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Landowner Donates \$1 Million North Castle Property to New York City DEP

Commissioner Christopher O. Ward of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced today that as part of its continuing watershed protection program the DEP has accepted a donation of a four-acre parcel of vacant commercial property in the Town of North Castle in Westchester County. The land fronts on Kaysal Court off Old Route 22, near a 15.7-acre parcel that the City acquired in 2000. The land gift took place in late August and will help to protect the drainage area of the Kensico Reservoir, which is a critical component of the City's Catskill and Delaware water supply systems.

New York City has secured over 59,000 acres in its watershed through purchases and conservation easements since 1997. This includes 927 acres in Dutchess and 7,193 acres in Putnam County to protect the West Branch and Boyd's Corners Reservoirs, and an additional 1,525 acres in Westchester County to protect the Kensico and Croton Reservoirs. Some of these properties have been opened for public access, although land under conservation easement is not open to the public.

"We extend our sincere thanks to Mr. Pepe for this important donation of land, which will protect a sensitive wetland and reservoir from the effects of development. The DEP will protect this property in perpetuity, which will benefit water consumers both locally and in New York City, as well as residents who want to see more of their town stay green" said Commissioner Ward.

The donor, Nicholas Pepe, said, "This donation works well for both parties; it's my way of giving back to the broader community. I know the City is interested in protecting the welfare of millions who drink water from our area. It was a natural fit and I am proud to have been in a position to donate this property; I hope other landowners will consider how they might help others, as well as themselves, by donating – or even selling their vacant land at fair market value – to the City."

The 59,000 acres of land and easements acquired or under contract throughout the watershed (in Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, and five counties west of the Hudson River) involve over 740 parcels, including over 8,000 acres

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of farm easements that are being acquired by the Watershed Agricultural Council. The City's acquisitions in the Kensico basin include roughly 180 acres of land in both fee simple and conservation easements. Acquisitions by the City in the Croton system (primarily in Yorktown, in the New Croton Reservoir Basin), along with several purchases by New York State for protection of the City's watershed, total about 1,300 acres.

The Land Acquisition Program acquires land or conservation easements at fair market value from willing sellers only, and pays property taxes in proportion to the property rights acquired. For conservation easements, landowners are therefore paid upfront for development rights and are relieved of significant property tax burdens in perpetuity. Landowners can generally continue to harvest timber and, in the Catskill Mountains, bluestone from the land under good management plans approved by the DEP. Under this arrangement, the DEP is effectively paying good land stewards to continue to care for their land, protect their views from development and enjoy passive recreational opportunities. For more information, landowners can contact the DEP's Land Acquisition Program at (800) 575-LAND.

The City has opened over 43,000 acres of its watershed land to public recreation, including over 27,000 acres of the land acquired under the Land Acquisition Program. The DEP has issued over 67,000 public access permits and over 6,300 hunting tags to people wanting to use City watershed property for recreation. There were also almost 10,000 boat tags issued in 2003 for people to use boats on City reservoirs.