

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 22, 2023

Contact: Caryn Shinske (609) 984-1795

Lawrence Hajna (609) 984-1795

Vincent Grassi (609) 984-1795

NEW JERSEY RECEIVES \$995,000 FEDERAL GRANT FOR WILDFIRE MITIGATION EFFORTS IN AREA OF JOINT BASE MCGUIRE-DIX-LAKEHURST

AWARD IS AMONG 13 GIVEN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION INITIATIVES AT MILITARY INSTALLATIONS

(23/P014) TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection is set to receive \$995,000 from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to reduce wildfire risk in the areas surrounding Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, Warren Grove Range, Naval Weapons Station Earle and Sea Girt National Guard Training Facility, Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette announced today.

The New Jersey grant is one of 13 projects funded nationally with \$24 million from the DOD’s 2023 [Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration \(REPI\) Challenge Program](#), which facilitates long-term partnerships to improve resilience to climate change, preserve habitats and natural resources, and promote sustainable land uses near military installations and ranges.



“The Murphy Administration is grateful to our federal partners for this grant funding, which will help us mitigate the increased risk of wildfires that are one of the many adverse impacts of climate change in New Jersey,” **Commissioner LaTourette said.** “Partnerships such as this help us ensure healthy forests that provide shade and shelter to visitors, keep open spaces green to sequester carbon, and also limit the greenhouse gas emissions that can increase ocean acidification.”

“Warmer springs and hotter, drier summers may lengthen New Jersey’s wildfire season and increase the occurrence of large fires. Reducing wildfire risk is a key aspect of ensuring that our farms, forests, and communities that are vital to our state’s economy and identity are resilient to a changing climate,” **said Nick Angarone, New Jersey Chief Climate Resilience Officer.** “This REPI Challenge award supports the New Jersey Forest Fire Service in some of its most critical wildfire mitigation and protection projects in the state.”

Funds from this grant round will be used to construct a strategic firebreak adjacent to the [Warren Grove Gunnery Range](#) in [Bass River State Forest](#), with project work expected to begin in April 2023. Firebreak work will consist of reducing hazardous forest fuels on a strategic strip of land bordering Allen and Oswego roads, in Bass River Township, Burlington County, and in Egg Harbor Township, Ocean County. By reducing the forest fuels, firefighters may more safely control the forward progress of wildfires that may start in this area. The firebreak will also provide improved access to fight any fires that may occur in the area.



Additionally, forest thinning on 1,305 acres will reduce combustible vegetation known as ladder fuels and improve wildlife habitat. Ladder fuels are small trees and low vegetation beneath the forest canopy. Most large trees in the project area will remain, which will keep the canopy intact. Thinning allows for a healthier forest, reduces competition among trees and provides greater resource availability. The likelihood of a catastrophic wildfire burning through a thinned forest is reduced.

Additional REPI funds will go toward the ongoing Greenwood Triangle Forest Fuels Maintenance Project in [Brendan T. Byrne State Forest](#) and Greenwood Forest Wildlife Management area. This project entails firebreak maintenance and underbrush removal to protect residents in Burlington and Ocean counties and to create safe conditions for firefighters during wildfire suppression efforts.



This funding will help the [New Jersey Forest Fire Service](#) continue to build a network of strategic firebreaks across the landscape and improve resilience.

Ongoing partnerships like this through the DOD, Naval Weapons Station Earle continues to strengthen the relationship between DOD and DEP. New Jersey's rich history of cooperation with its military installations is reinforced through the funds the DEP has received through the REPI Challenge Program.

"The wildfire management activities outlined in these projects not only benefit the military installations, but the natural resources and residents of New Jersey," **said John Cecil, Assistant Commissioner for State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites.** "Without funding provided through the REPI Challenge Program and additional funding leveraged through the DEP and other partners, these projects would not be possible."

The REPI Challenge Program cited a surge in forest fires adjacent to the Joint Base and Warren Grove Gunnery Range properties, in part due to dry weather conditions and dense accumulations of forest undergrowth, that can fuel wildfires. The New Jersey Forest Fire Service responded to 1,175 wildfires that burned 12,664 acres in 2022. When a wildfire encroaches a military installation, operations at the properties must be suspended, impacting various base and range activities and missions.

In 2019 the [Spring Hill Wildfire](#) burned 9,021 acres just north of the Warren Grove Gunnery Range in Bass River and Penn State Forest in similar forest fuel conditions. This fire highlighted the potential of a major wildfire threatening surrounding communities and military installations.

Combined, the 13 REPI Challenge projects will benefit 26 installations and their communities across the country. In addition to New Jersey, the DOD is funding projects in Guam, Hawaii, Arizona, Texas, California, Washington and Virginia.

To date, the REPI Challenge Program has leveraged more than \$144 million with more than \$417 million in partner contributions to protect more than 51 locations. REPI projects promote compatible land use, restore important habitats, promote species recovery and enhance climate adaptation efforts.

Warren Grove Gunnery Range is one of the most heavily used Air National Guard training ranges in the United States, and its location provides operational capabilities for all branches of military service. Naval Weapons Station Earle operates a receipts, storage, segregation and issue ordnance facility to support the Atlantic fleet, which includes the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and DOD conventional ammunition requirements.

For more information about this year's REPI recipients, visit www.repi.mil/Buffer-Projects/REPI-Challenge

Learn more about the DEP's Bureau of Climate Resilience Planning at www.nj.gov/dep/bcrp/ and other climate resilience initiatives at www.nj.gov/dep/climatechange/resilience.html

To learn more about wildfires in New Jersey, steps to protect property and other resources, visit www.njwildfire.org

Like the Forest Fire Service's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/NJForestFireService/

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Follow Commissioner LaTourette on Twitter and Instagram @shawnlatur and follow the DEP on Twitter @NewJerseyDEP, Facebook @newjerseydep, Instagram @nj.dep and LinkedIn @newjerseydep

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Department of Environmental Protection
P. O. Box 420
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-777-3373

Last Update: February 22, 2023