



**Somerset County
Park Commission**

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SOMERSET COUNTY SETS RECORD FOR OPEN SPACE ACQUISITIONS IN 2011

BRIDGEWATER, NJ – With the acquisition of 912.5 acres of open space from 10 property owners in 2011, Somerset County set a new annual record for protecting and preserving open space. The 2011 purchases brought the total open space inventory to more than 12,500 acres. Properties acquired in 2011 range in size from 0.28 to 247 acres.

The County has been able to leverage its tax dollars with the NJDEP Green Acres Program matching grants to maximize its available funding for open space acquisitions. A Green Acres matching grant of \$900,000 was awarded to Somerset County in 2011.

Notable acquisitions include:

- the 247-acre “Skillman Village” property;
- an increase of 650 acres in the Sourland Mountain Preserve in Hillsborough and Montgomery Townships;
- a total of 468 acres of forested land surrounding the Gibraltar (former 3M) Quarry, helping to preserve a significant length of Roaring Brook, including Roaring Rocks, a distinctive geological formation of large boulders overlaying Roaring Brook that “roars” during heavy rain; and
- a total of 160 acres of forested mountainside within the Sourland Mountain Preserve in Hillsborough Township.

The total acreage of the Sourland Mountain Preserve now exceeds 4,700 acres and it remains the largest park area within the County’s park system.

The Open Space Acquisition program is a cooperative effort between the Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Park Commission that has made Somerset County the model for open space preservation over the past decade.

“The aggressive efforts of the Freeholders and the Park Commission have provided the opportunity for all residents of Somerset County to enjoy ever-increasing access to active and passive recreation opportunities,” said Freeholder Director Patricia Walsh. “The open space and farmland that has been purchased on the way to the stated goal of 20,500 acres is a major contributor to the quality of life of which we are supremely proud in Somerset County.”

“Somerset County has taken advantage of a weak real estate market and has been successful in acquiring significant parcels of land at reduced costs,” commented Park Commission President Steve Fuerst. “Many property owners are eager to sell and other parcels may not have been available or would have been cost-prohibitive in a thriving market.”

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For the hearing/speech impaired

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The "Race for Open Space" began in 1960, at which time parks were considered a necessity in the face of rapid development, with terms like "suburbicide" appearing in the press. In the November 1961 election, a Green Acres bond issue was passed which allowed matching funds for new park acquisitions, the trigger for an aggressive open-space acquisition program.

In 1989, Somerset County voters approved a public referendum that established an annual assessment for the Open Space Trust Fund, a program that would furnish the Commission with funds for land-acquisition purposes. This began an aggressive initiative to purchase open space and farmland as a means of preserving the rural culture of Somerset County. A subsequent updating of the County Open Space Master Plan in 1994 set a goal of 10,500 acres of open space purchases.

A second public referendum in 1997 doubled the Open Space Trust Fund to allow for continued purchases as the cost of land in Somerset County began to dramatically increase.

In 2000, the Commission completed an update of its Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, recommending the doubling of the County's open space acquisition goal from 10,500 acres to 20,500 acres.

Of the 12,500+ acres of County parkland, 6,500 acres are available for use by the more than 2 million current park users annually. These lands contain five golf courses, on which over four million rounds have been played, three driving ranges, a pitch-and-putt course and a recreational putting course.

Other facilities include a riding stable, an environmental education center, two tennis facilities, an outdoor pool, paddle boating, a rock and rare plant garden, an award-winning rose garden, an arboretum and a sensory and fragrance garden. Six of the parks offer amenities including athletic fields, picnic facilities, bike paths and fishing opportunities.

Several natural areas offer solitude and pursuits such as bird-watching, cross-country skiing, and hiking. Special events, including concerts, fairs and festivals, golf tournaments, art shows and summer camps, occur throughout the year.

Information on all Somerset County Park Commission activities may be found on the Internet at www.somersetcountyparks.org. Like us on Facebook and Twitter.