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**PLUMSTED: County helps to preserve township land**

DATE POSTED: Wednesday, October 8, 2014 4:43 PM EDT

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PLUMSTED — The 167-acre tract of land near Long Swamp Road has met the criteria of the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund program.

All the lands purchased under the natural lands trust result in numerous and lifelong environmental benefits including protecting farmland, water quality, stream corridors, aquifer recharge areas, public water supplies, open space, wetlands and other natural lands with unique and sensitive features, according to a news release from the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders. The 167 acres was formerly farmland and it sits next to the 121-acre Long Swamp Property purchased by the county's Natural Lands Trust Fund in 2010. In addition there is a creek running through the property.

And, this property goes one step further, its proximity to Joint Base – McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst makes it a priority acquisition under the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative — a program which provides funding from the Department of Defense to buffer military installations.

"In an effort to protect the base from encroachment, the Natural Lands Trust has been closely working with the base and the Department of Defense in preserving open space that falls within its five mile buffer," said Freeholder Director Joseph H. Vicari, who serves as liaison to the Ocean County Division of Business Development and Tourism. "Continuing this practice helps the environment as we preserve open space and also helps in our efforts to preserve the base."

The Joint Base is the nation's only tri-service military base. It supports over 23 major mission partners and more than 80 total mission partners. In recent years, the county and the Department of Defense have worked together to preserve 13 properties totaling 8,574 acres surrounding the base, which sits in Burlington and Ocean counties.

"These transactions, mostly in Jackson and Plumsted townships, have been completed," Mr. Vicari said.

Of the total cost of \$14.8 million, the Department of Defense provided \$6.1 million to assist in purchasing the properties.

The purchase of another 11 properties by the base totaling 2,536 acres is pending.

The Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders has many good reasons to work closely with the base in its efforts to reduce encroachment.

"The Joint Base has the second largest work force in New Jersey," said Freeholder John P. Kelly, who serves as liaison to the base. "Its economic value and its military value are immeasurable when it comes to this country, this state and this county."

Mr. Kelly, who worked closely with Congressional leaders and community representatives, in saving Navy Lakehurst from being dismantled by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, twice, noted that taking steps now to protect the Joint Base will provide benefits in the future.

"You cannot rest on your past accomplishments when it comes to making certain this base is safe from spending cuts or a BRAC," he said.

In order to protect the Joint Base, Ocean County also took a leading role in developing a Joint Land Use Study with Burlington County.

"One of the key recommendations of that study was to protect the base through acquisitions of open space in order to protect it from encroachment," Mr. Kelly said.

The Plumsted Township tract, which has a purchase price of \$425,000, was approved for purchase by the Board of Freeholders on Oct. 1. It sits closest to the area of Fort Dix used for training and a firing range.

"This is a critical base area that could have a negative impact on residents if not for preserving the land in the buffer zone," Mr. Vicari said.

Freeholder John C. Bartlett Jr., who serves as liaison to the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust program, said no matter where the land is located it must meet the criteria of the program to be considered for purchase.

"All the properties we have preserved come from willing sellers, has the support of the respective municipality and meet the program criteria," Mr. Bartlett said. "The property we preserve with the DOD not only meets our principles but they overlap with the priorities of the base."

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He added, "Working with the DOD provides us with additional funds and helps our funding go further."  
Ocean County is already preparing for 2015, with five properties by the base totaling 317 acres being considered for preservation.

"This is a very active program," Mr. Vicari said. "And it's a good program built on our partnership with the Natural Lands Trust, the leaders of the Joint Base and the DOD. Everyone benefits with this kind of cooperation."

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