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544 Acre Barnegat Bay Scout Camp Preserved In Partnership With NJ Conservation Foundation

TRENTON - An agreement that will permanently preserve a 544-acre tract in the Barnegat Bay watershed in Ocean County was completed today when the Department of Environmental Protection acquired a conservation easement from the Jersey Shore Boy Scout Council and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, DEP Commissioner Bob Martin announced.

The \$1.1 million agreement with the Scout Council will preserve the Joseph A. Citta Boy Scout Reservation Camp in Ocean Township, which contains camping facilities used by the Boy Scouts and many other outdoor user groups. The property, which offers public hiking trails, also is environmentally important, containing Pine Barrens habitat in the headwaters of the Oyster Creek, which is a tributary to Barnegat Bay.

The preserved land will link Ocean County's Wells Mill Park to other preserve land in the Forked River Mountains, an ecologically unique area of rolling forests in the Pinelands National Reserve. The Scouts will be able to continue to own and manage the camp for camping and recreational use, and in turn have extinguished their development rights on the property while agreeing to providing a public trail system linking other open space.

As part of the 544-acre preservation deal, the Conservation Foundation assigned to the DEP an 84-acre conservation easement that it held since the 1970s on a portion of the Citta Camp. This acreage was included in the purchase agreement at no cost to the state.

This 544-acre easement acquisition brings the state's total of preserved land in the Barnegat Bay watershed to 2,895 acres since Governor Christie announced his comprehensive 10-point Barnegat Bay restoration plan in December of 2010.

"This is yet another important step in the Christie Administration's multifaceted, long-term commitment to restore Barnegat Bay, to protect the entire watershed and help bring the bay back from decades of ecological decline," said Commissioner Martin. "Land preservation is a key factor because it improves water quality by reducing the impacts of stormwater pollution on the bay."

"I commend the Jersey Shore Boy Scout Council for having the foresight to recognize the importance of preserving this land and its impact on Barnegat Bay," added Commissioner Martin. "I also commend the Conservation Foundation for being a great partner in helping to finalize this important preservation agreement."

“New Jersey Conservation Foundation is pleased to play a role in the preservation of the Joseph A. Citta Scout Reservation,” said Michele S. Byers, executive director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation. “The Boy Scouts had the foresight to preserve 84 acres of the camp with New Jersey Conservation Foundation back in 1979, and we congratulate them and the Department of Environmental Protection for now preserving the entire camp. “

Byers noted that over the past 30 years, New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the DEP have worked together, and with other partners, to preserve thousands of acres in the Forked River Mountain area of Ocean and Lacey townships.

The easement purchase is financed by \$1.1 million in voter-approved state Green Acres Program funds. Ocean County provided funding for the survey work needed for the acquisition.

Stewardship of this easement will be provided by DEP’s Green Acres Program and the Division of Parks and Forestry as part of Brendan T. Byrne State Forest. The trails through the Boy Scout Camp will be an expansion of the trail system at Wells Mill County Park and open for public use.

Commissioner Martin first announced a pending deal for the Citta Camp in December, 2011 at an event to mark the first anniversary of Governor Christie’s Barnegat Bay plan. At that time the agreement called for a 436-acre easement purchase. But detailed surveying of the Scout Council’s tract found it to be much larger, resulting in a 544-acres easement purchase, with an adjusted extra cost of \$56,681.

Governor Christie launched the 10-point comprehensive plan on Dec. 9, 2010, by making a landmark announcement of an agreement to close the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant in Lacey Township a decade ahead of the expiration of its federal operating license.

The Barnegat Bay Plan sets in place multifaceted strategies to restore and enhance the bay, including efforts to reduce stormwater pollution, develop water quality standards, close key gaps in scientific data, improve public stewardship of the bay, and preserve land in the bay’s 660-square-mile watershed.