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GREEN ACRES PHOTO CONTEST PUTS FOCUS ON FIVE DECADES OF OPEN SPACE PROTECTION AND PARK DEVELOPMENT

(11/P72) TRENTON - A picture may be worth a thousand words, but how many pictures would it take to capture the amazing diversity and beauty of 650,000 acres of open space and parks protected in New Jersey over the past 50 years with the help of the state's Green Acres Program?

That's the challenge the Department of Environmental Protection is putting into the shutter-happy hands of residents and visitors, asking them to capture their favorite Green Acres properties in a digital photography contest in conjunction with the 50th anniversary celebration of the first Green Acres bond referendum. The theme of the anniversary is "Green Acres: It's all yours."

The photo contest is being launched today in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the signing of the first Green Acres Bond Act by Governor Robert B. Meyner. Since that first bond referendum signed on June 3, 1961, voters have approved every bond act put before them, resulting in the protection of 650,000 acres of open space and development of hundreds of outdoor recreational facilities.

"The Christie Administration is committed to protecting open space," DEP Commissioner Bob Martin said. "I am extremely proud of everything the Green Acres Program has accomplished and the support voters have shown for open space over the years. I encourage everyone, young and old, to pick up their digital cameras and photograph their favorite Green Acres sites and the people who are using them. I am sure this experience will open a lot of eyes by creating new appreciation for these special places."

Virtually every community in New Jersey has been touched by the Green Acres Program.

"Properties protected with the help of Green Acres bond money are all around us, from playgrounds, athletic fields, boat launches and fishing piers to hiking trails, wildlife habitats and nature centers," said Richard Boornazian, Administrator of the Green Acres Program. "The greatest challenge of this contest is not in finding excellent photo opportunities, for they are everywhere, but in deciding where to start.

"We want everyone to get out and enjoy the preserved spaces that are truly theirs, but with a camera in their hands and with a mission to see them a little differently," Boornazian added. "We are certain that this contest will provide the public and us in the Green Acres Program with new perspectives on these important pieces of land, as well as an opportunity to create a photographic scrapbook of the program's many successes."

The contest is open to anyone six years of age or older. The goal is to photograph a New Jersey park or open space property that is preserved with Green Acres funds. Many of these properties are marked with distinctive green and white "Green Acres" signs emblazoned with a Mercer oak tree.

In addition to hundreds of municipal and county projects such as parks and playgrounds, most State Parks, State Forests and Wildlife Management Areas have been funded with Green Acres money. Green Acres money has also been used to help nonprofit groups with park and open space projects.

Participants in the contest are encouraged to enter photos in any or all of three theme areas:

- * People in Parks: People recreating or at play in parks preserved or developed with Green Acres funding;
- * Scenic: Natural landscapes that capture the scenic beauty of Green Acres funded properties;
- * Nature in New Jersey Close-Up: Close-ups of plants, trees, animals, leaves, rocks, water, and other natural aspects of Green Acres funded properties.

Each person may enter one photo per category. All entries must be submitted electronically by visiting <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/ga50/50photo.htm>

Entries will be separated and judged according to three age categories: youth (ages 6-12), teenagers (ages 13-17) and adults (ages 18 and older).

The deadline for submissions is Oct. 16. Entries will be reviewed by a panel of independent judges who will look for composition, color, lighting, mood, creativity and impact, among other elements. Prizes and certificates will be awarded to the winners at a public ceremony. Winning photos will be displayed at various parks throughout the state.

If you need help identifying a Green Acres property, look for Green Acres signs posted on many properties or visit the 50th anniversary website: www.nj.gov/dep/ga50. There you can search the DEP's Open Space Database by county and municipality or search for properties using a state map. You may also contact your local government for information.

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