

NEWS FROM THE DNREC

For more information contact Matt Chesser, Delaware State Parks, 302-739-9235; or Beth Shockley, Public Affairs, 302-739-9902.

Key land agreements expected to lay groundwork for economic development, ecological restoration and additional state parkland at Auburn Heights Preserve

A series of agreements to preserve and redevelop 99 acres of land near the Auburn Heights Preserve in northern Delaware is expected to boost economic development and ecological restoration in the scenic area, and add to state parkland at the preserve located in the Red Clay Valley near the Pennsylvania state line.

Five separate land parcels surrounding Auburn Heights, a 315-acre preserve owned by DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation near the old mill town of Yorklyn, will be protected through a series of fee simple acquisitions, conservation easements and adaptive reuse of historic properties.

"This is a 'win, win, win' for Delaware," said Governor Jack Markell. "By making this brownfields site more attractive to new business ventures, it means revitalization for Yorklyn. This cooperation between government and the private sector is a model that serves Delaware well through innovative partnerships that create economic opportunities concurrent with enhanced recreational and cultural amenities."

CCS Investors Inc. was the successful bidder, through the NVF bankruptcy proceeding, in contracting for 99 acres owned by NVF. Agreements between CCS and DNREC will convey approximately 87 acres in fee simple ownership and conservation easements to the state for \$2.6 million. The remaining 12 acres will be redeveloped by CCS and historic structures restored to create mixed use opportunities that will include commercial, residential and park development. Possibilities for development may include commercial office space, museum space, retail shops, art studios and restaurants.

DNREC is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to secure a Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant to pay about 75 percent of the total \$2.6 million cost of the project. The grant application was submitted to FEMA last week and an award is expected to be announced next year. The remaining funding is expected to come from the Delaware Open Space Program, private foundations

and conservation organizations. The area has been subject to severe flooding in recent years, resulting in significant economic impact.

The agreements were initiated by DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation and made possible through an unprecedented partnership among Parks, the Division of Air and Waste Management's Site Investigation and Restoration Branch (SIRB), and the Divisions of Water Resources and Soil and Water Conservation. Partners outside DNREC include the Delaware Economic Development Office, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the court-appointed trustee for NVF, The Conservation Fund and CCS Investors Inc. The project was further bolstered by strong support from neighboring property owners, as well as conservation and recreational organizations in the Yorklyn area.

The NVF Company produced vulcanized fiber and related products in Yorklyn until declaring bankruptcy in April 2009. DNREC's cleanup of zinc contamination at the site and stream restoration work in the surrounding community is ongoing. While zinc does not present a human health hazard, it is harmful to the aquatic life in Red Clay Creek.

The project will eventually include additional conservation easements and private contributions currently under negotiation with neighboring property owners. "DNREC is actively working to recreate wetlands and restore the area's natural floodplain through flood mitigation and ecological restoration," said DNREC Secretary Collin O'Mara. "This will ultimately reduce the area's historic flooding problems while continuing to improve the quality of the area's soil and water."

State officials also plan changes designed to make the area more attractive to tourism. Plans are to create a network of public trails for hikers, bicyclists, equestrians and steam car enthusiasts, by connecting the existing Auburn Heights Preserve to the nearby Oversee Farm, also owned by the state.

The Auburn Heights Preserve, part of the Delaware State Parks system, is home to the historic Marshall estate, which is managed through a partnership between Delaware State Parks and the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve. The Friends group owns a world-class collection of operating vintage steam cars, including 14 Stanley Steamers and the miniature Auburn Valley Railroad.