

CAPE MAY COUNTY OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN



CAPE MAY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

4 MOORE ROAD, DN 309

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE, NEW JERSEY 08210

TEL: (609) 465-1080; FAX: (609) 465-1418

WEB: WWW.CAPEMAYCOUNTYGOV.NET

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**AMENDED
JULY 17, 2007**

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2007**

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Overview

This document has been prepared as the Open Space and Recreation element of the Cape May County Comprehensive Plan. As such, it has been formally adopted by the Cape May County Planning Board and supersedes all previous Open Space and Recreation elements.

All public notice and participation requirements for the preparation of this plan as stated in the County Planning Enabling Act were properly addressed.

Executive Summary

The Cape May County Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) has been prepared by the Cape May County Planning Department for adoption by the Cape May County Planning Board to provide a countywide policy on open space and recreation issues. It serves as a strategic plan describing the County's open space and recreation needs and provides a basic action plan to address those needs.

The plan recognizes that the County is in need of additional public recreational land and open space. Accordingly, the plan recommends:

1. The maintenance and expansion (wherever possible and practical) of the existing County Park System.
2. The continuation of the County's Open Space Preservation Program in conjunction and coordination with other public and private open space preservation programs.
3. The active involvement of the County in providing planning and technical assistance to municipalities and other entities, both public and private, involved in the maintenance and preservation of open space.

This plan was reviewed by the Cape May County Open Space Preservation Board and reviewed and adopted by the Cape May County Planning Board as the Open Space and Recreation element of the Cape May County Comprehensive Plan.

Goals and Policies

As a resort area of regional significance, Cape May County has long recognized its responsibility to provide free and accessible open space and recreation opportunities to its many residents and visitors. With this in mind, the Cape May County Open Space and Recreation Plan has been prepared to meet the following goals:

1. To provide, on an equal and accessible basis, facilities regional in nature and capable of serving residents and visitors of the entire county.

2. To protect and preserve natural and scenic resources.
3. To present information on the current supply and demand for open space.
4. To implement open space and recreation planning policies consistent with the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan.
5. To encourage coordinated open space and recreation planning, acquisition and development initiatives of state, county, and local governments and conservation organizations.
6. To effectively use funds from the Cape May County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Program, and other sources of preservation funding that may become available.

Overview of County-Owned Open Space

County-owned open space and recreational land is comprised of two main categories: the County Park System and lands purchased by the County Open Space Preservation Program. A third minor category consists of three small fishing piers (Scotch Bonnet Pier along Stone Harbor Boulevard and North Wild Boulevard Pier, both in Middle Township and the Ocean City- Longport Bridge Fishing Pier.) maintained by various County departments and entities.

The Cape May County Park system is comprised of four distinct sites. County Park North, in Upper Township along the N.J. Route Nine corridor (25 acres), is officially known as the Richard K. Cameron Wildlife Sanctuary. The most active site, located in the center of the County in Cape May Court House, is known as Park Central (265 acres). This is the most visited site and contains many recreational facilities, as well as the popular County Zoo. Fishing Creek Park (1,508 acres), sometimes referred to as County Park South, is located in the Del Haven section of Middle Township near the Delaware Bay. The fourth and smallest site is the Avalon Manor Fishing Pier (0.2 acres), located in the Avalon Manor section of Middle Township. Together these sites provide approximately 1,800 acres of county owned recreational land.

On November 9, 1989, the voters of Cape May County approved, by a two to one margin, a ballot question endorsing the establishment of a trust fund to preserve open space and agricultural land. The trust is funded by a county property tax of one cent per \$100 of assessed valuation and currently generates approximately 4.5 million dollars annually. The properties acquired through this program, together with those of the County Park system, comprise all open space lands under County jurisdiction.

Needs Analysis

Open space is of special importance to the County's future. The County's beaches are the primary attraction for millions of tourists each year. Estuarine areas, wetlands and woodlands also represent open spaces that fulfill the obvious purposes of recreation, watershed protection, and valuable habitat for wildlife. These heavily used resource areas not only add stability to the County's seasonal economy, but also enhance the resort character of our area.

Although responsibilities vary according to the property in question, in general, the federal and state government's primary open space preservation roles are to acquire the largest land holdings encompassing natural, historical and wilderness areas. The local government's primary responsibility is to provide smaller more intensive uses, such as baseball fields and playgrounds which are usually situated within walking distance of the neighborhoods they serve. A county's primary role is to acquire large tracts which accommodate facilities not normally provided by municipalities due to the nature of the facility, such as large parks, sports arenas, golf courses, and hiking/bicycling trails.

Table Eight of the 2003-2007 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) provides an inventory of all open space and recreational lands in Cape May County broken down by Federal, State, County, municipal and non-profit ownership. This inventory includes all open space parcels, from State Forest lands to small municipal parks and playgrounds. An analysis of Cape May County Open Space from this table follows:

CAPE MAY COUNTY RECREATION OPEN SPACE

	Acres
Federal Recreation Open Space Areas	10,705
Interstate and Regional Areas	0
State Parks, Forests, Natural Areas, Marinas & Historic Sites	23,216
State Wildlife Management Areas	24,809
State Natural Lands Trust	416
State Reservoir Sites	0
New Jersey Water Authority	0
State Miscellaneous Areas	5,400
County Parks	2,045
Municipal Parks	4,442
Nonprofit Open Space	2,587
Total Open Space	73,620

Source: 2003-2007 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

This total of 73,620 acres represents approximately 45% of the total land area of Cape May County. While this appears to be an excessive percentage, it should be noted that the vast majority of these lands are inaccessible wetlands and restricted Federal wildlife lands, and, though valuable wildlife habitat and worthy of preservation in their own right, these lands are not generally thought of as traditional "active" recreational open space.

County Open Space Needs

The 2003-2007 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) uses the "Balanced Land Use Concept" to calculate the recreational open space needs for county governments. This general formula suggests a county's recreational open space needs should equal 7% of the "developed and developable area" of the county.

Under the Stormwater Management Planning Program sponsored by NJDEP, the County was tasked with designating priority open space acquisition areas. In order to determine which areas were suitable, a land analysis of the County was conducted (for more detail, see the Cape May County Watershed Management Planning Program Open Space Taskforce Open Space Prioritization Report, June, 2002). Of the County's 163,328 acres (255.2 square miles), approximately 65% (106,163 acres) were determined to be freshwater and tidal wetlands and wetlands buffer areas. Hence, these areas are not "developable". The remaining 57,165 acres are the "developed and developable" areas of the County. Using the SCORP recommended 7% formula, this equates to a recreational open space need of approximately **4,001 acres** for Cape May County.

The County Park system totals approximately 1,800 acres. When combined with the acquisitions of the County's Open Space Preservation Program (910 acres - not including purchases already added to the County Park system) and other County open space lands (154.1 acres), the County's recreational open space acreage totals 2,864.1 acres, well short of the 4,001 acres needed, particularly when it is considered that much of the area listed is wetlands or wetland buffer areas. A brief analysis follows:

Cape May County Open Space Needs

	<u>Acres</u>
County Need (2003-2007 SCORP formula)	4,001
County Park Lands	1,800.0
County Open Space Acquisitions	910.0
Other County Open Space	154.1
Total County-owned Open Space	2,864.1
Total County Need	1,136.9 Acres

Resource Assessment

This section provides an assessment of those public and private lands and water resources that have potential for providing the County with additional open space and recreational opportunities. These opportunities include, but are not limited to:

County Park System - The four-location County Park system is the most utilized County open space facility (County Park/Zoo Central alone receives over 650,000 visitors annually). Lands abutting this popular system are the highest priority.

Cox Hall Creek - Seventy percent surrounded by residential development, this 400 acre wetland area is the focus of the Cox Hall Creek Study, funded by NJDEP Watershed Management Planning Program funds. Situated in the middle of the 1,940 acre Cox Hall Creek Watershed, this area is targeted for saltwater wetland restoration and is the current focus of several funding requests. However, a significant portion of the land in question is privately owned. Opportunities to acquire lands within the Creek, watershed, or surrounding area are a high priority.

Lower Township, South of the Cape May Canal - This area is under intense development pressure and vacant developable land is vanishing at a rapid pace. It has also been identified by the NJDEP Stopover Project as prime habitat for migrating birds that visit the area annually and seek sustenance prior to their trip south across the Delaware Bay. Opportunities to acquire land in this area are a high priority.

Goshen Cluster - The Goshen area of Middle Township is located at the intersection of New Jersey State Route 47 and County Road No. 646 (Goshen - Swainton Road). The County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Program has been particularly successful in preserving land in this area with eleven preserved farms and two open space parcels with a combined total of approximately 973 acres. Opportunities to acquire additional land in this vicinity are a high priority.

Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail System - Through the use of Transportation Enhancement Grants and other funding sources, the County, together with Middle Township, the Borough of Woodbine, and Atlantic City Electric is in the process of creating a twenty-six mile bicycle trail/path that will traverse the spine of the County and connect Cape May Point State Park with Belleplaine State Forest. Several sections of this trail/path currently exist and plans are underway to fund and complete several more sections. Any opportunity to acquire lands adjacent to this trail for pedestrian/bicycle/recreational amenities will be pursued.

Golf Courses - While there are eight golf courses in Cape May County, some are private courses closed to the public and others are high-end courses with expensive greens fees that rely on the summer tourist trade for profit. Few of these courses are available or affordable to the typical County resident. Opportunities to acquire existing golf courses for public use are a high priority.

Water Supply Protection - Cape May County is the focus of a multi-million dollar groundwater study currently being conducted by NJDEP. Several areas within the County are subject to saltwater intrusion and many private and public wells are no longer capable of providing potable water. Opportunities to acquire open space lands that would further efforts to deter saltwater intrusion and offer protection to threatened groundwater supplies are a high priority.

Threatened or Endangered Species or Other Wildlife Habitat - Opportunities to acquire lands delineated as suitable habitat for threatened or endangered species, or suitable habitat for other non-threatened wildlife will arise. Because of their inherent value, these lands are a high priority.

Historic Sites - Occasionally, opportunities to acquire parcels having historic significance will arise. Based on open space and recreational criteria, these sites may also become a program priority.

Action Plan

This Action Plan provides for the orderly and coordinated implementation of the County Open Space and Recreation Plan. It is intended to guide the County's open space and recreation policies for the 2007-2011 period (5 years).

The County Zoo at County Park Central in Cape May Court House, Middle Township, is the most popular County facility, visited by over 650,000 persons annually. As such it is the focus of the "Cape May County Park System Master Plan", prepared for the Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders in July, 2004. This plan, which is considered part of this Action Plan, evaluates the existing park system and establishes priorities for upgrades and expansion. The County is currently exploring funding options to pursue the recommendations of the plan.

As previously mentioned, Cape May County has been actively pursuing the acquisition of open space since 1989 when the voters approved a ballot question endorsing the establishment of a trust fund to preserve open space and agricultural land. Since that time, the County has preserved approximately 6 square miles (3,840 acres) from development. Of this, approximately 1.5 square miles (1000 acres) is dedicated open space. Some of these parcels are used for active recreation such as soccer fields and baseball fields, while others remain in their natural state and serve as unspoiled habitat for migrating birds or spawning areas for aquatic species. As part of this action plan, the County intends to continue this endeavor and, as in the past, cooperate with municipalities and other preservation agencies and organizations in acquisition and preservation activities. Part of this endeavor is the preservation of existing recreation facilities, both public and private.

Cape May County is the recipient of a Smart Growth Strategic Planning Grant that is being used to designate suitable target areas that will ultimately assist our

municipalities in the implementation of a transfer of development rights program and contribute to the preservation of additional open space within the County. This planning assistance initiative is funded by the New Jersey Office of Smart Growth and is an example of how the County continues to assist our municipalities in open space preservation efforts. Initiatives such as this are an active component of this action plan.

Based on the above, the County's Open Space and Recreation Action Plan can be summarized in three tasks:

- Maintain existing County-owned recreational facilities and adhere to current plans for upgrade and expansion to meet current and anticipated need.
- Continue the County's Open Space Preservation Program and continue cooperation with other preservation agencies and organizations.
- Whenever possible, offer technical or planning assistance (such as aid in the implementation of TDR programs) to municipalities and other agencies/organizations to assist in the acquisition and preservation of open space lands.

Target Areas

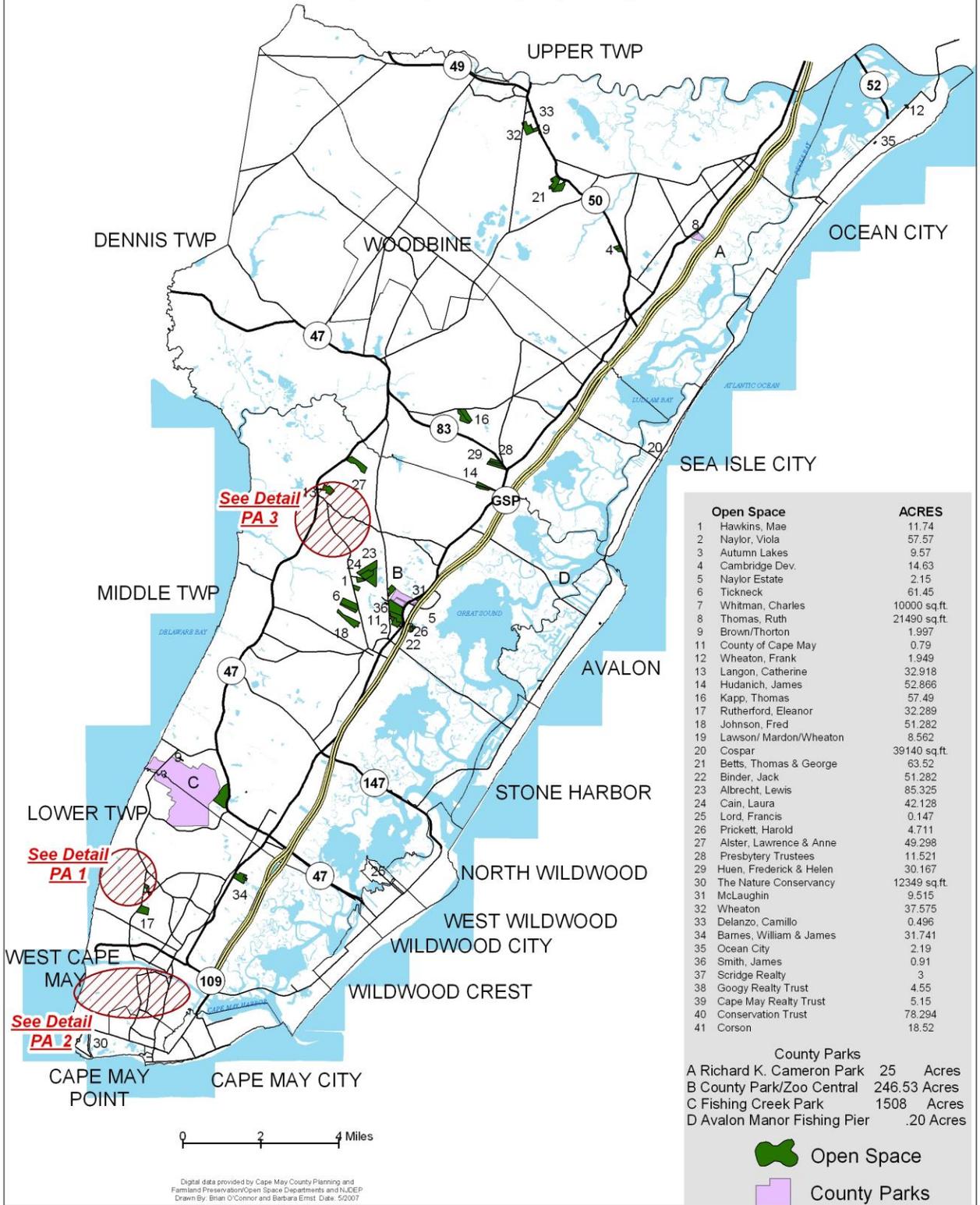
It is not possible to target specific parcels for future acquisition and a lot and block grouping of targeted lands is not recommended. Such detailed analysis could cause conflict at local levels and even lead to increased land prices at time of negotiation. Instead, this plan targets those general areas and property types discussed in the **Resource Assessment** section.

General Open Space System Map

The Open Space System Map shows those county-owned parcels that make up the Cape May County Open Space system. As discussed in detail in the Needs Analysis section, these parcels consist of two basic groups: County Park Lands and lands preserved by the County Open Space Preservation Program.

The map also shows the three priority acquisition areas mentioned in the Resource Assessment section.

Cape May County Open Space



Open Space	ACRES
1 Hawkins, Mae	11.74
2 Naylor, Viola	57.57
3 Autumn Lakes	9.57
4 Cambridge Dev.	14.63
5 Naylor Estate	2.15
6 Tickneck	61.45
7 Whitman, Charles	10000 sq.ft.
8 Thomas, Ruth	21490 sq.ft.
9 Brown/Thorton	1,997
11 County of Cape May	0.79
12 Wheaton, Frank	1,949
13 Langon, Catherine	32,918
14 Hudanich, James	52,866
16 Kapp, Thomas	57.49
17 Rutherford, Eleanor	32,289
18 Johnson, Fred	51,282
19 Lawson/ Mardon/Wheaton	8,562
20 Cospar	39140 sq.ft.
21 Betts, Thomas & George	63.52
22 Binder, Jack	51,282
23 Albrecht, Lewis	85,325
24 Cain, Laura	42,128
25 Lord, Francis	0.147
26 Prickett, Harold	4,711
27 Alster, Lawrence & Anne	49,298
28 Presbytery Trustees	11,521
29 Huen, Frederick & Helen	30,167
30 The Nature Conservancy	12349 sq.ft.
31 McLaughlin	9,515
32 Wheaton	37,575
33 Delanzo, Camillo	0.496
34 Barnes, William & James	31,741
35 Ocean City	2.19
36 Smith, James	0.91
37 Scridge Realty	3
38 Googy Realty Trust	4.55
39 Cape May Realty Trust	5.15
40 Conservation Trust	78,294
41 Corson	18.52
County Parks	
A Richard K. Cameron Park	25 Acres
B County Park/Zoo Central	246.53 Acres
C Fishing Creek Park	1508 Acres
D Avalon Manor Fishing Pier	.20 Acres

 Open Space

 County Parks

0 2 4 Miles

Digital data provided by Cape May County Planning and Farmland Preservation/Open Space Departments and NJDEP. Drawn By: Brian O'Connor and Barbara Ernst. Date: 5/2007

**Priority Acquisition Area 1
Cox Hall Creek Watershed**



0 0.1 0.2 Miles

Digital data provided by Cape May County Planning and
Zoning and Planning and Open Space Departments and NJDEP
Drawn by Ryan O'Carroll and Melissa Giral Date: 12/2005

**Priority Acquisition Area 2
Lower Twp. South of Cape May Canal**

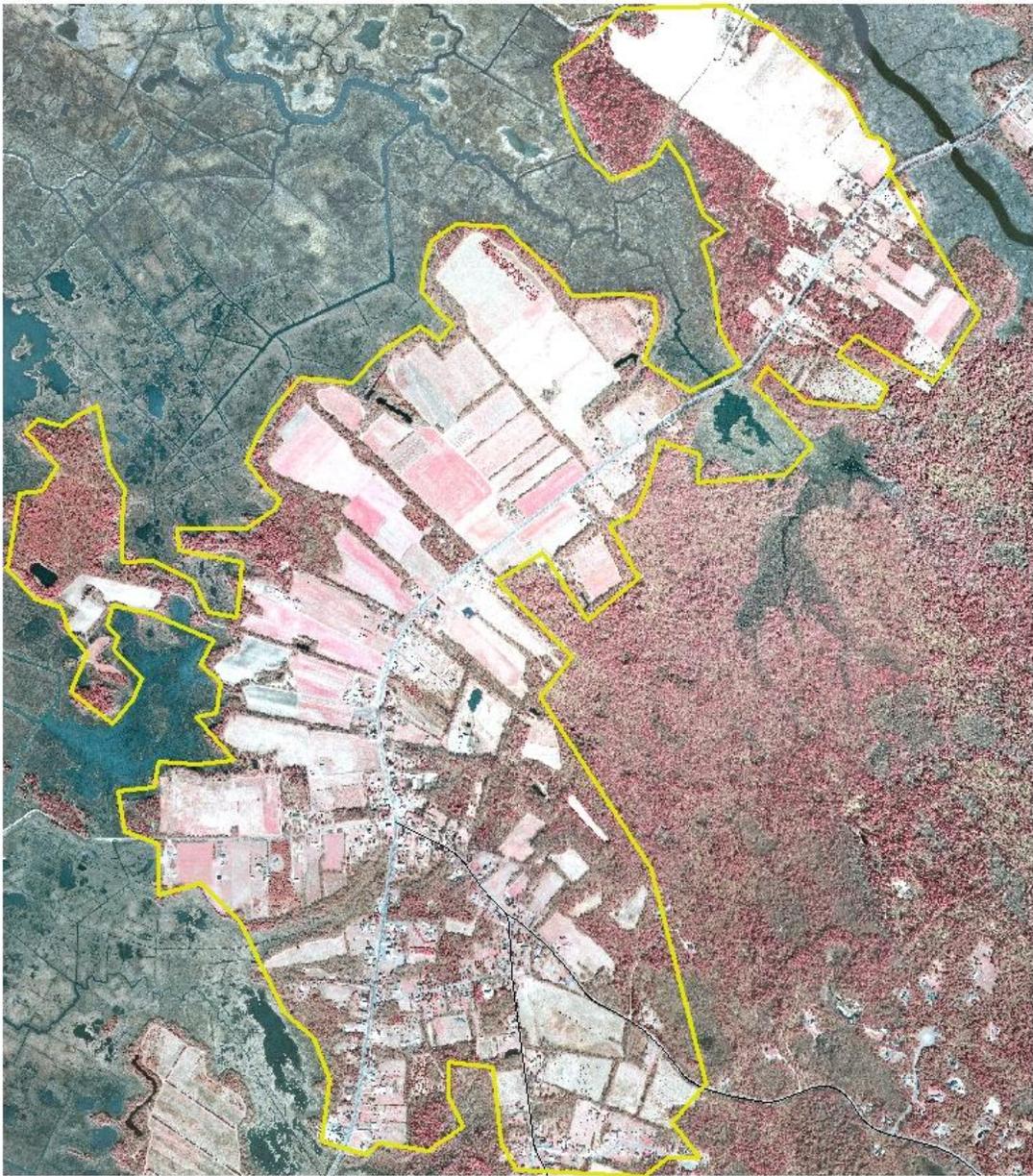


0 0.5 1 1.5 2 Miles



Digitized as provided by Cape May County Planning and
Zoning and Preservation and Open Space Department and FLD/DP
Drawn By: Ryan O'Carroll and Debra A. Giral Date: 12/2005

**Priority Acquisition Area 3
Goshen Area, Middle Twp.**



0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

Digitized as provided by Cape May County Planning and
Farm and Preserved Open Space Department and FLDSP
Drawn By: Ryan O'Carra and Debra A. Giral Date: 12/2005



Planning Adoption

In accordance with the County Planning Enabling Act of the State of New Jersey, N.J.S.A. 40:27 et seq., copies of the proposed Open Space and Recreation Plan, as an element of the County Comprehensive Plan, were provided to the municipal clerk and secretary of the planning board of each municipality in Cape May County and copies were also made available at the County Planning Offices. A notice of the public hearing was published in the official newspaper of the County and a newspaper of general interest in the County. The hearing was advertised as a legal notice twenty days prior to the date of the hearing.

Copies were also forwarded to the Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and Parks and Zoo Department. In addition, the proposed plan was made available to the public on the County website (www.capemaycountygov.net).

This document was adopted by the Cape May County Planning Board on December 20, 2005 as the Open Space and Recreation element of the Cape May County Comprehensive Plan. It was amended and re-adopted on July 17, 2007.