

**DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE**



NEWS RELEASE

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Governor announces first Forestland Preservation Program easements

*\$500,000 funding commitment from The Nature Conservancy helps
State of Delaware preserve 835 acres in Kent and Sussex Counties*



Pictured (from left) Delaware Secretary of Agriculture Ed Kee, Governor Jack Markell, Delaware Director of The Nature Conservancy Roger L. Jones, and State Forester Austin Short celebrate the announcement of the first conservation easements purchased under Delaware's Forestland Preservation Program—a total of 835 acres in Kent and Sussex Counties.

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(Harrington) - Governor Markell announced today that 835 acres of forestland in Kent and Sussex Counties will be permanently protected from development through the first phase of Delaware's Forestland Preservation Program (FPP). Aided by \$500,000 pledged from the state chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Delaware purchased conservation easements on nine properties—five in Kent County and four in Sussex County—at a cost of approximately \$1.41 million. An additional four forestland properties totaling 437 acres (three in Sussex and one in Kent) were accepted into the Agricultural Lands Preservation Program, which also administers the Forestland Preservation Program.

“One of our most important environmental challenges is the unprecedented loss of our forestland. If recent trends were to continue, Delaware could lose all of its remaining unprotected forest in the next century,” Governor Markell said. “This is why Delaware became one of the first states in the nation to establish a life-support system for our woodlands: the Forestland Preservation Program (FPP).”

Governor Markell thanked Roger L. Jones, State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Delaware for the organization's generous contribution to the preservation effort.

Roger L. Jones, State Director of The Nature Conservancy, said, “It was a pleasure to partner with the Department of Agriculture on this year’s Forestland Protection Program. Together we spent roughly \$1.5 million protecting land worth well over \$4.5 million. This is an incredible value for Delaware during any times, but even more so now when times are tight.”

The easements by the Forestland Preservation Program—targeted specifically at purchasing development rights from forest landowners—are the first step in maintaining Delaware's current base of forestland—now estimated at 30% of land area, or roughly 380,000 acres.

Out of 21 applications, the Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation Board ranked the top parcels based on a combination of three factors: (1) soil productivity for timber, (2) willingness of the owner to discount the sale of the easement, and (3) the property's location within a State Resource Area and/or Natural Area. Overall, the average discount of the easement purchase price accepted by the landowners was 67% (i.e., the owners, on average, were paid one-third of their easements' value). In this way, the program aims to preserve the greatest number of valuable forested acreage with the least amount of funding resources.

Modeled on the successful Agricultural Lands Preservation Program—which recently passed the 500-easement mark this past spring—The Forestland Preservation Act (Senate Bill 121) was signed into law in July, 2005. The current easement purchases have virtually depleted the program's one-time appropriation of \$1 million—authorized in 2008 by the General Assembly. "Though we will not know when it will be possible to receive additional state funds, we believe that the Forestland Preservation Program has made an excellent start. We will continue to accept applications—however, we need to make landowners aware that we do not know when we will have additional funding," said State Forester Austin Short.

Any owner of contiguous forestland in Delaware—comprising at least 10 acres and located outside of a designated growth zone—may apply to participate in the program. Interested landowners may call the Delaware Forest Service at 1-800-282-8685. More on the Forestland Preservation Program is available at: <http://dda.delaware.gov/forestry/conser.shtml#Preservation>.