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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR APPROVES PLAN FOR NATURAL DEVELOPMENT OF LIBERTY STATE PARK

TRENTON--Governor Christie Whitman today announced that Liberty State Park in Hudson County will be developed in a largely passive and natural state, including needed improvements to the waterfront and the historic Central Railroad of New Jersey (CRRNJ) Terminal, but without a golf course.

"Liberty State Park for many years has been the source of much public discussion and debate over how it should be developed," said Governor Whitman in making the announcement during the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP's) fourth annual Earth Day Student Environmental Summit. "Given the strong public sentiment on this issue and a careful analysis of financial considerations, it is now time for us to move ahead and implement a plan that not only will preserve open space and recreational opportunities for a broad spectrum of our state's citizens, but do so in the most prudent way possible."

The Liberty State Park Development Corporation in 1993 had proposed a plan that called for an 18-hole golf course and other open space and recreational improvements in the park. Under the plan, the golf course and other improvements would have been financed with \$20 million in bonds from the state's Economic Development Authority. The plan called for the bonds to be paid off over 30 years through revenue generated from the golf course operation.

Governor Whitman accepted the recommendation of DEP Commissioner Robert C. Shinn, Jr., who said that the fiscal realities of the golf course project, the importance of preserving open spaces and making the park more accessible to the public, and strong public support for natural development made passive improvement the preferable option.

"While I commend the Liberty State Park Development Corporation members for their diligent work in trying to identify a revenue-producing vehicle that is both compatible with existing park uses and would fund needed park improvements, the project lacks broad public support and is not the significant financial catalyst it originally was perceived to be," Shinn said.

The passive improvements that will be made will be funded in part by \$6 million from the proposed Green Acres bond, which will be used for waterfront

improvements. Another source, such as the state Economic Development Authority, will be sought for an additional \$5-6 million in improvements, which will fund additional waterfront improvements and infrastructure improvements to the historic CRRNJ Terminal.

The waterfront improvements will significantly upgrade the area between Freedom Way and Liberty Walk. The area to be improved consists of approximately 100 acres and will include a wildflower meadow, crescent lawn, a restroom, picnic/play area, paths/walkways and landscaping. These improvements are part of the Waterfront Improvement Plan that have proceeded through the design development stage. The estimated cost of this project is \$7-8 million, which will be utilized for drainage and utilities, park furnishings and walkways, grading and soil amendments, trees, seeding and landscape plantings.

Planned improvements at the CRRNJ Terminal include provision of a heating, ventilation and air conditioning system and code compliance upgrades to allow year-round visitation and enjoyment of this significant historic site. These improvements, which are expected to cost approximately \$4 million, will assist in the ongoing effort to preserve and restore the terminal, further efforts to relocate the ferry service to the terminal and help attract future restaurant facilities.

Improvements also include completion of recommended soil remediation measures. Testing to date confirms that, with the exception of a possible few, small isolated locations, the presumptive remedial action for the park is one foot of clean cover. With the final delivery of clean fill from the Route 287 Department of Transportation wetlands mitigation project, enough soil for remediation will be available at no cost to the park. For any of the few, isolated locations that are found to require it, additional remediation work will be conducted. ~~The final report on all testing is expected in June.~~

The 225-acre center portion of the park will be left as a natural area and will not be developed in any way. This section of the park will be remediated, and partially revegetated through a volunteer tree planting program and left to return to its natural state. Included in this section is a 35-acre wetlands habitat in the southeastern portion of the park. In the future -- following resolution of public access to this area and remedial measures -- interpretive programs, boardwalks and wayside exhibits may be provided to enhance and supplement programs offered at the Interpretive Center.

"This central area of the park would offer significant educational opportunities to observe natural succession over time, as well as the long-term benefits of a significant, mature wooded uplands. A living and evolving ecosystem would be a natural oasis in one of the most densely populated areas of the state," said Jim Hall, DEP's assistant commissioner for Natural and Historic Resources.

"These improvements are the first steps in a long-term plan to implement passive development of the park," said Commissioner Shinn. "We recognize the need for additional facilities and improvements between Freedom Way and Liberty Walk, as well as funding for the Camp Liberty recreation area, the CRRNJ Terminal Train Shed and other projects. In the future, I trust that these improvements could be realized in partnership with either the private sector, nonprofit organizations or other appropriate entities."

The proposal to create a golf course in Liberty State Park originated in the 1970s and has sparked spirited public discussions since that time. Nearly 600 citizens attended two public hearings on the Liberty State Park Development Corporation's golf course proposal in August 1994.

The 1,156-acre Liberty State Park, which opened in 1976, is located on the New York Harbor. Its three million annual visitors make use of the picnic areas, swimming pool and boat launching ramp; participate in educational and cultural programs at the park's Interpretive Center and CRRNJ Terminal; enjoy recreational and educational experiences at the Liberty Science Center; attend numerous festivals and events; or just savor the spectacular views along Liberty Walk.