



---

## AMERICAN LITTORAL SOCIETY

---

16 North High Street, Suite I, Millville, NJ 08332

July 13, 2010

Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders  
4 Moore Rd.  
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210

RE: Open Space Preservation Opportunities

Dear Freeholder Board,

I am writing on behalf of the undersigned organizations. The American Littoral Society, Delaware Bayshore Program works to protect and preserve important coastal lands throughout Salem, Cumberland and Cape May Counties. We are writing to ask you to consider applying to the State Green Acres Program to seek funding to match and augment funds currently raised through the County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Program. Cape May County established a Trust Fund in 1989 to preserve open space and agricultural lands. The Trust is funded by a county property tax of 1-cent per \$100 of assessed valuation and raised \$5.5 million toward land preservation last year. Since the county program's inception, the county has always had the option to leverage local open space dollars with state funding for a wide variety of projects, but has chosen not to do so.

This year's NJ State Green Acres application deadline is July 30<sup>th</sup> and is quickly approaching. We submitted a similar letter to the County in 2007, and still cannot understand why the County isn't aggressively taking advantage of this program on an annual basis.

Eighteen other counties in the state regularly apply for and receive matching funds from the State Green Acres Program. For example, between 2005 and 2010, Atlantic County utilized over \$3.2 million in Green Acres funding for land acquisition and almost \$285,000 for park infrastructure.

Because the county dedicates a portion of its 1-cent Farmland and Open Space Preservation tax for the acquisition of parkland and natural areas, it has always had the option to more than double the funds it raises every year by merely submitting a simple application. In addition to boosting local dollars to preserve important natural areas, the state funds can also be tapped to help the county and its towns develop park and recreational infrastructure - from athletic fields to fishing piers, trails, playgrounds, bathrooms and pocket parks.

By continually neglecting to take advantage of this competitive program, the county is denying its taxpayers and towns an important and substantial annual return for their open space investments – investments that could have more than doubled the amount of protected open space preserved within the county over the past two decades.

In addition, the county can also utilize matching state funds to assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as non-profit land preservation trusts in establishing and/or expanding nature preserves, state wildlife management areas, and federal refuge lands. For example, last year, Salem County received a \$1 million grant from State Green Acres Program for open space and recreation projects. The county used \$350,000 of this grant to play a pivotal role in expanding the Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge by 80 acres. By utilizing State Green Acres money, the county not only helped make the \$4.4 million deal possible, but was able to do so without spending a penny of its local open space dollars. In Cape May County, State Green Acres funds could be utilized to assist in efforts to complete the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge, which has only acquired 11,800 acres of the 21,820 acres that congress envisioned necessary to protect wetlands and wildlife resources of international importance.

Cape May County benefits greatly from being the eco-tourism capital of New Jersey. According to a recent report by the Atlantic County Community College, from wildlife watching activities to kayaking along tidal creeks, eco-tourism generates over \$522 million annually in Cape May County. Indeed, according to Diane F. Wieland, director of the Cape May County Department of Tourism, this amount is about double what it was a decade ago. Considering the accelerating economic value of eco-tourism in the county, the Freeholder Board should be doing everything possible to advance and support open space and park development efforts throughout the county.

The passage of the Open Space Ballot Question last year will provide funding for Green Acres, Farmland Preservation and NJ Historic Trust for another two years. However, this is merely a stop gap measure until a more long-term funding source is found. In the interim, the county should take full advantage of funding now while it remains available. Given the economic situation in New Jersey, it is uncertain when the county will have another opportunity to apply for matching grants once funding from the 2009 Ballot Question has been spent.

Therefore, we urge you not to miss the July 30<sup>th</sup> deadline for submission of an application. Please feel free to contact the Littoral Society if you need further information or assistance with the application process.

Sincerely,

Jessica Daher, Conservation Coordinator  
American Littoral Society

Shawn Lockyear, President  
Friends of Cape May National Wildlife Refuge

cc: Cape May County Open Space Review Board  
Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders  
Ms. Leslie Gimeno, Cape May County Planning Director