

Christie's choice for Pinelands panel raises concerns

Bob Jordan, Gannett Statehouse Bureau 3:44 p.m. EST January 18, 2015

TRENTON – Gov. Chris Christie's new nominee for the state Pinelands Commission is one of the candidates lawmakers declined to vote on last year because of fears that a 22-mile pipeline would be built on protected land in South Jersey.

Robert Barr of Ocean City was nominated again Friday. His nomination in 2014 was tabled by the Senate Judiciary Committee at a hearing that drew about 25 environmental advocates and opponents to the Statehouse.

The groups said adding Barr and fellow nominee Dennis Rooher could swing the panel to support the pipeline, which would run through Maurice River, Estell Manor and Upper Township.

Christie wanted the pair to replace Robert Jackson and D'Arcy Rohan Green, who voted last January against the pipeline. The vote was a 7-7 stalemate, killing the proposal.

The proposed gas line route, which has been backed strongly by Christie's administration and the state Board of Public Utilities, would include a pipeline laid underground along highway rights of way through about 10 miles of Pinelands forest area zones.

Jeff Tittel, state director of the Sierra Club, said the group opposes Barr's nomination.

"It's not just about the pipeline. Forty years of Pinelands protections are at stake," Tittel said. "With Barr being nominated again, it tells you the Christie administration is going to keep trying to get what they want. They're stubborn."

Christie's office did not respond to a request for comment.

What's next

Robert Barr's nomination will be considered by state lawmakers on a date to be determined.