

# Pipeline revived? Christie renominates pick for Pinelands Commission



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A map of the Pinelands management area.

*Pinelands Commission*

Gov. Chris Christie on Friday re-nominated one of his candidates for the Pinelands Commission, a move environmentalists say signals a renewed push for a controversial plan to build a gas pipeline through the protected region.

Robert Barr of Ocean City is once again up for a spot on the commission, charged with overseeing the protection of natural and cultural resources in the Pinelands, after being held by the Senate Judiciary Committee last fall.

Barr and Dennis Roohr, the mayor of New Hanover Township, were nominated by Christie to replace two commissioners whose terms had expired and who had voted not to allow South Jersey Gas to build a 22-mile natural gas pipeline through the pines.

Critics accused the Christie administration of trying to pack the commission with supporters of the pipeline, but Barr, a Democrat with the backing of pro-pipeline Sen. Jeff Van Drew (D-Cape May), told legislators he wasn't a guaranteed yes vote.

"I would tread extremely cautiously when dealing with development and things of that sort," he said at the time.

The two nominees were later held by the committee without receiving an up or down vote.

Roohr, who had told the committee he was not familiar with the controversy surrounding the pipeline proposal, was not listed among the nominations with Barr on Friday. Christie spokesman Michael Drewniak declined to say why Roohr was not renominated.

"We still have another nomination to make and we will get to it," he said.

## "The pipeline issue is still out there and unresolved"

Environmentalists say the Governor and pro-pipeline allies of both parties in the Legislature are gearing up to revive the proposal. The pipeline would provide a source of natural gas to the coal-fired B.L. England power plant in Beesleys Point, which could be forced to close unless it switches to natural gas soon.

Supporters say it would provide a cleaner fuel source for B.L. England and increase energy reliability in the southern parts of the state. South Jersey Gas would pay \$8 million for the exemption, which would be used to acquire and preserve land in the region.

"The pipeline issue is still out there and unresolved," Carleton Montgomery, head of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, told NJ Advance Media on Friday. His group, which opposes the pipeline, wrote in their December "**State of the Pinelands**" report that "maneuvers are afoot" to bring the issue back onto the table in 2015.

The plan was shot down by a 7-7 Pinelands Commission vote last year after securing the support of the state Board of Public Utilities and the Governor's office. The company is in the process of appealing that ruling in state court, according to spokesman Dan Lockwood.

"We continue to analyze the most cost-effective and environmentally responsible way to implement the project for southern New Jersey residents, particularly those in Atlantic and Cape May counties," Lockwood said.

Jeff Tittel, head of the New Jersey Sierra Club, said that Christie's nominations to the commission could set a precedent for development in the region going forward.

"The Pinelands Commission has been the most successful land use regulation model in the country," he said. "This is not just about the pipeline; it's about dismantling 40 years of protections."

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