



news releases

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW JERSEY'S WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA SYSTEM REACHES 350,000-ACRE MARK DURING DIVISION'S 125th ANNIVERSARY

TRENTON – The state's network of Wildlife Management Areas has reached an important milestone with recent land acquisitions increasing the size of the system to 350,000 acres, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin announced today.

To put this in perspective, New Jersey has more acreage in its Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system than its much larger neighbor New York State, and more than Vermont, Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined.

“This achievement is especially notable since it is coming during the 125th anniversary of the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife,” Commissioner Martin said. “Wildlife Management Areas, managed by the Division of Fish and Wildlife, provide countless hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities, and protect a wide range of landscapes, habitats, and wildlife that reflect the state's diversity. The Christie Administration is proud to celebrate this impressive system of natural lands that are so important to the sporting community, our residents and our quality of life.”



The 122-unit Wildlife Management Area system had its beginning with the purchase of the 387-acre Walpack Tract in Sussex County in 1932 as a “Public Shooting and Fishing Ground” by the Board of Fish and

Game Commissioners, the predecessor of today's New Jersey Fish and Game Council.

Wildlife Management Areas can be found across the state, from the vast salt marshes of Delaware Bay, to the pitch pine and oak forests of the Pinelands, to the rocky ridges of northwestern New Jersey's Kittatinny Ridge.

In recent months, the Division of Fish and Wildlife, through the DEP's Green Acres Program, added 502 acres to the system, nudging its size to just over 350,000 acres.

Recent acquisitions include an 18-acre addition to the Prospertown Lake WMA in Millstone, Monmouth County; a 28-acre addition to the New Sweden WMA in Lawrence Township, Cumberland County; a 204-acre addition to the Heislerville WMA in Maurice River Township, Cumberland County; and a 36-acre addition to the Peaslee WMA in Buena Vista, Atlantic

County. In addition, numerous parcels totaling 217 acres were added to the Hammonton Creek WMA and Makepeace Lake WMA, both in Mullica Township, Atlantic County.

The purchase of lands for the Wildlife Management Area system was initially funded entirely from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. In fact, the first 100,000 acres were purchased with license revenues supported by New Jersey's sportsmen and sportswomen.

In 1961, the first Green Acres bond issue was approved by state voters, enabling the public to participate in the development of the system. Operational funding for the management of Wildlife Management Areas continues to be provided by hunters and anglers.

Wildlife Management Areas account for nearly 45 percent of state-owned public open space in New Jersey. The largest WMA is the nearly 34,000-acre Peaslee Wildlife Management Area in Cumberland County.

While Wildlife Management Areas were originally established primarily to provide areas for hunting, trapping, and fishing, their purpose has greatly expanded beyond that today.

“Hunting and fishing enthusiasts will always find Wildlife Management Areas ideal for their use, but activities such as bird watching, nature photography, cross-country skiing and hiking are growing in popularity on these lands,” said Division of Fish and Wildlife Director Larry Herrighty. “New Jersey’s hunters and anglers are to be commended for their support of the Wildlife Management Area system and the recreational opportunities they help provide.”



The number of people in search of wildlife-oriented recreational opportunities has grown significantly as shown by the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The 2011 National Survey found that 794,000 people hunted and fished in New Jersey, and more than 2.4 million participated in other wildlife-oriented recreational activities, such as bird watching, wildlife observation and photography.

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife is one of the oldest state wildlife management agencies in the nation, tracing its beginning to March 8, 1892, with the enactment of legislation calling for the appointments of three fish and game commissioners and a paid “game protector” for the “better protection of the fishing interests and of the game birds and game animals of this state.”

This structure evolved into the New Jersey Division of Fish and Game, which was integrated into the DEP when the latter was formed on the first Earth Day, April 22, 1970. In 1979, the Division of Fish and Game became the Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife, and in 2000, the name was changed to the Division of Fish and Wildlife to encompass its mission of managing all wildlife.