouth and Ocean Counties to Highlight Open Space and Transportation Plans

Gov. Christie Whitman today visited two projects to show the kinds of improvements she wants to ensure under her plan to preserve 1 million acres of open space and improve the transportation system in New Jersey.

"All over New Jersey, we have to do more to preserve our open space and improve the infrastructure already in place," Gov. Whitman said. "A glut of development not only steals the precious little open space remaining in New Jersey, it puts an added strain on our transportation system."

"Today in New Jersey, we have crumbling roads, dangerous intersections, and broken railroad tracks and we don't have enough money to make scores of desperately needed improvements."

The Governor has proposed a November referendum in which voters would decide whether to increase the gasoline tax by four cents per gallon to provide a stable source of funding for the Transportation Trust Fund.

Speaking at a proposed construction site on Route 9 in Dover Township, Gov. Whitman said improvements will be made to prevent future accidents and improve the flow of traffic. The stretch of road from Indian Head Road to Stevens Road, a 1.34 mile route, is receiving \$8.84 million in improvements. The project consists of adding a center turn lane, widening of up to eight feet on both sides, adding right turn lanes to the Sunset Avenue intersection, and the redesign of the Church Road intersection signals.

"A stretch of highway like this may soon become a 'road less traveled.' Not out of choice, but out of necessity. Out of concern for safety," Gov. Whitman said.

"Without new funding, roads like this will become too unsafe to travel. Bridges will weaken. Buses won't run."

In addition to providing a safer and more efficient transportation system, Gov. Whitman said her vision also includes preserving 1 million acres of open space.

While stopping at the 208-acre Joe Palaia Park in the Oakhurst section of Ocean Township, Gov. Whitman said the park is a good example of the kind of open space and recreational facilities she wants to see more of in New Jersey. The recreation and conservation belt connects with parks in Eatontown and borders the West Long Branch bicycle and pedestrian trails.

Named for Senator and former Ocean Township Mayor Joe Palaia, the park was purchased with nearly \$1 million in Green Acres funding in 1974. In 1989, \$250,000 in Green Acres money paid for the construction of the Saul Ruben Fields.

"Our Green Acres open space and Farmland Preservation programs have helped us to save hundreds of thousands of New Jersey acres," the Governor said. "But we have to pick up the pace of preservation. We have to act fast because time is not on our side. In fact, we have lost more than half of our farmland since 1950. Every acre that is lost is lost forever."

Gov. Whitman said she has made it a priority of her second term to reach the goal recommended by the Council on New Jersey Outdoors - preserving one million acres of open space and farmland within the next ten years.

Legislation has been introduced in the state Legislature that will ask voters to dedicate approximately \$100 million in existing revenues each year for the next ten years for open space and farmland preservation. The funds will pay for preservation programs and finance the debt service on the bonds needed to reach the Governor's one million-acre goal.

"Look around and you'll see the good that a park can do for a community," the Governor said. "Drive around New Jersey and you'll appreciate the urgent need for us to act quickly to preserve open space and farmland."