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Open Lands Trust to Create Public Hunting Ground in Illinois' Deer Capital

SPRINGFIELD – February 20, 2013. Governor Pat Quinn today announced acquisition of 547 acres of public land in four Illinois counties to boost public access for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and outdoor recreation. The $2.8 million in land purchases includes 410 acres in Pike County, a hallowed deer hunting region, and 71 acres in Hackmatack, the nation's newest National Wildlife Refuge. This acquisition is part of Governor Quinn's ongoing commitment to expand and preserve Illinois' natural resources and boost the economy.

The properties were acquired through the Illinois Open Lands Trust (OLT), which is funded by Governor Quinn's *Illinois Jobs Now!* capital program and allocated for public recreation and conservation purposes.

"Preservation of open space for future generations is a worthy goal, and hunting, fishing and other forms of outdoor recreation generate billions of dollars a year in Illinois," Governor Quinn said. "Continuing to expand outdoor recreation areas and natural habitats such as Hackmatack are not only good for our economy, but also ensure that Illinois children can enjoy nature and lead a healthy lifestyle. Let's leave no child inside!'"

"Pike County is a tremendous deer hunting destination with virtually no public access. This acquisition will give hunters an opportunity to pursue white-tails in Illinois' deer capital," said Illinois Department of Natural Resources Director Marc Miller. "There is tremendous demand in Illinois for public access to open space and this purchase helps meet that demand."

The Pike County property includes extensive timber and upland areas with some tillable Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and pasture areas well-suited for public hunting programs. The newly acquired property will remain closed to the public while the IDNR continues development of a management plan, submits regulations for hunting and other recreation programs at the site, and installs public access areas.

The Pike County parcel - southwest of Pittsfield - was acquired for the appraised value of $1.8 million. Today's announcement includes acquisition of three other properties to expand public

lands:

Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, McHenry County, 71.8 acres ($511,000) - The parcel was acquired to formally establish the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, the first refuge established in northern Illinois. The core areas of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge are rich in important natural resources, including rare and diverse natural communities, endangered and threatened species, wetlands, diverse aquatic systems and migratory birds. Eventually, the Hackmatack Refuge will improve or restore 11,000 acres of wetlands, prairie and forest, and will conserve habitat corridors between protected parcels to ensure sustainability of local ecological systems.

Expansion of Lowden-Miller State Forest, Ogle County, 64 acres ($450,000) - A 64-acre tract of land best known locally as the centerpiece of Sinnissippi Forest's former Christmas tree operation, has been added to Lowden-Miller State Forest. This acquisition will give the public better access to the easternmost portion of this resource which is named for Illinois Governor Frank Lowden, an advocate of reforestation who was responsible for planting a half-million trees.

"Twenty years ago, my late wife Nancy and I took great pleasure in the creation of Lowden-Miller State Forest, knowing that the people of Illinois would now be able to enjoy this magnificent part of the Rock River Valley," Warren Miller, former owner of the property said. "When we reluctantly closed our Christmas tree operation in 2010, it was my hope that this tract could be added to the State Forest. I am extremely pleased that we've finally been able to do so."

Expansion of Kickapoo State Recreation Area, Vermilion County, 0.94 acres ($25,000) - This parcel of land is located at the entrance to Kickapoo State Recreation Area adjacent to the Rock Cut Botanical Area, an Illinois Natural Areas Inventory site that supports some 40 species of sedge, a state-listed threatened grass-like plant.

Funds used to acquire these properties are through 2009 capital dollars appropriated for the Open Lands Trust Program, administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Since the program was first authorized in 1998, the OLT has acquired 41,000 acres for public recreation and conservation.

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