

Editorial: N.J. Pinelands Commission should reject 22-mile natural gas pipeline

By [Times of Trenton Editorial Board](#)

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In what appears to be an unprecedented bipartisan alliance, four former governors have joined in opposing a plan for a 22-mile pipeline through the New Jersey Pine Barrens.

Former Govs. Christie Whitman, Jim Florio, Tom Kean and Brendan Byrne wrote to the Pinelands Commission, which is considering the proposal from South Jersey Gas. The pipeline would supply the BL England power plant, which has agreed to stop burning coal, with cleaner-burning natural gas.

That's a step in the right direction, but running the pipeline through the most ecologically valuable stretch of land in the state, perhaps the whole East Coast, would be an end-run in the wrong direction.

Sometimes called "the lungs of New Jersey," the 1 million-acre expanse of pristine woodlands is home to an aquifer estimated to hold 17 trillion gallons of some of the nation's purest water. It's a habitat for endangered and threatened species.

The former governors are calling on the Pinelands Commission not to waver from its mission of preserving the region from development.

"The current proposal would compromise the integrity of the Pinelands Plan and serve to encourage future development contrary to the vision the plan sets out for growth and conservation in the Pinelands," they wrote to Mark Lohbauer, commission chairman.

South Jersey Gas officials, saying placement of the pipeline along the roadway would not scar the Pinelands, also add job creation and the energy needs of South Jersey residents to their arguments for the project. To sweeten the deal, the company has offered a donation of \$8 million to buy private land abutting the pipeline for preservation.

The projected pipeline and its cargo, infiltrating an area of such ecological sensitivity, inspire appropriate worry. The most secure and reliable technology is prey to failure – consider poorly cast wrought-iron rivets in the Titanic’s hull; a faulty O-ring in the space shuttle Challenger; the damaged blowout prevention mechanism in BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil rig.

A natural gas explosion and fire in the Pine Barrens could be disastrous.

Beyond that, however, once the Pinelands protections are breached by yielding permission for the pipeline construction, there would be precedent and pressure from other developers to follow suit.

“The need to set out clear and stable guidance for infrastructure development such as pipelines was one of the principal motivations behind the Pinelands (preservation) legislation and plan,” wrote the governors. “We urge the commission to stick to the plan in this case.”

The commission is set to announce its decision early next month.

We urge its members to remember their promise to preserve, protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the Pinelands National Reserve.



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