

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR VISITS MORRIS COUNTY; HIGHLIGHTS COUNTY'S OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION EFFORTS

Gov. Christie Whitman today visited Morris County to participate in a series of events, including the announcement of the donation of 10 acres of land on Wildcat Ridge in Rockaway Township for open space preservation and her support for legislative action to move school board elections from April to November. She also attended the Morris County 4-H Fair.

The land was donated by American Tower Corporation to the Morris Land Conservancy, and, ultimately, will become Green Acres land. The land is part of a 15-acre parcel located in the center of the Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area.

"I want to thank the folks at American Tower for their generosity in making sure this hawk-watch remains available for the many volunteers who help track the hawk migration each year," the Governor said while hiking on Wildcat Ridge. "The voter approved plan to save one million acres of open space and farmland over the next decade is truly a historic commitment and one that puts the State of New Jersey in the vanguard of preservation nationwide."

"But I am glad to see that the state government is not alone in this crusade. Towns and counties have stepped up to help fund special natural treasures and landmarks such as Wildcat Ridge. Nearly every county and more than 90 municipalities have established open space trust funds - and Morris County is truly a leader, with 19 towns creating dedicated funds for preservation," she said.

"Why is all of this land preservation -- especially the preservation of continuous lands -- so important? First, these woodlands perform the invaluable task of cleansing the air we breathe. Just as important, they purify our drinking water for free, instead of the costly water treatment plants we would have to build to replace that function," Gov. Whitman said.

"And, of course, having places like this in New Jersey, where you can take in this kind of a view, is absolutely priceless," the Governor said. "This is the kind of future we want for New Jersey. And thanks to the partnerships like those between the state Department of Environmental Protection, the Morris Land Conservancy, Rockaway Township, and the American Tower Corporation, we are moving closer to our vision."

Gov. Whitman said she hoped the next step taken would be the acquisition of a 300-acre tract contiguous to Wildcat Ridge Wildlife Management Area for open space preservation.

During a press conference on moving school board elections to November with Morris County Clerk Joan Bramhall, the Governor said on average, three times as many people go to the polls in November as they do in April.

"And school board members are responsible for the largest part of property tax bills," she said. "That is why I believe we should move the election of school board members to November. Once again, I call on the Legislature to pass this proposal so we can end the drought of participation in school elections. Let's make sure the majority of voters speak their minds on one of the most important decisions a community makes every year: who will invest their tax dollars in the public schools they support?"

The Governor in her 1998 State of the State address highlighted the need to move school board election from April to November to encourage greater voter participation.

At the 4-H Fair at Chubb Park, Chester, the Governor said the 4-H spirit of environmental stewardship has helped tremendously in encouraging all New Jerseyans to be conservators and protectors of the environment.

"The 4-H also does a great job in helping more than 550 young people -- from grade school to high school and beyond -- dedicate their hearts, their hands, their heads, and their health to improving their community and their world," Gov. Whitman said.

