



NEWS

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CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION, LOCAL OFFICIALS MARK EARTH WEEK WITH MAJOR LAND PRESERVATION AGREEMENT IN CENTRAL NEW JERSEY

TRENTON -- Agriculture Secretary Douglas H. Fisher and Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin today marked Earth Week by announcing agreements to preserve 1,900 acres in the heart of central New Jersey as wildlife habitat, preserved farmland, and additions to county parks and greenways along historic Crosswicks Creek.

During a news conference, Secretary Fisher and Commissioner Martin joined their partners from Monmouth County, Mercer County, Burlington County, Upper Freehold Township, and the Monmouth Conservation Foundation, as well as local officials, to announce contracts with members of the Flemer family, which until recently operated the land as Princeton Nurseries, once one of the nation's largest commercial nurseries.

More than 1,000 acres will be preserved as open space through the creation of a 512-acre State Wildlife Management Area and nearly 500 acres of additions to the adjacent Monmouth County Park system's Crosswicks Creek greenway and the Mercer County Park Commission's Crosswicks Creek Greenway corridor.

Another 900 acres will be preserved through acquisitions of development rights on farmland. When landowners sell development rights, or a farmland easement, they continue to own the land but agree to deed restrictions that keep the land permanently available for agricultural uses.

The agreements, made possible by the DEP's Green Acres Program and the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), come during the 50th anniversary year of the first Green Acres bond referendum, the groundbreaking legislation that launched five decades of land preservation efforts in the Garden State. The SADC this month also celebrated the preservation of its 2,000th farm under the Farmland Preservation Program.

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Add One/Princeton Nurseries

"Governor Chris Christie is committed to protecting New Jersey's environment," Commissioner Martin said. "This is the largest single preservation agreement for the State this year and is a perfect way to celebrate Earth Week and commemorate the 50th anniversary of land preservation efforts in New Jersey.

"This is a truly beautiful landscape with scenic views and a remarkable preservation opportunity right in the heart of the most densely populated state in the nation," Commissioner Martin added. "I commend the Flemer family and all of the partners for having the foresight to recognize its importance and then working together toward its preservation."

"This project is in the midst of what already is the highest concentration of preserved farmland in the state, and for good reason -- the farmland here has extraordinarily high-quality soil, among the best in New Jersey," said Secretary Fisher. "We are grateful to the Flemer family who worked the land for so many years and, as responsible stewards, were committed to ensuring that it remains in farming and continues to serve as a tremendous agricultural resource for the Garden State for generations to come."

Final closing is expected to take place by early next year. The \$28 million agreement uses more than \$16.4 million in state, local and nonprofit open-space funding sources for the outright purchases of land for a 512-acre state Wildlife Management Area and nearly 500 acres as additions to the Monmouth and Mercer County parkland systems. The SADC and its partners are providing another \$11.4 million to purchase farmland easements on an additional 900 acres.

The rolling landscape, situated where Monmouth, Mercer and Burlington counties meet, will help connect thousands of acres of existing county park lands and greenways along Crosswicks Creek, an area rich in outdoors recreation opportunities as well as the history of the Revolutionary War and early 1800s. The historic village of Walnford is nestled within Monmouth County's Crosswicks Creek Greenway.

The portion of the land being preserved as a state Wildlife Management Area and as additions to county parklands consist of grasslands, mature forests and forested wetlands that provide a great diversity of wildlife habitat and will offer recreational opportunities for those who enjoy hiking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting and being in the outdoors. Some nursery roads will be developed into a trail system for hiking, bicycle riding and horseback riding.

The farmland portion will be a major addition to the permanent agricultural land base in an area where approximately 15,000 acres of farmland is preserved.

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Add Two/Princeton Nurseries

The majority of the land is in Upper Freehold in Monmouth County, with additional parcels in Hamilton Township in Mercer County and North Hanover Township in Burlington County. Monmouth County is providing more than \$10 million for the project -- \$7 million toward the purchase of open space for county parkland additions, and in cooperation with Upper Freehold another \$4.6 million toward the purchase of farmland easements.

"Monmouth County is proud to be part of a unique collaboration that preserves farmland, provides open space and protects the waters of the Crosswicks Creek Stream Valley while also providing public recreation opportunities," said Monmouth County Freeholder Lillian Burry. "Working together, the Farmland Preservation Program, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and the Monmouth County Park System accomplishes all of this for future generations."

In a statement, the Flemer family said: "For fifty years, Princeton Nurseries and the Flemer family have been proud members of the Allentown and Upper Freehold community. We are grateful to our staff and to our customers for all those good years and to the State of New Jersey for ensuring that this land we love will keep its rural character and natural beauty forever. For the John Flemer Family, this celebration today is a fulfillment of one of John's wishes during his lifetime."

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes: "We are extremely pleased to partner with our fellow counties and environmental agencies to acquire this important property. Through this acquisition, we are able to preserve in Mercer County both the Rock Hill Farm and the portion of the Crosswicks Creek stream corridor running through the farm, both of which are critical to our open space and farmland preservation goals."

Upper Freehold Mayor Lori Sue H. Mount: "Many thanks to the commitment made by the owners of Princeton Nurseries to conserve and preserve this area as well as the many state and county officials who worked hard to complete this deal. We are fortunate to have representatives who have the foresight to understand how important preservation such as this is to our region. The citizens of Upper Freehold Township and all of Monmouth County should be grateful."

Monmouth Conservation Foundation Executive Director Adele Keller: "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and The Monmouth Conservation Foundation is pleased and excited to be part of this important preservation project. The scope of this project is impressive. Having the largest unreserved farming operation in Monmouth County contiguous to many preserved farms and open space areas is of great significance to our communities."

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Add Three/Princeton Nurseries

Burlington County Freeholder Director Bruce Garganio: "This project is a true tribute to partnership in the name of open space and land preservation. Burlington County is a very serious player when it comes to farmland preservation and park development, and we welcome the opportunity to work with the State and our neighboring counties to advance this agenda."

FLEMER PROPERTY FACTS

LOCATION: More than 1,900 acres flanking Province Line Road in Upper Freehold, North Hanover and Hamilton Townships; adjacent to Monmouth County's Crosswicks Creek Park and Mercer County's Crosswicks Creek Park. For maps, visit:

<http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/news/press/2011/index.html>

THE LAND: The property has grasslands that will be ideal habitat for grassland birds such as pheasants and contains mature forests of oak and beech, along with many large tulip poplars as well as sweet gum, black gum, and hickories. The land provides ideal habitat for birds such as eastern meadowlark, grasshopper sparrow and great blue heron. The DEP has designated the forests along Crosswicks Creek a Natural Heritage Priority Site, meaning its biological diversity makes it worthy of special protection efforts. The majority of the farmland consists of soils classified as prime farmland, the most productive soils for agricultural production

FUNDING SOURCES: Open Space Acquisitions: DEP Green Acres Program \$7.2 million; Monmouth County \$7 million; Mercer County \$1.7 million; Monmouth Conservation Foundation \$500,000. Farmland easements: SADC \$6.6 million; Monmouth County and Upper Freehold \$4.6 million; Burlington County \$257,000. (Note: Funding contribution estimates are tentative pending surveys and final closing.)

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