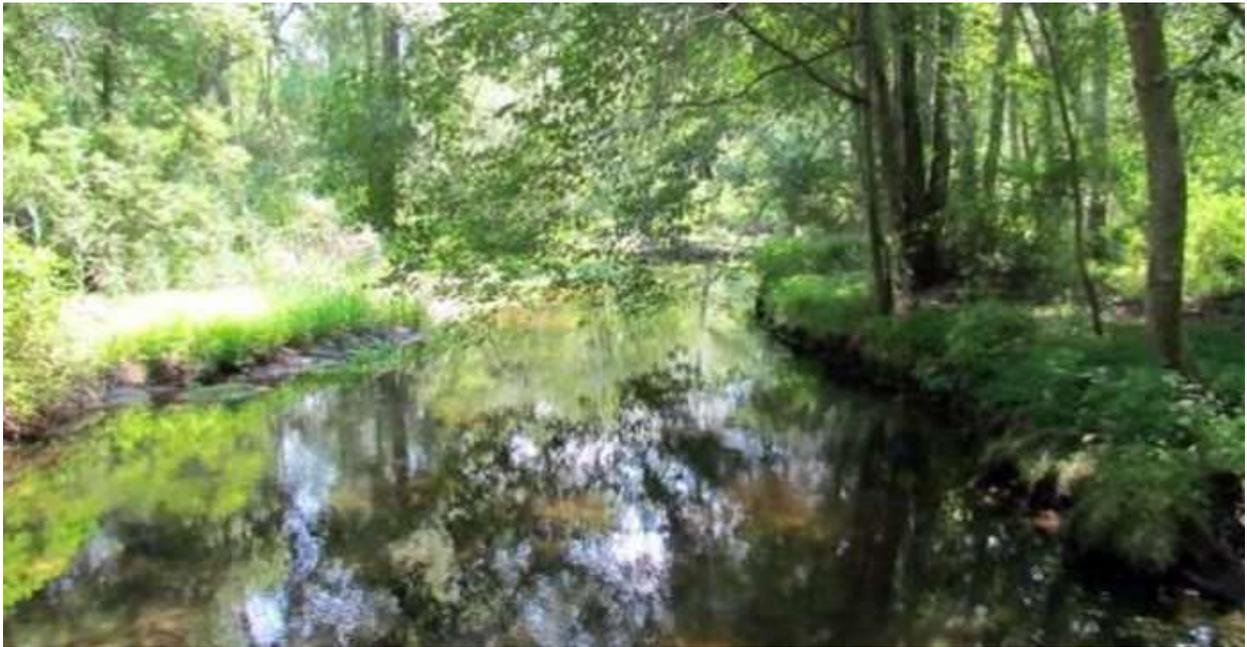


NJ ENVIRONMENT NEWS

Conservation news and commentary for the Garden State

600 ACRES IN VINELAND TO BECOME NEW NATURE PRESERVE

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VINELAND, NJ: – One of the largest remaining pieces of open land in the Upper Menantico watershed – 600 acres along the Menantico Creek – has been permanently preserved by New Jersey Conservation Foundation and its partners.

New Jersey Conservation Foundation and Cumberland County purchased the property in Vineland for \$1.174 million on Aug. 8 and will permanently preserve the land in its natural state.

“We’re excited to establish the new Menantico Preserve,” said Michele S. Byers, executive director of the Far Hills-based nonprofit. “This property is less than five miles from downtown Vineland and a short distance from downtown Millville. Together, these two cities have a population of nearly 90,000 residents and a real need for more public open space.”

NJ Conservation Foundation plans to establish trails, parking and river access over the next few years to turn the preserve into a destination for hikers, dog walkers, bird watchers and nature enthusiasts.

Funding for the purchase came from a public-private partnership that includes the New Jersey Green Acres Program, Cumberland County, William Penn Foundation, Open Space Institute, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Natural Lands.

“We are very happy that this area along the Menantico Creek will become a nature preserve for Vineland residents and visitors to our city to enjoy,” said Mayor Anthony Fanucci. “We want to thank the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the many public and private groups that have partnered together on this important project. The quality of life for Vineland residents is made substantially better by protecting our water resources and ensuring the preservation of natural areas and green spaces for passive recreation.”

The new preserve is surrounded by farms, forests and homes, and is roughly bordered by Hance Bridge, Panther and Mays Landing roads. The preserve features 2.2 miles of the Menantico Creek and its tributaries – part of the federally-designated Maurice Wild and Scenic River system. The property has extraordinarily high plant and animal diversity. The Menantico Creek is one of the main tributaries of the Maurice River, which flows into the Delaware Bay.

“The NJDEP Green Acres Program is proud to support these preservation partnerships,” said Martha Sullivan Sapp, the Green Acres Program Director. “Open space is a powerful way to connect people to nature, their communities, and each other.” The new preserve contains characteristic Pine Barrens vegetation and wildlife, and is located just outside the boundary of the million-acre Pinelands National Reserve.

The property is home to at least seven endangered, threatened and special-concern animal species, including bald eagles, red-headed woodpeckers, barred owls and Cope’s gray tree frogs. Its interior forests provide breeding habitat for many migratory Neotropical songbirds, including ruby-throated hummingbirds, scarlet tanagers, yellow-throated warblers and Acadian flycatchers.

The land was purchased jointly by New Jersey Conservation Foundation and Cumberland County from the Phelan and Murray families, who owned it for many years. It is one of the first open space properties purchased through Cumberland County’s land preservation fund. In turn, Cumberland County transferred its interest to New Jersey Conservation Foundation to own and manage the property.

“Cumberland County is always in search of collaborative opportunities to improve the health and quality of life of its citizens,” said Cumberland County Freeholder Director Joseph Derella. “This new public open space in the City of Vineland not only protects important ecological resources, but gives a space for residents and visitors to get out and explore the world around them. Adding this new park to the list of growing attractions in Cumberland County continues to show what a great place it is to live and visit!”

The Menantico Preserve’s forests provide significant groundwater recharge to the Kirkwood-Cohansey Aquifer, which holds 17 trillion gallons of fresh water and supplies the needs of millions of South Jersey residents, farmers and businesses.

The Menantico Creek project was supported through the Open Space Institute’s Delaware River Watershed Protection Fund. The Fund is made possible with support from the William Penn Foundation from its Delaware River Watershed Initiative, which seeks to protect water quality in the Delaware River Basin.

“When kept intact, unspoiled forests are the most effective method for cleaning the drinking water of the Delaware River Watershed’s 15 million residents across four states,” said Peter Howell, Executive Vice President at OSI. “The Open Space Institute applauds the impressive coordination of multiple funding partners, including federal, state, county and private nonprofits, for this amazing conservation triumph.”

Barbara Brummer, The Nature Conservancy’s New Jersey director, praised the partnership that made the Vineland project possible. “The day when all land in New Jersey will either be developed or preserved is approaching, so it is critical for us to protect our state’s most ecologically valuable parcels while we still can,” said Brummer. “This project is a perfect example of how partners working together can do just that.”

“The financial incentives provided by the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) help local partners protect, restore, and enhance important habitats for waterfowl, waterbirds and other Neotropical migrant songbirds important not only to the local community, but on a national level as well,” said Jim Feaga, regional biologist for Ducks Unlimited.

A local conservation group, Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and its Tributaries (CU Maurice River), helped out with a property cleanup and will assist with a trail plan in the future.

“The Menantico is a fantastic example of a Pinelands river, yet it is outside the Pinelands Preserve’s regulatory umbrella and is therefore vulnerable,” said Jane Morton Galetto, president of CU Maurice River. “We salute New Jersey Conservation Foundation’s efforts to protect New Jersey’s remaining wild places. We were happy we were able to play a role in the effort to prepare this property for preservation.”