

# N.J. a step closer to buying historic land

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## DEP tests 17-acre site next to New Bridge Landing

RIVER EDGE — The state could soon be in a better position to purchase property here that many want to see preserved from development because of its value as a Revolutionary War landmark.

The Department of Environmental Protection began taking soil and water samples this week at the Bergenfield Auto Parts Co., a 1.7-acre site that could serve as the public entrance to New Bridge Landing, one of the state's most historic sites.

Gen. George Washington

crossed the Hackensack River in 1776 at New Bridge Landing, which covers about 20 acres. Preservationists have plans to build a visitor's center at the site and have \$1.1 million in a federal grant to help buy the property.

"The information gained from this investigation will help further negotiations with the property owner to purchase this tract for use as part of a historic park," said DEP spokesman Fred Mumford.

DEP Commissioner Bradley Campbell called the old auto parts

site, now vacant, "an eyesore that detracts from the ultimate enhancement of New Bridge Landing."

To begin its investigation, the DEP was forced to go to court for permission to retrieve soil samples and conduct tests at the site because the owner has not been cooperating, Campbell said. Testing should be done in three months.

But much of the debris has been cleared, officials said.

Assemblywoman Loretta Weinberg, D-Teaneck, said the

area has the potential of being a "mini Williamsburg," referring to the restored colonial town in Virginia that has become a big tourist attraction.

"This has been a pet project of mine since 1993," Weinberg said, welcoming news of the testing. "I think this is a big leap forward."

Historians say the fighting done at the New Bridge Landing site was a pivotal moment in the Revolutionary War. Had Washington's troops not fended off the British at New Bridge, they say,

the war could have been lost.

A preliminary 2002 sampling showed the land could be contaminated with gasoline, lead, and other materials, Mumford said. A cleanup could range from treating it on the site to removing the material. The testing will determine the extent and could tell officials if the Hackensack River is in danger.

"It has a public health protection component as well," Mumford said.

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